

CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

UNDERSTANDING THE MIND OF GOD

John Owen and Seventeenth-Century Exegetical Methodology

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF CALVIN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

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GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

MAY 2002



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**UNDERSTANDING THE MIND OF GOD:  
JOHN OWEN AND SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY EXEGETICAL METHODOLOGY**

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and submitted in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

**Doctor of Philosophy**

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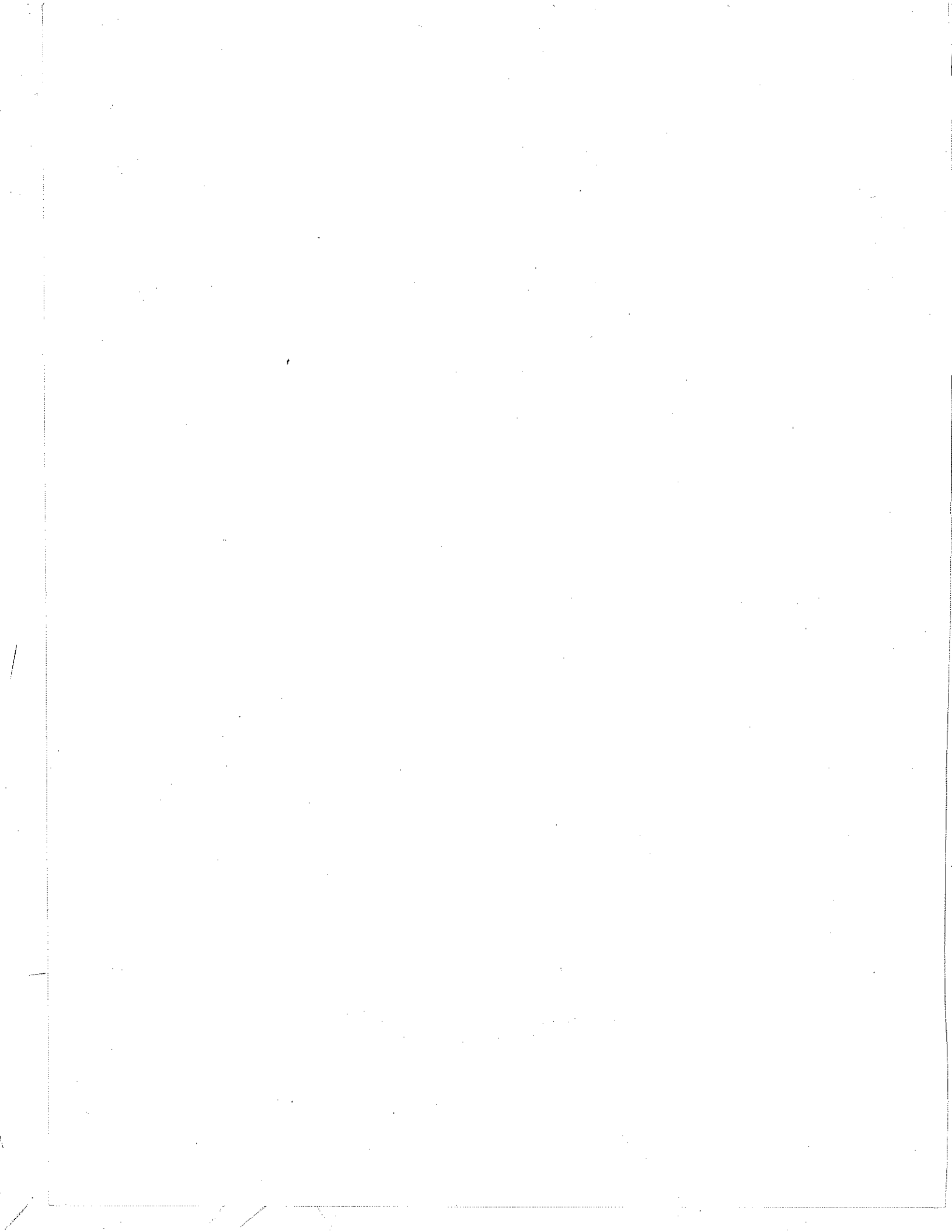
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**To Kelly**  
**My Wife, Partner, and Best Friend**

Every believer may, in the due use of the means appointed of God for that end, attain unto such a full assurance of understanding in the truth, or all that knowledge of the mind and will of God revealed in the Scripture, which is sufficient to direct him in the life of God, to deliver him from the dangers of ignorance, darkness, and error, and to conduct him unto blessedness.

- John Owen

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## Preface

My interest in the Puritans arose primarily from my study of the history and development of Reformed theology, and my attempt to communicate this rich tradition to others during my years of youth, college, and pastoral ministry. The initial attraction revolved around three interconnected aspects of seventeenth-century thought. First, I was overwhelmed by their passion for the Scripture; the commitment of the Puritans to the sovereign authority of the Word of God, both as a theoretical principle and even more so as a practical guide for daily life, was expressed on every page of their writings. Second, the tenacity with which the Puritan divines adhered to their orthodox convictions in the midst of an increasingly hostile intellectual environment stands out as faithful, honorable, and exemplary. Third, the experiential quality of a vibrant Puritan faith awakened a longing in my own heart for a full, passionate, and overpowering experience of the love and mercy of the Triune God. Their agonizing examination of their sinfulness, their staggering awe of the Almighty, and their insights into the redemptive work of Christ forged the distinctive aspects of my own faith. These three traits – reverence for the Word of God, Reformed orthodoxy, and experiential faith – converge in the Puritan emphasis on the glory of God. More than any other single feature, the Puritan determination to live every moment consciously committed to the pursuit of God's glory invigorated my intellectual and spiritual life. Like them, I pray that God will make me an instrument of his praise, and that I might forever serve the one, true King of Glory.

I wish to acknowledge and thank the numerous teachers who have encouraged my academic pursuits and who, in large part, are the true authors of this work. Dr. Garth Rosell at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary first exposed me to the writings of John Owen, where I found a penetrating analysis of the Christian faith and a powerful assurance of the grace of Jesus Christ. My passion for the Scriptures, initially formed by

my discipler, Mark Masthay, and molded throughout my experiences in ministry, underwent significant refining in the capable hands of my Th.M. advisors at Gordon-Conwell, Drs. Moises Silva and Greg Beale. It was under the direction of Dr. Richard Muller at Calvin Seminary that these two streams – the writings of the Puritans and my interest in biblical studies – merged together. He guided me through the rich field of exegetical history and to the magnificent works of Reformed Orthodox exegetes. The instruction and guidance of these men in the study of hermeneutics, exegesis, and biblical theology underlies whatever merit is present in these pages.

Finally, I must express my heart-felt thanks to my wife, Kelly, who, over the past years, has shared her life with me, and, consequently, with my work. She has been, and continues to be, the clearest source of strength and light for my faith and studies – it is no exaggeration to say that, without her, there would be no book, no chapter, no paragraph. This work is a small token of my gratitude and love for her.

*Soli Deo Gloria*  
Henry M. Knapp  
May 2002

## Abstract

The biblical exegesis of the seventeenth century has been criticized for (1) serving only to prove text dogmatic, polemic works; (2) reverting to the scholasticism of medieval times, ignoring the vitality of the Reformers' humanism; and (3) being academically inferior due to the neglect of scientific advances in biblical studies. John Owen's interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews is used to evaluate the legitimacy of this criticism.

Seventeenth-century orthodox exegetical techniques reflect (1) precritical assumptions about Scripture (*analogia fidei*, *analogia Scripturae*, scope, contemporary application), (2) developments of Renaissance humanism (biblical and cognate languages; grammatical, linguistic, and lexical advances; text criticism; rhetorical argumentation), and (3) orthodoxy's scholastic heritage (theological definitions and distinctions; continuity with historic faith; the role of reason; demonstrative exposition).

Contrary to the dogmatic proof texting criticism, Owen's commentary on Hebrews 1:1-3 reflects a reluctance to speak on theological issues not directly flowing from the text, while still showing how classical theological constructions concerning the Godhead naturally flow from a careful analysis of Scripture.

Owen seeks to prove the author's reliance on Hebrew originals as the text source for the OT citations in Hebrews 1, supporting his concern for the exegetical priority of the original languages. He further demonstrates how the author appropriately applied each citation according to (1) its original OT context, (2) its OT literal sense, and (3) the scope of both OT and NT pericopes. When the text demands it, Owen cautiously turns to typology, emphasizing the historicity of the type, the type's foreshadowing of only a portion of its fulfillment, the correlation between type and antitype, the escalated nature of the antitype, and a literary aspect in the author's typology.

Owen denounced Arminian use of Hebrews 6:4-6 as the product of poor interpretive methodology. Demonstrating the proper connection between exegetical method and dogmatic outcomes, Owen explains the author's intent and the linguistic features of the text while asserting its basic compatibility with the Reformed doctrine of perseverance.

John Owen's exegetical work so completely defies the traditional assessment of seventeenth-century biblical studies as to call into question the validity of the conventional scholarship on this issue. Owen belongs to a long exegetical trajectory which shows continuity with the methodology of medieval scholastics; the style, presuppositions, and theology of the Reformers; and the academic and intellectual developments arising from Renaissance humanism.

# Chapter I

## Seventeenth-Century Exegesis and John Owen

### 1. Statement of the Problem

It is a commonly held belief that the seventeenth-century exegetical work produced by Reformed authors contributed little, if anything, to the development of scriptural interpretation. The whole period is often viewed as a regressive time in biblical studies where the advances in hermeneutics and exegesis made by the sixteenth-century Reformers were arrested and betrayed by the very theologians who claimed to be their intellectual descendants. Rather than building upon the "new," refreshing interpretive insights of the Reformers, the exegetical material produced by the Puritans and continental orthodox is seen as a retreat to the false methods, presuppositions, and conclusions of the medieval period.

#### 1.1 The Criticism of Seventeenth-Century Exegesis

Evidence of this belief is widespread in the scholarship of recent centuries, showing itself in a variety of ways. First, in many surveys of the history of biblical interpretation, the entire period is marginalized, if not totally ignored. Note, for instance, the virtual silence concerning this period in the *Cambridge History of the Bible*, or in the collection of essays in *The Church's Use of the Bible*.<sup>1</sup> When the period is mentioned in these surveys, attention is often focused, not on the orthodox exegetes, but on radical thinkers and interpreters (e.g., Hugo Grotius, Baruch Spinoza, Richard Simon) and the

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<sup>1</sup> S. L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, Vol. 3 (Cambridge: University Press, 1963-1970); D. E. Nineham, ed., *The Church's Use of the Bible Past and Present* (London: SPCK, 1963); John Hayes and Carl Holladay, *Biblical Exegesis: A Beginner's Handbook* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982).

developments which flowed from their work.<sup>2</sup> Second, in many studies which do address the orthodox exegetes, their biblical work is spoken of very pejoratively. Frederic Farrar's comments in his lectures on the history of interpretation are especially virulent: "They read the Bible by the unnatural glare of theological hatred,"<sup>3</sup> and "they wrote folios full of theological hatred about problems as to which Christ was silent; they persecuted as heretics those whom He would most have loved. Of course under such a system true exegesis became impossible."<sup>4</sup> Not all critics are as malicious as Farrar, but the general tone is evident in the charges of "bibliolatry," "rigidity," and "legalism."<sup>5</sup> Howard Teeple sums up of the history of the Bible in this era this way: "the period was one of intolerance, heresy-hunting, and witchcraft mania."<sup>6</sup> Finally, these pejorative assessments are usually set in contrast with the biblical work of the Reformers. Whereas the Reformers' handling of the text was a practice of "warm, lively, personal piety," and a great step toward the true historical-critical approach to exegesis, their orthodox successors reverted to the faulty interpretive methods of the medieval scholastics and "lost the living reality with which Luther and Calvin had invested Scripture, so that in

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<sup>2</sup> A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 41-44; John Rogerson, Christopher Rowland, and Barnabas Lindars, *The Study and Use of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 96-104; W. Neil, "The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible, 1700-1950," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 3:238-293; Howard Teeple, *The Historical Approach to the Bible* (Evanston: Religion and Ethics Institute, 1982), 66-70.

<sup>3</sup> Frederic Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: Dutton, 1886; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 363-364.

<sup>4</sup> Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 375-377.

<sup>5</sup> Dean Freiday, *The Bible: Its Criticism, Interpretation and Use in 16th and 17th Century England* (Pittsburgh: Catholic and Quaker Studies, 1979), 95; Robert Grant, *The Bible in the Church* (New York: MacMillan, 1960), 123, 115; J. K. S. Reid, *The Authority of Scripture: A Study of Reformation and Post-Reformation Understanding of the Bible* (London: Methuen, 1962), 77.

<sup>6</sup> Teeple, *The Historical Approach to the Bible*, 65-66.



their hands Scripture became an external authority legalistically conceived, and adherence to Scripture rigid biblicism.”<sup>7</sup>

At least three reasons are generally given to support this sweeping criticism. The first is the claim that the post-Reformation orthodox scholars were increasingly absorbed in doctrinal controversies with both Rome and the radical wing of the Reformation. The need for polemical firepower in these battles led, in turn, to the subordination of true exegetical work in favor of a purely dogmatic use of biblical texts. Again, Farrar best expresses this critique, stating that dogmatists misused Scripture by applying it “to the polemic elaboration of minute and sectarian dogma,” and further, “the ‘Analogy of Faith’ and the ‘Analogy of Scripture’ were made the pretext for regarding the Bible as a sort of quartz-bed, in which was to be found the occasional gold of a proof-text.”<sup>8</sup> A few representative citations from other scholars show the widespread nature of this appraisal: “Hermeneutical methods were often poor during this time, for exegesis became the handmaid of dogmatics, and often degenerated into mere proof-texting.” The Protestant orthodox “were quite willing to take any scriptural statement out of context, or completely detach it from its intent if the words themselves (or even part of them) seemed to support a particular doctrine.” “The pioneering exegesis of the Reformation is again completely absorbed by dogmatics, especially in Protestant Orthodoxy. For Orthodoxy biblical exegesis is in essence only an auxiliary discipline which prepares ‘proof texts’ from the biblical canon for the dogmatic system.” “It is hard to escape the suspicion that while the final authority of the Scripture might be maintained in theory,

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<sup>7</sup> Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*, 77. See also, William Klein, Craig Blomberg, and Robert Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 41; Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 36; Kemper Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 171-175.

<sup>8</sup> Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 336, 365.

actually it was made subordinate to the doctrinal system itself, for almost the only use to which it was put was that of providing proof-texts for the various doctrines.”<sup>9</sup>

A second reason given by the critics of post-Reformation exegesis is related to the assessment above: with the rise of a more polemical dogmatics, theologians in the seventeenth century employed and developed a scholastic approach to the material, shunning the benefits of the Renaissance humanism which had been embraced in the previous era – with dire consequences for biblical interpretation. David Dockery notes, “This new form of scholasticism resulted in an authoritative and dogmatic interpretation,” and in the words of William Klein, et. al., “Ironically, the spiritual children of Calvin and Luther seemed to lapse back into a Protestant form of scholasticism... they appeared to place more importance on intellectual agreement with Protestant dogma than on the practice of warm, lively, personal piety.”<sup>10</sup> This scholasticism is viewed as a detrimental development in part because it is seen as a logical structure for theology with undue reliance on Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning, thus giving reason at least an equal standing in religious matters with revelation.

The third reason is connected to, and a consequence of, the other two. As a result of these scholastic and dogmatic tendencies, the exegetical methodology of the period is seen as academically inferior to the more scientific method which proceeded and

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<sup>9</sup> Henry Virkler, *Hermeneutics: Principles and Processes of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 67; Dean Freiday, *Nothing without Christ* (Newberg: Barclay Press, 1984), 64; Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism*, 36; John Hayes and Frederick Prussner, *Old Testament Theology: Its History and Development* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 14. See also, Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, 173; Bruce Demarest, “Hebrews 7:3 : A *Crux Interpretum* Historically Considered,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (1977):149-150; Bert Loonstra, “Scholasticism and Hermeneutics,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, ed. Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 298-300.

<sup>10</sup> David Dockery, “Study and Interpretation of the Bible,” in *Foundations for Biblical Interpretation*, ed. David Dockery, et. al. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 43; Klein, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 41. See also, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 147-188, esp. 185-186; David Dockery, *Biblical Interpretation, Then and Now* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 160-161; George Goris,

followed it. Whereas the Reformers, embracing the freedom of Renaissance humanism, had begun the quest for a critical, scientific exegesis – a quest later pursued by proponents of the modern historical-critical method – the post-Reformation orthodox, seeking to recapture the authority previously invested in the Bible, reverted to the hermeneutical presuppositions of the medieval interpreters. Consequently, “the Reformation principle of exegesis, namely, the one grammatico-historical sense, is in the way of being completely abandoned.” “In the years following the Reformation, Protestant Orthodoxy slipped into the practice of harmonizing biblical passages with dogmatic formulations, undercutting any genuine historical concerns.”<sup>11</sup> Fortunately, in the eyes of these critics, the Protestant orthodox were unable to stem the tide of the advance toward a true scientific biblical hermeneutic: “The attempt of [the Reformers’] successors to invest the Bible with the authority that the Church had lost was therefore bound to be little more than an ineffective effort to turn back the clock.”<sup>12</sup> The Protestant orthodox turned their backs on the academic advances of the humanistic Reformers, and operated under similar presuppositions about the Bible and theological formation as did the medieval scholastics – the inevitable result being an inferior exegetical methodology, unscientific and unable to free itself from the confines of tradition and authority.

## 1.2 A Reassessment of Orthodox Interpretation and Its Critics

In recent decades there have been a growing number of scholars who have challenged on all three fronts this analysis of seventeenth-century exegesis. First, studies

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“Puritan Legalism as a Method of Moral and Religious Reform in the Christian Reformed Church,” Th.D. diss. (Union Theological Seminary, 1932), 89-99.

<sup>11</sup> Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, 175; Duncan S. Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1986), 166. See also, Teeple, *The Historical Approach to the Bible*, 66; Raymond Brown, *The Sensus Plenior of Sacred Scripture* (Baltimore: St. Mary’s University, 1955), 63-65; Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, 171; Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 365, 369-377.

<sup>12</sup> Neil, “The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible,” 238.

have shown that the biblical citations in the doctrinal work of the Puritans and the continental orthodox should not be viewed as isolated proof texts. Rather, the doctrinal systems in the post-Reformation era were built upon the result and effort of solid biblical exegesis; scriptural interpretation functioned as the pathway toward competent theological formulations. The Puritan exegete saw his role as bridging the gap between the technical aspects of exegesis and the application of the text to contemporary issues and the body of believers. Directly countering the older scholarship, Richard Muller argues:

Since it has so often been implied that the Reformation was a time of exegesis, virtually without dogma, and the era of orthodoxy was a time of dogmatic system without exegesis, it must be added that at no time before or since the era of orthodoxy was systematic theology so closely wedded to the textual and linguistic work of the exegete. The loci of the theological system arose directly out of meditation on specific texts and issues in Scripture and continued, throughout the seventeenth century, to be understood in that relationship.<sup>13</sup>

The proof texts in a dogmatic system or theological treatise were not haphazardly “mined” from Scripture, but reflect the author’s awareness and use of a well developed interpretive history on the verse.

Furthermore, the assertion that the biblical exegesis of the post-Reformation period, on the continent and in England, were simply polemically and dogmatically driven cannot be sustained in light of an examination of the actual writings of the orthodox scholars. Milton Terry in his survey of the history of scriptural interpretation describes the flowering of biblical work during this era:

The spirit of religious inquiry, and the widespread interest in biblical studies, which were created by the Protestant Reformation, continued with unabated vigour in the

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<sup>13</sup> Richard A. Muller, “Biblical Interpretation in the 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries,” in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald McKim (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 135-136. See also, Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 2:500-501; Richard A. Muller, “Joseph Hall as Rhetor, Theologian, and Exegete: His Contribution to the History of Interpretation,” in *Solomon’s Divine Arts*, Joseph Hall, ed. G. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 28; Peter van Kleeck, “Hermeneutics and Theology in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century: The Contribution of Andrew Willet,” Th.M. thesis (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1998).

seventeenth century. The Scriptures were translated into many languages, and former translations were carefully revised, critical and philological pursuits engaged the talents of the most distinguished scholars of Europe, and almost innumerable exegetical works made their appearance, from the diminutive pocket volume to the ponderous folio commentaries and polyglots.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the great number of polemical and dogmatic tracts published during this period, the orthodox also produced a vast number of commentaries and other biblical studies. From within Puritan circles, these commentaries ranged from being highly dogmatic to immanently practical. Some Puritan expositors were greatly concerned with technical, grammatical, and textual issues and made great use of comparative texts and Jewish commentators, while others focused upon an exhortative, biblical-theological approach.<sup>15</sup>

With regard to the second criticism of seventeenth-century biblical exposition, and indeed of the Protestant orthodoxy as a whole – that is, that it evolved into “scholasticism” – this assessment is generally conceded. However, the extent, characteristics and qualities of the “scholasticism” which developed, and its proper relation to previous eras, is widely debated. The characterization of scholasticism such as

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<sup>14</sup> Milton Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise on the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 683.

<sup>15</sup> Examples of dogmatic commentaries include: Edward Dering, *XXVII Lectures, or Readings, vpon part of the Epistle to the Hebrues* (London, 1614); John Mayer, *A Commentarie vpon the New Testament. Representing the diuers expositions thereof, out of the workes of the most learned, both ancient Fathers, and moderne Writers*, 3 vols. (London, 1631); William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980); David Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1649; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978). Practical: Joseph Hall, *Solomon's Divine Arts*, ed. G. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991); William Jones, *A Commentary vpon the Epistles of Saint Paul to Philemon, and to the Hebrewes* (London, 1635). Technical/linguistic: Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the Five Bookes of Moses* (London, 1627); *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament, wherein the Text is Explained, Doubts Resolved, Scriptures Paralleled, and Various Readings observed. By the joynt-Labour of certain Learned Divines*, ed. Thomas Gataker, et. al. (London, 1645); Matthew Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962). Hebraic: Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis* (Cambridge, 1605; 2d ed., 1608); note especially the Targumic and linguistic work of John Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica* (1658-1674; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997). Exhortative: John Owen, *Exposition on Psalm 130 in The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

that advocated by Brian Armstrong, R. T. Kendall, and others,<sup>16</sup> has been countered by those who trace the continuity of the academic teaching methodology of scholasticism practiced by the orthodox back through the Reformation and into the medieval time.<sup>17</sup> In addition, the stark juxtaposition of a rigid, formal scholasticism with the benevolence achieved via humanism – a cold dogma instead of the warmth of the Reformers' kerygma – is regarded as an inaccurate portrayal, and one which masks the true interaction between the movements.<sup>18</sup> It is also important to distinguish between the intended style of the writing, scholastic, biblical/exegetical, annotations, or popular/homiletical commentaries; for instance, the seventeenth-century writers would not have viewed their homiletical commentaries or annotations as scholastic in method. Thus, according to these scholars, the mere fact that the Reformed orthodox employed scholastic methodologies in interpreting the Bible does not automatically mean that the exegesis is deficient.

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); R. T. Kendall, "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," in *John Calvin*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 199-214; A. C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology 1640-1790 – An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*.

<sup>17</sup> One of the best reviews of this discussion can be found in the editors' "Introduction" to the collection of essays in Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, ed. *Reformation and Scholasticism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001). See also, Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995); Richard A. Muller, "Ad fontes argumentorum: The Sources of Reformed Theology in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century," *Utrechtse Theologische Teeks* 40 (1999):1-29; Richard A. Muller, "Scholasticism and Orthodoxy in the Reformed Tradition: An Attempt at Definition," Inaugural Address (Grand Rapids, Calvin Theological Seminary, 1995); Carl Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999); Willem J. van Asselt, *Inleiding in de gereformeerde scholastiek* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1998).

<sup>18</sup> See, for instance, Paul Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classical, Scholastic, and Humanistic Strains* (London: Harper Torchbooks, 1961); Heiko Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Medieval Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981); Heiko Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963); Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:16-22.

In terms of the seventeenth-century biblical interpretive enterprise, it is important to recognize that the distinction between scholastic and humanistic exegetical techniques is both artificial and, in some ways, anachronistic. The orthodox themselves did not differentiate their expository methods in this manner, nor speak of them in these terms. Additionally, the distinction between the influence of scholasticism and that of humanism is far from clear cut – especially as far as the application of hermeneutical methods is concerned. Most of the techniques used by Puritan biblical commentators which show great continuity with techniques from the medieval scholastic age have, nevertheless, been altered to some degree in light of the changing academic environment of the fifteenth through seventeenth centuries. Similarly, “humanistic” exegetical techniques frequently have roots in the scholasticism of previous centuries. It is possible, nonetheless, to identify a more dominant influence of the use and emphasis of most exegetical methods – tracing a primary trajectory to either the academic approach of the medieval scholastics, or that of Renaissance humanism.

Finally, numerous studies are demonstrating that the criticism of orthodox biblical exegesis as somehow academically lacking is grossly inaccurate. The underlying principle of this criticism rests with the overall assessment that hermeneutics in the Reformation period involved a radical break with the past and that they represented the initial, undeveloped practice of modern critical exegesis. On strictly “history of exegesis” terms, the debate is often phrased as a conflict between precritical and modern higher critical methodologies. The term “precritical” is clearly anachronistic and is being used here in its modern scholarly sense to denote the set of presuppositions and exegetical approach to the Bible which dominated the practice of interpretation until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. The “precritical” designation does not mean un-critical; it is used simply to distinguish the earlier critical methods from those of

modern biblical higher criticism.<sup>19</sup> The seventeenth-century biblical work is criticized for reflecting the precritical presuppositions common during the medieval era, instead of the more scientific, higher critical views which, reportedly, germinated in the Reformation, lay stagnant during the orthodox period, and finally flowered with the development of biblical higher criticism. This foundational belief has been challenged as a failure to properly understand the nature of the Reformers' hermeneutical strategy and their demand for a literal exegesis.<sup>20</sup> Rather than standing as an island of "true" exegesis in the midst of the precritical exegetical assumptions of the medieval and post-Reformation expositors, the Reformers' interpretive principles exhibited great continuity with the hermeneutics of those who came before and after. Farrar's hope that "the splendid progress" of the Reformers' exegetical methods would bring in the period of true modern critical exegesis is based on a flawed understanding of the Reformers' intentions and

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<sup>19</sup> David Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37 (1980-81):27-38; David Steinmetz, "Theology and Exegesis: Ten Theses," in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle. Textes du Colloque International tenu à Genève en 1976*, ed. Olivier Fatio and Pierre Fraenkel (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978), 382; Richard Muller and John Thompson, "The Significance of Precritical Exegesis: Retrospect and Prospect," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard Muller and John Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 335-345; Gerald Sheppard, "Interpretation of the Old Testament between Reformation and Modernity," in *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses: Commentary on Hebrews 11*, William Perkins, ed. J. Augustine (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 46-70; Jens Zimmermann, "English Puritans and German Pietists: A Re-examination of Precritical Interpretation in Light of the Anthropocentric Turn in Hermeneutics," Ph.D. diss. (University of British Columbia, 1997).

<sup>20</sup> Brevard Childs, "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beitrag zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie*, ed. Donner, Hanhart, and Smend (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 80-93; David Steinmetz, ed., *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990); Richard Gamble, "*Brevitas et facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin's Hermeneutic," *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985):1-17; Richard Gamble, "Exposition and Method in Calvin," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987):153-165; M. H. Franzmann, "Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics," *Concordia Journal* 15 (1989):337-350; Henri Strohl, "La méthode exégétique des Réformateurs," in *Le problème biblique dans le Protestantisme*, ed. J. Boisset (Paris, 1955); David Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995); Klaas Runia, "The Hermeneutics of the Reformers," *Calvin Theological Journal* 19 (1984):121-152; Richard A. Muller, "The Hermeneutic of Promise and Fulfillment in Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament Prophecies of the Kingdom," in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. David Steinmetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1990), 68-82; Richard Muller and John Thompson, eds., *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).



their own connection to the expository practices of medieval scholars.<sup>21</sup> In this regard, one should also note the growing criticism of the modern higher critical exegetical method, especially as that criticism (perhaps inadvertently) recalls the earlier precritical presuppositions and methodology.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the argument that the Reformers' use of the tools of humanism contrasted sharply with both their absence in pre-Renaissance medieval times and their neglect in the post-Reformation era appears to ignore the vast linguistic and rhetorical resources generated by orthodox authors, and their overwhelming use in the production of orthodox theoretical and exegetical works. Indeed, "the era of Protestant orthodoxy must be regarded not only as a continuation of the philological and interpretive development of the Renaissance and Reformation but also as the great era of Protestant linguistic study, whether in the biblical or in the cognate languages."<sup>23</sup> Although confronted with a different set of polemical and doctrinal issues, the Reformed orthodox in large part carried on the hermeneutical methods of the Reformers, as well as continued to reap the interpretive benefits of Renaissance humanism.

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<sup>21</sup> Farrar, *History of Interpretation*, 357; Hans Kraus, "Calvin's Exegetical Principles," in *Interpretation* 31 (1977):9-18. Cf. Richard Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of Reformation: The View of the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard Muller and John Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 8-13; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:470.

<sup>22</sup> Gerhard Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, trans. Robert Yarbrough (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1994); Gerhard Maier, *The End of the Historical-Critical Method*, trans. Edwin Leverenz and Rudolph Norden (St. Louis: Concordia, 1974); Reid, *The Authority of Scripture*; Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis"; Joel Green, "Modernity, History and the Theological Interpretation of the Bible," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 (2001):308-329; William Sanford LaSor, "The *Sensus Plenior* and Biblical Interpretation," in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 260-277; Brevard Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 139-150; Hans W. Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative; A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974). Cf. Freiday, *Nothing without Christ*, 66-71; O. C. Edwards, "Historical-Critical Method's Failure of Nerve and a Prescription for a Tonic," *Anglican Theological Review* 59 (1977):115-134.

<sup>23</sup> Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries," 135. See also, Maier, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 70-73; Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation*;

This debate between the older, critical evaluation of seventeenth-century exegesis and its more recent reassessment is part of the larger dispute over the faithfulness of the post-Reformation orthodox to the Reformers' thought.<sup>24</sup> Under the epithet of "Calvin vs. the Calvinists," one theory claims that there is a great discontinuity between the Reformers and their followers, either a substantial modification or a fatal deviation from the refreshing theological insights of the sixteenth century. A subset of this theory (as laid out above) asserts that the exegetical practices of orthodoxy followed the same deteriorating path, rejecting or misapplying the biblical hermeneutics developed during the Renaissance and Reformation. This "discontinuity theory" has been countered by more recent scholarship which has argued that there is a strong trajectory of thought between the three eras – medieval, Reformation, and orthodoxy. The difference between the theological works of the Reformers and their followers should not be seen as a "modification," much less a "distortion" or "rejection," but rather as a continuous development of Reformation thought. That does not mean, however, that orthodox theologies were merely a static reproduction of their predecessors, for the new writings were expressed in light of methodological, though not material, changes – expressed in new ways for new times. The exegetical component in this reassessment of the post-Reformation orthodox is not nearly as well developed or explored, and whether the same criticism of the traditional view of seventeenth-century exegesis is appropriate needs to be corroborated by further study.

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Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought*; Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation*; Oberman, *Harvest of Medieval Theology*.

<sup>24</sup> See especially the following excellent summaries and the literature therein: Richard A. Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995):345-375 and 31 (1996):125-160; Asselt and Dekker, "Introduction"; Randall Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification: A Comparative Study in Reformed Spirituality* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 7-44.

There have been a number of overviews of the exegetical and hermeneutical landscape during the seventeenth century, either seeking to draw out interpretive principles from the general era or noting the contribution of individual exegetes.<sup>25</sup> In addition, some of the individual exegetical techniques employed in the seventeenth century have attracted study, including the role of the scope<sup>26</sup> and the analogies of faith and Scripture,<sup>27</sup> the developing interest in Hebraic studies,<sup>28</sup> the impact of the polyglots and textual advances,<sup>29</sup> the question of the literal sense and allegorical interpretation,<sup>30</sup> and the corresponding growth of typology as an exegetical tool.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Samuel Berger, *La Bible au seizième siècle; étude sur les origines de la critique biblique* (Paris, 1879); C. L. Cohen, "Two Biblical Models of Conversion: An Example of Puritan Hermeneutics," *Church History* 58 (1989):182-196; Robert A. Coughenour, "The Shape and Vehicle of Puritan Hermeneutics," *Reformed Review* 30 (1976):23-34; Thomas D. Lea, "The Hermeneutics of the Puritans," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996):271-284; Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries"; Kleeck, "Hermeneutics and Theology in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century"; Auguste Bernus, *Richard Simon et son Histoire critique du vieux testament: la critique biblique au siècle de Louis XIV* (1869; repr. Geneva: Slakine Reprints, 1969); Richard A. Muller, "Joseph Hall as Rhetor, Theologian, and Exegete: His Contribution to the History of Interpretation," in *Solomon's Divine Arts*, Joseph Hall, ed. G. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 11-37; Richard A. Muller, "William Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition: Interpretation, Style, and Method," in *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses: Commentary on Hebrews 11*, William Perkins, ed. J. Augustine (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 71-94.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald Sheppard, "Between Reformation and Modernity: The Perception of the Scope of Biblical Books," in *A Commentary on Galatians*, William Perkins, ed. Gerald Sheppard (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), vii-xiii; Jacques Le Brun, "Meaning and Scope of the Return to Origins in Richard Simon's Work," *Trinity Journal* 3 (1982):57-70; Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 72-81; Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

<sup>27</sup> Gerald Sheppard, "The Role of the Canonical Context in the Interpretation of the Solomonic Books," in *Solomon's Divine Arts*, Joseph Hall, ed. Gerald Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 67-107; Sheppard, "Interpretation of the Old Testament between Reformation and Modernity"; Theodore Letis, "Brevard Childs and the Protestant Dogmaticians: A Window to a New Paradigm of Biblical Interpretation," *Churchman* 105 (1991):261-277.

<sup>28</sup> Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, "Foundations of Biblical Philology in the Seventeenth Century: Christian and Jewish Dimensions," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Isadore Tweersky and Bernard Septimus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 77-94; Jai-Sung Shim, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Hebraism in the Early Seventeenth Century as Reflected in the Work of John Weemse," Ph.D. diss. (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1998); Carl Trueman, "Protestant Scholasticism, Jews and Judaism: Some Notes on Their Connection," *Journal of Progressive Judaism* 4 (1995):61-76; Peter van Rooden, *Theology, Biblical Scholarship, and Rabbinical Studies in the Seventeenth Century: Constantijn L'Empereur (1591-1648), Professor of Hebrew and Theology at Leiden* (Leiden: Brill, 1989); S. G. Burnett, "The Christian Hebraism of Johann Buxtorf (1564-1629)," Ph.D. diss. (University of Wisconsin, 1990).

<sup>29</sup> Theodore Letis, "John Owen Versus Brian Walton: A Reformed Response to the Birth of Text Criticism," in *The Majority Text*, ed. T. Letis (Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), 145-190;

## 2. The Goal of This Study

In order to evaluate the validity of the older criticism directed at the interpretive practices of the seventeenth century – and to determine if it is appropriate to reassess orthodox exegesis along the same lines as its theology has been – this study will examine the theological and exegetical writings of John Owen, a highly influential pastor and Puritan scholar in the mid-seventeenth century. The primary thrust of this study will be to analyze the interpretations and conclusions Owen draws from Scripture in his biblical commentaries, with particular attention to his interpretations on the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. From his exposition and commentary on the Hebrews text, an appraisal can be made of the interpretive methodology which he used in discovering the scriptural meaning, and of his utilization of contemporary exegetical tools and techniques.

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Richard A. Muller, "The Debate over the Vowel Points and the Crisis in Orthodox Hermeneutics," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10 (1980):53-72; Martin Klauber, "Jean-Alphonse Turretini and the Abrogation of the Formula Consensus in Geneva," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991):325-338; Martin Klauber, "The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675): An Introduction and Translation," *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990):103-123; Martin Klauber and Glenn Sunshine, "Jean-Alphonse Turretini on Biblical Accommodation: Calvinist or Socinian?" *Calvin Theological Journal* 25 (1990):7-27.

<sup>30</sup> Childs, "The *Sensus Literalis* of Scripture"; Charles Cannon, "William Whitaker's *Disputatio de Sacra Scriptura: A Sixteenth-Century Theory of Allegory*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 25 (1962):129-138; R. P. C. Hansen, *Allegory and Event* (London: SCM Press, 1959); Victor Harris, "Allegory to Analogy in the Interpretation of Scriptures," *Philological Quarterly* 45 (1966):1-23.

<sup>31</sup> O. R. Johnston, "The Puritan Use of the Old Testament," *Evangelical Quarterly* 23 (1951):183-209; Emory Elliott, "From Father to Son: The Evolution of Typology in Puritan New England," in *Literary Uses of Typology: From the Late Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Earl Minor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 204-227; Donald Dickson, "The Complexities of Biblical Typology in the Seventeenth Century," *Renaissance and Reformation* 11 (1987):253-272; Perry Miller, "Introduction," in *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 1-41; Mason Lowance, "Typology and the New England Way: Cotton Mather and the Exegesis of Biblical Types," *Early American Literature* 4 (1969):15-37; Mason Lowance, "Introduction," in *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, Samuel Mather (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969), v-xxiii; Thomas Davis, "The Exegetical Traditions of Puritan Typology," *Early American Literature* 5 (1970):11-50; Thomas Davis, "Edward Taylor and the Traditions of Typology," *Early American Literature* 5 (1970):27-47; Thomas Davis, "The Traditions of Puritan Typology," in *Typology and Early American Literature*, ed. S. Bercovitch ([Amherst]: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 11-45; Edward Davidson, "John Cotton's Biblical Exegesis: Method and Purpose," *Early American Literature* 17 (1982):119-138; Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1981).

### 3. The Method of This Study

#### 3.1 Source Material

There is a wealth of primary material which may be examined in this exercise. John Owen published an in-depth discourse on Psalm 130, *A Practical Exposition on Psalm CXXX*, in 1668, though the work appears as a collection of lectures or sermons on the text rather than as a formal commentary. Much of Owen's theological writings begin with a careful examination of a pertinent biblical text, and as such, they are a relevant source for this investigation. However, Owen's most accessible and explicit exegetical work is his massive commentary, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. This work, published in four volumes from 1668-1684, includes a number of *Exercitations*, short discourses addressing preliminary issues germane to the epistle's interpretation. Because of the size of this commentary and his extensive treatment of each verse, the bulk of this investigation focuses on Owen's exegesis of the verses in the first chapter of Hebrews.<sup>32</sup>

Of course, another main source of information regarding Owen's exegetical method is his theological writings about the Bible. The nature and use of the Scripture was still an important issue, and hotly debated, in the post-Reformation era, and like many other orthodox theologians, Owen wrote and preached extensively on the authority of God's written Word. In 1659 Owen penned two works advancing the authority of the original language texts of Scripture over ancient or modern translations, *Of the Divine Original of the Scriptures* and *A Vindication of the Hebrew and Greek Texts*, which also embroiled him in the emerging "text criticism" debate. Along with his 1677 work, *The Reason of*

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<sup>32</sup> John Owen, *A Practical Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vols. 17-23 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

*Faith*, these books clearly set out Owen's understanding of the nature of Scripture, especially its divine origin and, consequently, its authority in matters of faith and practice. While this view of the Bible has an obvious impact on one's interpretive approach, Owen's exegetical methodology is most explicitly presented in *The Causes, Ways and Means of Understanding the Mind of God* (1678). The theoretical principles and procedures laid out in these and other works, along with Owen's actual exegetical observations and conclusions, provide the evidence from which an evaluation of his interpretive methodology is assessed.<sup>33</sup>

Owen's stated hermeneutical principles and his approach to the biblical text are measured against similar writings from his English and continental contemporaries. An exegete's interpretation is often supported by an appeal to a theoretical principle, and so the exegetical writings of Owen's contemporaries provide some relevant information for the study. The preface to published commentaries frequently included some discussion of important methodological principles, as for instance in the commentaries by William Perkins, John Mayer, Matthew Poole, and Jean Diodati.<sup>34</sup> Larger systematic and theological works – such as those by Edward Leigh, William Whitaker, and Francis Turretin – often also contain explicit interpretive rules or canons.<sup>35</sup> Robert Boyle, Francis

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<sup>33</sup> John Owen, *Of the Divine Original of the Scriptures*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

<sup>34</sup> Rodolfe Cudworth writes the "Epistle Dedication" for William Perkins, *A Commentarie or Exposition Vpon the Fiue First Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister... William Perkins*, vol. 2 (London, 1616-1618); John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon the New Testament. Representing the divers expositions thereof, out of the workes of the most learned, both ancient Fathers, and moderne Writers*, 3 vols. (London, 1631); Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979); Jean Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible, plainly Expounding the Most Difficult Places Thereof* (London, 1648).

<sup>35</sup> Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity consisting of Three Bookes : The First of which Handling the Scripture or Word of God, Treateth of its Divine Authority, the Canonick Bookes, the Authentickall*

Osborne, Nicholas Byfield, and others wrote tracts encouraging the reading of Scripture by the laity, including guidelines for proper interpretation, and Thomas Hall authored an introductory text on biblical exegesis for students preparing for ministry.<sup>36</sup> Other theoretical works focused on specific interpretive techniques, such as John Wilson's defense of the analogy of Scripture in *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter Asserted* and John Weemse's use of Hebraic insights in interpretation in his *Christian Synagogue* and *Exercitations Divine*.<sup>37</sup> Most useful, however, are the explicit treatments of the exegete's task which were available in the seventeenth century, including the comments by William Perkins in *The Arte of Prophecyng* and by Henry Lukin in *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*.<sup>38</sup> The exegetical strategy advanced by these authors are used to evaluate Owen's own method, both in theory and in practice.

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*Edition, and Severall Versions, the End, Properties, and Interpretation of Scripture : The Second Handling God Sheweth that there is a God, and What He is, in His Essence and Several Attributes, and Likewise the Distinction of Persons in the Divine Essence: The Third Handleth the Three Principall Works of God, Decree, Creation and Providence* (London, 1646); William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, trans. William Fitzgerald (1610; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849); Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. J. Dennison (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992).

<sup>36</sup> Robert Boyle, *Some Considerations Touching the Style of the H. Scriptures extracted from several parts of a discourse concerning divers particulars belonging to the Bible* (London, 1663); Francis Osborne, *The Private Christians non ultra, or, A Plea for the Lay-man's Interpreting the Scriptures* (Oxford, 1656); Nicholas Byfield, *Directions for the Private Reading of the Scriptures* (London, 1648); T[homas] W[ilson], *Theological Rules, to Guide Vs in the Vnderstanding and Practice of Holy Scriptures: two centuries: drawne partly out of Scriptures themselues: partly out of ecclesiasticall writers old and new* (London, 1615), sometimes erroneously attributed to Thomas Walkington; Thomas Hall, *Vindiciae Literarum, The Schools Guarded, or, The Excellency and Vsefulness of Humane Learning in Subordination to Divinity, and preparation to the ministry, as also, Rules for the Expounding of the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1655).

<sup>37</sup> John Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter Asserted, or, A Discourse Concerning the Right Interpretation of Scripture, wherein a late exercitation, intituled, Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres, is examin'd* (London, 1678); John Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue, in The Workes of Mr. John Weemse of Lathocker in Scotland, in these volumes. Containing these eight bookes... Serving generally for a helpe to the understanding of all that desire to know and obey the will of God in holy writt...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1636); John Weemse, *Exercitations Divine. Containing diverse Questions and Solutions for the right understanding of the Scriptures...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1632).

<sup>38</sup> William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng, or, A Treatise Concerning the Sacred and Onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching, in The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister... William Perkins*, vol. 2 (London, 1616-1618); Henry Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture, Containing the several Tropes, Figures, Properities of Speech used therein; with other Observations, necessary for the right Understanding thereof* (London, 1669).

One other main source of information relevant to this study comes from the biblical interpretations on Hebrews 1 by other Reformation and post-Reformation era commentators. Because of the importance of evaluating Owen's work in historical context, and of assessing his method in light of the standards of his time, numerous commentaries on Hebrews are examined and the interpretations therein are compared with Owen's.

### 3.2 Contemporary Commentators on Hebrews

Some of the more relevant contemporary exegetes and their works, almost all of which are found in Owen's library catalogue, include:

**William Gouge** (1578-1653) was a prominent preacher in London, served as an officer in the Westminster Assembly, and wrote the biblical annotations for the Old Testament historical books authorized by the Assembly. Although he avoided political involvement, Gouge's staunch advocacy for the spread of Puritanism led to frequent conflict with Archbishop Laud. Reflecting nearly one thousand sermons delivered on the book, his *Commentary on Hebrews* was published just fifteen years prior to Owen's first installment of his *Exposition*, and was the most extensive treatment of Hebrews then available. Owen only mentions Gouge by name once (and that second-hand), though he frequently deals with exegetical options similar to those promoted by Gouge in his *Commentary*.<sup>39</sup>

**Matthew Poole's** (1624-1679) *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* was written following Poole's resignation from his pulpit when, bound by his Puritan and Presbyterian principles, he refused to conform to the Act of Uniformity. Originally written in Latin

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<sup>39</sup> William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (1655; repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980). Owen mentions Gouge in his comments on Hebrews 9:14, Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 22:295, disagreeing with an opinion which some unnamed commentator ascribed to Gouge.



for scholars, *Synopsis Criticorum* was a compilation of the critical labors of previous biblical commentators, its value deriving from the breath of scholarship combined with brevity in presentation.<sup>40</sup>

**David Dickson** (1583?-1663), a Scottish divine who served as a chaplain in the Scot's army during the Bishops' Wars, published numerous political, theological, and exegetical works, including commentaries on Hebrews, the Gospel of Matthew, the Psalms, and Paul's epistles. *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* was reprinted various times during Owen's lifetime and extensively used by Puritan preachers in their sermons. He was ejected from his professorship for failing to take the oath of supremacy at the Restoration.<sup>41</sup>

**George Lawson** (d.1678) preached in various pulpits in England prior to and during the Commonwealth. He retained his position and the support of Parliament even though his theology had a strong Arminian flavor. He mainly wrote of political theory, specifically evaluating and rejecting the views of Hobbes. His one theological work was *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrewes wherein the Text is Cleared, Theopolitica Improved, the Socinian Comment Examined*, where he refutes Socinian interpretations.<sup>42</sup>

**William Jones's** (1561-1636) only major publication was *A Commentary vpon the Epistles of Saint Pavl to Philemon, and to the Hebrewes*. Archbishop Laud took

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<sup>40</sup> Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979); Matthew Poole, *Synopsis criticorum et aliorum commentaria in Biblia*, 8 vols. (London, 1669).

<sup>41</sup> David Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1649; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978).

<sup>42</sup> George Lawson, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrewes wherein the Text is Cleared, Theopolitica Improved, the Socinian Comment Examined* (London, 1662).

exception to the work and forced him to make revisions. Educated at Cambridge, Jones served in a Suffolk pulpit throughout his forty-four year ministry.<sup>43</sup>

**Edward Dering or Deering** (1540?-1576) was considered “the most learned man in England” by his contemporaries in the mid-sixteenth century. An early Puritan, he was suspended for his attacks on Anglican clergy by Elizabeth, to whom he later dedicated the publication of his Hebrew’s lectures. The most extensive treatment of Hebrews prior to the work by Gouge and Owen, Dering’s *XXVII Lectures, or Readings, vpon part of the Epistle to the Hebrues* reveal his warm affections, deep convictions, remarkable command of language, and his abrasive presentation.<sup>44</sup>

*Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament*, or simply, *The Westminster Annotations*, are the biblical annotations authorized by Parliament though not an official publication of the Westminster Assembly. Different scholars (mostly Assembly members) worked on the various sections of the annotations. John Downham was probably the author of the annotations on the Epistle to the Hebrews.<sup>45</sup>

*The Dutch Annotations upon the Whole Bible* were ordered and authorized by the Synod of Dort in 1618 as part of their deliberations over the Remonstrants. They were first published in the Netherlands in 1637, and, following their translation by Theodore Haak, in England in 1657.<sup>46</sup>

**Tommaso Cajetan** (1469-1534) is important as a Roman exegete and for his strictly literal biblical commentaries, published in five volumes in 1639. A cardinal, Aquinas

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<sup>43</sup> William Jones, *A Commentary vpon the Epistles of Saint Pavl to Philemon, and to the Hebrewes* (London, 1635).

<sup>44</sup> Edward Dering, *XXVII Lectures, or Readings, vpon part of the Epistle to the Hebrues* (London, 1614).

<sup>45</sup> *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament* (London, 1645).

<sup>46</sup> *The Dutch Annotations upon the Whole Bible: or, All the Holy Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, together with, and according to their own Translation of all the Text: As both the one and*

scholar, and Dominican theologian, Cajetan was the papal legate who examined Luther at the Diet of Augsburg in 1518. Until his death, Cajetan wrote extensively, countering the Reformation developments to much acclaim, though his commentaries, frequently opposing the normative interpretations, were not well received by Rome.<sup>47</sup>

**Desiderius Erasmus** (d.1536) was a principal leader in Christian humanism. A gifted classical scholar and Christian theologian, Erasmus used his talents to advance the achievements of Renaissance humanism. Toward that end, Erasmus edited, translated and published numerous Greek and Latin classics, as well as biblical commentaries, works by the Church Fathers, and, by collating and using ancient manuscripts and other evidence, the first critical Greek New Testament edition (1516). *Annotations*, his initial philological notes and comments, were expanded in succeeding editions and republished throughout Europe.<sup>48</sup>

**John Calvin's** (1509-1564) exegetical work makes up a vast amount of his *Opera*.

During Owen's time, Calvin's biblical interpretations continued to be important for Reformed thinkers, both because of their theological orientation and because of Calvin's humanistic approach to the text. He mentions Calvin as often as he names any like-minded commentator (Owen most frequently identifies his opponents by

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*the other were ordered and appointed by the Synod of Dort, 1618. And published by Authority, 1637, 2 vols., trans. Theodore Haak (London, 1657).*

<sup>47</sup> Tommaso Cajetan, *Opera Omnia Quotquot in Sacrae Scripture Expositionem Reperiumter* (Lyon, 1639).

<sup>48</sup> Erasmus, *Novum Instrumentum* (Basel, 1516; repr. Fromman-Holzboog: Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1986); Erasmus, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: Galatians to the Apocalypse*, ed. Anne Reeve (New York: Brill, 1993).

name), though he is hardly enslaved to his interpretations, objecting to Calvin's conclusions at various points.<sup>49</sup>

**Francis Gomarus** (1563-1641) was a Dutch Reformed minister and theologian, and a leading representative of Calvinism in opposition to the growing Arminian theology. As a professor of theology at the University of Leiden, Gomarus was influential in the controversy culminating in the Synod of Dort. The Synod authorized a Dutch translation of the Bible, Gomarus working on the Old Testament. His biblical comments, including those on Hebrews, were published in his *Opera Theologica Omnia* in 1644.<sup>50</sup>

**Johannes Coccejus** (1603-1669), a Dutch theologian a generation after Gomarus, early exhibited extraordinary linguistic abilities. His Hebraic and rabbinic studies led to an early publication of Talmudic works. He was a prolific author (his *Opera Omnia* is in twelve volumes), writing in the area of biblical theology, dogmatics, philology, and exegesis. Commenting on principle books of the Bible (including Hebrews), Coccejus's unique brand of covenant/federal theology runs throughout his biblical interpretations.<sup>51</sup>

**David Paraeus** or **Pareus** (1548-1622) taught New Testament and Old Testament at Heidelberg for the final twenty years of his life. Despite polemical works against Lutherans, Unitarians, and Catholics, Paraeus's irenic spirit dominates his numerous

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<sup>49</sup> John Calvin, *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*. 59 vols. (vols. 29-87 of *Corpus Reformatorum*), ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss (Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863-1900); John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, ed. D. Torrance & T. Torrance (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

<sup>50</sup> Francis Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia* (Amsterdam, 1644).

<sup>51</sup> Johannes Coccejus, *Opera Omnia Theologica, Exegetica, Didactica, Polemica, Philologica*, 12 vols. (Amsterdam, 1701-1706).

NT and OT commentaries, such as his *Commentarius in Diui Pauli Epistolam ad Hebraeos*.<sup>52</sup>

**Johannes Piscator** (1546-1625) held various faculty positions and was a devote follower of Ramus. A well respected teacher, he published textbooks in philosophy, philology, and theology, as well as a translation of the Bible into German. His interpretation of Hebrews is part of his Latin commentary on the whole Bible in *Commentarii in omnes libros Novi Testamenti*.<sup>53</sup>

**Jean Diodati's** (1576-1649) *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible* are the English translation of his notes and clarifications on the text which he made while revising a French translation of the Bible made in Geneva where he taught dogmatics. Diodati served as a deputy to the Synod of Dort and helped compile its canons.<sup>54</sup>

**Johann Crell** (1590-1633) was a second generation follower of Socinius who tirelessly advanced the Unitarian cause. He taught and preached at Rakow and was a prodigious writer, producing commentaries on nearly all the books of the New Testament. His Socinianism was promoted in England by John Biddle and others who translated and published Crell's exegesis of Hebrews under the title, *The Expiation of a Sinner in a Commentary Vpon the Epistle to the Hebreuves*. Owen frequently interacted with Crell's interpretations as well as those of the Socinian **Jonas Schlichting** (1592-1661).<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> David Paraeus, *Commentarius in Diui Pauli Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, in *Opera Theologica*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1628).

<sup>53</sup> Johannes Piscator, *Commentarii in Libros Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (Herborn, 1591-1622).

<sup>54</sup> Jean Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible, plainly Expounding the Most Difficult Places Thereof* (London, 1648).

<sup>55</sup> Johann Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica, didactica, et polemica. Sive ejus in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros commentarii. Maximan partem hactenus inediti*, in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, vols. 8-9 (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam]: Sumptibus Irenici Philaethii, 1656); Johann Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner in a Commentary Vpon the Epistle to the Hebreuves* (London, 1646); Jonasz Schlichting, *Commentaria*

**Hugo Grotius** (1583-1645) was a distinguished Dutch jurist and humanist.

Theologically, Grotius is difficult to pin down. In the debate between Gomarus and Arminius, he supported Arminius and, following 1618, was sentenced to life imprisonment. Escaping two years later, Grotius lived as an exile in Paris, labeled as, and debating with, the Socinians, Reformed, and Arminians alike. His *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum* is an excellent example both of his humanism and his anomalous theology. Grotius frequently serves as a foil for Owen.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. John Owen and the Epistle to the Hebrews

John Owen was one of the most prominent Puritan thinkers in the “high orthodox” period during the mid- to later seventeenth century, as well as an important figure in the political events of his day. Born sometime in 1616 into a Puritan family, Owen was educated at Oxford and afterwards served as a private chaplain until moving to London during the Civil War, where his long association with Parliament (as one of its main preachers), Oliver Cromwell, and the Commonwealth began. In the mid-1640s his mild Presbyterianism transformed to a firm Congregationalism which he stoutly defended throughout his life. When Oliver Cromwell was sent by Parliament to suppress the rebellion in Ireland, he invited Owen to accompany him as a chaplain, and he became Cromwell’s chief adviser in ecclesiastical matters. This further led to his appointment as Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and eventually as the University’s Vice-Chancellor. During this time, much of his polemical work was produced, directed against the Arminians, Socinians, and Catholics. However, Owen had a falling out with his

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*posthuma, in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros : cuncta hactenus inedita : in dous tomos distincta* (Irenopoli [Amsterdam], 1656).

<sup>56</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 7 vols. (Groningen: Zuidema, 1641; repr. 1829).

benefactor when he opposed the plan to offer Cromwell the crown. Though he was one of the more prominent churchmen during the Civil War and the Commonwealth, Owen's political connections spared him the full brunt of Royal displeasure which visited many other Puritan clergy following the Stuart Restoration. Nevertheless, he was ejected as from his position as Dean at the Restoration, and his ministry was further hampered by the Clarendon Code. Owen continued to lead a small house congregation illegally until it finally merged with that of fellow Congregationalist Joseph Caryl. His second marriage (the first ending with the death of his wife) brought financial independence to the family, and enabled Owen to focus on his writings. His latter years were marked by his continued efforts on behalf of non-conforming orthodox believers and the publication of his theological, exegetical, and pastoral works. Owen left behind no extant diary and the biographical information in his correspondence is remarkably scant; consequently, little is known of his personal side, though his efforts as a pastor were appreciated and admired.<sup>57</sup>

There are a number of good reasons to focus on the thought and writings of John Owen in addressing the question raised in this project, not the least of which is his great significance in the articulation and development of Reformed theology in England. Owen is generally recognized as one of the ablest defenders of Puritan orthodoxy, and was described by contemporaries as "the Calvin of England" and "a pastor, a scholar, a divine of the first magnitude."<sup>58</sup> A life-long admirer, J. I. Packer comments that Owen "is by

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<sup>57</sup> Biographical information can be found in Andrew Thomson, "Life of Dr. Owen," in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); William Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen* (1840; repr. Choteau: Gospel Mission, 1981); Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971); Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987).

<sup>58</sup> Ambrose Barnes, *The Memoirs of the Life of Mr. Ambrose Barnes, late merchant and sometime alderman of Newcastle upon Tyne*, ed. William Longstaffe (Durnham, 1867), 16; the latter quote is from David Clarkson's funeral sermon for Owen as printed in Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen*, 411.

common consent not the most versatile, but the greatest among Puritan theologians,” and that he “was one of the greatest of English theologians. In an age of giants, he overtopped them all.”<sup>59</sup> Although he did not write a systematic theology per se, Owen’s theological contribution to the church is immense. Polemically, he was a vigorous defender of orthodoxy against Arminian, Socinian, and Roman views. He wrote passionately on the person and work of Christ, encouraging the believer’s communion with the Godhead, and his work on the nature and operation of the Holy Spirit is masterful and has few equals. An independent, Owen was deeply involved in discussions concerning the nature of the Church in light of the Presbyterian-Congregationalist controversies. And, most importantly for this study, Owen and his writings were immersed in the Scriptures – both as to the nature of the sacred text and its function in theological articulation – including his masterful exegesis of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Nearly all of Owen’s writings have been published in recent decades and are readily available. The nineteenth-century collection of his works in twenty-four volumes edited by William Goold has recently been republished by Banner of Truth (minus the Latin seventeenth volume). Owen’s Latin *Theologoumena Pantodapa* and a shorter treatise against Quaker scriptural interpretation is now available in English translation, *Biblical Theology*, from Soli Deo Gloria. *The Correspondence of John Owen* and *The Oxford Orations of Dr. John Owen* were compiled, edited, and published by Peter Toon in the early 1970s. Owen also wrote a number of prefaces and introductory epistles to works of other authors, a partial list of which is found in Goold’s Indices in volume sixteen. Some of these works have been reprinted along with Owen’s prefaces, most notably John Durham’s *Exposition of the Song of Solomon*. Finally, Owen left his mark on a number of joint publications: *The Savory Declaration* (a Congregationalist adaptation of the

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<sup>59</sup> J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990), 81, 191.



Westminster Confession) in 1658, "The Fundamentals of Religion" in 1654, and *The Humble Proposals* in 1652.<sup>60</sup>

Yet, despite the acclaim accorded him and the availability of his literary legacy, scholarship on Owen is remarkably light, especially prior to the publication of his biography by Peter Toon in 1971 and the theological examinations by Sinclair Ferguson and his students. Along with Ferguson's study, Dewey Wallace and William Chalker early wrote theological overviews of Owen; Wallace's in particular is still important.<sup>61</sup> Owen's political influence has garnered some study,<sup>62</sup> as has his pastoral and devotional life.<sup>63</sup> On prolegomena issues, Sebastian Rehnman's study is meticulously researched and contains a wealth of information on Owen's theological sources and on the breadth of his

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<sup>60</sup> John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, 23 vols., ed. William Goold (1850-1855; repr. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *Theologoumena Pantodapa* (1661; repr. *Biblical Theology*, Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994); James Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (1668; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982); John Owen, *The Correspondence of John Owen*, ed. Peter Toon (Cambridge: James Clarke, 1970); John Owen, *The Oxford Orations of Dr. John Owen*, ed. Peter Toon (Callington, 1971); *The Humble Proposals* are reprinted in Peter Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Seoul: Westminster Publishing House, n.d.), 64-68.

<sup>61</sup> Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith*; Dewey Wallace, *The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660* (Princeton: Wallace, 1965); William Chalker, "Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century English Calvinists – A Comparison of their Doctrines of the Knowledge of God, Faith, and Assurance," Ph.D. diss. (Duke University, 1961). See also, Don Everson, "The Puritan Theology of John Owen," Ph.D. diss. (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959); Dale Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology," Ph.D. diss. (McGill University, 1967).

<sup>62</sup> Sarah Cook, "A Political Biography of a Religious Independent: John Owen, 1616-1683," Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1972); Carolyn Polizzotto, "The Campaign against The Humble Proposals of 1652," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 38 (1987):569-581; Godfrey Vose, "Profile of a Puritan: John Owen (1616-1683)," Ph.D. diss. (University of Iowa, 1963); Lloyd Williams, "'Digitus Dei': God and Nation in the Thought of John Owen: A Study in English Puritanism and Nonconformity, 1653-1683," Ph.D. diss. (Drew University, 1981); Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (New York: Viking, 1984), 170-178.

<sup>63</sup> John Hannah, "The Cure of Souls; or, Pastoral Counseling : The Insight of John Owen," *Reformation and Revival Journal* 5 (1996):71-82; John Hannah, "Insights into Pastoral Counseling from John Owen," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, ed. Charles Dyer and Roy Zuck (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 348-360; Douglas Jones, "Liturgy Lessons from Owen," *Reformation and Revival Journal* 5 (1996):111-118; Stephen Mayor, "The Teachings of John Owen Concerning the Lord's Supper," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18 (1965):170-181; David King, "The Affective Spirituality of John Owen," *Evangelical Quarterly* 68 (1996):223-233. Note also the Christian life in light of Owen's eschatology in Christopher R. Smith, "'Up and Be Doing': The Pragmatic Puritan Eschatology of John Owen," *Evangelical Quarterly* 61 (1989):335-349.

academic background.<sup>64</sup> Much of Carl Trueman's extensive work on Owen focuses on the principles of the Puritan's theology and their outworking in the rest of his thought.<sup>65</sup> Owen has been used by scholars on both sides of the "Calvin vs. the Calvinists" debate to demonstrate their case: most notably with A. C. Clifford's *Atonement and Justification* who argued that Owen's soteriology had departed significantly from the original Reformers'. Other studies have taken the opposite route, stressing the continuity of Owen with Calvin – this theme comes through the work of David Wong, Joel Beeke, Jonathan Won, Richard Hawkes, and others. An excellent summary of the debate, as well as a meaningful contribution in its own right, is Randall Gleason's study on mortification in Owen and Calvin.<sup>66</sup> Owen's Christology is perhaps the area most studied up to this point. In addition to the monograph by Won mentioned above, Richard Daniels, Robert Wright,

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<sup>64</sup> Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002); Sebastian Rehnman, "Theologia Tradita: A Study in the Prolegomenous Discourse of John Owen (1616-1683)," D.Phil. diss. (University of Oxford, 1997); Sebastian Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, ed. Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 181-203. See also, sections in Zimmermann, "English Puritans and German Pietists"; Michael Bobick, "Owen's Razor: The Role of Ramist Logic in the Covenant Theology of John Owen," Ph.D. diss. (Drew University, 1996); G. J. McGrath, "Puritans and the Human Will: Voluntarism within Mid-Seventeenth Century English Puritanism As Seen in the Thought of Richard Baxter and John Owen," Ph.D. diss. (University of Durham, 1989); Alan Spence, "John Owen and Trinitarian Agency," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990):157-173.

<sup>65</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998); Carl Trueman, "Faith Seeking Understanding: Some Neglected Aspects of John Owen's Understanding of Scriptural Interpretation," in *Interpreting the Bible*, ed. A. N. S. Lane (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 147-162; Carl Trueman, "John Owen's *Dissertation on Divine Justice*: An Exercise in Christocentric Scholasticism," *Calvin Theological Journal* 33 (1998):87-103.

<sup>66</sup> Clifford, *Atonement and Justification*; Jonathan Won, "Communion with Christ: An Exposition and Comparison of the Doctrine of Union and Communion with Christ in Calvin and the English Puritans," Ph.D. diss. (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1989); David Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen," Ph.D. diss. (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998); Joel Beeke, *Assurance of Faith* (New York: Lang, 1994); Richard Hawkes, "The Logic of Grace in John Owen, D.D.: An Analysis, Exposition, and Defense of John Owen's Puritan Theology of Grace," Ph.D. diss. (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987); Gleason, *John Calvin and John Owen on Mortification*. See also, Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith*; Wallace, *The Life and Thought of John Owen*; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*; Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen."

and Peter De Vries wrote dissertations on the subject, and there are some relevant individual articles.<sup>67</sup>

Two controversies have led to the publication of material on Owen and his view of Scripture. The first arises from Owen's debate with Brian Walton concerning the divine origin of the Hebrew vowel points. John Bowman fleshes out the debate while Theodore Letis defends Owen (or at least seeks to explain and justify his reasoning).<sup>68</sup> The second, more extensive controversy concerns Owen's understanding of the nature of Scripture as God's Word. The work of Jack Rogers and Donald McKim identify Owen as part of a movement away from the dynamic understanding of Scripture held by the Reformers, to a more static, inerrant biblicism. Other scholars dispute this assessment.<sup>69</sup> All these scriptural studies, however, focus on the nature of the text, and not upon its use or interpretation. Very little has been done on Owen's handling of the Bible,<sup>70</sup> and almost

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<sup>67</sup> Richard Daniels, "'Great is the Mystery of Godliness': The Christology of John Owen," Ph.D. diss. (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1990); Robert Wright, "John Owen's Great High Priest: The Highpriesthood of Christ in the Theology of John Owen," Ph.D. diss. (University of Denver, 1989); Peter de Vries, "*Die mij heeft liefgehad*": *De betekenis van de gemeenschap met Christus in de theologie van John Owen (1616-1683)* (Heerenveen: Groen, 2000); Peter de Vries, "Union and Communion with Christ in the Theology of John Owen," *Reformed Theological Journal* 15 (1999):77-96; Peter de Vries, "The Significance of Union and Communion with Christ in the Theology of John Owen," *Reformed Theological Journal* 17 (2001):75-89; R. Tudor Jones, "Union with Christ: The Existential Nerve of Puritan Piety," *Tyndale Bulletin* 41 (1990):186-208; Alan Spence, "Christ's Humanity and Ours: John Owen," in *Persons, Divine and Human*, ed. Christoph Schwobel and Colin Gunton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 74-97; Alan Spence, "Inspiration and Incarnation: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology," *King's Theological Review* 12 (1989):52-55.

<sup>68</sup> John Bowman, "A Forgotten Controversy," *Evangelical Quarterly* 20 (1948):46-68; Letis, "John Owen Versus Brian Walton." More on this controversy and Owen's understanding of textual criticism follows in later chapters of this study.

<sup>69</sup> Rogers and McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible*; Donald McKim, "John Owen's Doctrine of Scripture in Historical Perspective," *Evangelical Quarterly* 45 (1973):195-207; Freiday, *The Bible: Its Criticism, Interpretation and Use*, 89-95. Cf. J. D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Stanley Gundry, "John Owen on Authority and Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John Hannan (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 212-217; W. Robert Godfrey, "Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 225-243; Geoffrey Bromiley, "The Church Doctrine of Inspiration," in *Revelation and the Bible*, ed. Carl Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1958), 203-217.

<sup>70</sup> Trueman, "Faith Seeking Understanding," deals broadly with Owen's interpretive philosophy, as does Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith*, 196-199.

nothing on what Goold says Owen “consecrated the best energies of his life,” his massive *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*. A. Craig Troxel uses Owen’s exegesis of verses in Hebrews 9 to discuss his teaching about the glory of gospel worship, Robert Wright examines Owen’s *Exercitations* and select sections of his Hebrews *Exposition* to explore Owen’s view of Christ as “the great high priest,” and scattered throughout Richard Daniels’s dissertation are citations from Owen’s *Exposition* which give examples of his Christology.<sup>71</sup> Yet, except for rare instances, no comment is made concerning the actual method or act of exegesis which generates the theological conclusions under study. For all the biblical exegesis which Owen performed and published throughout his lifetime, precious little is reflected in modern scholarship.

Finally, the biblical interpretations of John Owen make a good case study in the history of exegesis in the seventeenth century because he was so completely a product of his age – and because of his academic and intellectual abilities. What makes Owen so extraordinary as an exegete and theologian is not that he was ahead (or outside) of his time, but that his thought and writings encompassed, all at once, all that was representative of his age – he was chief of his era, not because he represented something beyond his time, but because he represented the best of his era. John Owen was steeped in Puritan Reformed thought and his theological formulations represent the pinnacle of Reformed orthodoxy in England, though he was well schooled in the alternative theological movements of his time. As this study will show, Owen had all the skills, training, and expertise of a highly educated humanist, and this humanism is inextricably woven into the fabric of his exegetical approach. Similarly, Owen can very easily be (and often is) classified as a scholastic thinker, employing the techniques and methods of

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<sup>71</sup> A. Craig Troxel, “‘Cleansed Once for All’: John Owen on the Glory of Gospel Worship in ‘Hebrews,’” *Calvin Theological Journal* 32 (1997):468-479; Wright, “John Owen’s Great High Priest”;

scholasticism throughout his work – including his biblical interpretations. Above all, Owen was a scholar. His writings exhibit a thorough knowledge of a wide variety of intellectual areas, and his academic abilities are evident from his time at Oxford and the respect of his colleagues. What Owen called, “my own small library,” contained nearly three thousand works, many of them multi-volume sets.<sup>72</sup> The auction catalogue of his library in 1684 attests to the breadth of his intellectual interests, and lists numerous classics, writings on philosophy, history, and geography, and extensive philological works. Of course, the bulk of the catalogue enumerates the vast collection of books on divinity – including the major authors of the patristic, medieval, Reformation, and contemporary periods. Thus, John Owen was a Reformed, scholastic, humanistic, academically remarkable theologian and exegete – which makes his biblical interpretations perfect for this study.

One other quality justifies the choice of Owen for this study – his exegetical commentary on the biblical book of Hebrews. *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* appeared in four folio volumes, the first published in 1668, followed by other volumes in 1674, 1680, and, posthumously, in 1684, and is generally acknowledged as his greatest work. Having finished the last volume for press, Owen is reported to have laid down his pen and said, “Now, my work is done; it is time for me to die.”<sup>73</sup> In the first volume, Owen’s exposition of the first two chapters of the epistle are preceded by an extended set of preliminary *Exercitations*, which introduce the epistle and many of its unique qualities.

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Daniels, “Great is the Mystery of Godliness.”

<sup>72</sup> John Owen, *Of the Death of Christ: The Price He Paid, and The Purchase He Made*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 10 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 471; Edward Millington, ed., *Bibliotheca Oweniana, sive Catalogus librorum... Rev. Doct. Vir. D. Joan. Oweni...* (London, 1684).

<sup>73</sup> Thomson, “Life of Dr. Owen,” 1:lxxxvi.

As a object of exegetical study, the Epistle to the Hebrews is difficult to surpass, for it is a virtual laboratory for exploring exegetical issues. First, it is a book full of essential Christian doctrine, for the author is dealing with some of the most crucial aspects of the faith – the person of Christ, his priesthood, atonement, and faith. Second, the epistle ties together the two covenants, drawing out the message of the Old Testament in its New Testament fulfillment. Third, by virtue of the author’s reliance and use of the Old Testament in the epistle, the epistle itself also serves as an example of apostolic exegesis – how the apostle handled the message of the OT and specific passages therein is clearly manifest. Fourth, the epistle offers a vast number of opportunities to see different exegetical techniques at work – typology, reliance on the original languages, textual issues, the importance of the scope and the analogy of faith, and the value of a functional knowledge of Hebraic and ancient near-eastern culture. The benefit of all of these is frequently demonstrated throughout this epistle, and the history of its interpretation throughout the church age.

It was the importance of the Hebraic influence on the epistle, however, which eventually led Owen to author his *Exposition*. In his opening epistle to the reader, Owen acknowledges that for some time he had desired to write an exposition of Hebrews, but that the presence of previous commentators and annotators on the biblical book deterred him. Owen’s biographer, Andrew Thomson, notes, however, that “not disdainful of the labours of those who had gone before him, he yet found that the mine had been opened, rather than exhausted,”<sup>74</sup> and that one major untapped lode was the value, even the necessity, of understanding the customs of the original Jewish audience.

But that which most of all took off the weight of the discouragement that arose from the multiplied endeavours of learned men in this kind, was an observation that all of them, being intent on the sense of the words as absolutely considered, and the use of

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<sup>74</sup> Thomson, “Life of Dr. Owen,” 1:lxxxv.

them to the present church, had much overlooked the direct respect and regard that the author had in the writing of this Epistle to the then past, present, and future condition of the Hebrews, or church of the Jews. Looking at these things as dead and buried, of no use in the present state of the church, they did either wholly neglect them, or pass them over in a light and perfunctory manner; nor, indeed, had many of them, though otherwise excellently well qualified, a competency of skill for the due consideration of things of that nature. But yet, those that shall seriously and with judgment consider the design of the writer of this Epistle, the time wherein he wrote it, the proper end for which it was composed, the subject-matter treated of in it, the principles he proceeds upon, and his manner of arguing, will easily perceive, that without a serious consideration of them it is not possible to come to a right comprehension, in many things, of the mind of the Holy Ghost therein.<sup>75</sup>

Owen's exposition, however, is not simply a commentary on the epistle from the Talmud or other Jewish sources, as for instance the work of John Lightfoot.<sup>76</sup> As will be demonstrated in this study, Owen's *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* is an exhaustive commentary employing all the humanistic and scholastic techniques available in his era.

## 5. Prospectus

Before exploring the actual exegesis and interpretive conclusions John Owen draws from his analysis of the Epistle to the Hebrews, it is helpful to survey the theoretical principles which prevailed during his time. Chapter 2, "Seventeenth-Century Exegetical Techniques," examines the process for interpreting Scripture as expressed and practiced by seventeenth-century commentators. The specific techniques and rules advanced in the various manuals on the exegetical enterprise which were produced during the Puritan era are compared and contrasted throughout the chapter. A contemporary definition, an explanation of its value, and numerous examples of its use by Owen and other exegetes accompany each individual technique.

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<sup>75</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:6.

<sup>76</sup> Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*.

In the exegesis of the historic Reformed community, four major principles functioned on a presuppositional level. Prior to the advent of the modern critical approach to examining the scriptural text, orthodox churchmen universally assumed that the basic creeds and extrabiblical formulations of Christian faith generated by the patristic and early church Fathers were faithful summaries of the content of the Scripture, which itself was understood to be self-consistent and thus the ultimate judge of its own meaning. These assumptions led to the exegetical principles of the *analogia fidei* and the *analogia Scripturae*. The controlling character of the *scopus* – the author's purpose in writing each particular book or passage of the Bible – in determining a text's intended meaning was also one of the Puritan exegete's hermeneutical assumptions. One final assumption dominated the biblical commentaries in the seventeenth century – a presupposition that the Scripture was written for the deliberate purpose of edifying the Church, both in its original state and in its modern expression. Thus, no exegetical enterprise was complete without an explicit attempt by the expositor to demonstrate the abiding validity and authority of the message of the text to the life and witness of the contemporary Christian community.

The last two sections of the second chapter attempt to distinguish the exegetical techniques used by the Reformed exegete which reflect the influence of scholasticism from those which reflect the influence of humanism, granting again the somewhat artificial nature of this distinction. The extensive attention given by the orthodox to the knowledge and use of the original languages in biblical studies is a good example of an exegetical technique which clearly flows from the Renaissance desire to "return to the sources." Other examples include the advances in philology and attention to grammatical and syntactical issues, the study of cognate languages, the developing interest in Judaism and other Hebraic studies, the concern for the history of the text (giving rise to textual



criticism), and the use of rhetorical and persuasive argumentation. Each of these in some minor way is connected to an earlier scholastic tradition, but they largely grow out of humanistic concerns and were adapted into the exegetical methodology of the Reformed orthodox as a result of the commentators' exposure to these new academic developments. Numerous techniques used by the biblical expositors, however, can be traced much more directly to medieval scholasticism. These include a frequent use of technical (widely recognized) and semi-technical (those used only by one author) distinctions and definitions to clarify theologically ambiguous scriptural texts; the consistent reference to previous church authorities and theologians (though not as absolute authorities as was done in medieval commentators, but as a testimony to the historicity of one's own interpretation); the application of pedagogical forms such as the *locus* style and the *quaestio* approach; and, most importantly, the use of reason and demonstrative arguments in explaining a text. For each of these techniques, a contemporary definition is sought from seventeenth-century theological and exegetical manuals, Owen's own theoretical thoughts on the technique are explored, and examples are gathered from his exegesis of Hebrews (and occasionally from his other exegetical works) as well as the commentaries of his contemporaries.

Once a broad, theoretical picture has been gained of the exegetical milieu within which John Owen operated, the following chapters examine the actual process and results of his exposition of Hebrews, and especially of his analysis of the first chapter in the epistle. The opening comments by the epistle's author concerning God and Christ the Son have long been recognized as an important part of the biblical witness to the doctrine of the Trinity. Chapter 3, "Hebrews 1:1-3 : The Doctrine of the Trinity," examines Owen's discussion of the first three verses of Hebrews when and where they have bearing upon the Trinity doctrine. The chapter begins with a summary of the trinitarian concerns of the

seventeenth century, especially in light of the Socinian work of Johann Crell and John Biddle. Following this, Owen's interpretation of Hebrews 1:1-3 is inspected for the conclusions he draws which have a direct bearing upon the orthodox expression of the doctrine of the Trinity. Throughout the chapter, Owen's exegetical work in Hebrews is related to his comments on the Trinity as found in his other writings, as well as the exegetical interpretations of other Reformed and non-Reformed commentators. Finally, the chapter closes with some observations about Owen's exegetical methodology, and the manner in which theological and doctrinal conclusions arise from his handling of the text.

The next three chapters deal with the difficulties inherent in the interpretation of the many Old Testament citations used by the biblical author in the latter half of the first chapter of the epistle. There are a great many exegetical issues present here, and the commentator's approach to the quotations reveals much of his explicit and implicit exegetical presuppositions and methodology. Chapter 4, "The Citations of the Old Testament : Their Purpose and Text," explores the reasons Owen and his contemporaries give for the plurality of OT citations at this point, and the textual history of each quotation.

Given their own high appreciation for the Scripture, it is not surprising that most Reformed authors (including Owen) argue that the apostle intentionally cites these Old Testament passages as authoritative proof texts for his dogmatic assertions. Another reason is vigorously advanced by Owen (much more so than by any of his colleagues) – the occasion of the writing and the intended audience of the original writing (i.e., first century Jews) demanded such OT support. The chapter then follows Owen's preliminary *Exercitations* in analyzing the text history of the citations as used by the apostle in Hebrews. Owen focuses upon the twenty-five different places where the OT is quoted word for word. The hermeneutical significance of this analysis is important to Owen

because of his concern for defending the authority and purity of the original texts – the original Greek and Hebrew – especially in light of the increasing tension applied within the Protestant community over text criticism. His conclusions concerning the textual source used by the apostle are examined in light of other writers of his time, and in light of the polemical situation confronting the orthodox in England and on the continent.

Chapter 5, “The Citations of the Old Testament: Their Use by the Apostle,” continues the examination of the Hebrews 1 quotations, focusing on the content of the citations and the appropriateness of their use by the apostle. Did the apostle draw a meaning from the OT for use in his epistle to the Hebrews which the Old Testament itself did not contain? And if so, does that mean that the modern exegete need not concern himself with the original author’s intended meaning of a text? Can the modern preacher simply use biblical citations to bolster their argument without concern for that citation’s meaning in its biblical context? The seriousness of this question causes Owen to spend significant time in his *Exposition* defending the author’s use of the passages. Additionally, Owen’s grasp of the scope is compared with that of other commentators, and its influence on how the OT citations are to be understood are used to emphasize the appropriateness of their employment by the epistle’s author. The chapter concludes with drawing certain methodological conclusions regarding the exegetical process as a whole, in light of the apostle’s use of the Old Testament and Owen’s analysis of the citations in their New Testament context.

In most commentators’ analysis of the Old Testament citations in Hebrews 1, the interpretive technique of typology played a crucial role in justifying the apostle’s own exegetical style, and so chapter 6, “Owen’s Analysis of the Role of Typology in Hebrews,” explores the theory of typology and evaluates its use and abuse in Puritan England. The first section of the chapter examines the presence of typology in Puritan

biblical exegesis as a continuous trajectory of the Reformation's hermeneutic of the literal sense. The guidelines they developed and/or codified are presented as a basis upon which to judge their practical typological assessments. The second section reviews Owen's own evaluation of the typologically based conclusions drawn by other exegetes, those both inside and outside the Reformed camp, and the third section examines the citation from 2 Samuel 7:14 in Hebrews 1:5b where Owen approvingly uses typology in his exegesis. These comments reveal much of Owen's own understanding and appreciation for the typological procedure. In an attempt to summarize Owen's method in regard to the use of typology, the next section in chapter 6 examines his interpretation of Hebrews 7:1-3, with especial attention to the typological issues inherent in the author's argument concerning the correspondence between Melchizedek and Christ.

An example of Owen's interpretive methodology and its impact and implications for his theological thought is made in chapter 7, "John Owen's Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6: A Study of the Saints' Eternal Perseverance in Puritan Exegesis." Following a summary of the Reformed doctrine of perseverance in the seventeenth century, and an assessment of the role of the pericope in Hebrews 6:4-6 in the debate, Owen's exegesis of these verses is contrasted with the interpretation of the Arminian author, John Goodwin. From his exegesis, Owen defends the perseverance doctrine from Goodwin's attack, as well as critiques his opponent's interpretive process. Purely from an exegetical standpoint, Owen persistently points out Goodwin's interpretive fallacies, and identifies when and where Goodwin's theological presuppositions lead him to make mistakes in his biblical exposition. Owen's own exegetical strategy is clear from the manner in which he arrives at his biblical and theological results: the attention he gives to the true scope of the text, his faithful application of the techniques characteristic of humanism (such as lexical and grammatical insights, comparative language studies, etc.), and especially his

use of familiar exegetical procedures such as the analogy of Scripture are all evident in the dogmatic conclusions he draws from the biblical text. A summary of the importance of proper exegetical methodology in deriving theological doctrine as evidenced in the debate between Goodwin and Owen concludes the chapter.

The final chapter, chapter 8, "The Exegetical Methodology of John Owen," offers some conclusions regarding the exegetical methodology employed by John Owen, with especial regard to the dual critique that biblical interpretation in the seventeenth century served simply to provide proof texts for dogmatic argumentation and that the interpretation lacked academic sophistication. Owen's application of, and faithfulness to, the assumptions of the exegetical milieu in which he wrote is assessed, and the critique frequently leveled at exegetes from this time period is shown to be misapplied, at least, to the biblical interpretations of John Owen.

## Chapter II

# Seventeenth-Century Exegetical Techniques

### 1. Post-Reformation Works on Interpretation

#### 1.1 Seventeenth-Century Manuals and Sources on the Task of Exegesis

The Reformation's insistence upon the sole authority of the written Word led to a outpouring of material, exegetical and dogmatic, positive and polemical, in the post-Reformation era on the doctrine of Scripture. The biblical canon was defined and its integrity defended, the divinity and properties of Scripture were asserted, and its role as *principium cognoscendi theologiae* was clearly affirmed. In addition to these works which focused upon the nature of the Scripture, additional material appeared which addressed the question of how the church was to use the Bible in its theological reflection, for, even granting the orthodox insistence upon the divinity and authority of the biblical text, the process of biblical interpretation and application remained in doubt.

Thus, in seventeenth-century England, as on the continent, numerous Protestant authors were commenting on the proper exposition of Scripture. Often, these writers included rules or canons of interpretation in short sections of larger systematic works as, for instance, in William Ames' *The Marrow of Divinity*, Francis Turretin's *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, or Wilhelmus à Brakel's *The Christian's Reasonable Service*.<sup>1</sup> Others, like Edward Leigh in his *A Systeme or Body of Divinity* and William Whitaker in *A*

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<sup>1</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (1629; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. J. Dennison (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992); Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Redelijke Godsdienst* (Utrecht, 1700; repr. *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, 4 vols., Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992). For Lutheran post-Reformation background on Scripture see Robert Preus, *The Inspiration of Scripture: A Study of the Theology of the Seventeenth Century Lutheran Dogmaticians* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1955); Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism*, 2 vols. (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970); and for Reformed background see

*Disputation on Holy Scripture*, wrote more detailed descriptions of the interpretive enterprise in larger sections of their works.<sup>2</sup> Rodolfe Cudworth, John Mayer, James Durham, Matthew Poole, and Jean Diodati were among those who occasionally included references to theoretical principles in the midst of their own exegetical commentaries, and the very structure of some works, like Willet's *Hexapla* series, reveal their authors' interpretive stance.<sup>3</sup> Numerous polemical works also attest to the orthodox concern for proper biblical interpretation. For instance, John Owen argues in *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* and in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, his attack against John Biddle's Socinianism, that the main root of his opponents' errors lies in their faulty handling of the scriptural text.<sup>4</sup>

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Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), especially volume 2.

<sup>2</sup> Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity consisting of Three Bookes : The First of which Handling the Scripture or Word of God, Treateth of its Divine Authority, the Canonick Bookes, the Authentick Edition, and Severall Versions, the End, Properties, and Interpretation of Scripture : The Second Handling God Sheweth that there is a God, and What He is, in His Essence and Several Attributes, and Likewise the Distinction of Persons in the Divine Essence: The Third Handleth the Three Principall Works of God, Decree, Creation and Providence* (London, 1646); William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, trans. William Fitzgerald (1610; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849). See also, Daniel Wytttenbach, *Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae: methodo scientifica pertractatae* (Frankfurt, 1747), 1:167-209; Voetius's bibliography, Gisbertus Voetius, *Exercitia et Bibliotheca, Studiosi Theologiae* (Utrecht, 1644) has various sections full of bibliographic references pertinent to interpretive issues.

<sup>3</sup> Rodolfe Cudworth writes the "Epistle Dedication" for William Perkins, *A Commentarie or Exposition Vpon the Fiue First Chapters of the Epistle to the Galatians*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister... William Perkins*, vol. 2 (London, 1616-1618); John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon the New Testament. Representing the divers expositions thereof, out of the workes of the most learned, both ancient Fathers, and moderne Writers*, 3 vols. (London, 1631); James Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (1668; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982); Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979); Jean Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible, plainly Expounding the Most Difficult Places Thereof* (London, 1648); Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Genesin* (Cambridge, 1605); *Hexapla in Exodum* (London, 1608); *Hexapla in Danielelem* (Cambridge, 1610); *Hexapla: That is, a Six Fold Commentarie vpon the most diuine Epistle of the holy apostle S. Paul to the Romanes* (Cambridge, 1611); *Hexapla in Leviticum* (London, 1631); see also the abridged method in use in *An Harmonie upon the First Booke of Samuel* (Cambridge, 1614).

<sup>4</sup> John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 368-412; John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae: or The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 12 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 50-84. Note also here Owen's *Pro Sacris Scripturis adversus hujus temporis fanaticos* (Oxford, 1658; repr., *A Defense of Scripture against Modern Fanaticism*, in *Biblical*

Robert Boyle, Francis Osborne, and Nicholas Byfield were among the many who wrote tracts encouraging individual church laity to read the Bible. Osborne specifically insists that the lack of knowledge of the original languages, while a hindrance for the layman, does not prevent one from making valid interpretations about the sacred text, and Byfield's work has sections summarizing each biblical book, a calendar for reading the whole Bible in a year's time, and a collation of texts for specific occasions (grief, fear, doubt, etc.).<sup>5</sup> Thomas Hall's *Vindiciae Literarum* was written to serve as an introductory text on biblical exegesis for those preparing for the ministry, and he stressed such things as paying proper attention to grammatical figures in the text, knowledge of the original languages, and the analytical use of logic and deductive reasoning in comprehending the true sense of a passage.<sup>6</sup> Individual interpretive techniques were the subject of various books, as, for instance, when the foundational importance of the analogy of faith as the judge of proper interpretation for the orthodox exegete was stoutly defended by John Wilson in *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter Asserted* in opposition to the philosopher Lodewijk Meijer's Cartesian rationalism, or the Socinian Ludovicus Wolzogen's absolute literalism.<sup>7</sup>

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*Theology*, Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), hereafter cited as *Defense of Scripture against Modern Fanaticism*, which is an attack on the interpretive practices of the Quakers.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Boyle, *Some Considerations Touching the Style of the H. Scriptures extracted from several parts of a discourse concerning divers particulars belonging to the Bible* (London, 1663); Francis Osborne, *The Private Christians non ultra, or, A Plea for the Lay-man's Interpreting the Scriptures* (Oxford, 1656); Nicholas Byfield, *Directions for the Private Reading of the Scriptures* (London, 1648).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Hall, *Vindiciae Literarum, The Schools Guarded, or, The Excellency and Vsefulness of Humane Learning in Subordination to Divinity, and preparation to the ministry, as also, Rules for the Expounding of the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1655).

<sup>7</sup> John Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter Asserted, or, A Discourse Concerning the Right Interpretation of Scripture, wherein a late exercitation, intituled, Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres, is examin'd* (London, 1678). Cf. Lodewijk Meijer, *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres* (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam], 1666); Ludovicus Wolzogen, *Orthodoxa Fides, sive Adversus Johannem de Labadie censura censurae Medioburgensis* (Utrecht, 1668).



Three of the more elaborate and detailed descriptions of the exegetical method advanced by the post-Reformation orthodox were produced late in the sixteenth century by the Tudor Puritan, William Perkins, and early in the seventeenth by the Hebraic scholar, John Weemse and by the Canterbury preacher, Thomas Wilson. *The Arte of Prophecyng* was Perkins' handbook to his students on the proper method of Puritan preaching – a style which centered on the clear exposition of the theological doctrine of a scriptural text.<sup>8</sup> Prior to proclaiming the true sense of the text, however, it was necessary to understand that true sense, and thus, about half of his book deals with Perkins' interpretive methodology. For the interpretation of an Old Testament text, nothing could compete with Weemse's *Christian Synagogue*, a rigorous treatment of the Hebrew text – including the marginal readings in the Masorah, and a discussion of the proper pointing of the Hebrew – general interpretive rules, the movement from exegesis to application, and an extensive analysis of Hebraic customs and their influence upon the biblical text. These same issues dominate a large portion of Weemse's *Exercitations Divine*.<sup>9</sup> Wilson's work, *Theologicall Rules*, is a collation of more than three hundred and fifty "exegetical" rules drawn from the Scriptures and the writings of theologians through the centuries,

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<sup>8</sup> William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng, or, A Treatise Concerning the Sacred and Onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister... William Perkins*, vol. 2 (London, 1616-1618); and see the studies by Erwin Gane, "The Exegetical Methods of Some Sixteenth-Century Puritan Preachers: Hooper, Cartwright, and Perkins," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (1981):21-36, 99-114.

<sup>9</sup> John Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, in *The Workes of Mr. John Weemse of Lathocker in Scotland, in these volumes. Containing these eight bookes... Serving generally for a helpe to the understanding of all that desire to know and obey the will of God in holy writt...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1636); John Weemse, *Exercitations Divine. Containing diverse Questions and Solutions for the right understanding of the Scriptures...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1632). On Weemse, see Jai-Sung Shim, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Hebraism in the Early Seventeenth Century as Reflected in the Work of John Weemse," Ph.D. diss. (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1998).

including Augustine, Gregory of Nazianzus, Chrysostom, Luther, Beza, Perkins, and Keckermann.<sup>10</sup>

Two books which consciously deal with the issues of exegetical method in light of the Reformation principles of *sola Scriptura* and Scripture's perspicuity were written by Henry Lukin and John Owen. Lukin's work, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, deals briefly with the divinity and properties of Scripture, and then discusses at length the necessary interpretive steps to uncover the true meaning of a text.<sup>11</sup> He elaborates upon the analogy of faith and Scripture, and upon the grammatical tools one needs to properly handle a scriptural passage. After writing extensively upon the nature of Scripture in *The Reason of Faith*, particularly asserting the Spirit's role in its production, John Owen then turned in *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God* to speak of how the Spirit imparts to our minds the meaning within the Scripture which he himself intended.<sup>12</sup> Though not as exhaustive a handbook on the "technical" aspects of interpretation as, say, Weemse's *Christian Synagogue*, Owen's work, nevertheless, clearly outlines the steps necessary in arriving at the Spirit's "intendment" for a text. Published in the same year, Lukin's work (with an introductory preface by Owen himself) and Owen's own *The Causes, Ways, and Means* show some dependence upon each other – structurally they are both similar, both describe the interpretive process as

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<sup>10</sup> T[homas] W[ilson], *Theologicall Rules, to Guide Vs in the Vnderstanding and Practice of Holy Scriptures: two centuries: drawne partly out of Scriptures themselues: partly out of ecclesiasticall writers old and new* (London, 1615), sometimes erroneously attributed to Thomas Walkington.

<sup>11</sup> Henry Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture, Containing the severall Tropes, Figures, Properties of Speech used therein; with other Observations, necessary for the right Understanding thereof* (London, 1669).

<sup>12</sup> John Owen, *The Reason of Faith*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God as Revealed in His Word, with Assurance Therein*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991). See also the extensive discussion on the nature of Scripture, including a large section on interpretation, in Andreae Rivetus, *Isagoge: sev introductio generalis, ad Scripturam Sacram Veteris & Novi Testamenti* (1627).

“seeking to understand the mind of God,” and both pay particular attention to the Holy Spirit as “the principal cause” of Scripture.<sup>13</sup>

The overall plan and various exegetical techniques laid out in *The Causes, Ways, and Means* and used by Owen to elucidate the true meaning of a passage of Scripture are summarized in his letter to the Christian reader which he wrote for James Durham’s commentary on the Song of Solomon. Initially, Owen carefully identifies the scope of the book as a whole,

and as the whole Song carries this design and intention evidently in the face of it; so the safe rules of attending to the true meaning of the original words, the context of the discourse, the nature of the allegorical expressions, the just period of the Dialogists, or Interlocutors, the analogy of faith, by collation with other scriptures, and the experience of believers in common, will through the supply and assistance of the Spirit upon their fervent supplications, lead humble and believer enquirers, into such acquaintance with the mind of God, in the several particulars of it, as may tend to their own, and others’ edification.<sup>14</sup>

In the rest of this chapter, these diverse techniques, first explained and illustrated by seventeenth-century authors, are then individually examined in Owen’s theoretical approach, and finally examples are given of their use in his exegesis.

## 1.2 The Seventeenth-Century Definition of “Interpretation”

While all these works, and numerous others, dealt with the orthodox method of interpreting Scripture, they did not necessarily reflect a consensus on what “interpretation” entailed. They did agree that “interpretation” went beyond the bare words of the biblical text; simply reading Scripture was not interpreting it. Rather, interpretation

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<sup>13</sup> While these simply may be coincidence, and/or both authors using common terminology, Owen’s preface to Lukin’s work, the parallel date of publication, and the structure of the two treatises suggest otherwise (though note that Owen had previously spoken of understanding Scripture as “the mind of God” in his *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:63).

<sup>14</sup> John Owen, “To the Christian Reader,” in *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, James Durham (1668; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 21-22.

meant grasping the intent of the author. Robert Boyle writes that interpretation comes from understanding a writer's "style," and, for Boyle, "style"

comprehends not only the Phraseology, the Tropes and Figures made use of by a Writer, but his Method, his lofty or humbler Character, his Pathetical or languid, his close or incoherent way of writing, and in a word, almost all the whole manner of an Authors expressing himself.<sup>15</sup>

Similarly, Perkins defined interpretation as, "the Opening of the wordes and sentences of the Scripture, that one entire and naturall sense may appeare."<sup>16</sup> While orthodox exegetes, like their Reformation forefathers, stressed the importance of the literal words of the text, true exegesis aimed at the discovery of "the one, true sense" of the text, "the Mind of God signified to us by those Words and Sentences of Scripture."<sup>17</sup> The introductory letter to the English translation of Jean Diodati's work, calls upon readers to look beyond the mere written word to its meaning for faith and life: "the written Word of God (I mean not the shell, or outside of a bare literal sense (there is more in it) but the inside and kernel of a true spiritual meaning therein comprised) is a mass of infinite delights."<sup>18</sup> Proper interpretation of the Scripture leads to an understanding of "the mind and will of God therein revealed."<sup>19</sup> As William Whitaker noted in his disputations with the Catholic polemicist Robert Bellarmine, "Scripture therefore is concerned not merely with the words, but the true sense of the words, which we may rightly call the very life and soul of Scripture."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737.

<sup>17</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 4. See also, Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 171; Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 2; Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:368; Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:passim. For the orthodox rejection of the medieval *quadriga*, see later in this work and the primary and secondary sources listed there, especially, Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:487-499.

<sup>18</sup> The introductory letter is signed by "R. G." Diodati, *Annotations*, A1v.

<sup>19</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:119. See also, Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:118, where Owen argues that the "indendment" of the author is the goal of interpretation, not the bare words themselves.

<sup>20</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.i.402.

The need for the Scripture to be interpreted was recognized by the orthodox and insisted upon in part due to the pious literalism naïvely promoted by the Socinians.<sup>21</sup> In addition to the obstacles involved with seeking to understand documents written over fifteen hundred years ago in obscure and unfamiliar languages, Reformed exegetes from the sixteenth century onward, while insisting on the perspicuity of the overall biblical message, recognized that not each and every text was equally clear. There are, according to Francis Osborne, “the darker and more obscure places, wrapp’d up in such mystery’s that the best accomplishments of any in the world are not sufficient for them, and if men be not here modest and sober in their expositions, they may soone make themselves as ridiculous as the Monke.”<sup>22</sup> Again, seeking to fulfill the primary purpose of the texts, that is, to illuminate the “mind of God,” interpretation is necessary, if simply to ensure that the biblical passage is understood by the contemporary audience; Weemse writes, “this Interpretation of the Scriptures maketh the people to understand them, for when the Scriptures are not interpreted, they are like a Nut not broken,” and, “the giving of the sense here, is more than to give the grammaticall interpretation of the words; they [the apostles] gave the sense and the spirituall meaning of them when they preached.”<sup>23</sup> The goal of understanding also serves as a measuring rod for the effectiveness of one’s exegesis – if the Church fails to grasp a text’s meaning, then the expositor has failed in his exegesis.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Owen’s preface and his response to the preface of John Biddle’s *A Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity, According to the Scriptures* (London, 1648) in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:11-84. See also, Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xviii; Wyttenbach, *Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae*, 1:155; Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), esp. 85-99.

<sup>22</sup> Osborne, *The Private Christians non ultra*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Weemse, *Exercitationes Divine*, I.xv (pg. 163).

<sup>24</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:750.

Though united in their understanding of the purpose and need for biblical interpretation, Puritan theoreticians, nevertheless, differed in their discussion of the exact activities which are included in this process of divining the “true sense” of the Scripture’s words. According to some authors, the act of interpretation involved both the translation of the original text into the common vernacular and the explication of the sense of the text. Thus, John Wilson described the exegete’s goal:

Interpretation is either Verbal or Real. The former is all one with that which is commonly called translation... the latter, which is usually called exposition, which is the opening of the true Sense of Scripture, or unfolding the Mind of God signified to us by those Words and Sentences of Scripture that we are searching into.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, Osborne distinguishes two steps in biblical interpretation: the first concerning the actual words and “their proper signification, which he calls a version, paraphrase or metaphrase, rendering the originall in more knowne tongue,” and a second step whereby the sense of the text is expressed.<sup>26</sup> Alternatively, while recognizing the translation process to be an essential part of the overall proclamation of the Word, both Perkins’s outline of the exegetical procedure and Whitaker’s discussion on the subject distinguish between reading the translated text of Scripture and the method one follows to explain it.<sup>27</sup> Edward Leigh’s interpretive plan also separated translation from interpretation, yet the latter he further divided into explaining the meaning of the text and addressing its application to the Church community: “The right expounding of Scripture consists in 2 things. 1. In giving the right sense. 2. In a right application of the same 1 Cor. 14.3.”<sup>28</sup> In his discussion on exegesis, Lukin insisted that application was a necessary part of

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<sup>25</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 4.

<sup>26</sup> Osborne, *The Private Christians non ultra*, 3. See also Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 2-3.

<sup>27</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737; Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.i.402.

<sup>28</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 171.

interpretation, arguing that the task was incomplete until “you infer something proper from the true sense of the Scripture you discover.”<sup>29</sup>

Throughout his commentary on Hebrews,<sup>30</sup> John Owen, working from the original Greek, provided his own translation for the reader. This could be seen either as a preliminary step to his actual exegesis or as the first step in his exegetical method. Owen’s persistent practice throughout the volumes of the *Exposition to the Hebrews* is to first present the Greek text, make any necessary textual, grammatical and lexical observations, and then to provide an English translation for the reader. For instance, following the citation of the Greek text of the first two verses in chapter 1 of Hebrews, Owen writes: “Many of these words being variously rendered, their true grammatical sense and importance is to be considered before we open the meaning of the whole, and aim of the apostle in them; in which way we shall proceed throughout the whole epistle.”<sup>31</sup> Thus, while translation was clearly important to Owen’s work, in the absence of any theoretical discussion of the process, it is difficult to judge whether the rendering of the original Scripture in the common language represented an integral part of exegesis to Owen, or was simply provided as a useful guide for the reader.

In terms of the role of application in the exegetical procedure, Owen’s thoughts are more clear. Liberally scattered throughout his *Exposition*, Owen drew conclusions from the scriptural text intended to direct the reader in ways to apply the message of Hebrews. It was not uncommon for Owen to cite as many as four or five different points of application for each verse. These “Doctrinal and Practical Observations” were gathered together by Owen’s editor and appended to the preliminary *Exercitations*, perhaps

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<sup>29</sup> Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 33.

<sup>30</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vols. 17-23 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

<sup>31</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:3.

echoing Owen's own intention to have them substitute for an analysis of the scope and contents of the epistle which would commonly accompany an exegetical work of this kind.<sup>32</sup> However, as important as these were to Owen, in his initial preface, he clearly distinguished this process of gathering "practical observations" from "the exposition of the text."<sup>33</sup> The application of the text, through Owen's "practical observations," were included as an additional step to the actual exegetical process – perhaps a crucial one since the edification of the church was central to a Puritan's use of the Bible – but nevertheless, one which was distinct in Owen's methodological strategy.

Thus, it appears for Owen that there existed three distinct components in his handling of Scripture: the establishment and annotations of the text accompanied by the making of a translation (which may or may not be seen as a first step in Owen's formal exegetical method), the actual exegesis or exposition of the text, and the drawing of practical conclusions or observations. In the preface to the second volume of the *Exposition*, Owen defends the length of his discourse by specifically citing these three steps:

The method of the whole is so disposed, as that anyone, by the sole guidance of his eye, without further trouble than by turning the leaves of the book, may carry on or continue his reading of any one part of the whole without interruption or mixing any other discourses therewithal. So may he, in the first place, go over our consideration of the original text, with the examination of ancient and modern translations, and the grammatical construction and signification of the words, without diverting unto anything else that is discoursed on the text. In like manner, if any desire to peruse the exposition of the text and context, with the declaration and vindication of the sense and meaning of the Holy Ghost in them, without the least intermixture of any practical discourses deduced from them, he may, under the same guidance, and with the same labour, confine himself thereunto from the beginning unto the end of the work. And whereas the practical observations with their improvement do virtually contain in them the sense and exposition of the words, and give light unto the intendment of the apostle in his whole design, for ought I know some may be

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<sup>32</sup> These sections, taken from the various volumes of Owen's original works, are gathered together in the Gould edition, Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 18:461-546.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:9.



desirous to exercise themselves principally in those discourses; which they may do by following the series and distinct continuation of them from first to last.<sup>34</sup>

## 2. The Spiritual State of the Interpreter

The various techniques used by John Owen to elucidate the meaning of a scriptural text function within a general framework which reflects his “precritical” approach to the Bible. This framework itself exerts considerable influence upon the interpretation of any particular pericope, largely by limiting the exegetical options available to the expositor. As Owen outlines in his exegetical theory in *The Causes, Ways, and Means*, this framework has two aspects: (1) a subjective or spiritual element, whereby the interpreter’s own personal piety empowers him to grasp the sense of the text intended by the Holy Spirit, and (2) an objective element, which Owen divides into the *disciplinary* and *ecclesiastical* means, whereby the message of the text is related to the overall content of the Christian faith.<sup>35</sup>

### 2.1 Piety: The Seventeenth-Century Definition and Use

The post-Reformation theologians and exegetes uniformly affirmed that the true sense of the Bible could only be discovered by the Christian believer who sought God’s assistance throughout the exegetical process. William Whitaker taught that the interpretive process began with prayer: “In the first place, prayer is necessary for reading the scriptures so as to understand them”<sup>36</sup> – and garners support for this statement from biblical citations, similar views of the Church Fathers, and others throughout church history. William Perkins lists a variety of methods to be employed in uncovering the intent of the Scripture, the last emphasizing the need for fervent prayer : “Fifthly, before

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<sup>34</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:14-15.

<sup>35</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:126. See also, 199-201.

all these things God must earnestly be sued vnto by prayer, that he would blesse these meanes, and that he would open the meaning of the Scriptures to vs that are blind.”<sup>37</sup>

Following Perkins, his mentor, William Ames similarly records the various aspects of general interpretation whereby the sense of any text may be known, noting that these also apply to interpreting Scripture: “however, there is one exception : The special light of the Spirit must be sought for in the Scriptures by the godly.”<sup>38</sup> In seeking to understand the Song of Solomon, James Durham requires “much conversing with the Bridegroom, especially by prayer, that he who causes the dull to understand doctrine, may manifest himself, and open our eyes to behold wonderous things.”<sup>39</sup>

For the orthodox, the importance of the Spirit’s work in proper interpretation was tied directly to the nature of the text itself – the Holy Spirit was understood as the one who inspired the writing, and was thus the one most competent to explain its intended meaning. Following a defense of the Spirit’s inspiration of the Scripture, Edward Leigh writes of the work of interpretation, noting that exegetes “must pray earnestly to God for his Spirit to inlighten them,” since, “the Scripture are to be understood by that Spirit that dictated them.”<sup>40</sup> This link between the authorship of the text and its proper understanding should lead every inquirer to prayer: “If the scriptures should be interpreted and understood by the same Spirit whereby they were written, then it is necessary for all who would interpret or understand them to consul the Holy Spirit.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.467. See also, V.x.475.

<sup>37</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737.

<sup>38</sup> Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, I.xxxiv.26. See also, Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 180-181, 189; Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 41; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.18.

<sup>39</sup> Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 25.

<sup>40</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 180-181.

<sup>41</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.viii.451. See also, Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 40; Wilson, *Theologicall Rules*, 2, 125; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.19. Muller, *Post-*

When a reason for the necessity of praying prior to interpretation is given by the orthodox it is usually, as Leigh states, for the “inlightenment” of the human mind through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Thus, one must “come to the reading and studie of the Scriptures with Prayers and greatest reverence, relying on the Divine promises, for the inlightening of their minds by the holy Ghost.”<sup>42</sup> The reason why this supernatural enlightenment is necessary is rooted in Reformed anthropology and in no way is to be understood as a limitation of the Scripture – illumination is needed, not to supply some lack in the nature or character of the text, but due to the state of fallen man.

We readily admit that man needs to be enlightened by God’s Spirit before he can understand Scripture in its spiritual sense. Apart from this illumination he cannot comprehend spiritual matters, as they are foolishness to him... the problem is not with the perspicuity of Scripture, but with man’s intellect, which must be wrought upon by the Holy Spirit before he can understand the spiritual matters presented in Scripture.<sup>43</sup>

While Wilhelmus à Brakel does not explain in this section why spiritual matters appear as foolishness apart from the Spirit’s illumination, he does indicate that the problem rests with man’s intellect.

Since the orthodox argue that the Spirit is required for proper interpretation – “without which we shall ever expend labour in vain upon the study of the scriptures”<sup>44</sup> – the question naturally arises about the interpreter who proceeds without the Spirit’s assistance, or the one who studies the text with no accompanying Christian faith. Again, à Brakel:

[In interpretation,] one must penetrate to the kernel itself, seeking to perceive the internal essence of the matter. For this the natural man is blind, regardless of how

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*Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:231-312 explores orthodoxy’s understanding of the Spirit’s role in the inspiration of the text.

<sup>42</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 189. See also, Wilson, *Theologicall Rules*, 7-8; Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.iii.415; Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 25; Weemse, *Exercitations Divine*, I.xv (pg. 163); Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 41.

<sup>43</sup> Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:53.

<sup>44</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.x.475.

learned, proficient in the Word of God, and able he may be to understand the context and convey the literal meaning of the text to others. A godly person, on the contrary, immediately begins to view the unique clarity, nature, and power of spiritual matters contained in the text and his perception increases the more he engages himself in observing and meditating upon these matters.<sup>45</sup>

Here, à Brakel recognizes that even apart from the Spirit's illumination, one can be learned, proficient, understand, and even teach the meaning of a text to others, yet, nevertheless, still remain blind to its spiritual matters. Whitaker takes a different stance and argues that what the unregenerate interpreter lacks is not knowledge or insight, but assurance and confidence.

We say that the Holy Spirit is the supreme interpreter of scripture, because we must be illuminated by the Holy Spirit to be certainly persuaded of the true sense of scripture; otherwise, although we use all means, we can never attain to that full assurance which resides in the minds of the faithful. But this is only an internal persuasion, and concerns only ourselves.<sup>46</sup>

These two – the inability to grasp Scripture's spiritual meaning and the lack of accompanying assurance – are what spoil the fruits of the interpretations of the ungodly, and why the spiritual act of prayer is a necessary part of the exegetical method.

While prayer was the most frequently advanced spiritual means in interpretation, it was not something to be done carelessly or independently of other spiritual avenues. Orthodox exegetes were to cultivate a truly godly character and lifestyle, which in turn would open the Scripture more clearly to them. In addition to beginning with prayer and proceeding with great reverence, Leigh also noted the need for “a pious disposition and spirituall frame of the heart, that they may not understand onely but cordially affect what they understand.”<sup>47</sup> Similarly, à Brakel argued for three spiritual things necessary in preparation for “profitable reading” of the Scripture: (1) “a reverent, spiritual frame,” (2) God's Spirit to “cause us to perceive the truth”, and (3) the interpreter “must also

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<sup>45</sup> Brakel, *A Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:78.

<sup>46</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.iii. 415.

attentively incline the heart to obedience in order to exercise faith, be receptive to comfort, and comply with all that which the Lord shall proclaim, promise, and command.”<sup>48</sup> In this, both Leigh and à Brakel saw the application of scriptural knowledge, the “cordial affect” of what one understands from the text, as part of the interpretive process.

## 2.2 Piety: In the Thought and Works of Owen

In his own treatment of the spiritual means whereby we come to know the mind of God through the Scriptures, Owen deals with these same themes, elaborating on them in turn. The centrality of the Spirit in proper biblical interpretation is the dominant purpose and aim of his treatment of the interpretive enterprise. Owen intended *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God*, as well as his *The Reason of Faith*, to be seen as further developments in his ongoing *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*. While *The Reason of Faith* dealt with the Spirit’s work of inspiration, *Causes, Ways, and Means* explored the Spirit’s role in the proper interpretation and understanding of the message inspired therein. Belief in the divine authorship of the text (the subject of the first book), is incomplete and fails to fulfill its intended purpose, apart from the ability to understand its message : “although this be the first fundamental principle of supernatural religion, yet it is not sufficient unto any of the ends thereof (that we believe the Scripture to be a divine revelation), unless we understand the mind and will of God therein revealed.”<sup>49</sup> Like his Reformed brethren, Owen clearly saw the link between the Spirit’s authorial role in the Bible and his role in correctly perceiving and applying its message.<sup>50</sup> Thus, Owen’s

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<sup>47</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 189. See also, Wilson, *Theological Rules*, 1.

<sup>48</sup> Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:77.

<sup>49</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:119.

<sup>50</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:119-122.

overriding interest in *Causes, Ways, and Means*, is the spiritual means (i.e., the work of the Spirit) in communicating the Scriptures to the interpreter. For Owen, the Spirit is “the principal efficient cause” of the knowledge and understanding of the will of God in Scripture:

There is an especial work of the Spirit of God on the minds of men, communicating spiritual wisdom, light, and understanding unto them, necessary unto discerning and apprehending aright the mind of God in his word, and the understanding of the mysteries of heavenly truth contained therein.<sup>51</sup>

Following this statement of the purpose of his work, Owen defends its validity by analyzing various testimonies in the Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:13-18, Isaiah 27:7, Luke 24:44-45, Ephesians 1:17-19, and particularly, Psalm 119:18, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” He seeks to demonstrate that the biblical authors themselves sought the Spirit’s guidance in understanding God’s written Word. The fact that the apostles and the psalmist prayed for spiritual illumination is proof enough that the man’s natural faculties are not sufficiently able to grasp the Bible’s full meaning. “In the mere exercise of our own natural reason and understanding, with the help of external means, we cannot attain that knowledge of the mind and will of God in the Scriptures, of the sense and meaning of the Holy Ghost therein.”<sup>52</sup>

Given the nature of the text and the witness of the Bible to the Spirit’s necessity, Owen asserts that the first priority in interpretation is “fervent and earnest prayer for the assistance of the Spirit of God revealing the mind of God, as in the whole Scripture, so in particular books and passages of it.”<sup>53</sup> Biblical expositors are to seek God so that “he would enlighten [their] minds and lead [them] into the knowledge of the truth.”<sup>54</sup> Owen’s

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<sup>51</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:124-125. See also, Owen, *Defense of Scripture against Modern Fanaticism*, 850-852.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:125. See also, 4:127-173, and esp. 136-40.

<sup>53</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:201.

<sup>54</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:202.

confidence and assurance in the power of the Spirit to answer this prayer convinced him that anyone who turns to God for illumination through the Scripture will surely not be disappointed. Prayer is so necessary and effective that anyone who is fervent and committed to it “shall be preserved from pernicious errors, and attain that degree in knowledge as shall be sufficient unto the guidance and preservation of the life of God in the whole of his faith and obedience.”<sup>55</sup> Owen is careful not to imply that prayer will somehow mysteriously prevent one from drawing erroneous interpretation, but simply that through a prayerful spirit, one can assuredly gain “the knowledge of all truth necessary to be known.”<sup>56</sup>

In light of his controversies with the “enthusiasts,” who argued for an immediate, direct revelation of God’s will to the individual,<sup>57</sup> Owen explains why the Holy Spirit is necessary for godly interpretation: there is need of “the supernatural illumination of our minds,” though not to deliver new doctrine, but to enable the believer to receive and understand what is written in the scriptural texts.<sup>58</sup> This need for illumination emanates from two sources, both reflected in the Reformed understanding of the nature of man: first, by creation, man is finite and limited, while the things of God are infinite:

The principal matter of the Scripture is mysterious, and the mysteries of it are laid up therein by God himself, and that in a way inimitable by the skill or wisdom of men... And can we ourselves trace these paths of wisdom without his especial guidance and assistance? – it is highly atheistical once to fancy it.<sup>59</sup>

The second reason man is unable to delve into these divine mysteries and instead is dependent upon the Spirit’s work is the noetic consequences of sin – its destructive

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<sup>55</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:204.

<sup>56</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:231.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:125, 158-160. The “enthusiasts,” for Owen, were members of the growing Quaker movement. See his rebuttal of their view of revelation in Owen, *Defense of Scripture against Modern Fanaticism*.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:126.

<sup>59</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:225.

effects on the human mind. "If our minds be not corrupted or depraved, there is no need of the gospel or its grace; and if they are, we cannot understand the mind of God therein without especial illumination."<sup>60</sup>

While these reasons are either stated briefly or simply assumed by his contemporaries, Owen devotes considerable time to show why the Spirit's illumination is a necessary component in proper exegesis. Owen lists three things which the Spirit does when he illumines the mind of an expositor. First, he imparts to the human mind that spiritual light which alone is able to combat the natural hindrances and obstacles of sin. Second, "he freeth, delivereth, and purgeth our minds from all those corrupt affections and prejudices which are partly inbred in them, partly assumed by them or imposed on them."<sup>61</sup> Finally, "he implants in our minds spiritual habits and principles, contrary and opposite unto those corrupt affections, whereby they are subdued and expelled."<sup>62</sup> So, the work of the Spirit in illuminating the mind of the interpreter is first to enable him to perceive spiritual mysteries, and second to counter the noetic effects of sin in the interpreters mind, both negatively (by acting against "those corrupt affections") and positively (by imparting "spiritual affections").

Once again, the question arises concerning the interpretive abilities of the ungodly who use their natural reasoning and linguistic abilities as the sole means to understand the Scripture. In the face of Socinian insistence on the priority of reason in interpretation, Owen condemns the "foolish imagination" that the mysteries of God could be grasped apart from the Spirit's illumination:

And I shall add hereunto, that among all the false and foolish imaginations that ever Christian religion was attacked or disturbed withal, there never was any, there is

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<sup>60</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:138.

<sup>61</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:184.

<sup>62</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:185.



none more pernicious than this, that the mysteries of the gospel are so exposed unto the common reason and understanding of men as that they may know them and comprehend them in a useful manner, and according to their duty, without the effectual aid and assistance of the Spirit of God.<sup>63</sup>

What, then, of educated men who disdain the Spirit's work in interpretation? Owen acknowledges that they may gain knowledge, but no "saving illumination."<sup>64</sup>

1. Such knowledge gained without the Spirit's influence is not true knowledge. It fails to "affect the heart, and conform the soul unto the will of God revealed."<sup>65</sup>
2. "The things revealed in the Scripture are expressed in propositions whose words and terms are intelligible unto the common reason of mankind." But, having understood the words, they do so without belief in the things spoken and written about. "Men may have a knowledge of the words, and the meanings of propositions in the Scripture, who have no knowledge of the things themselves designed in them."<sup>66</sup>
3. Such knowledge "doth only inform the mind in the way of an artificial science, but doth not really illuminate it."<sup>67</sup>
4. Knowledge without spiritual insight fails to produce the assurance of faith and truth that true interpretation does. The only confidence one has apart from the illumination of the Spirit, is confidence in one's own scientific ability to discern propositions. The pursuit of a true, godly assurance is one of Owen's primary objectives in this treatise on exegetical method.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:125.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:230.

<sup>65</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:156.

<sup>66</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:156.

<sup>67</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:157.

<sup>68</sup> E.g., Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:124, 127.

5. Finally, such knowledge fails to engender trust in God within the individual, and hence, falls far short of the true knowledge of the mind and will of God which is available in the Scripture through the work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>69</sup>

There is, therefore, a gift of spiritual wisdom and understanding necessary hereunto, that we may discern the 'wonderful things' that are in the word of God. To whom this is not given, they know not the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven... the meanest believer who hath received this wisdom from above, according unto the measure of the gift of Christ, knoweth more of the mind of God in due manner than they do.<sup>70</sup>

Neglect of the spiritual means in interpretation is why so many "are skilful enough in the disciplinary means of knowledge," and yet "such strangers to the true knowledge of the mind of God."<sup>71</sup>

While fervent prayer was the primary spiritual method mentioned by Owen, it is by no means the only way in which the interpreter seeks spiritual illumination. In addition to seeking God's blessing in prayer, exegetes must prepare themselves "to receive impressions from divine truths as revealed" and to conform their "minds and hearts unto the doctrine made known."<sup>72</sup> "Practical obedience in the course of our walking before God" is another spiritual means for understanding the Scripture.<sup>73</sup> That is, if one persists in ungodly living, the ability to understand the essence of Scripture is diminished. Rather the contrary is required – that one would vigorously pursue further growth and progress in knowledge. One must never think they have "enough" insight into God's mind.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:158.

<sup>70</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:141.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:202.

<sup>72</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:205. See also, Owen, "To the Christian Reader," 22.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:206.

<sup>74</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:206-207.

Finally, the faithful practice of spiritual disciplines enables the reader of Scripture to better grasp its intended meaning.<sup>75</sup>

Thus, it is clear from Owen's *The Causes, Ways, and Means*, that the spiritual element is crucial for the proper interpretation of the text – because the true content of Scripture is beyond human capabilities, it may be grasped only as an act of faith on the part of the pious interpreter.<sup>76</sup>

In Owen's own exegetical work, the influence of this spiritual means to biblical understanding is not readily apparent, though Owen alludes to it occasionally. For example, when he deals with the complex phrases in Hebrews 1:3, ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης and χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, he asserts that these “are unquestionably sublime and mysterious.” After noting some difficulties in properly interpreting the terms, he expresses his dependence upon God for proper interpretation; he desires “to handle (as it becometh us) both things and words with reverence and godly fear, looking up unto Him for assistance who alone can lead us into all truth.”<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, this subjective character of Owen's interpretative framework is not frequently expressed in explicit manner in his commentary. The guiding influence of approaching the text humbly and in prayer surfaces only implicitly when Owen denounces the exegetical conclusions of the heretics – their heretical status itself hinders proper biblical interpretation. After making clear his intent to reveal the exegetical and theological errors of the Socinians in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, Owen accuses the Socinian interpretation of lacking any real, vibrant spirituality; though it appear scholarly, once the truth is known, it “washes off the

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<sup>75</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:207-209.

<sup>76</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, esp. 4: chapters 7-9. See also, Carl Trueman, “Faith Seeking Understanding: Some Neglected Aspects of John Owen's Understanding of Scriptural Interpretation,” in *Interpreting the Bible*, ed. A. N. S. Lane (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 147-162.

<sup>77</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:88.

paint to expose the dead bones inside.”<sup>78</sup> The Socinians are “overpowered with prejudice,” and therefore their exegetical conclusions fail due to their own “weakness and absurdity.”<sup>79</sup> The exposition of Hugo Grotius, whom Owen understood as a “learned man,” frequently misses the mark because of what he sees as Grotius’s Socinian tendencies.<sup>80</sup> Owen understands the Jews as “avoiding the argument” of the Scripture, and in their rejection of the Messiah their understanding of the Bible is filled with “miserable entanglements.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, the evidence of Owen’s application of the spiritual means as an interpretive tool comes largely from his critique of the conclusions of those whom he judges to be spiritually deficient.

### 3. Precritical Hermeneutical Principles and Presuppositions

When Owen discusses the disciplinary and ecclesiastical means of understanding Scripture, he is describing in general the exegetical techniques, both of humanistic and scholastic influence, which he then employs in his interpretation. These individual techniques, however, all operate within the bounds of his precritical hermeneutic principles. These principles largely insist on the coherent and consistent message of Scripture and its relevance for the contemporary church. Thus, the use of scholastic distinctions or humanist-inspired lexicons are guided by his precritical assumptions concerning Scripture – his commitment to the analogies of faith and Scripture, the scope

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<sup>78</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:84. See also, 12:51; Wilson, *Theological Rules*, 52.

<sup>79</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:73. See also, 19:155-156, 157-158, 198-199; and the numerous critiques of the Socinian exegetical strategy and its connection to their erroneous spiritual state, Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:passim.

<sup>80</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:51. See also, 19:155, 198; John Owen, *A Review of the Annotations of Hugo Grotius*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 12 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

<sup>81</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:14. See also similar comments in 19:7-12, 132-133; 17:120-121, 424-427; and throughout John Owen, *Theologoumena Pantodapa* (1661; repr. *Biblical Theology*, Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994).

of the text, and the application of the Bible's message to the beliefs, practices, and expectations of the church family.

### 3.1 The Analogy of Faith

#### 3.1.1 The Analogy of Faith: Seventeenth-Century Definition and Use

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the *analogy of faith* in the post-Reformation orthodox's hermeneutical strategy. Their exegetes consciously followed it, and they expressed and defended it in their theoretical writings. Yet, in practice, evidence of its use in the exegetical enterprise is only found in subtle ways. The analogy of faith did not dictate the interpretation of any particular text; what it did was limit the options which the exegete would consider as appropriate explanations of a passage. That is, the analogy of faith restricted the range of possible meanings which the exegete would consider – other potential meanings of a passage were simply not mentioned since they were excluded a priori by the *analogia fidei* assumption.

The analogy of faith dictated that no true interpretation of a text of Scripture could be contrary to the overall expression of the faith; the true meaning of a passage could not be set in opposition to other general doctrinal aspects of Christian belief. This fundamental assumption of interpretation is itself based on three other assumptions – (1) God cannot lie and is not self-contradictory, (2) the divinity of Scripture, its divine origin, means that it also is self-consistent, and (3) the core Christian doctrines flows faithfully from the Scriptures. In his discussion of the *analogia fidei*, Francis Turretin summarizes these assumptions: “as the Spirit is always undoubtedly self-consistent, we cannot consider that to be his sense which is opposed to other truths delivered by him.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xix.

Thomas Aquinas defined the concept of “analogy” with such an appeal to internal consistency; an analogy was achieved when “the truth of one Scripture is evidenced not to oppose the truth of another.”<sup>83</sup>

The Reformed orthodox defined the analogy of faith as the overall sum of Christian doctrine or the accepted core of the faith which has been expressed historically throughout the church age.<sup>84</sup> Henry Lukin characterized the analogy as “those common principles, generally agreed upon amongst Christians, according to the general scope of Scriptures.”<sup>85</sup> Representing other thinkers, William Perkins grounded the analogy in the Apostles’ Creed and the Decalogue:

The analogie of faith, is a certaine abridgement or summe of the Scripturres, collected out of most manifest & familiar places. The parts thereof are two. The first concerneth faith, which is handled in the Apostles Creede. The second concerneth charitie or loue, which is explicated in the Ten Commandments.<sup>86</sup>

Turretin’s description is broader and vaguer, substituting “the articles of faith” for Perkins’ Apostles’ Creed:

The analogy of faith (Rom. 12:6) signifies not only the measure of faith granted to each believer, but also the constant harmony and agreement of all heads of faith exhibited in the clearer expressions of Scripture (to which all expositions ought to be conformed) that nothing may be determined at variance with the articles of faith or the precepts of the Decalogue.<sup>87</sup>

William Whitaker also appealed to Romans 12:6, τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως, [“the analogy (or proportion) of faith”] in describing the role of the analogy of faith in interpretation. He also is more explicit about what constitutes the analogy, though his

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<sup>83</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964), I.ia.10.

<sup>84</sup> The importance of staying within the Christian theological tradition for the orthodox theologian and exegete is noted by Richard A. Muller, “Ad fontes argumentorum: The Sources of Reformed Theology in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century,” *Utrechtse Theologische Teek* 40 (1999):16-19.

<sup>85</sup> Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 33.

<sup>86</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737.

<sup>87</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xvii.

disclaimer “such as” allows for a broader understanding of “the general tenour of scripture.” Whitaker writes,

All our expositions should accord with the analogy of faith, which we read of, Rom. xii.6. Now the analogy of faith is nothing else but the constant sense of the general tenour of scripture in those clear passages of scripture, where the meaning labours under no obscurity; such as the articles of faith in the Creed, and the contents of the Lord’s Prayer, the Decalogue, and the whole Catechism: for every part of the Catechism may be confirmed by plain passages of scripture.<sup>88</sup>

The fact that these authors, like others who speak of the analogy of faith, do not firmly delimit the boundaries of the faith is either an example of their unwillingness at this point in their discussions to define *articuli fundamentales* (something that happened in a more formal way only in the latter half of the seventeenth century),<sup>89</sup> or an assumption that the fundamentals are well understood and accepted by their audience.

Regardless of the specific composition of the faith by which an analogy is made, all orthodox exegetes recognized that the “general tenour” of the faith was drawn from the clear texts of Scripture; the analogy of faith was grounded in “the constant and perpetual Sentence of Scripture in those places that are undoubtedly plain and obvious to our Understanding.”<sup>90</sup> Thus, ultimately, the exegetical influence of the analogy of faith depended upon Scripture itself. Rodolfe Cudworth, the seventeenth-century editor of Perkins’ commentaries, notes that the clear and plain parts of Scripture

haue a necessarie vse, both in regard of the simple, who are to bee fedde with milke, beeing but babes in Christ: and of the learned who are strong men in Christ, that they may haue some rule, whereby to trie the spirits, consonant to the Analogie of faith, and doctrine of the Orthodoxe Fathers of the Church.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.472.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion of the post-Reformation Reformed understanding and development of the fundamental articles of faith, see Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:277-311.

<sup>90</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 169. See also, Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 33, 36; Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.472; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xvii.

<sup>91</sup> Cudworth, “Epistle Dedication,” 2:177.

Scripture serves both to strengthen young believers and to provide a “rule” of faith for the mature – the analogy of faith upon which to evaluate doctrinal and exegetical options.

In their interpretations, orthodox theologians recognized the interdependence of the analogy of faith and the Reformation’s pursuit of the literal sense of the text.

Understanding that literal sense to be that meaning which God himself intends for the Scripture to have, faithfulness to the analogy of faith is seen by John Weemse as one criterion whereby the literal sense can be identified.

When we search to finde out the literall sense of the Scripture, that cannot be the literall sense of it which is contrary to the analogie of faith, which is eyther *in credendis* or *in faciendis*. If it be contrary to the articles of our faith or any of the commandements, then that cannot be the literall sense.<sup>92</sup>

The analogy of faith was also used to identify the presence of non-literal language in the Bible. Turretin writes, “now this is the surest criterion of a figurative locution: . . . if [the bare meaning of the words] are repugnant to the analogy of faith and at variance with any received doctrine, either theoretical or practical.”<sup>93</sup> Thus, if the “literal” meaning of the words are at odds with the analogy of faith, then the text must be taken in a figurative sense. Perkins similarly notes,

If the natiue (or naturall) signification of the words doe manifestly disagree with either the analogy of faith, or very perspicuous places of the Scripture: then the other meaning which is giuen of the place propounded, is naturall & proper, if it agree with contraie and like places, with the circumstances & wordes of the place, & with the nature of that thing which is intreated of.”<sup>94</sup>

He then gives the example of this in analyzing Christ’s words, “this is my body which is broken for you” (Luke 22:19). Perkins argues that the bread cannot ontologically be Christ’s body (the native or natural signification of the words) since the analogy of faith

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<sup>92</sup> Weemse, *Exercitations Divine*, I.xix (pg. 179).

<sup>93</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xix.

<sup>94</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:740.



disallows it. But the bread *is* his body “by a Metonymie of the subject for the adiunct.”<sup>95</sup> In this way, Perkins shows how his interpretation fits the analogy of faith, the original occasion and subject under discussion, the rest of the Scriptures, the “lawes of logike,” and is faithful to the vernacular way of speaking.

The analogy of faith provided a clear boundary between acceptable and non-acceptable biblical interpretations. All biblical exegesis was to be tested by this presupposition; Edward Leigh asserts that “all expositions ought to agree with the Analogie of faith,” and Whitaker condemns as falsehood all contrary opinions, “whatever exposition is repugnant to this analogy must be false.”<sup>96</sup> Weemse argues that “true interpretation is that interpretation which is *super fundamentum*, upon the foundation, and gives the true interpretation of the place intreated.”<sup>97</sup> The foundation he has in mind here is “the foundation of salvation,” the Christian faith itself, and he warns that proper interpretation cannot be contrary, beside, or about the foundation, but must be built upon that foundation – upon and according to the analogy of faith.

Of course, this did not mean that every interpretation which was in accordance with the analogy of faith was acceptable. Wilhelmus à Brakel explicitly warns against this abuse of the *analogia fidei* – not every possible interpretation of a text which faithfully corresponds to the analogy of faith is exegetically accurate.<sup>98</sup> As noted earlier, the analogy was used to restrict the available exegetical options to those which are not in opposition to the received Christian faith – it did not dictate which option was the proper

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<sup>95</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:741.

<sup>96</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 183; Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.472. See also the similar claims by Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737; Wilson, *Theologicall Rules*, 32, 113-114; Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 33-36; Wyttenbach, *Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae*, 1:192; Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, *passim*; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xvii.

<sup>97</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 41.

<sup>98</sup> Brakel, *A Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:79.

exposition of the biblical text. In this regard, Owen is at his exegetical best here when he refuses to opt for a popular dogmatic exposition simply because it fits the analogy of faith, and instead, works within the analogy of faith to find an exposition which faithfully flows from the use of all exegetical techniques.

### 3.1.2 The Analogy of Faith: In the Thought and Works of Owen

Owen's commitment to the Reformed understanding and employment of the *analogia fidei* is evident throughout his writings – when handling the Scripture, he is committed that “a due consideration of the analogy of faith always to be retained.”<sup>99</sup> He appeals to the analogy of faith when interpreting Scripture in polemic contexts, in his dogmatic treatises, and in his exegetical expositions. As he notes in *Causes, Ways and Means*, in order to avoid stumbling about on the Scripture, especially on the difficult passages, the Holy Spirit has supplied “a rule of the interpretation of Scripture, which whilst we sincerely attend unto we are in no danger of sinfully corrupting the word of God... and this rule is, the analogy or “proportion” of faith.”<sup>100</sup> Like Whitaker and Turretin, Owen links the analogy of faith with the phrase τὴν ἀναλογίαν τῆς πίστεως in Romans 12:6. This analogy Owen further defines as “what is taught plainly and uniformly in the whole Scripture as the rule of our faith and obedience.”<sup>101</sup> The self-consistency of the biblical witness is again paramount in this definition, and Owen clearly expresses his intention to employ this principle in his exegesis; to be guided by the analogy of faith is to interpret every pericope “so as not to admit of any sense which interfereth with what is elsewhere plainly declared.”<sup>102</sup> Indeed, the need to faithfully

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<sup>99</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:201.

<sup>100</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:198.

<sup>101</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:198.

<sup>102</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:199.

comply with the analogy of faith trumps every contrary interpretation which rises even from the best use of man's intellectual abilities.

What sense soever any man supposeth or judgeth this or that particular place of Scripture to yield and give out to the best of his rational intelligence is immediately to give place unto the analogy of faith, – that is, the Scripture's own declaration of its sense in other places to another purpose, or contrary thereunto.<sup>103</sup>

In Owen's writings, the analogy of faith not only plays a negative role, excluding interpretations which are contrary to accepted Christian belief, but it also functions positively, helping guide the interpreter to the truth. For instance, in his theological treatise on the Holy Spirit, Owen acknowledges the seeming difficulties which surround the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation, yet assures the reader that "express testimonies of Scripture, with the clear and evident analogy of faith, will carry us easily and safely through this seeming difficulty."<sup>104</sup>

The application of the *analogia fidei* in interpretation is of crucial importance to Owen because of the way the Reformers' understanding of the perspicuity of Scripture was being practiced (i.e., distorted) by unorthodox exegetes. For the orthodox, the analogy of faith served to limit reason's competence in divining theological truth and served as the foundation of all biblical interpretation. Carl Trueman asserts the importance of the *analogia fidei* in interpretation:

In the light of the radical Scripture principle of the Socinians, there was a pressing need for theologians such as Owen to counterbalance the Reformation emphasis upon Scripture's perspicuity with an emphasis upon the need for responsible exegesis set in the context of broader theological concerns. Only in this way could such basic orthodox doctrines such as the Trinity be safeguarded. The naïve anti-

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<sup>103</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:224.

<sup>104</sup> John Owen, *ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 160. See also, Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:198-199.

intellectualism which was the alternative could provide no realistic defence against the Socinian's radical onslaught.<sup>105</sup>

Owen's *Vindiciae Evangelicae* was written to combat such Socinian anti-intellectualism and abuse of the perspicuity doctrine. In this work, Owen reproduces in full John Biddle's preface to his catechism, *A Confession of Faith*, much of which argues against the use of the analogy of faith. Biddle accuses other catechisms of being

so stuffed with the supposals and traditions of men that the least part of them is derived from the word of God: for when councils, convocations, and assemblies of divines, justling the sacred writers out of their place in the church, had once framed articles and confessions of faith according to their own fancies and interests, and the civil magistrate had by his authority ratified the same, all catechisms were afterward fitted to those articles and confessions, and the Scripture either wholly omitted or brought in only for a show.<sup>106</sup>

While agreeing with Biddle's desire to be firmly rooted in Scripture, Owen takes him to task for dismantling the analogy of faith through his own appeal to reason and to his distorted reading of Scripture.<sup>107</sup> Owen derides Biddle's "desire for novelty," insisting that Biddle has done nothing but duplicate the errors and heresies of the past.<sup>108</sup> This longing to generate new and unique insights runs counter to the analogy of faith, and Owen expresses his disgust with those who ignore the persistent witness of Scripture and the force of the clear and plain texts:

When men will engage their inquiries into parts of the Scripture mystical, allegorical, or prophetical, aiming to find out, it may be, things new and curious, without a constant regard unto this analogy of faith, it is no wonder if they wander out of the way and err concerning the truth, as many have done on that occasion. And I cannot but declare my detestation of those bold and curious conjectures which... many have indulged themselves in on obscure passages in the Scripture.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 85. See also, 94-99; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:517-520.

<sup>106</sup> John Biddle's *A Confession of Faith* (London, 1648). See also, John Biddle, *Duae Catecheses* (London, 1664), 3-4. The English here is from Biddle's preface reproduced in Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:55-59.

<sup>107</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:59-84.

<sup>108</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:82.

<sup>109</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:198.

Thus, Owen's polemical attack against the Socinians and their naïve interpretation of the Scripture frequently rests on his assumption of the analogy of faith and its limiting role in the interpretive process.

Explicit evidence of the application of the analogy of faith in Owen's exegetical writings is plentiful, though subtle. Frequently, Owen will simply ignore or briefly pass over alternative explanations of a text which do not correspond to the *analogia fidei*. Where this precritical assumption becomes expressed, however, is when Owen is reacting to other, non-orthodox, interpretations of a text. Thus, for example, throughout his exposition, Owen notes that the Socinian interpretation of Hebrews falls outside the accepted Christian faith, as do various Jewish interpretations of the Old Testament citations used in Hebrews 1. Nevertheless, while not frequently mentioned in an explicit way, Owen's commitment to the analogy of faith is reflected in the theological orthodoxy of his own exegetical conclusions. As noted above, the analogy of faith does not in and of itself guarantee accurate interpretation – faithful attention to the sum of Christian doctrine as contained in the Apostles' Creed, the Decalogue, and other expressions of the Christian faith promises to keep the exegete from grievous interpretive errors; it does not guarantee to lead him to the true meaning of the text. Nevertheless, for Owen the benefit of avoiding error through attention to *analogia fidei* is great. Owen asserts that any man who comes to the Scripture text faithfully,

and in his inquiries to have a constant due regard unto the analogy of faith, so as not to admit of any sense which interfereth with what is elsewhere plainly declared – such a person shall not miss of the mind of the Holy Spirit, or if he do, shall be assuredly perserved from any hurtful danger in his mistakes... Wherefore, although a man should miss of the first proper sense of any obscure place of Scripture, which, with all our diligence, we ought to aim at, yet, whilst he receiveth none but what contains a truth agreeable unto what I s revealed in other places, the error of his mind neither endangereth his own faith or obedience, nor those of any other.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:199. See also, Owen, "To the Christian Reader," 21.

Thus, even a wrong interpretation, if arrived at in accordance with the analogy of faith, is not damaging – for what is errantly gained is nevertheless part of the truth of the faith. A good example of this is in Owen’s handling of the meaning of ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης [“the brightness of his glory”] in Hebrews 1:3. Most of Owen’s contemporary exegetes used this text in expressing the relationship between the Father and the Son in the Godhead. Owen does not believe that the text addresses this issue, yet, because the exegetes’ description of the relationship between Father and Son was done in accordance with the analogy of faith, Owen does not see their faulty interpretations as dangerous.<sup>111</sup>

### 3.2 The Analogy of Scripture

#### 3.2.1 The Analogy of Scripture: Seventeenth-Century Definition and Use

The analogy of faith, based as it is on the clear and plain passages of the Bible, is simply an extension of the *analogy of Scripture*. According to the *analogia Scripturae*, the surest and truest guide for determining the meaning of a particular text is to seek its explanation within the rest of Scripture. *Sacra Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* – Scripture is its own interpreter. Given its adherence to the *sola Scriptura* principle, it is not surprising that Reformed exegetes would claim that “the received Doctrine of the Reformed Churches, both our own and those abroad hath been hitherto, that Scripture is its own Interpreter,” and that *Scripturam ex Scriptura explicandam esse*.<sup>112</sup> Or as Perkins asserts, “the supream and absolute meane of interpretation is the Scripture it selfe.”<sup>113</sup> This principle was intended in part to counter man’s natural inclination to assert his own

<sup>111</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:92, and see below for more detailed examination of Owen’s thought at this point.

<sup>112</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 16. See also, Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1:vii; Wytenbach, *Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae*, 1:167.

<sup>113</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737.

authority. Instead, biblical interpretation, as Turretin argues, “is not to be sought by each man’s private judgment (which is the *idia epilysis* condemned by Peter), but is to be gathered from the Scriptures themselves as their own best and surest interpreter (Neh. 8:8; Acts 17:11).”<sup>114</sup>

As with the *analogia fidei*, justification for the *analogia Scripturae* principle is grounded in the Reformed understanding of God and the nature of the scriptural text – the assumption of the unity and coherence of the Bible which itself derives from the divine origin of the written word. Since the Bible teaches a unified truth, one passage cannot be logically contradictory to another – “for God’s word must always bring perfect truth, it cannot fight against it self.”<sup>115</sup> And, since God authored the text via his Spirit-inspired penmen, then God himself speaking through his word is its best expositor. These and similar arguments for the *Scriptura sui interpres* principle are well collected by Whitaker in his *Disputation* where he expresses his argument: “he who made the law alone hath supreme authority to expound the law. But God alone made the scriptures. Therefore God alone hath supreme authority to interpret the scriptures” – which, Whitaker argues, he does through other Scriptures.<sup>116</sup> Whitaker also cites such distinguished churchmen as Irenaeus, Hilary, Augustine, Basil, Optatus, Ambrose, Lyra, and even Cajetan (who is frequently criticized by the Protestant orthodox for his biblical interpretation) as supporters and proponents of this interpretive principle.<sup>117</sup> John Weemse finds biblical support for this practice in the Bible itself whereby the New Testament authors cite texts from the Old Testament:

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<sup>114</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xviii.

<sup>115</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 192.

<sup>116</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.viii.459.

<sup>117</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.viii.461-466. Cajetan’s view of Hebrews and the author’s use of the Old Testament there often serves as a foil for the orthodox commentators as will be noted later.

The two Testaments are Gods two Silver Trumpets, and his two lips, as it were, breathing out one truth. When the Apostles cite Scripture to confirme their doctrine, it is not because their doctrine stands in neede of confirmation. But it is for our cause, to let us see the harmony and consent that is betwixt the Old and New Testament.<sup>118</sup>

It is this very presupposition of the “harmony and consent” of the biblical text which opponents of the principle of *analogia Scripturae* principle criticize: Frederic Farrar, in his *History of Interpretation*, objects to this “obscure rule” that Scripture interprets Scripture, “a rule which exegetically considered has no meaning.” He continues, “such a view is true only of the simplest essentials of the faith. There is no mechanical unity in the Bible.”<sup>119</sup> The root, then, of the difference between the Reformed orthodox and their critics is their respective presuppositions concerning the origin and nature of Scripture.

An important contemporary text in this discussion is *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter Asserted* by John Wilson.<sup>120</sup> In this treatise, Wilson defends the Reformation *Scriptura sui interpres* principle as “the sole rule of interpretation” against the competing “rules” of rationalism and philosophy. Wilson is reacting to a work of Lodewijk Meijer, *Philosophia Sacra Scriptura Interpres*,<sup>121</sup> which attempts “to make use of the same method in Theology that Des Cartes had done in Philosophy,” and argues that “the onely sure and infallible Rule of Interpretation” is “the principals of Reason and the dictates of Philosophy.”<sup>122</sup> Wilson defines the “rule of interpretation” to be that basis upon which the

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<sup>118</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 60.

<sup>119</sup> Frederic Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: Dutton, 1886; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 332-333n1. Critiques of Farrar’s theological grid and pejorative theological and moral assessments can be found in Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:3-11; Richard A. Muller, “Biblical Interpretation in the Era of Reformation: The View of the Middle Ages,” in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard Muller and John Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 3-22; Gerald Sheppard, “Interpretation of the Old Testament between Reformation and Modernity,” in *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses: Commentary on Hebrews 11*, William Perkins, ed. J. Augustine (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 50-53.

<sup>120</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*.

<sup>121</sup> Meijer, *Philosophia S. Scripturae Interpres*.

<sup>122</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 17.



exegetical conclusions of a certain text are judged to be accurate or not, “that which gives us objective Evidence by which the true Sense of Scripture is discern’d, and for which it is received.”<sup>123</sup> In this regard, he argues forcefully for the Reformation’s analogy of Scripture, insisting that “in expounding Scripture we must be regulated and determined by the Scripture it self.”<sup>124</sup> While he values reason and its role in the interpretive process, Wilson refutes the rationalists’ attempt to elevate reason as the primary principle in evaluating exegetical conclusions, maintaining instead fidelity to the *analogia Scripturae*.

In practice, the exegete, acting in accordance with the analogy of Scripture, was to arrive at his exegetical analysis of a particular text by comparing it with other scriptural passages. “The Pastors and teachers of the Church, must diligently and painefully study the Scriptures, giving themselves to read, compare place with place.”<sup>125</sup> This process took place in two ways – first, in their exegetical and theological works, commentators would gather together parallel testimonies from other parts of Scripture to support their interpretation. This practice was so prolific throughout the Reformed orthodox era that it helped give rise to the modern critique of “orthodox proof texting.” Secondly, the exegete was instructed to compare the text under examination with other biblical texts, a “collation of places in the Scripture.” This included places in the Bible where a particular text was quoted or alluded to by another biblical author, and places (texts) which dealt with the same issue or theme.

The collation or comparing of places together, is that, whereby places are set like parallels one beside another, that the meaning of them may more evidently appeare... Collation of places is two-fold. The first is the comparing of the place propounded with it selfe cited and repeated else-where in holy writ... the second

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<sup>123</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 6.

<sup>124</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 169. See also, 16.

<sup>125</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 181.

collation is of the place propounded with other places: and those againe are either like or vnlike.<sup>126</sup>

Through this comparison, the meaning of obscure texts could be deduced from parallel plainer ones. Wilson explains, “whatsoever speaks darkly and uncertainly in any place, is to be explained by it self in those other places, where it speaks more plainly,” or, as Whitaker writes, “One place must be compared and collated with another ; the obscurer places with the plainer or less obscure. For though in one place the words may be obscure, they will be plainer in another.”<sup>127</sup> A thorough collation of texts according to the analogy of Scripture involved not only the scriptural witnesses which paralleled the meaning of a text, but also those passages which demonstrated that meaning through contrast, that is, dissimilar passages: “Comparison (*synkrisis*) compares passages of Scripture with each other (Acts 9:22) – the more obscure with the plainer, similar and parallel with similar, dissimilar with dissimilar.”<sup>128</sup>

### 3.2.2 The Analogy of Scripture: In the Thought and Works of Owen

Only on rare occasions does Owen specifically address the *analogia Scripturae*, although it obviously dominated his exegetical and theological practice. In *Causes, Ways, and Means*, Owen notes that there are in Scripture τινὰ Δυσερμήνευτα, “some things that are ‘hard to be interpreted.’” However, in light of these difficult, obscure passages,

we have a relief provided, in the wisdom of the Holy Spirit in giving the whole Scripture for our instruction, against any disadvantage unto our faith or obedience... Whatever is so delivered in any place, if it be of importance for us to know and believe, as unto the ends of divine revelation, it is in some other place or places

<sup>126</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:738, 738.

<sup>127</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 169; Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.471. See also, Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 182; Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 57; Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 47-48; Brakel, *A Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:78; Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:738; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1:vii; Wyttenbach, *Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae*, 1:168.

<sup>128</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xviii. See also, Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 12; Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 60; Wilson, *Theologicall Rules*, 16, 40, 74, 124.

unveiled and plainly declared... There can be no instance given of any obscure place or passage in the Scripture, concerning which a man may rationally suppose or conjecture that there is any doctrinal truth requiring our obedience contained in it, which is not elsewhere explained.<sup>129</sup>

Further, Owen argues that the analogy of Scripture limits what possible meanings may be attached to any obscure text: “we affix no sense unto any obscure or difficult passage of Scripture but what is materially true and consonant unto other express and plain testimonies. For men to raise peculiar sense from such places, not confirmed elsewhere, is a dangerous curiosity.”<sup>130</sup> In the face of Socinian interpretations of the anthropomorphisms used in the Bible to describe God, Owen demands that the Scripture “be allowed to expound itself,” and that if so allowed, “the Scripture plainly interprets itself as to these attributions unto God.”<sup>131</sup> What follows is a list of scriptural citations which prove that God is not corporal and that the descriptions are intended to highlight characteristics of his nature and character. In explaining why the epistle’s author used so many Old Testament citations in the first chapter of Hebrews, Owen notes that “it is useful to have important fundamental truths confirmed by many testimonies of Scripture,” and that “what, it may be, is obscure in one is cleared in another; and so what doubts and fears remain on the consideration of one testimony are removed by another, whereby the souls of believers are carried on unto a ‘full assurance.’”<sup>132</sup> Thus, one of the benefits of a clear commitment to the *analogia Scripturae* is the confidence and assurance offered to the believer in seeing the unity and coherence of the scriptural witness.

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<sup>129</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:196-197.

<sup>130</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:197.

<sup>131</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:100, 103-104.

<sup>132</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:165.

Owen is convinced that “the conferring and comparing of scriptures is an excellent means of coming to an acquaintance with the mind and will of God in them,” and that faithful application and adherence to the analogy of Scripture is a sure defense against heretical biblical interpretation.<sup>133</sup> Ignoring this analogy is

the root of almost all the errors and heresies that are in the world. Men whose hearts are not subdued by faith and humility unto the obedience of the truth, lighting on some expressions in the Scripture, that, singly considered, seem to give countenance to some such opinion as they are willing to embrace, without further search fix it on their minds and imaginations, until it is too late to oppose any thing unto it; for when they are once fixed in their persuasions, those other places of Scripture which they should with humility have compared with that whose seeming sense they cleave unto, and from thence have learned the mind of the Holy Ghost in them all, are considered by them to no other end but only how they may pervert them, and free themselves from the authority of them.<sup>134</sup>

By application of the analogy of Scripture, the interpreter can be assured that he will not be led into error by misinterpreting a single text.

Examples of Owen’s dedication to the analogy of Scripture are overwhelmingly evident throughout his writings. In his polemic encounters, both in writing and in person, the correlation of texts, the proliferation of supporting testimonies, is Owen’s main and most powerful weapon. In the preface to *Vindiciae Evangelicae* Owen recounts how he handles Socinian opponents:

In dealing with these men, is there any better course in the world than, in a good order and method, to multiply testimonies against them to the same purpose?... Being engaged myself once in a public dispute about the satisfaction of Christ, I took this course, in a clear and evident coherence, producing very many testimonies to the confirmation of it; which together gave such an evidence to the truth, that one who stood by instantly affirmed that ‘there was enough spoken to stop the mouth of the devil himself.’<sup>135</sup>

He claims that his best defense against Socinianism is a diligent reading of Scripture “with the assistance and direction of all the rules and advantages for the right

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<sup>133</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:187.

<sup>134</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:188.

<sup>135</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:51.

understanding of them.”<sup>136</sup> When discussing any difficult doctrine, Owen’s *modus operandi* is to array a series of Scriptures, often addressing individual texts at length.<sup>137</sup> Owen’s defense of the doctrine of the Trinity is a good example of this kind of textual correlation. In *A Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, the Christian belief that Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God is demonstrated “by divine testimony and by divine revelation” – Owen lists forty-eight texts side by side, giving brief comments on some and showing their interrelation with one another.<sup>138</sup> In this same work, Owen provides twenty-three passages which he uses to prove that the Holy Spirit is “an eternally existing divine substance, the author of divine operations, and the object of divine and religious worship,” as well as twenty verses showing that the “Scripture abundantly testify” that the second Person of the Trinity took upon himself human nature in one person.<sup>139</sup>

Owen consistently refers to other biblical texts to clarify or further develop a particular point of his exegesis. For instance, in seeking the exact extent covered by the neuter gender use of  $\pi\alpha\nu$  in Hebrews 1:2, Owen’s first recourse is to compare its use with other scriptural texts, 1 Cor 15:27 and Rom 9:5.<sup>140</sup> Further examples of Owen’s appeal to other passages in Scripture to support his exegetical conclusions are too numerous to mention; it is hardly an exaggeration to say that in his exposition of every verse in his Hebrews commentary, Owen brings in corresponding texts to expound and explain the passage’s meaning. Usually, Owen simply lists parallel passages, though he not

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<sup>136</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:51.

<sup>137</sup> E.g., John Owen, *The Nature of Apostasy from the Profession of the Gospel and the Punishment of Apostates Declared*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 7 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 11 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *On Schism*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 13 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*; Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*.

<sup>138</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:383-386.

<sup>139</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:399-401, 414-417.

<sup>140</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:43. See also, 36, 42, 47, 104.

infrequently employs other texts to clarify the meaning of a particular verse under discussion. In this, Owen believes he is following the example of the apostles themselves, as for instance is evidenced by the use of many Old Testament citations by the Hebrews epistle's author to support his statements regarding Christ.<sup>141</sup> By means, then, of the *analogia Scripturae*, Owen, like other Reformed exegetes, used Scripture itself to reveal the meaning of difficult texts, and was assured that his interpretations were in accordance with the overall thrust of the Bible.

### 3.3 Scope and Occasion

#### 3.3.1 Scope and Occasion: Seventeenth-Century Definition and Use

In the hermeneutical practice of the seventeenth century, the *scope* played a crucial role in fixing the proper interpretation of a passage.<sup>142</sup> The scope of a text referred to the focus, design, target, or "intendment" (one of Owen's common descriptions) of the passage. Individual verses and phrases must be interpreted in light of the purposes for which they were written and according to the intent of the whole work. In the Reformation and post-Reformation eras, scope was used both in a larger sense for the overall purpose and message of the Bible, *scopus Scripturae*, and in a more restricted or local sense for the design and/or argument of a particular section or book of the Bible. Building upon the Reformers insistence that Christ was the center or focus of all of Scripture,<sup>143</sup> Perkins defines scope in its broader sense in this way:

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<sup>141</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:165-166.

<sup>142</sup> Gerald T. Sheppard, "Between Reformation and Modern Commentary: The Perception of the Scope of Biblical Books," in *A Commentary on Galatians*, William Perkins, ed. Gerald Sheppard (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), vii-xiii; Sheppard, "Interpretation of the Old Testament between Reformation and Modernity," 46-70; Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:211-230.

<sup>143</sup> See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:211-221 for a full discussion of this broader understanding of scope as *scopus Scripturae* in the Reformers.

The summe of the Scripture is contained in such a syllogisme (or forme of reasoning, as this is which followeth.)

The true Messias shall be both God and man of the seede of Daud; he shall be borne of a virgin; he shall bring the Gospell forth of his Fathers bosome; he shall satisfie the Law; he shall offer up himselfe a sacrifice for the sinnes of the faithfull; he shall conquer death by dying and rising againe; he shall ascend into heaven; and in his due time he shall returne unto iudgement.

Jesus of Nazaret the Sonne of Mary is such a one:

He therefore is the true Messias.

In this syllogisme the Maior is the scope or principall drift in all the writings of the Prophets: and the Minor in the writings of the Euangelists and Apostles.<sup>144</sup>

However, in exegetical practice, the term was usually used in its more restricted sense, to specify the aim, intent or central purpose of a particular text under examination. Thus, the scope referred to the human author's main goal in the original writing.

However, this precritical view of "scope" should not be confused with the modern, critical exegetical practice of seeking the author's historic situation and finding the meaning of a text there. The modern method looks at the texts in parts, seeking to discover the historical referent that lay behind the words, whereas the precritical view of scope placed a single passage or book within the larger context of the Bible as a whole. The precritical assumption of the scope was that the whole biblical witness determined an author's intent as they wrote the sacred text – biblical context determines the scope of a writing, not the historical situation alone as in modern hermeneutics. A biblical author's intention was, as guided by the Holy Spirit, to complement the pattern, design, context, and purpose of the whole divine record in Scripture, and it was this intention that the interpreter sought to explicate.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecy*, 2:732.

<sup>145</sup> A fuller discussion of the difference between the precritical and modern view of scope can be found in Sheppard, "Between Reformation and Modern Commentary;" Sheppard, "Interpretation of the Old Testament between Reformation and Modernity."

In this light, the scope of a particular passage or book is related to the *analogia fidei*, though not identical to it. The scope describes how a book or text fits into the overall Christian belief as dictated by the analogy of faith: the analogy itself is the *scopus Scripturae* (the scope of the whole Bible), while the scope of an individual book describes how that text interrelates and corresponds to the purposes of the overall scriptural message. While the usage of *scopus* in this manner became popular only with Erasmus's work early in the sixteenth century,<sup>146</sup> it shares the same "precritical" assumption about the nature of Scripture as does the analogies of faith and Scripture. Discovering, and then staying faithful to, the scope of a passage under consideration was a crucial factor in arriving at a proper interpretation. Edward Leigh insists, "to understand the better both the words and phrases, they must diligently consider of the scope and circumstances of the place," and Whitaker writes that "we ought to consider the scope, end, [and] matter... of each passage."<sup>147</sup>

In addition to scope, other related terms such as *argument*, *occasion*, *circumstances*, and *context* often appear in seventeenth-century exegesis. A technical relationship between argument and scope does not appear to be universally acknowledged or employed. William Perkins in his Jude commentary differentiates between the two terms, though the distinction he draws is not clear. He speaks of "the generall ayme and scope of

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<sup>146</sup> Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology*, 72-81; Manfred Hoffmann, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Jacques Le Brun, "Meaning and Scope of the Return to Origins in Richard Simon's Work," *Trinity Journal* 3 (1982):57-70; Richard A. Muller, "William Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition: Interpretation, Style, and Method," in *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses: Commentary on Hebrews 11*, William Perkins, ed. J. Augustine (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 79.

<sup>147</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 182-183; Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.470. See also, Wyttenbach, *Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae*, 1:180, 183; Cudworth, "Epistle Dedication," 2:181; William Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition vpon the Epistle of Iude*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister... William Perkins*, vol. 3 (London, 1616-1618), 479; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xviii; Brakel, *A Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:78; Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 47; Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 11; Byfield, *Directions for the Private Reading*, Table I, and see the "Epistle Dedication."



this Epistle,” and then later of “the argument.”<sup>148</sup> It appears that he uses “scope” to define the intent of the text, and “the argument” describes how that intent is communicated. However, this is by no means a universally accepted distinction, as for instance when Rodolfe Cudworth, in his prolegomena to Perkins’s Galatians commentary, subsumes both “occasion” and “scope” under “argument.” In one paragraph where he summarizes the argument of the epistle, he notes that “two things are generally to be considered,” the occasion of the writing and the scope.<sup>149</sup> However, in most instances, the two words are used interchangeably – usually in the prolegomena of an exegetical work – with some authors preferring one over the other.

The occasion and circumstance of the text refer to the historical situation which prompted the writing of the biblical material and frequently included discussions on the author, date, subject matter, and original recipients of the work. In his instruction in exegetical techniques, Perkins stresses the importance of attaining a firm grasp of the occasion and circumstances prior to drawing exegetical conclusions. “The circumstances of the place propounded are these; Who? To whom? Upon what occasion? At what time? In what place? For what end? What goeth before? What followeth?”<sup>150</sup> The final two questions raises the issue of “context,” what precedes and follows the immediate text under examination. One modern study by Thomas Lea claims that Puritan exegetes recognized that “context was the chief determining factor of the meaning of the word.”<sup>151</sup> Concern for the context focused on the importance of analyzing a particular pericope

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<sup>148</sup> Perkins, *A Godly and Learned Exposition vpon Iude*, 3:479, 480.

<sup>149</sup> Cudworth, “Epistle Dedication,” 2:181.

<sup>150</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737-738. See also, Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 23-26, 31-36; Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 33; Turretin, *Institutes of Elentic Theology*, II:xix.xviii; Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 10-11; Wilson, *Theologicall Rules*, 32, 57-58.

<sup>151</sup> Thomas D. Lea, “The Hermeneutics of the Puritans,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996):278.

within its immediate literary background. Turretin insists on attending “to the connection (*allelouchian*) of the words.”<sup>152</sup> Whitaker speaks of this as the “antecedents and consequents of each passage,” and notes that “the ancients frequently fell into mistakes from not attending to the series and connection of the text.”<sup>153</sup>

### 3.3.2 Scope and Occasion: In the Thought and Works of Owen

Owen was extremely cognizant of these exegetical issues. His understanding and application of the scope of Scripture exerted an enormous influence upon his exegesis. Whereas the *analogia fidei* and the *analogia Scripturae* functioned largely on a subtle presuppositional level and attention to the grammatical and syntactical construction of the text obviously controlled the specifics of his exegesis, Owen relied heavily upon his analysis of the scope of the text to guide him to an accurate interpretation. Owen gives the impression that, no matter how plausible a certain interpretation might be on its own, it must be rejected if it conflicts with the overall design of the biblical author.

In his exegetical method, he insists on the “due examination of the design and scope of the place,” and that “any rational consideration” of a text must include the ability to judge what is “the design of him that writes or speaks.”<sup>154</sup> It is on this ground that Owen finds fault with the Socinian John Biddle, for in Biddle’s handling of Scripture “he hath utterly perverted the scope and intendment of the places urged,” and it is only through turning “aside from their purpose, scope, and intendment” that Biddle’s own interpretations are made.<sup>155</sup> In their discussion of the attributes of God which arise from

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<sup>152</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II:xix.xviii.

<sup>153</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.470, 471. See also, Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:78; Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 33-36; Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 182-183; Wilson, *Theological Rules*, 62.

<sup>154</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:201, 223. See also, 4:209.

<sup>155</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:62, 64.

the anthropomorphic descriptions in the Bible, Owen agrees with (and even commends) Biddle's use of Scripture and his lexical analysis, but the men part ways over whether the bare letter, or the intention of the author (i.e., the scope), is to guide the meaning of the text.<sup>156</sup>

In his preface to his *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Owen states clearly the importance of a firm grasp of the scope and occasion in coming to an understanding of the letter's meaning. He states that anyone who "would come to a right understanding of this Epistle must always bear in mind, – 1. To whom it was written... 2. To what end it was written... 3. On what principles the apostle deals with them in this argument... [and] 6. The main argument he insist on."<sup>157</sup> Because of this necessity, Owen precedes his *Exposition* with a series of prolegomena-like *Exercitations*, which address all these issues in significant detail. In his very first exercitation, Owen relates the end and scope of all Scripture (*scopus Scripturae*) to the end and scope of this particular epistle. Of Scripture as a whole, this "especial end"

supremely and absolutely, is the glory of that God who is the author of it. This is the centre where all the lines of it do meet, the scope and mark towards which all things in it are directed. It is the revelation of himself that is intended, of his mind and will, that he may be glorified... Particularly, the demonstration of this glory of God in and by Jesus Christ is aimed at.<sup>158</sup>

Whereas other biblical books capture some parts of this overall scope, the Epistle to the Hebrews is supreme, since

Now, herein doth this Epistle come behind no other portion of Scripture whatever; for... this expresseth the whole and all the parts of it distinctly, from the very foundation of calling men to the knowledge of God and obedience, unto the utmost end of his glorifying himself in their salvation by Jesus.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:110-115, 118.

<sup>157</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:13.

<sup>158</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:48.

<sup>159</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:49.

In a later exercitation, Owen claims that there are two things about Christ which are the pillars and foundation of the Church – his divine nature and his work of mediation in the atonement for sin, “the unfolding and particular application of this way of instruction is the principal design and scope of the apostle Paul in his Epistle unto the Hebrews.”<sup>160</sup>

The importance of appreciating the occasion of the epistle’s writing was made clear by Owen in that the bulk of his exercitations are spent focusing on the state of the “Judicial Church” prior to and in the Apostolic age. In his opening preface to the whole work, Owen confesses that it is the apparent neglect of this Jewish character of the writing which prompted Owen’s own work.<sup>161</sup> Owen spends much time here precisely because he feels that there are many places in the epistle where the author assumes some common understanding of the Jewish heritage, and that the epistle’s message is lost without an awareness of that background.<sup>162</sup> Abiding by the historical context, then, is seen as crucial in a proper examination of the text.

Examples of the scope and occasion influencing Owen’s exegesis are manifold. For instance, in his examination of Hebrews 1:3 when he discusses various interpretations of ἀπαύγασμα and χαρακτήρ, Owen states:

I shall not examine in particular the reasons that are alleged for these several interpretations, but only propose and confirm that sense of the place which on full and due consideration appears, as agreeable unto the analogy of faith, so expressly to answer the design and intendment of the apostle.<sup>163</sup>

The purpose of the author helps Owen decide whether the ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης refers to Christ’s human or divine nature. He asserts that the author intended to speak of Christ’s

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<sup>160</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:216. See also, 17:89-90, 97-100.

<sup>161</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:5.

<sup>162</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:6-7.

<sup>163</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:89-90.

person, not his essence, and hence, the brightness relates to aspects of both natures.<sup>164</sup>

Similarly, in concluding his discussion of the first three verses of the epistle, Owen again looks back to the overall scope of the writing to assure his readers that he is faithfully expositing the intent of the author.

The design of the apostle, as we have now often showed, is to evince the necessity of abiding in the doctrine of the gospel, from the excellency of the person by whom it pleased God to reveal it unto us. This he hath done already in general, in that description which he hath given us of his person, power, works, offices, and glory; whereby he hath made it evident that no creature whom God was pleased at any time to make use of in the revelation of his will, or the institution of his worship, was any way to be compared with him.<sup>165</sup>

Owen explicitly appeals to this design in determining the usefulness of the sun-beam illustration in explaining how the Son is the “brightness” of his Father. Most of his contemporaries immediately jump to this analogy in expressing the relationship between the Father and Son – as a beam emanates from the sun, is distinct yet of the same essence as the sun, so is the Son related to the Father.<sup>166</sup> After noting six ways in which this analogy can indeed demonstrate the intricacies of the Godhead, Owen, constrained by his hermeneutical commitment to the original design of the author, comments:

I acknowledge that these things are true, and that there is nothing in them disagreeable unto the analogy of faith. But yet as sundry other things may be affirmed of the sun and its beam, whereof no tolerable application can be made to the matter in hand, so I am not persuaded that the apostle intended any such comparison or allusion, are aimed at our information or instruction by them. They were common people of the Jews, and not philosophers, to whom the apostle wrote this epistle; and therefore either he expreseth the things that he intends in terms answering unto what was in use among themselves to the same purpose, or else he

<sup>164</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:90.

<sup>165</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:121.

<sup>166</sup> David Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1649; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 8; William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (1655; repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 15; William Jones, *A Commentary vpon the Epistles of Saint Paul to Philemon, and to the Hebrewes* (London, 1635), 57; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:809; John Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition Upon All the Epistles, and the Revelation of John the Divine* (London, 1647; repr. 1958), 666; *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament, wherein the Text is Explained, Doubts Resolved, Scriptures Paralleled, and Various Readings observed. By the joynt-Labour of certain Learned Divines*, ed. Thomas Gataker, et. al. (London, 1645), MM2v.

asserts them plainly in worlds as meet to express them properly by as any that ware in use amongst men. To say that there is an allusion in the words... is to teach the apostle how to express himself in the things of God.<sup>167</sup>

Another excellent example of the power of the scope to regulate interpretation is found in Owen's view of the author's purpose in writing the first chapter of Hebrews. In examining Hebrews 1:4 ["So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs"], Owen argues that the scope of the chapter speaks to Christ's person and not specifically to either of his natures. Thus, the comparison between the angels and Christ made here by the author of the epistle deals not with their natures, but with their respective offices, Christ's being far superior to that of the angels. This understanding of the scope as dealing with their offices and not their natures continues to exert its influence over the interpretation of the following Old Testament citations.<sup>168</sup>

The scope and occasion of the text, combined with the analogies of Scripture and faith, play an especially important role throughout Owen's exegesis of the Epistle to the Hebrews because of his belief in the typological background of the Old Testament. The historic practices of the Old Testament Israelites foreshadowed the glory and excellencies of the time of their fulfillment in Christ:

It pleased the Holy Ghost herein to use these terms and expressions, to mind the Hebrews how they were of all instructed, though obscurely, in the things now actually exhibited unto them, and that nothing was now preached or declared but what in their typical institutions they had before given their assent unto.<sup>169</sup>

The famous Puritan exegete Matthew Poole saw this typological nature of the Old Testament as controlling the whole scope of the epistle. Thus, the author's main design in writing to the Hebrews is to show that "the whole economy of Moses was designed but to

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<sup>167</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:92.

<sup>168</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:121-126. See also the discussion of the Old Testament citations in chapters 4 and 5 of this work.

lead them to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to be perfected in him, he being the truth and substance of all those shadows.”<sup>170</sup> Owen takes a similar view of the scope of the material, and, consequently, in the course of his exegesis, he must frequently expand upon various types previously expressed in the Old Testament, including the Temple and its worship, the elect/reprobate status of Jacob and Esau, the ark and the Shechinah glory cloud.<sup>171</sup>

### 3.4 Application to the Contemporary Church

#### 3.4.1 Application: Seventeenth-Century Definition and Use

The importance of the scope and occasion, however, should not be overestimated or misunderstood in the orthodox’s hermeneutical strategy. Puritan exegetes used the historical information concerning a pericope to illuminate specific aspects of the text, in order to obtain a fuller grasp of the passage’s theological content. This important step, however, was not seen as the ultimate goal of exegesis, nor does a full understanding of the historical circumstances of the writing comprehend the true extent of the divine purpose of the sacred writing. The recognition and assessment of a book’s historic circumstances is a necessary, but limited step in the complete exposition of the biblical text. According to seventeenth-century hermeneutical assumptions, the scriptural text was directed not only to its original hearers, but ultimately for the continual benefit of the whole Church; the “great end” of the Bible lies in its perpetual witness to modern believers. In insisting that every Christian take advantage of the opportunity to read Scripture, Robert Boyle argues for this timeless quality of the sacred writing:

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<sup>169</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:97.

<sup>170</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:808.

<sup>171</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:13, 55, 93, 94.

The several books of the Bible were written chiefly and primarily to those to whom they were first addressed, and to their contemporaries, and that yet the Bible not being written for one Age or People onely, but for the whole people of God, consisting of persons of all Ages, Nations, Sexes, Complexions and Conditions, it was fit that it should be written in such a way as that none of all these might be quite excluded from the advantages designed them in it.<sup>172</sup>

For the post-Reformation orthodox, the task of biblical interpretation was not complete until the text was communicated to the present Christian community. Proper exegesis in precritical hermeneutics demanded a contemporary exposition of the text to the present-day church; “right exegesis opens Scripture to the life of the church.”<sup>173</sup>

Puritan commentators presupposed that the true meaning of all Scripture, while firmly tied to the grammar of the text, is ultimately orientated to the full life of the Church; exegetes assumed that the letter of the text would naturally lead to matters of *credenda*, *agenda*, and *speranda*. While formally rejecting the medieval allegorical method which gave rise to this four-fold analysis (the *quadriga*), Reformed biblical writers in the seventeenth century nevertheless recognize that true exposition does not stop at understanding the text, but must include an hortatory or “uses” section. Cudworth discusses this necessity at length in his preface to Perkin’s Galatians commentary:

And as for the measure, in regard of breuitie or prolixity, the golden meane hath always beene iuged by the learned to be that best, which is not onely to giue the bare meaning paraphrastically, but to make collection of doctrine & application of uses; yet briefly, rather pointing at the chiefe, then dwelling long vpon any point. Some are of opinion that a Commentator is onely to giue the literal sense of the place, without making further vse of application, or instruction; To which I could easily subscribe, if all the Lords people could prophesie, or if all were able to handle the word of God, the sword of the spirit.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 21-22. See also Wilson, *Theologicall Rules*, 57; Osborne, *The Private Christians non vltra* and Byfield, *Directions for the Private Reading* where similar arguments underlie their urging of the laity to read Scripture.

<sup>173</sup> Muller, “William Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition,” 87. See also, 82; Muller, “Biblical Interpretation in the Era of Reformation,” 11; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:509.

<sup>174</sup> Cudworth, “Epistle Dedication,” 2:178-179.



Therefore, to help Christian readers of the text who are not yet spiritually mature enough to draw their own conclusions, “beside the meaning, [Perkins] hath briefly drawne out such doctrines as naturally arise from the text, shewing withall how they ought to be applied for confutation, correction, instruction, consolation.”<sup>175</sup>

Perkins himself had written that the preparation to preach the Word of God involved two parts, interpretation and the “right diuision or cutting” of a text. After dealing with the proper process of interpretation, “we are now come to speake of the right cutting or the right deuiding of it. Right cutting of the word is that, whereby the word is made fit to edifie the people of God.”<sup>176</sup> Perkins sees the application of the text and its interpretation as two distinct steps, yet they are interrelated and both are necessary for the growth of the church.

### 3.4.2 Application: In the Thought and Works of John Owen

Owen follows his Reformed brethren in stressing the importance of applying the meaning of a text to contemporary Christian life and practice. His book detailing his interpretive method, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, followed *The Reason of Faith*, where Owen demonstrates the divinity of Scripture. He explains that simply believing in the divinity of Scripture is not satisfactory; the Scripture is given to us to be obeyed, and obedience requires understanding. “Although [acknowledging the authority and divinity of Scripture] be the first fundamental principle of supernatural religion, yet it is not sufficient unto any of the ends thereof (that we believe the Scripture to be a divine revelation), unless we understand the mind and will of God therein revealed.”<sup>177</sup> The

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<sup>175</sup> Cudworth, “Epistle Dedication,” 2:179.

<sup>176</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737, 750. See also Diodati, *Annotations*, A1v; Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 7, 16. See also the interaction between interpretation and application as discussed above.

<sup>177</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:119.

goal, then, of interpretation is not to learn “the form of the doctrine of godliness, but to get the power of it implanted in our souls.”<sup>178</sup>

In his preface to the first portion of his *Exposition of Hebrews*, Owen closes his description of his methodology with this final step:

The exposition of the text is attended with an improvement of *practical observations*, answering the great end from which the Epistle was committed over to all generations for the use of the church. If in some of them I shall seem to any to have been too prolix, I must only answer, that having no other way to serve the edification of the generality of Christians, I thought not so.<sup>179</sup>

In the preface to the second portion, Owen elaborates upon the timeless intent of the epistle to speak to the Church.

Though this Epistle was written unto the Hebrews, and immediately for their use, yet it is left on record in the canon of the Scripture by the Holy Ghost, for the same general end with the other parts of Scripture, and the use of all believers therein to the end of the world. This use in our Exposition is also to be regarded, and that principally in the parenetical or hortatory part of it... In this respect they are grounds for the application of the exhortations in the Epistle unto all professors of the gospel to the end of the world. And this must guide us in our Exposition.<sup>180</sup>

These statements explain why Owen is determined to fill his commentary with guiding insights from the text for the life of the Church.

Following this rule, then, Owen frequently draws doctrinal and practical conclusions as he moves through the text. During the course of his exposition of Hebrews 1:1-3, Owen makes no less than thirty-two separate “observations.” This is obviously no abnormal practice on his part for he easily adds these insights into the flow of the work; application of the text to the Church community is part and parcel of how he views his exegetical task. Indeed, Owen finds scriptural support for this practice in the book of Hebrews itself; one of the “practical observations” he makes on Hebrews 3:7-11 is that

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<sup>178</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:205.

<sup>179</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:9.

<sup>180</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:13-14.

“whatever was given by inspiration from the Holy Ghost, and is recorded in the Scripture for the use of the church, he continues therein to speak it to us unto this day.”<sup>181</sup>

This fundamental understanding of interpreting the ancient documents as containing God’s present witness to contemporary situations, yet all the while acknowledging the importance of the historic context of the original writing, is well illustrated in Owen’s concluding discussion of the first two verses of Hebrews 1, where he pauses “to consider some things that may be a refreshment to believers in their passage, in the consideration of those spiritual truths which, for the use of the church in general, are exhibited unto us in the words we have considered.”<sup>182</sup> The first “use” for the church of this text is the recognition that the person of the Father is the source of all revelation. This use is further explored in three ways – what is the teleological purpose of revelation (*speranda*), the authority, love, and care of the Father in revelation (*credenda*), and how those who preach and those who hear are to respond to that revelation (*agenda*).<sup>183</sup>

These examples concerning the scope of the epistle, its connection to the rest of Scripture and orthodox belief, and the application of its message to the contemporary church illustrate how Owen’s precritical hermeneutical assumptions concerning the nature and purpose of Scripture guided his actual interpretation of individual texts. As demonstrated above, these principles were by no means simply theoretical guidelines which Owen discusses in isolation from his exegetical practice. Rather, they exert considerable influence in his exposition, limiting the range of exegetical possibilities which he considers as valid interpretative options.

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<sup>181</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 20:21. See also, 18:469, where the sentence ends, “... and is spoken for the use of the church in every age.”

<sup>182</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:34.

<sup>183</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:35-40.

#### **4. The Influence of Scholasticism in Owen's Exegesis**

The method of biblical interpretation employed by the Puritans is one example of the depth of continuity which existed in exegetical practice between the medieval, Reformation, and post-Reformation eras. Many of the techniques they used to discover the true design of the biblical text, and then to express it meaningfully to their readers, were developed and utilized in the previous centuries as exegetes sought to expound upon the content of the scriptural material. These techniques often had a very "scholastic" flair and history.

##### **4.1 Scholasticism: Method, Style, and Owen's Commentary**

The continued influence of scholasticism in seventeenth-century Puritanism is readily evident in the exegetical methodology employed by Owen and his exegetical contemporaries. With the recent reappraisal of Protestant orthodoxy, the term "scholasticism" has been understood to have both a positive and negative sense as it was used by the orthodox theologians themselves. Negatively, "scholasticism" was used as a shorthand designation of the speculative theologies rejected by the Reformers. The positive understanding of the term referred to a description of an academic setting or method used as a pedagogical tool to communicate classroom disputations. Thus, something was "scholastic" when it was clearly defined, precisely described, and logically presented, as is suitable for educational purposes.

It is worth noting that, in a general sense, the structure of Owen's whole exegetical project (and many commentaries of his contemporaries) roughly follows the scholastic (i.e., academic/pedagogical) model – or at least has identifiable scholastic elements.

According to the characteristics outlined by Richard Muller, a work is "scholastic"

when it concentrates on 1) identifying the order and pattern of argument suitable to technical academic discourse, 2) presenting an issue in the form of a thesis or question, 3) ordering the thesis or question suitably for discussion or debate, often

identifying the “state of the question,” 4) noting a series of objections to the assumed correct answer, and then 5) offering a formulation of an answer or an elaboration of the thesis with due respect to all know sources of information and to the rules of rational discourse, followed by a full response to all objections.<sup>184</sup>

Owen’s *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* hardly matches this definition when compared, for instance, with a classical piece of scholasticism such as Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*. Nevertheless, Owen’s prolegomena-like *Exercitations* serve to set the stage and frame the argument for his exposition, and the point behind the “state of the question” is arguably similar to what Owen pursues in the early part of his handling of each pericope – fixing the text, clarifying linguistic issues, identifying lexical concerns, and so forth. In nearly every verse, following Owen’s initial comments on its meaning, he introduces and dialogues with alternative understandings of the text (frequently raised by his theological opponents), much like the formal scholastic model of objections and answers. Finally, Owen’s interpretation of a passage is summarized, in light of his foregoing analysis, in a series of practical doctrines or uses. The point here is not that Owen consciously employed a formal scholastic method when designing and implementing a structure for interpreting the book of Hebrews; rather, the similarities between the scholastic form and Owen’s *Exposition* is more likely a function of his life-long association with the academic community at Oxford (including extensive “scholastic” training) and his desire for pedagogical clarity – a desire to communicate the content of Hebrews in the most educational manner.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Muller, “Ad fontes argumentorum,” 4.

<sup>185</sup> For an assessment of Owen’s scholastic training and academic environment, see Sebastian Rehnman, “John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, ed. Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 181-203; Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002).

## 4.2 Distinctions and Definitions

One of the most prominent characteristics of Owen's exegetical work linking him to his scholastic heritage is the use of finely construed *distinctions and definitions* in arriving at a proper interpretation. One of the tools Owen employs in expounding upon a text's meaning, particularly when confronted by an exegetically difficult pericope, is an analysis via theologically crafted distinctions. For example, in identifying the proper referent for the title ὁ θεός in Hebrews 1:1, Owen distinguishes between two different ways of predicating names to God, either essentially (*essentialiter*) where the entirety of the Godhead or divine essence is intended, or personally (*personaliter*) when the referent is to one of the persons in the Trinity in relationship to the other persons. It is, of course, this very distinction which is denied by the Socinians, and Owen is careful not to appear to be introducing extra-biblical ideas simply to make a theological point. He defends his decision to distinguish between essential and personal predication on exegetical grounds because the opening verse speaks of God, ὁ θεός, while later in the sentence, the Son, ἐν υἱῷ, is specifically identified:

This observation is made necessary from hence, even because he [the author] immediately assigns divine properties and excellencies unto another person, evidently distinguished from him whom he intends to denote by the name God in this place; which he could not do did that name primarily express, as here used by him, the divine nature absolutely, but only as it is subsisting in the person of the Father.<sup>186</sup>

Owen's willingness to use distinctions in a scholastic manner to help elucidate the meaning of the text is readily found throughout his exposition of Hebrews. Prominent examples from just the first three verses include his discussion on the economy of the Godhead, distinguishing the "order of acting" from the "order of subsistence," instrumental and efficient causes, essential and accidental agreement between the Father

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<sup>186</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:7.

and Son, and the manner of the hypostatic union of the divine and human nature in Christ.<sup>187</sup> In all these cases, Owen explicitly ties his application of these distinctions to the text itself; their use is necessary if one is to faithfully expound upon the author's intended meaning.

A more thorough example of this use of distinctions to elaborate upon the meaning of a passage is found in Owen's explanation of what the author of Hebrews intended by saying that the Son was appointed heir "of all things," πάντων. After dealing with the grammar and surrounding context, Owen identifies the scope of πάντων to include every created thing. In this instance, Owen sees πᾶν as referring to all persons and all things. Persons are further subdivided into angels and men, both categories further separated into those who do God bidding (good angels and elect men) and those who do not (fallen angels or devils and reprobate men). "All things" are differentiated into 1. Spiritual, 2. Ecclesiastical, 3. Political, and 4. Natural. Spiritual things can be either temporal, grace, gifts, or eternal things. Ecclesiastical or church things are either Judaical (OT) or Christian (NT). Political/civil things are considered either as managed by Christ's friends or his enemies.<sup>188</sup> After dividing his topic in this way, Owen speaks on each item at length, and in this way, the true design of the apostle is explored.

#### 4.3 Teaching Methodology

Further examples of Owen's scholastic background are found in the echo of the pedagogical *quaestio* in his exposition and in his extended discussions on specific theological issues. The medieval teaching method underlies, for instance, his exploration of the meaning of the phrase ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων in Hebrews 1:2, where he

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<sup>187</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:34-35, 32, 74, 95, 40.

<sup>188</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:49.

answers three questions: who, what, and how. The relative pronoun ὃν leads to a discussion on the Son (who), while κληρονόμον and πάντων answer what the Son has and to what extent, and, finally, ἔθηκεν describes the manner in which the Son becomes the heir.<sup>189</sup> Owen's discussion of the identity of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1 follows a similar question-and-answer pattern, as does his approach to the apostle's descriptions of apostates in 6:4-6.<sup>190</sup>

Reflecting the *locus* method which arose during the Reformation as a modification of the medieval *scholion* in light of the place-logic of Rudolf Agricola, orthodox exegetes frequently interrupted their exegesis to delineate certain characteristics of particular topics of theology – topics raised by the biblical text itself.<sup>191</sup> The six-fold method of the *Hexaplas* of Andrew Willet explicitly included two sections addressed to the dogmatic implications of a text – the fourth or “didactica” section where the “doctrine observed out of the text” is collected, and the fifth or “places of confutation” where the disputations concerning the doctrine are handled.<sup>192</sup> This educational tool was used in varying degrees by different exegetes. Drawing out theological loci was an important part of the interpretive task for some commentators like Tena, Gomarus, and Gouge, and much less important to others who followed Calvin's discursive style like Dickson, Jones, Piscator, or those who wrote “Annotations” and “Paraphrases.” Owen's style is similar to Calvin's, though in his *Exposition* he occasionally feels compelled by a particular biblical passage

<sup>189</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:40-46.

<sup>190</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:297-300, 72-83. Also, see the further discussions in later chapters of this work.

<sup>191</sup> Muller, “William Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition,” 75; Richard A. Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism – A Review and Definition,” in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, ed. Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 56-60, 62-63.

<sup>192</sup> E.g., Willet, *Hexapla in Genesin; Hexapla in Exodum; Hexapla in Danielem; Hexapla vpon Romanes; Hexapla in Leviticum; An Harmonie of the First Booke upon Samuel*. See also, Muller, “Ad fontes argumentorum,” 10-11; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:533-534.



to delve into a certain topic or *locus* of dogmatic theology. These times, however, occur irregularly (contrary to what many critics of orthodox exegesis allege), and in Owen's case, they frequently happen at surprising places. For instance, while Owen does not excessively expand on the doctrine of the Trinity while examining Hebrews 1:1-3 (though it obviously arises in his exegesis), he does give extended treatment to other theological loci, including the dominion of Christ and the nature of God's providence.<sup>193</sup>

#### 4.4 Connection with Church Tradition

The way in which the Protestant orthodox referenced previous church Fathers and theologians further illustrates both their separation from, and similarity with, the medieval scholastic method. Like the Reformers of the previous century, the seventeenth-century Puritans derided the medieval "scholastic" tradition of commenting upon previous church authorities' work. The regular practice of citing and using Lombard's Sentences as their text source was belittled for bypassing the true source, Scripture. Rodolfe Cudworth's condemnation of such practices reflected the general tenor of Protestant critics:

Wherein the Schoolemen (I meane the Sententiaries, the Summists, and Quodlibertaries) are chiefly (if not only) to be censured, who setting aside the scriptures, haue vanished away in vaine speculations in their Questions vpon Lombard the Master of the Sentences, & vpon Thomas their new Master. So that had it not bene for some few Glosses (which notwithstanding like the glosses of Orleans doe often corrupt the text) Nicolaus de Lyra, Hugo de S. Charo, and Peter Comestor... we should not haue had among such a multitude of writers, one poore Comment vpon the Bible for diuers hundred years. And no maruaile, seeing it is an ordinary thing for yong nouices in Popish Vniuersities (and I would it were but there only) not to lay the foundation of their studie in Diuinitie vpon the rocke, but vpon the waters: that is, not vpon the Scripture, but vpon Aquinas, or some such Summist: & to reade the Scriptures no further then they giue them light for the vnderstanding of their Schoole Doctours.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:47-69, 105-108.

<sup>194</sup> Cudworth, "Epistle Dedication," 2:177.

Cudworth does allow that there were some positive developments by the “schoolmen,” particularly some glosses and commentators’ work, but insists that only those who dealt with the Scripture itself, and not those who focused upon others’ comments, were of any use.

This negative view of the value of previous church leaders, however, does not do justice to the teaching of the Reformed orthodox, for they fully recognized the value of the insights of the *communio sanctorum* in gaining an understanding of the mind of God. The third of Perkins’s steps in the study of divinity speaks of the importance of listening to the witness of history: “Thirdly, out of a orthodoxall writings, we must get aid not onely from the latter, but also from the more ancient Church.”<sup>195</sup> Thus, the orthodox encouraged the study and appreciation of the theological work of other Christian thinkers (both ancient and recent), yet warned against granting to them the authority and force of the Scripture itself which must always retain its role as *principium cognoscendi theologiae*. Edward Leigh recognized the value of Catholic and Jewish as well as orthodox interpreters – as long as they were all read with discernment: “The Jewish expositors, the Ancient Fathers, and other Interpreters Ancient and Moderne Popish and Protestant, are usefull for the right understanding of the Scripture, if they be read with judgement.”<sup>196</sup> William Whitaker likewise cautiously supports the use of others’ works, “we may use their labours, advice, prudence, and knowledge; but we should use them always cautiously, modestly, and discreetly, and so as still to retain our own liberty,” and (again warily) acknowledges the interpretive value of gleaning insights from the community of faith: “we allow that it is a highly convenient way of finding the true sense of scripture, for devout and leaned men to assemble, examine the cause diligently, and

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<sup>195</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:736.

<sup>196</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 183.

investigate the truth; yet with this proviso, that they govern their decision wholly by the scriptures.”<sup>197</sup> Similarly John Weemse: “Wee are not to cite the Fathers as witnesses in matters divine, unlesse their speeches may be warranted out of Gods word.”<sup>198</sup> Hall, Mayer and others all echo these limited endorsements of drawing insights from others’ interpretive works in their own exegetical examinations.<sup>199</sup>

In light of their cautious support of reading the work of previous scholars, the orthodox produced lists of “approved” expositors. These were men who, though not guaranteed to be orthodox in their interpretations, nevertheless, were useful in gaining insight into the intended meaning of a text. At the outset of John Mayer’s *Commentarie upon the New Testament*, he provides an extensive inventory of references he has used to do his exegesis. He lists one hundred and ten different sources, including patristic, medieval, and contemporary authors, Reformed, Lutheran, and Catholic exegetes, philosophers, and various glosses and annotations.<sup>200</sup> Leigh divides his list of approved expositors in three categories, giving a short assessment of the value of each. He cites Jerome, Origen, Austin (Augustine), “Golden-mouth’d” Chrysostome, Gregory Nazianzene, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, and Bernard as Church Fathers worthy to be listened too;<sup>201</sup> Calvin, Piscator, Junius, Beza, Bucer, Drusius, Capellus, Cameron, Martyr, Lavater, Musculus, Zanchi, Paraeus, Rollock, Rivet, and Willet as orthodox Protestants;<sup>202</sup> and the “Popish” expositors he notes are Aquinas (“he was the first thorow Papist of name that ever wrote, and with his rare gifts of wit, learning and

<sup>197</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.473; vi.434.

<sup>198</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 273.

<sup>199</sup> Hall, *Vindiciae Literarum*, 8-9; Mayer, *A Commentarie upon the New Testament*, 3:A3v-A3r; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1:vii; Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 38.

<sup>200</sup> Mayer, *A Commentarie upon the New Testament*, 3:A3v-A3r.

<sup>201</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 184-186.

<sup>202</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 186-187.

industry did set out Popery most”), Lyra as “recommended by Luther as following the literall sense,” Cajetan, “a learned & moderate papist”, Estius, and Maldonate, “a most supercilious writer; and no marvell, since he was for his Country a Spaniard and his profession a Jesuite.”<sup>203</sup> Perhaps the most useful guide in this area were the published bibliographic reference, similar to Gisbertus Voetius’s, *Exercitia et Bibliotheca*. In this spectacular collection, Voetius gathers a vast list of resources for the entire academic curriculum, with the whole second half of the work dedicated to theological material – books on textual studies, interpretation manuals, lexical and grammatical resources, and commentaries on every biblical book.<sup>204</sup>

In this, as in other regards, Owen follows his Reformed brethren; he both encourages the use of other scholars’ work as well as warns against relying too heavily upon it. In his theological and exegetical writings, Owen has every intention of standing within the overall faith as it has been handed down by the apostles and faithfully expounded by the church’s best thinkers. Indeed, he derides the Socinians for taking pleasure in opposing what the church has historically taught,<sup>205</sup> and in his own dogmatic works, Owen strives to show the continuity of his thought with those who have gone before (while nevertheless resting his beliefs on his understanding of Scripture and not on the thoughts of others).<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 187-188.

<sup>204</sup> Voetius, *Exercitia et Bibliotheca*.

<sup>205</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:59-84; esp. 59.

<sup>206</sup> John Owen, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: or *A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ – God and Man*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 6-27; John Owen, *Salus Electorum, Sangius Jesu: or, The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 10 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 422-424; Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:19-74; Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:11-23.

For Owen, benefiting from the thoughts of others is important for both academic study and the ordinary, common reading of Scripture. In *Causes, Ways, and Means*, Owen's interest is to demonstrate how through the study of the Bible,

every believer may, in the due use of the means appointed of God for that end, attain unto such a full assurance of understanding in the truth, or all that knowledge of the mind and will of God revealed in the Scripture, which is sufficient to direct him in the life of God, to deliver him from the dangers of ignorance, darkness, and error, and to conduct him unto blessedness.<sup>207</sup>

Owen's concern here is for the common believer to experience the full depth of assurance, and this assurance cannot come but through the Scripture itself.

We do not depend on the authoritative interpretation of any church or person whatever. And although ordinary believers are obliged to make diligent and conscientious use of the ministry of the church, among other things, as a means appointed of God to lead, guide, and instruct them in the knowledge of his mind and will revealed in the Scripture, which is the principal end of that ordinance; yet is not their understanding of the truth, their apprehension of it and faith in it, to rest upon or to be resolved into their authority, who are not appointed of God to be lords of their faith, but helpers of their joy.<sup>208</sup>

In this passage, Owen both accepts the fact that the work of scholars and theologians are "the ministry of the church" and that ordinary believers are "obliged" to use them, and that these helps nevertheless do not alone lead to the kind of spiritual assurance and confidence that the believer is to seek after.

In part, Owen here is reacting to a serious pastoral problem he sees developing in the church: that the common believer is focusing more energy in the study of other writings than they are with direct immediate study of the Scripture. In frustration, Owen notes,

It may seem altogether needless and impertinent to give this direction for the understanding of the mind of God in the Scripture, namely, that we should read and study it to that end; for who can imagine how it should be done otherwise? But I wish the practice of many, it may be, of the most, did not render this direction necessary; for in their design to come to the knowledge of spiritual things, the direct

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<sup>207</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:122-3.

<sup>208</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:123.

immediate study of the Scripture is that which they least of all apply themselves unto. Other writings they will read and study with diligence; but their reading of the Scripture is for the most part superficial, without the intension of mind and spirit, that use and application of means, which are necessary unto the understanding of it, as the event doth manifest.<sup>209</sup>

In his anti-Socinian work, Owen levels the same critique:

And truly I must needs say that I know not a more deplorable mistake in the studies of divines, both preachers and others, than their diversion from an immediate, direct study of the Scriptures themselves unto the study of commentators, critics, scholiasts, annotators, and the like helps, which God in his good providence, making use of the abilities, and sometimes the ambition and ends of men, hath furnished us withal. Not that I condemn the use and study of them, which I wish men were more diligent in, but desire pardon if I mistake, and do only surmise, by experience of my own folly for many years, that many which seriously study the things of God do yet rather make it their business to inquire after the sense of other men on the Scriptures than to search studiously into them themselves.<sup>210</sup>

Here we see an interesting (and unfortunate) parallel with the medieval method of working solely with the writings of previous church authorities – the key document (the Scripture) is pushed aside and human writings are given preference over it.

However, like other orthodox writers, Owen also acknowledged the usefulness, yes, even the importance of attending to the insights of other Christians through the centuries. Owen recognized three means designed to explain the Scriptures: 1) the Spiritual, by which he refers to the prayers and careful preparation of the spiritual state of the interpreter, 2) the Disciplinary, where Owen outlines “the due use and improvement of common arts and sciences,”<sup>211</sup> and 3) the Ecclesiastical, by which he intends the “means and helps for the interpretation of Scripture” supplied “by the ministry of the church in all ages.”<sup>212</sup> Owen is careful here to distinguish what he means by ecclesiastical helps from either the Catholic appeal to universal tradition, or to the “consent of the fathers”

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<sup>209</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:201.

<sup>210</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:52.

<sup>211</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:209.

<sup>212</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:226.

argument. In both instances, Owen fights instead for the supremacy of the Scripture.

However, he does argue for a valid application of previous expositors' thoughts in the interpretive process:

the sole use of ecclesiastical means in the interpretation of the Scripture is in the due consideration and improvement of that light, knowledge, and understanding in, and those gifts for the declaration of, the mind of God in the Scripture which he hath granted unto and furnished them withal who have gone before us in the ministry and work of the gospel.<sup>213</sup>

With varying amounts of appreciation, Owen lists the following Church Fathers and later day divines: Origen, Chrysostom, Theodoret, Aretine, Oecumenius, Jerome, Ambrose, Austin (Augustine), Bucer, Calvin, Martyr, and Beza.<sup>214</sup>

It is also clear that Owen himself was incredibly versed in the writings of these and many other authors. Owen spent significant time at Oxford, one of the best university libraries in England, first as a student and then as the vice-Chancellor.<sup>215</sup> In addition to whatever Owen might have used at Oxford, we see in the auction catalogue of his library from 1684 the importance Owen placed upon knowing the wisdom of other writers.<sup>216</sup>

Owen owned the prominent works of the Church Fathers, including the *opera omnia* of Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Tertullian, Cyprian, Philo, Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius, Justin Martyr, Clement of Alexandria, Origen Irenaeus and Chrysostom, as

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<sup>213</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:228.

<sup>214</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:228-229. See also, Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:487, 489, and 10:488 where similar lists are given.

<sup>215</sup> Biographical information about Owen and his time at Oxford can be found in Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971); William Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen* (1840; repr. Choteau: Gospel Mission, 1981); and especially Rehman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford." Studies which reflect the academic and library resources at Oxford and other English Universities include, William T. Costello, *The Scholastic Curriculum at Early Seventeenth Century Cambridge* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); Mark Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge in Transition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959); Charles Mallet, *A History of the University of Oxford*, 3 vols. (London: Methuen & Co., 1924-1927); C. M. Dent, *Protestant Reformers in Elizabethan Oxford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

<sup>216</sup> Edward Millington, ed., *Bibliotheca Oweniana, sive Catalogus librorum... Rev. Doct. Vir. D. Joan. Oweni...* (London, 1684), hereafter, "Owen, *BO*," followed by the section (I or II) and page number.

well as the *Bibliotheca Patrum*.<sup>217</sup> The writings of medieval scholastic authors were also part of his library – Aquinas, Alvarez, Anselm, Assisi, Lombard.<sup>218</sup> Of course, the works of Protestant and especially Reformed authors abound in the library, the *opera omnia* of Calvin, Musculus, Martyr, Davenant, Perkins, Junius, Gomarus, Cameron, and Zanchi, and many of the works of Maccovius, Ursinus, Trelcatius, Usher, Prideaux. Finally, Owen’s library reflects his knowledge of the writings of his opponents: the Socinian literature of Biddle, Socinius, Crellius, Slichtingius, Ejusdius, Wolzogen and many others; Arminian works by Arminius, John Goodwin, and the Remonstrants; and of course various Catholic authors like Bellarmine.<sup>219</sup> Obviously, Owen’s familiarity with these authors is not simply demonstrated by his library, but primarily by the consistent references (both positive and negative) to these men which are scattered liberally throughout Owen’s writings. Sebastian Rehnman has done an excellent job identifying and cataloguing these references.<sup>220</sup>

It is evident from his *Exposition* that Owen put into practice the importance of the “ecclesiastical helps.” The auction catalogue lists nearly every commentary on Hebrews published at that time – notable ones like those by Calvin, Gomarus, Dickson, and Gouge, as well as less common names like Lawson, Jacques Cappel, and Walker’s *Paraphrase*.<sup>221</sup> While he rarely cites an author by name (except for main opponents like Crellius and Grotius), it is clear from his exegesis that Owen had extensive contact with

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<sup>217</sup> The *opera omnia* are listed in Owen, *BO*, I.1-4, 12. The *Bibliotheca Patrum* was cited by Owen in *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 15 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 20.

<sup>218</sup> Owen, *BO*, I.1-2, 17.

<sup>219</sup> Some of the Socinian works are gather together (minus Biddle’s writings) in the auction catalogue, Owen, *BO*, I.18-19. The rest are scattered throughout.

<sup>220</sup> Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, *passim*; Rehnman, “John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford.”

<sup>221</sup> Of the over seventy (mostly Reformation and later) Hebrews commentaries and annotations I have found that were published by Owen’s time, his library contained all but about twenty.



numerous other biblical commentators. Some, like Isidore, Baronius, Grotius, and Enjedinus he disagrees with,<sup>222</sup> and some like the church Fathers Chrysotom, Theophylacts, Augustine, and Basil he speaks about very reverently.<sup>223</sup> Owen provides an abridged list of those modern expositors he interacts with – Calvin, Brentius, Marlorat, Rollock, Gomarus, Paraeus, Estius, Tena, a Lapide, Ribera, Beza, Cameron, Thomas, Cajetan, and Lyranus.<sup>224</sup>

Clearly, interaction with previous authorities, while not to be accomplished in the same manner as done by medieval theologians, was nevertheless an integral aspect of the seventeenth-century expositor's task.

#### 4.5 The Role of Reason in Biblical Exegesis

##### 4.5.1 The Exegetical Role of Reason: Seventeenth-Century Definition and Use

The scholastic *methodus* employed on both sides of the Reformation usually involved proceeding from first causes through the means and to an end goal. This process invariably entailed the use of reason to identify logically necessary conditions and connections between doctrinal *loci*.<sup>225</sup> One of the main critiques of the Protestant scholastic period is found here – that it became too embroiled with Aristotelian philosophy, and as a consequence, that the theological and dogmatic work which resulted was logically (instead of biblically) produced. This is not the time to examine the merits of this critique or the effect of the recent reassessment of the overall orthodox period on

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<sup>222</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:42, 45, 69.

<sup>223</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:42, 109, 86, 118.

<sup>224</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:89, 109. I assume it is abridged since he interacts with other commentators not listed here.

<sup>225</sup> Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1:231-249, esp. 243-249; Muller, "The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism," 56-60; Paul Helm, "Calvin (and Zwingli) on Divine Providence," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994):390.

this judgement.<sup>226</sup> However, the biblical theoreticians of the seventeenth century dealt specifically with the benefits and limitations of the use of philosophy and reason in the exegetical enterprise, and so some comments here are in order.

When Puritans and other orthodox wrote of the role of reason and philosophy in their exegetical method, they were insistent both as to its usefulness and its limitations. Rational argumentation was to be used to draw conclusions from the biblical material that fit within the *analogia fidei*. Reason itself was consistently denied the status of being the standard; rather, it functioned in a supportive role, subservient to Scripture, the *principium cognoscendi theologiae*. John Wilson's *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter Asserted* is an excellent example of the detail and clarity with which the orthodox sought to stress this point in the face of opposition from Socinian rationalism and Cartesian philosophy. Wilson's thesis is that Scripture itself is the only "rule of faith" and was not subject to the dictates of reason and/or philosophy. Nevertheless, Wilson readily acknowledges a role for reason in the exegetical process. When applying the *analogia Scripturae*, "logic hath also its use here for the better discerning the dependence of one thing in Scripture upon another and collecting of one thing from another."<sup>227</sup> In the search for truth, and as a faculty of mankind given by God, reason is a valuable gift and beneficial; however, even though "next to Holiness, Mans Reason is his greatest glory," reason is not the final arbiter of truth, for that role belongs to Scripture.<sup>228</sup> Working under the direction of faith, reason finds its true fulfillment:

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<sup>226</sup> This issue is well summarized in Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, "Introduction," in *Reformation and Scholasticism*, ed. Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 11-43. See also, Richard A. Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," *Calvin Theological Journal* 30 (1995):345-375; 31 (1996):125-160.

<sup>227</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 11.

<sup>228</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 22. See also, 21-25.

It is undeniable, that for the Interpreting of Scripture, there is a necessary use of the Faculty of Reason, and the several actings of it, as instrumentally subservient to the finding out the sense of Scripture. Faith doth not exclude Reason, but elevate and advance it by giving it a clearer light; it doth not silence, but regulate and conduct it.<sup>229</sup>

As a necessary consequence, Wilson argues that a true interpretation of Scripture will never be contrary to reason, for, “God, who is the Author of all truth, as well natural as supernatural, cannot contradict himself.”<sup>230</sup>

Wilson’s affirmation of the place of reason in the interpretive process is echoed in other Reformed authors. Wilhelmus à Brakel concedes that reason is a natural and unavoidable part of human life – “no one can make application toward himself or someone else except by way of inference, which causes one to reason as follows...” – though he insists upon the inadequacy of deductive reasoning.<sup>231</sup> Rational deduction functions in limited manner, subservient to the Bible.

Our faith is not founded upon rational deduction extracted from a certain text, but upon the text itself. Our ability to reason is merely a means whereby one may perceive that a certain doctrine finds expression in the text... Our reasoning cannot deduce anything from the text which was not already inherent in it, but can extract and unveil what is contained in the text already. Thus, faith is not founded upon reason but upon the Word of God.<sup>232</sup>

The relationship between reason and the Scripture is clear:

We agree that intellect and reason are absolutely necessary to understand Scripture, and thereby to exercise faith. They are only the means, however, whereby we may know what God says in His Word, and this Word works faith and is the foundation of faith... Reason must surrender itself to the Word; the Word must never surrender itself to reason.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 24.

<sup>230</sup> Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 29. See also the even stronger argument for the complimentary role of reason in Wytenbach, *Tentamen theologiae dogmaticae*, 1:178 and 1:193-196.

<sup>231</sup> Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:47, 63.

<sup>232</sup> Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:47-48.

<sup>233</sup> Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:59-60.

It is the failure to observe this distinction which condemns the Socinians, who argue that “one should accept nothing as truth which is not congruent with reason,” thus asserting reason’s priority over Scripture – an anathema to the Reformed ranks.<sup>234</sup>

Consequently, orthodox theoreticians taught the importance of learning and applying reason, philosophy, and logic for the exegetical process. Edward Leigh asserts that all ministers should be “expert in all the liberall Arts, especially in Grammer, Logicke, Rhetoricke, generall philosophy, and History,” and in a marginal note he explains, “Logicke teacheth the Preacher to Analyze and divide his Text, collect true and proper Doctrines from it, assisteth him in confuting of Heresies, solving all questions.”<sup>235</sup> Thomas Hall states nearly the identical thing, “Logick is necessary for analysing, defining, dividing, and more orderly resolution of a Text; also for Argumentation and defence of the truth against an adversary.”<sup>236</sup> Hall notes that Scripture itself employs rational argumentation, thus “sanctifying” its use: “neither is Logick a profane thing, (as some profane ones imagine) for the Scripture itselfe useth many Logicall Arguments, from the cause, the effect, the consequent, from mercies, judgements, and from the Old Testament.”<sup>237</sup> In his exegetical manual, Robert Boyle gives a series of examples demonstrating the biblical authors’ use of deductive reasoning, syllogisms, etc.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:59.

<sup>235</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 181.

<sup>236</sup> Hall, *Vindiciae Literarum*, 6. See also, Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:736; Wilson, *Theological Rules*, 44, 75; William Ames, *Disputatio Theologica, De Perfectione SS. Scripturae* (Cambridge, 1646), 13-20; Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, I.xxxiv.26; Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 33.

<sup>237</sup> Hall, *Vindiciae Literarum*, 7.

<sup>238</sup> Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 62-64, 68-70.

#### 4.5.2 The Exegetical Role of Reason: In the Thought and Works of Owen

John Owen also recognized both the value/necessity and the dangers/limitations in using reason as a tool in interpretation. Like other orthodox theologians, he is determined to keep reason in a subservient position to the revelation of God through the Scripture. In a swipe at Socinian rationalism, Owen asserts, “some would have all things that we are to believe to be levelled absolutely unto our reason and comprehension – a principle which, at this day, shakes the very foundations of the Christian religion,” and claims that Socinian interpreters are “great pretenders to a dictatorship in reason, indeed hucksters in sophistry.”<sup>239</sup> Owen charges that they have given reason pre-eminence above Scripture and power over it, for “unless they discover the consonancy of it to the word, to the law and testimony, whatever they propose on that account may be rejected with as much facility as it is proposed.”<sup>240</sup> In contrast, he insists that all reason be constrained by the proposition, “Whatever God, who is *prima veritas*, hath revealed is true, whether we can comprehend the thing revealed or no,” and that reason functions properly when it is “so far captivated to the obedience of faith as to acquiesce in whatever God hath revealed, and to receive it as truth.”<sup>241</sup>

On the other theological front, Owen combats “the enthusiasts’” rejection of the role of reason in seeking biblical understanding; he rejects “the pretence of some, that we need no other assistance of the Spirit of God for the right understanding of the Scripture but only his blessing in general on our own endeavours.”<sup>242</sup> Reason is needed – rational

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<sup>239</sup> Owen, *A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ*, 1:50; Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:395. See also, 2:368, 411.

<sup>240</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:208. See also, 12:85.

<sup>241</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:209, 208.

<sup>242</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:162.

thought illuminated by the Holy Spirit – but it is the application of the faculty of reason nonetheless. Of the enthusiasts, he writes,

Those who would prohibit us the use of our reason in the things of religion would deal with us as the Philistines did with Samson, – first put out our eyes, and then make us grind in their mill. Whatever we know, be it of what sort it will, we know it in and by the use of our reason; and what we conceive, we do it by our own understanding.<sup>243</sup>

Scripture itself testifies (John 6:45; 16:13; 1 John 2:20, 27) to the work of the Spirit in giving illumination through teaching, leading, and guiding into the truth. This necessarily entails

a mind capable of instruction, leading, and conduct. The nature must be rational, and comprehensive of the means of instruction, which can be so taught. Wherefore, we do not only grant herein the use of the rational faculties of the soul, but require their exercise and utmost improvement. If God teach, we are to learn, and we cannot learn but in the exercise of our minds.<sup>244</sup>

Thus, Owen condemned both the autonomy some like the Socinians gave to the faculty of reason and the neglect and scorn heaped upon its use by the enthusiasts.<sup>245</sup>

The full extent of Owen's appreciation for the operation of reason, carefully controlled by Scripture, is found in his confident assertion of the truth value of propositions logically derived and deduced from the Scripture – not only was the Scripture itself trustworthy, but so was any truth faithfully derived from Scripture.

Whatever is so revealed in the Scripture is no less true and divine as to whatever necessarily followeth thereon, than it is as unto that which is principally revealed and directly expressed. For how far soever the lines be drawn and extended, from truth nothing can follow and ensue but what is true also; and that in the same kind of truth with that which it is derived and deduced from. For if the principal assertion be a truth of divine revelation, so is also whatever is included therein, and which may be rightly from thence collected.<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:125.

<sup>244</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:167.

<sup>245</sup> See especially, Owen, *Defense of Scripture against Modern Fanaticism*, chapters 2 and 4.

<sup>246</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:379. See also, Owen, *Defense of Scripture against Modern Fanaticism*, 797, 816; Wilson, *Theological Rules*, 13.

Owen find justification for this principle in the apostle's handling of the Old Testament Scriptures where deductions and conclusions are made from a text and asserted with the same force as the Scripture text itself. Thus, when Owen examines the Scripture citations made by the author of Hebrews in the first chapter (and in particular the title "Son" in verse five), he notes

That it is lawful to draw consequences from Scripture assertions; and such consequences, rightly deduced, are infallibly true and "de fide." Thus from the name given unto Christ, the apostle deduceth by just consequence his exaltation and pre-eminence above angels. Nothing will rightly follow from truth but what is so also, and that of the same nature with the truth from whence it is derived. So that whatever by just consequence is drawn from the Word of God, is itself also the Word of God, and truth infallible.<sup>247</sup>

Owen then concludes, giving rational deduction great authority and power:

whatsoever is directly deduced and delivered according to the mind and appointment of God from the Word is the Word of God, and hath the power, authority, and efficacy of the Word accompanying it.<sup>248</sup>

Owen clearly believes in the power of reason, yet continues to constrain its authoritative function by subjecting it to Scripture. Reason is a faithful handmaid, but Scripture is the queen.

Consequently, in his "Disciplinary helps" for how the Spirit guides in interpreting biblical texts, Owen encourages a growing "skill in the ways and methods of reasoning, which are supposed to be common unto the Scriptures with other writings," that is, with logical and rhetorical analysis.<sup>249</sup> An exegete needs the ability

to judge the sense of propositions, how one thing depends on another, how it is deduced from it, follows upon it, or is proved by it; what is the design of him that writes or speaks in any discourse or reasoning; how it is proposed, confirmed, illustrated – is necessary unto any rational consideration to be exercised about whatever is so proposed unto us.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:147.

<sup>248</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:147.

<sup>249</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:223.

<sup>250</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:223.

#### 4.6 Demonstrative Argumentation

In light of the importance of the faculty of reason to the orthodox, it is not surprising that *deductive reasoning* and *demonstrative arguments* are liberally scattered throughout Owen's exposition. Owen rarely resorts to explicitly framed syllogisms, as, for instance, does Edward Dering in his interpretation of Hebrews 1:3.<sup>251</sup> Nevertheless, the major premise, minor premise, conclusion form of argumentation frequently undergirds Owen's presentation of the material. For instance, to Owen's eye, the deity of Christ is plainly evident in the description of the Son as the creator of the world –  $\delta\iota' \omicron\upsilon$  καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας (Hebrews 1:2). After dismissing the grammatical and contextual arguments of those who would "wrest from believers this illustrious testimony given to the eternal deity of the Son of God,"<sup>252</sup> Owen argues on a syllogistic level : 1. Christ made the worlds, 2. He who made all things is God, 3. *ergo*, Christ is God.<sup>253</sup> Further deductive arguments and informal syllogisms are evident throughout Owen's *Exposition to the Hebrews*, as for instance in his discussion of the dependency of all creation on God, the Judaical responsibility to accept Christ, and perfect role of the Son in imaging the Father.<sup>254</sup> In his clash with John Goodwin over the proper interpretation of the descriptions of the apostates in Hebrews 6:4-6, Owen heavily critiques Goodwin's syllogistic reasoning – however, it is not the pattern or form of reasoning he rejects, but Goodwin's *faulty* reasoning. Goodwin illogically argued for the syllogism:

Illumination is ascribed to believers;

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<sup>251</sup> Edward Dering, *XXVII Lectures, or Readings, vpon part of the Epistle to the Hebrues* (London, 1614), B.iii. I.e., Christ bears up all things, "this being knowen to be the worke of the liuing God," therefore, "it is assured, that he is verie God."

<sup>252</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:73.

<sup>253</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:77.

<sup>254</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:106, 47, 88-93.



Illumination is ascribed to these men;

therefore, these persons are believers<sup>255</sup>

and Owen wants his readers to be aware of its fallacy. This same faulty reasoning is present in Goodwin's analysis of every characteristic listed in these verses – if it can be ascribed to true believers, then everyone who is so described must be a true believer. Time and again, Owen points out the illogic of this underlying assumption, while never calling into question the basic validity of using syllogistic reasoning.

Even given this array of examples of the scholastic influence on Owen's exegetical method and results, the "scholasticism" in his *Exposition* is still not readily evident; while it might be easy to classify this work as belonging in the scholastic period, it is much more difficult to identify individual scholastic characteristics – particularly when "scholastic" is neutrally (and not pejoratively) defined. This is most likely due to the combination of a few factors: (1) Defined as a educational/classroom method of presenting material, scholasticism is simply not easily applied to exegetical work – neither in the post-Reformation era, nor perhaps even prior to the Reformation. (2) The techniques of scholastic method function closely with the precritical hermeneutical assumptions listed earlier, and like these assumptions, their influence on biblical interpretation is great, yet primarily, subtle – and they operate on a "macro" level, rather than directly impact the specific interpretation of individual words or phrases. (3) While scholasticism was clearly a potent stimulus on Owen and other post-Reformation orthodox, it was by no means the only influence, for Renaissance humanism exerted itself powerfully on the shape, style, and method of the interpretive process.

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<sup>255</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:647.

## 5. The Influence of Humanism in Owen's Exegesis

Most of the techniques mentioned above demonstrate the great continuity of the Reformed exegetical practice with the interpretative methods employed throughout the Church era up until their time, particularly those hermeneutical methods typically identified with medieval exegesis. However, even a cursory analysis of the actual exegesis of the era reveals an equal indebtedness to the style and principles of Renaissance humanism which had developed in the previous two centuries – especially with regard to philological and rhetorical issues.<sup>256</sup>

### 5.1 The Importance and Use of the Original Languages

The most obvious effect of humanism on the practice of biblical interpretation was the attention paid to the original source material for the Scripture. This involved, among other things, a renewed appreciation and use of the Greek and Hebrew languages, attention to the textual history of the biblical manuscripts, and a strict emphasis on the literal sense of the text. The orthodox understanding of the “literal sense” was not, contrary to some opinions, a denial of a “spiritual” sense as in the modern critical method; rather, the Reformation and post-Reformation exegetes, following one prominent strand of medieval exegesis, sought to locate the spiritual sense of a text entirely in its literal wording.<sup>257</sup>

Concerning *the use of Greek and Hebrew*, Leigh insisted that prospective divinity students and expositors learn the languages so that they have a first hand knowledge of the text and not one filtered through a translation.

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<sup>256</sup> See, Muller, “Biblical Interpretation in the Era of Reformation,” 13-16; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:47-50.

<sup>257</sup> The post-Reformation understanding of the literal sense of a scriptural text is examined in later chapters of this work.

They must labour for a competent knowledge in the original tongues the Hebrew and Greek, in which the Scripture was written, that so they may consult with the Hebrew Text in the old, and the Greeke in the new Testament; and see with their owne, not anothers eyes.<sup>258</sup>

William Ames believes that biblical study in the original languages allows one to arrive at the “precise” meaning of a text: “Some knowledge, at least, of these languages is necessary for a precise understanding of the Scriptures, for they are to be understood by the same means required for other human writings, i.e., skill and experience in logic, rhetoric, grammar, and the languages.”<sup>259</sup> Translations are not bad, since they provide access to the Word for many, yet, “the emphasis and force of the word is more clearly seen in the Originall Text, then in a translation.”<sup>260</sup> It is because of the erroneous interpretations arising from the Vulgate that Whitaker argues for an active knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew.

We ought to understand the words which the Holy Spirit hath used in the scriptures; and therefore we ought to know the original languages. We should consult the Hebrew text in the old Testament, the Greek in the new: we should approach the very fountain-heads of the scriptures, and not stay beside the derived streams of versions. Indeed, the ignorance of these languages, the Hebrew and the Greek, hath been the source of many errors; at least, those who are not acquainted with them are destitute of the best helps and assistances, and are involved in frequent unavoidable mistakes.<sup>261</sup>

Knowledge of Greek and Hebrew helps expose inadequate interpretations: “such faults and blemishes in versions the heretics, and above all the papists, abuse to the confirmation of their errors; which, however, are most easily removed by an inspection of the originals and a knowledge of the languages.”<sup>262</sup> This Renaissance-inspired concern for the original languages is uniformly shared by Reformed exegetes and theologians, as

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<sup>258</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 181.

<sup>259</sup> Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, I.xxxiv.26.

<sup>260</sup> Hall, *Vindiciae Literarum*, 3.

<sup>261</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.468.

<sup>262</sup> Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture*, V.ix.469-470.

is reflected in the depth and breadth of the biblical language section in Voetius's bibliography.<sup>263</sup>

In his dealings with the Socinians, Owen warns against arguing with a Socinian without a full comprehension of Greek and Hebrew, for "he that is not in some measure acquainted with these will scarcely make thorough work in dealing with them." A working knowledge of the original languages serves as a guard against misinterpretations and even heresy.<sup>264</sup> Throughout his works, Owen consistently makes use of, and argues for the use of, the original languages.<sup>265</sup> He formalizes this concern in his exegetical manual, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, his first "Disciplinary help" for understanding the mind of God through the Scriptures being, "knowledge of and skill in the languages wherein the Scripture was originally written."<sup>266</sup> "It is of singular advantage, in the interpretation of the Scripture, that a man be will acquainted with the original languages, and be able to examine the use and signification of words, phrases, and expressions as they are applied and declared in other authors," for, in this, Scripture is like other written things, which must be understood through language: "it is necessary that the words he [any author] speaks or writes be rightly understood; and this we cannot do immediately unless we understand the language wherein he speaks, as also the idiotisms of that language, with the common use and intention of its phraseology and expressions."<sup>267</sup> At

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<sup>263</sup> See Wilson, *The Scriptures Genuine Interpreter*, 10; Osborne, *The Private Christians non ultra*, 19; Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 7-9; Wilson, *Theological Rules*, 19-20, 59; Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, *passim*; Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecy*, 2:744-749; Voetius, *Exercitia et Bibliotheca*, 287-306.

<sup>264</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:50. See also, Owen, *Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, 3:50. Owen cites various examples of where reliance on the Vulgate and corrupt texts led to erroneous interpretations, 3:49-51.

<sup>265</sup> His extensive treatment of the Greek and Hebrew texts are dealt with in a later chapter of this work.

<sup>266</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:210.

<sup>267</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:215.

this point, Owen does helpfully warn against any naïve view that a knowledge of the original languages somehow guarantees a proper interpretation.

It is fervent prayer, humility, lowliness of mind, godly fear and reverence of the word, and subjection of conscience unto the authority of every title of it, a constant attendance unto the analogy of faith, with due dependence on the Spirit of God for supplies of light and grace, which must make this or any other means of the same nature effectual.<sup>268</sup>

Full command of the biblical languages is no substitute for the work of the Spirit in granting insight into the mind of God; it is the Spirit who effectuates that knowledge.

Owen clearly followed his own instruction here, for his mastery of Greek and Hebrew are evident throughout his works. In his commentary on Psalm 130, he cites the Hebrew text throughout and offers his own paraphrase of the psalm.<sup>269</sup> After citing the Greek text of each verse in Hebrews, Owen provides his own translation into English with notations justifying his linguistic decisions. He freely cites the Greek (and Latin) of numerous classical authors and Greek Fathers, and his expertise with the Hebrew language was good enough to quote extensive sections of unpointed Rabbinic and Talmudic Hebrew.<sup>270</sup> Finally, Owen's library contained extensive linguistic and philology materials including lexicons, concordances, grammars, etc., and numerous Greek and Hebrew editions of the Bible.<sup>271</sup>

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<sup>268</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:219. See a similar warning in Osborne, *The Private Christians non ultra*, 19.

<sup>269</sup> John Owen, *A Practical Exposition Upon Psalm CXXX*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 6 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 327-329.

<sup>270</sup> Greek classical and Church Fathers references (both in Greek and Latin translation) are scattered throughout Owen's works (see, for instance, Greek citations of Homer at *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:123, and Plato at *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:41, or many of the footnotes in his "Controversial" literature, vols. 10-16), and some have been catalogued by Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," 187-189; Hebrew language citations are mostly found in his *Exposition* throughout the verses, and in the *Exercitations*, vols. 17 and 18.

<sup>271</sup> Owen, *BO*, I.1-4, 19-23.

## 5.2 Linguistic, Lexical, and Grammatical Concerns

With the rise of interest of language study, *linguistic and grammatical issues* became of paramount importance to the biblical interpreter. The importance of a mastery of the grammar of the Greek and Hebrew was universally acknowledged by Reformed authors; Leigh asserts that exegetes “must Consider the Text exactly in it selfe, the Grammer of it must be sifted, the nature of every word by itself and the alteration it admits in diversity of construction.”<sup>272</sup> A vast bulk of material testifies to the Puritan awareness of different literary forms and language in the Scripture, and the need to handle them appropriately – see, for instance, the opening third of Keach’s *Tropologia*, large sections in Weemse’s *Christian Synagogue* and *Exercitations Divine*, and intricate discussions in Perkins’s *Arte of Prophecyng* and Lukin’s *An Introduction to Scripture*.<sup>273</sup> Owen insists that the true exegete brings no other meaning to the Scripture but what the grammar of the text, understood in its proper context, allows: “we impose no sense upon them, we strain not any word in them, from, beside, or beyond its native, genuine signification, its constant application in the Scripture, and common use amongst men.”<sup>274</sup>

The control exercised over interpretation by the grammar of the original language in a text is widely evident in Owen’s exegesis of the Epistle to the Hebrews. A few

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<sup>272</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 182. See also, 171-173; Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 139-171; Hall, *Vindiciae Literarum*, 6; Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, I.xxxiv.26; Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:736, 744; Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 231, 242-254.

<sup>273</sup> Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia; A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (1682; repr. London: William Hill Collingridge, 1856); Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*; Weemse, *Exercitations Divine*; Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:744-749; Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture*, 45-110. Also, Samuel Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament, by which Christ and the Heavenly Things of the Gospel were Preached and Shadowed to the People of God of Old* (Dublin, 1683; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969); Michael Walther, *Harmonia Biblica, sive Brevis & plana conciliatio locorum Veteris et Novi Testamenti apparenter sibi contradicentium* (1626; repr. Nuremberg, 1696); John Smith, *The Myserie of Rhetorique Unveil’d: wherein above 130 the tropes and figures are severally derived from the Greek into English* (London, 1665); Salomon Glass, *Philologia Sacra, qua totius sacrosanctae Veteris et Novi Testamenti scripturae* (Jena, 1623); Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 44-45; Wilson, *Theologicall Rules*, 22-29.

<sup>274</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:394.

examples will demonstrate this. In discussing the meaning of ἐκάθισεν, “sat down,” in 1:3, Owen notes that καθίζω could either be a neutral or active voice paralleling the Hebrew Kal or Hiphil verb forms. By analyzing the grammar and syntax of the sentence, however, he concludes concerning the active sense “caused him to sit” that “the following words will not grammatically admit this construction,” and therefore, “the apostle clears the neutral sense of the word.”<sup>275</sup> A more controversial example is found in Owen’s rejection of Hugo Grotius’s proposal that δι’ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας, “by whom also he made the worlds,” (Hebrews 1:2) should be read as δι’ οὗ... “on account of whom...”<sup>276</sup> Owen systematically proceeds to demonstrate on grammatical grounds the impossibility of reading δι’ οὗ as δι’ οὗ; his argument, while supporting his overall theological position, is nevertheless made strictly on a linguistic and textual basis.<sup>277</sup> Owen deals similarly with the Socinian assertion that ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας, “made the worlds,” refers to the new creation of Christians via Christ’s redemption and not the physical creation of the cosmos.<sup>278</sup> He specifically looks at aspects of the grammar such as the presence of the article before τοὺς αἰῶνας, the overall context, and lexical background of both αἰών and ποιέω and concludes that the Socinian idea “sinks under its own weakness and absurdity.”<sup>279</sup> Owen explicitly leans on details of grammar and syntax in seeking the exact meaning of these phrases and numerous others throughout his analysis of this pericope.

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<sup>275</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:86.

<sup>276</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 7 vols. (Groningen: Zuidema, 1641; repr. 1829), 7:352.

<sup>277</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:69-70.

<sup>278</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees (1609; repr. London, 1818), 94; Johann Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica, didactica, et polemica. Sive ejus in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros commentarii. Maximan partem hactenus inediti*, in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, vols. 8-9 (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam]: Sumptibus Irenici Philalethii, 1656), vol. 9, fol. 71-72; Johann Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner in a Commentary Upon the Epistle to the Hebrewes* (London, 1646), 3.

The advances in philology brought about by the Renaissance studies also enabled (and compelled) the exegete to be more exacting in their *lexical studies*. The production of biblical lexicons in English like William Robertson's *The Second Gate* and Andrew Symson's *Lexicon Anglo-Graeco-Latinum Novi Testamenti* as well as various lexicons available in Latin combined with the availability of non-biblical ancient Greek works allowed the Puritan expositors to explore in depth the nuances of meaning in particular words.<sup>280</sup> Leigh provides a list of approved lexicons of the Hebrew (including those by Buxtorf, Avenarius, Forster, Schindler) and Greek (Stephanus, Budeus, Scapula) and concordances (Buxtorf for the OT, Stephanus for NT Greek, Kirchers LXX Greek, Cotton/Newman in English), as does Voetius in his bibliography – many of which were found in Owen's library.<sup>281</sup>

A number of times in his *Exposition of Hebrews*, Owen appears to be quoting some unidentified lexicon. When translating Hebrews 1:4, Owen struggles to properly render the phrase τοσοῦτω κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων. He feels that “melior” and “better” do not do justice to κρείττων. Citing Homer and Eustathius as support, he notes that “κρείττων is properly ‘nobilior,’ ‘potentior,’ ‘praestantior,’ ‘excellentior.’”<sup>282</sup> While this

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<sup>279</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:73. See also, 70-74.

<sup>280</sup> William Robertson, *The Second Gate, or, The Inner Door to the Holy Tongue : Being a Compendious Hebrew Lexicon or Dictionary* (London, 1654); Andrew Symson, *Lexicon Anglo-Graeco-Latinum Novi Testamenti, or, A Complete Alphabetical Concordance of All the Words Contained in the New Testament* (London, 1658).

<sup>281</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 182; Johann Buxtorf, *Lexicon Hebraicum et Chaldaicum* (Basel, 1615); Johann Avenarius, *Dissertatio Philologico-Theologica de mendis Scripturae* (Wittenberg, 1675); Johann Forster, *Dictionarium Hebraicum Novum* (Basel, 1557); Valentin Schindler, *Lexicon Pentaglotton, Hebraicum, Chaldaicum, Syriacum, Talmudico-Rabbinicum, & Arabicum* (Frankfurt, 1612); Robert Estienne, *Lexicon Trilingve* (Strasbourg, 1590); Guillaume Bude, *Lexikon Hellenoromaikon* (Basel, 1572); Johann Scapula, *Lexicon Graeco-Latinum* (Basel, 1565); Johann Buxtorf, *Tiberias, sive, Commentarius Masorethicus* (Basel, 1620); Robert Estienne, *Concordantiae Bibliorum Utriusque Testamenti* (Geneva, 1555); Konrad Kircher, *Concordantiae Veteris Testamenti Graecae* (Frankfurt, 1607); Samuel Newman and Clement Cotton, *A Large and Complete Concordance to the Bible in English* (London, 1643); Voetius, *Exercitia et Bibliotheca*, 287-302; Owen, *BO* I.1-4.

<sup>282</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:123.



seems to have come from some linguistic source, it is not a citation from Symson (who offers “potior,” “melior,” or “best”), Stephanus (“praestantia”), or Pasor.<sup>283</sup> Similarly, in seeking to explain what the apostle means when he speaks of Melchizedek as ἀγενεαλόγητος, Owen notes that the root word, “γενεαλογία is a ‘generation, descent, a pedigree,’ not absolutely, but ‘rehearsed, described, recorded.’”<sup>284</sup> This litany is also not found exactly as cited by Owen, though the definition in Symson’s lexicon has close parallels – “without descent, or pedigree... one whose beginning cannot be found, or whose genealogy is not recorded.”<sup>285</sup> Because of the conflict with the Socinians over Christ’s deity, Owen carefully explores the lexical meaning of κληρονόμον in his exegesis of 1:2. He analyzes the root word, other grammatical forms, and examines the ancient Greek usage in Plato to support his definition. As before, Owen’s apparent citations do not match some of the more common lexicons, though again there is some resemblance to Symson’s work.<sup>286</sup>

### 5.3 The Study of Cognate Languages and Judaism

In addition to advances in the study of biblical languages, the Renaissance also brought about a vibrant interest in the *cognate languages* (Syriac, Chaldean, Aramaic, and others), and a deeper appreciation for non-biblical Jewish writings. Recognizing their value in the exegetical process, the orthodox urged the use of ancient and contemporary biblical editions. Leigh encourages biblical exegetes to “make use of Paraphrases and

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<sup>283</sup> Symson, *Lexicon Anglo-Graeco-Latinum*, 21; Brian Walton, *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, vol. 5 (London, 1657), 850 on Hebrews 1:4; George Pasor, *Lexicon Graeco-Latinum in Novum Domini Nostri Jesu Christi Testamentum* (London, 1650), 413.

<sup>284</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:332. See also, 21:336.

<sup>285</sup> Symson, *Lexicon Anglo-Graeco-Latinum*, 50. Of course, close parallels between lexicons is to be expected.

versions among which the Chaldee and the Septuagint for the Old Testament, the Syriacke and the Arabicke for the New excell.”<sup>287</sup> Matthew Poole sees justification for the common use of a version in the New Testament citations of (he argues) the Septuagint, for, although a translation may be imperfect, they nevertheless faithfully communicate the gospel to all nations.

And we shall observe the penmen of the New Testament giving such a defence to the commonly received version in their times, that although the Septuagint version which we have appears to us more dissonant from the Hebrew than any other, yet most of the quotations of the Old Testament which we have in the New are apparently from that version; which teacheth us, that it is not every private minister’s work to make a new version of the Scripture, but he ought to acquiesce in the version which God hath provided for the church wherein he lives, and not ordinarily, or upon light grounds, to enter into a dissent to it.<sup>288</sup>

Use of a translation or version, however, is not without its limitations, the traditional opinion being that they are reliable only in so far as they faithfully express the divine originals: for example, “no versions are fully authentic except as they express the sources, by which they are also to be weighed,”<sup>289</sup> and, “a Translation is authenticke, in so farre as it agrees with the originall.”<sup>290</sup> The divine status accorded the Scripture by the Reformed did not extend to the versions:

As accurate as a translation may be, it nevertheless is neither authentic nor infallible... The original texts are directly inspirited by God and originate with God – both as to doctrinal content as well as the words. In translations, however, only the doctrinal content is divinely inspirited, not the words.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>286</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:41; Symson, *Lexicon Anglo-Graeco-Latinum*, 89. Owen speaks of “an inheritance which is a man’s lot and portion,” while Symson defines κληρονόμος as “he that hath that lot or portion which by law is due unto him.”

<sup>287</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 182.

<sup>288</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1:iv.

<sup>289</sup> Ames, *Marrow of Theology*, I.xxxiv.29.

<sup>290</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 68.

<sup>291</sup> Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:70-71.

Weemse points to the LXX as a good example, demonstrating its interpretive value, while denying it “inspired” status on the grounds that it was intentionally altered to avoid political retribution by the Ptolomites.<sup>292</sup>

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, many different biblical versions were published, ancient and contemporary. The auction catalogue of Owen’s library shows that he had access to an extraordinary number of these – Chaldean, Syriac, numerous Septuagint editions and manuscripts – and the linguistic tools (dictionaries, lexicons, grammars) to use them.<sup>293</sup> Contrary to both contemporary and modern reports, Owen was not unwilling to make frequent use of non-Hebrew/Greek editions of the Bible in his exegetical practice.<sup>294</sup>

References to the versions and translations – especially the Syriac and the Chaldean from ancient times, and contemporary translations of Beza and Erasmus – frequently punctuate Owen’s linguistic analysis of a verse. In his exegesis of Hebrews 1:3, a careful look is made into the meaning of τοὺς αἰῶνας and all the key words in the verse, analyzing not only the Greek words themselves, but often also the parallel words in Latin, Syriac, Hebrew and Aramaic.<sup>295</sup> Further examples of this kind of use of the versions are found nearly every time Owen begins work on a new verse of the epistle. Additionally, the versions were also used in discovering the meaning of the overall text – the ancient witness assisted the contemporary expositor in gaining insight into the passage’s divine intent. For instance, commenting on Daniel 7:9 in the midst of his exposition of Hebrews 1:4, Owen cites with approval the meaning assigned to the verse in the Chaldean, Syriac,

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<sup>292</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 69-70. See also, Brakel, *A Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:71-72; Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 7-9.

<sup>293</sup> Owen, *BO I.1*, 3, 7-9, 19-21.

<sup>294</sup> Owen’s exact thoughts regarding “the versions” will be examined in later chapters of this work.

<sup>295</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:74-76, 84-86.

Arabic, and Latin versions.<sup>296</sup> Finally, Owen also used the versions in his text criticism, though much more cautiously than some of his contemporaries.<sup>297</sup>

In the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the theologians and exegetes in England were becoming increasingly aware of the potential benefits of an in-depth knowledge of the post-biblical Jewish tradition. The influence of Hebraic studies on the post-Reformation period has been the subject of recent studies,<sup>298</sup> and was readily acknowledged by the orthodox themselves. Leigh contends, "The Church of God is much beholding to the Hebrew Rabbines, being great helps unto us for understanding holy Scripture in many places, as well of the New Testament as the Old,"<sup>299</sup> and he provides a list of the best Jewish commentators, "the pure Masters of the Hebrewes," including Maimonides, Kimchi, Ezra, and Jarchi. He does, however, also issue this warning: "men in a burning fever cannot dreame of things more ridiculous, then some of the Rabbines have seriously written and taught."<sup>300</sup> Other Puritans echoed Leigh's encouragement and concerns, notably the excellent Hebraists John Weemse and John Lightfoot, and Voetius's bibliography included a large section on Hebrew, Rabbinic, and other cognate language materials.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:128.

<sup>297</sup> See later in this work for a fuller discussion of Owen's response to seventeenth-century text criticism.

<sup>298</sup> E.g., Shim, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Hebraism in the Early Seventeenth Century," and see the works cited therein; Moshe Goshen-Gottstein, "Foundations of Biblical Philology in the Seventeenth Century: Christian and Jewish Dimensions," in *Jewish Thought in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Isadore Tweersky and Bernard Septimus (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); S. G. Burnett, "The Christian Hebraism of Johann Buxtorf (1564-1629)," Ph.D. diss. (University of Wisconsin, 1990); Peter van Rooden, *Theology, Biblical Scholarship, and Rabbinical Studies in the Seventeenth Century: Constantijn L'Empereur (1591-1648), Professor of Hebrew and Theology at Leiden* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

<sup>299</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 184.

<sup>300</sup> Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 183.

<sup>301</sup> Boyle, *Some Considerations*, 14, 21-22, 31-36; Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*; Weemse, *Exercitationes Divine*; Ames, *Disputatio Theologica*, 4-6; Voetius, *Exercitia et Bibliotheca*, 295-307.

Owen was incredibly well versed in Hebraic studies, perhaps much more so than is currently recognized,<sup>302</sup> and he is not hesitant to make use of it. In his rejection of the Socinian belief that God is spatial, Owen approvingly cites Maimonides, as he does to counter Socinian teaching about God's corporeal nature and his "middle" or "limited foreknowledge."<sup>303</sup> A good example of Owen's comprehension of the Rabbinic literature is found in his extended treatment of Grotius's interpretation of Isaiah 53 in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, where he approvingly cites Rabbinic interpretations and an impressive list of Jewish expositors.<sup>304</sup> A similar grasp of the Jewish commentators and teachers is demonstrated in Owen's *Exercitationes* to the *Exposition*, particularly when he deals with the origin of the priesthood of Christ, the Sabbath day, and the Old Testament anticipation of the Messiah.<sup>305</sup>

Owen's exegesis reflects his own deep interest in Hebraic and Judaistic studies; there are many examples throughout the *Exposition* where Owen interacts at length with Jewish thought, either with approval or as a foil for his own interpretations.<sup>306</sup> He made frequent use of various aspects of the Masoretic text and notes, and he also makes direct reference to the Targum,<sup>307</sup> the tractates of the Talmud and Misnah,<sup>308</sup> and other writings by ancient Rabbis.<sup>309</sup> He interacts frequently with two post-Talmudic Rabbis, Maimonides, "the first disposer of their faith into fundamental articles," and Kimchi.

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<sup>302</sup> Note the virtual absence of any discussion on Owen's Hebraic interests in his biographers, Toon, *God's Statesman*; Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen*; Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987). Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," 189-190, touches very briefly on Owen's Hebraic abilities.

<sup>303</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:97, 103, 120.

<sup>304</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:255-285.

<sup>305</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, vols. 17-18: *passim*.

<sup>306</sup> E.g., Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:74-77, 128-129, 172-173, 179, 219-223.

<sup>307</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:14-17, 46, 75, 94, 119.

<sup>308</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:8, 76.

<sup>309</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:9-10, 26, 46, 50.

Along with Philo, Owen often cites these writers in a positive sense, and just as frequently in the negative.<sup>310</sup> A testimony to Owen's linguistic ability, he freely cites the unpointed text from the Targums, Talmud, and other Judaistic writings, and his library contained a vast amount of Rabbinic material.<sup>311</sup> It was, in part, other expositors' neglect of the Jewish character of the epistle which lead Owen to comment on Hebrews in the first place, and without an extensive knowledge of biblical and rabbinic Judaism, Owen believes that one seeks a clear understanding of this epistle "altogether in vain."<sup>312</sup> It is clear from his exegesis that Owen took seriously the Hebraic background of the Epistle to the Hebrews, and that he was very competent to deal with this Judaistic material.

#### 5.4 The History of the Biblical Text

The Renaissance heritage is also apparent in the post-Reformation orthodox's *textual study*, their examination of the biblical manuscripts and both ancient and modern translations. The seventeenth-century debate about the value and role of text criticism, and its companion discussion about the origin of the Hebrew vowel points, has been studied by modern scholarship,<sup>313</sup> but the Puritans' awareness of the need for an examination of the history of the text as a part of the exegetical method has not always been appreciated.

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<sup>310</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:95, 20-22. See also, 25-27, 33, 75, 94.

<sup>311</sup> Only a portion of that literature is collected under the heading "Rabbini", Owen, *BO I.19*; see also the Hebraic works on pages, 3, 7, 8, 11, etc.

<sup>312</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:6, 8.

<sup>313</sup> For an overview and analysis of the consequences of this debate see Theodore Letis, "John Owen Versus Brian Walton: A Reformed Response to the Birth of Text Criticism," in *The Majority Text*, ed. T. Letis (Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), 145-190; Richard A. Muller, "The Debate over the Vowel Points and the Crisis in Orthodox Hermeneutics," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10 (1980):53-72; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:418-446; Martin Klauber, "Jean-Alphonse Turretini and the Abrogation of the Formula Consensus in Geneva," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991):325-338; Martin Klauber, "The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675): An Introduction and Translation," *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990):103-123; John Bowman, "A Forgotten Controversy," *Evangelical*

William Perkins was an early advocate of the kind of limited text criticism which was almost universally accepted by the Reformed. As part of the preparation for proclaiming the biblical message, Perkins urges an examination of diverse textual variants, and when different textual traditions are found, various steps are to be taken to identify the correct wording. The most appropriate reading is the one which is found through a collation of existing texts, an analysis in light of the analogy of faith, the grammatical construction of the immediate context, and the occasion and scope of the passage. "If first it doe agree with Grammatical construction and with other approued copies, if also it doe agree in respect of the sense with the circumstances and drift of the place, and with the analogie of faith, it is proper and natural."<sup>314</sup> Perkins quickly and decisively heads off the appearance that he is doubtful of the Scripture's reliability:

I lay downe this rule, not because I thinke that the Hebrew and Greeke text is in all copies corrupted through the malice of the Iewes, as Lindanus doth wickedly calumniate, and after him all Papists; but that the diuers readings, which in some places haue crept in, either by reason of the vnskilfulnes, or negligence and ouersight of the Notaries, might be skanned and determined."<sup>315</sup>

John Weemse is another respected Reformed scholar who acknowledged the necessity and value of text work in the interpretive process. Weemse's "first help" in the interpretation of Old Testament passages was to note the marginalia of the Masorah Bible. He recognized three outcomes from a comparison of the margin reading and the line reading: either (1) the Scripture itself "alludes to both" and therefore both are to be a part of one's interpretation, (2) the marginalia is not "contrary to the text," in which case it can serve as a good illustration, or (3) the Masorite reading is contrary to the text and must be rejected: "The marginall readings of the Mazorites we may use them for

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*Quarterly* 20 (1948):46-68; François Laplanche, *L'Écriture, le sacré et l'histoire: Érudits politiques protestants devant la bible en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1986).

<sup>314</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:749.

<sup>315</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:749.

illustration, (where they are not approved by the holy Ghost) although we may not make them line reading. If they impair not the credit of the Scripture, or is contrary to it.”

“Where the Mazonite notes seeme to impair the credit of the Text, there we are not to follow them.” “Where the double reading of the Mazonites is contrary to the Text, it should bee altogether reiected and cast off.”<sup>316</sup> One assesses if the line reading or the marginal reading is correct by examining the “drift of the place” (i.e., the scope and occasion), the context, the analogy of Scripture, grammatical helps, and the evidence of other versions.<sup>317</sup> Once again, Voetius’s bibliography shows that he expected text critical work to be an important part of one’s academic training.<sup>318</sup>

Owen does not in all ways agree with either the presentation of Perkins or Weemse, or with other Reformed authors on these matters, but his views on text criticism are firmly within the Reformed tradition of his time, and are much more positive, both in theory and in practice, than what the impression of his debate with Brian Walton has left us with.<sup>319</sup> While Owen emphatically denies any course which would appear to give the ancient versions an authoritative standing, he frequently interacts with the Vulgate, other old Latin versions, the Syraic, Targums, and LXX, as well as various Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. He deals specifically with these, and with the contemporary translations of Erasmus, Beza and Tremellius, to illuminate a meaning, to act as a foil for his own interpretation, or occasionally to make an assessment concerning the wording of the text itself.<sup>320</sup> Owen is also able to read and use the Masorah, a vast system of notes and

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<sup>316</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 43, 46, 48.

<sup>317</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, 45-48.

<sup>318</sup> Voetius, *Exercitia et Bibliotheca*, 504-523.

<sup>319</sup> Owen’s understanding and limited application of text criticism is the subject of a later section in this work.

<sup>320</sup> E.g., Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:3-4, 84-86, 149-150, 177-178.



textual criticisms written in the margins of the Hebrew Bible by the Masoretes.<sup>321</sup> His library contained the most advanced and scholarly works on text criticism of his time.<sup>322</sup>

Each time Owen addresses a new verse in Hebrews, he begins by citing the Greek (taken from Stephanus's edition) and then examines textual, lexical, and grammatical issues for the way they may impact how he intends to translate the Greek into English. During this analysis, Owen frequently notes textual variants which occur in other manuscripts. While not identifying the sources of most of the variants he cites, he occasionally references a "MS T" by name.<sup>323</sup> Owen never clarifies what "MS T" is, and what we now call Uncial T (029 Codex Borgianus) is a Greco-Sahidic manuscript which only includes 179 verses from Luke 22-23 and John 6-8. This uncial appears to have been first published in 1789 and is (was?) located at Rome, and so cannot be Owen's "MS T."<sup>324</sup> A comparison of the variants of "MS T" which Owen cites and modern codices shows that "MS T's" textual variants correspond to those of either Uncial A or Uncial **Ⲛ**. **Ⲛ** was only discovered in the nineteenth century and came to England from Russia in 1933. Uncial A (Codex Alexandrinus), on the other hand, was presented to Charles I in 1628, and it is likely that it came to Oxford either at that time or during Charles's "exile" there before and during the Civil War.<sup>325</sup> Finally, it should be noted that Walton's *London*

<sup>321</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:8.

<sup>322</sup> Buxtorf, *Tiberias*; Walton, *Polyglotta*; Matthew Poole, *Synopsis criticorum et aliorum commentaria in Biblia*, 8 vols. (London, 1669); Louis Cappel, *Critica Sacra, sive de variis quae in Vetus Testamentum lectionibus occurrunt* (Paris, 1650). See, Owen, *BO I.1*, 3.

<sup>323</sup> Reference to "MS T" occurs only in the 1668 publication (the *Exercitations and Hebrews 1-2*) at 1:3 (19:84), 1:8-9 (19:177), and 1:12 (19:195), although in later editions he continues to note this manuscript's variants without naming the source.

<sup>324</sup> Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament: An Introduction to the Critical Editions and to the Theory and Practice of Modern Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 113; Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 56.

<sup>325</sup> Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 107, 108.

*Polyglott* uses Uncial A in its apparatus right below his given text, and that Owen's citation of "MS T" always corresponds to where the *Polyglott* cites Uncial A in its apparatus. While he does not identify the manuscript he is working from, in his comments on 3:7-11, Owen notes

there are some little varieties in some words and letters observed in some old manuscripts, but of no importance or use, and for the most part mere mistakes; as ἐνδοκίμασαν for ἔδοκίμασαν, ταύτη for ἡρείνη, εἶπα for εἶπον; as many such differences occur, where some have tampered to make the apostle's words and translation of the LXX. In all things to agree,<sup>326</sup>

and in each case, the listed variant is from Codex Alexandrinus. In a text note on Hebrews 1:12, Owen writes that "in the last verse, for ἐλίξεις one copy hath ἀλλάξεις to answer unto ἀλλαγῆσονται."<sup>327</sup> Again, comparing with existing codices, the "one copy" Owen refers to could be either Uncials **N** (unlikely, see above) or D\*. Uncial D\* is the uncorrected reading of Codex Bezae which was presented to Cambridge University by Theodore Beza in 1581.<sup>328</sup> Thus, it appears that Owen used Codex Alexandrinus (from the *Polyglott*) and Codex Bezae in his text work (as well as other identified sources).

In his assessment of the variants, Owen competently employs the theories of textual criticism. An alternate reading of 1:3 is rejected because Owen surmises that a scribe unintentionally inserted a phrase taken from later in Hebrews 12:2 because of the linguistic similarity of the two verses.<sup>329</sup> On a reading of Hebrews 4:3 where Εἰσερχόμεθα is changed to Εἰσερχώμεθα (again echoing Codex Alexandrinus), Owen rejects the variant because he judges that it was altered from the original simply to echo the preceding

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<sup>326</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 20:4.

<sup>327</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:195.

<sup>328</sup> Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (London: United Bible Societies, 1971), 593; Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 49-50; Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 107-108.

<sup>329</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:84.

subjunctive verbs in 4:1 and 4:2.<sup>330</sup> He spurns the reading of “MS T” in 1:8-9 based on stylistic, grammatical, and rhetorical reasons, for the variation “takes off from the elegance of the expression, and darkens the sense; for the article prefixed to the last ῥάβδος declares that to be the subject of the proposition.”<sup>331</sup> He further suspects that a scribe’s attempt to harmonize the Epistle to the Hebrews with the Septuagint’s language is the cause of various minor alterations in 3:7-11.<sup>332</sup>

Owen’s most impressive textual work, however, comes when he discusses the presence or absence of σκηνή (“tabernacle”) in Hebrews 9:1. He notes that Stephanus, following sixteen ancient manuscripts, includes it because of the weight of the number of witnesses. However, Owen observes that other copies omit it, and this reading is supported by all the ancient versions. Breaking with Stephanus’s edition, Owen argues that “the reasons for its rejection are cogent and undeniable.” He then proceeds to list four of these reasons, primarily basing them upon the context, scope, and linguistic flow of the pericope.<sup>333</sup>

The most notable feature of Owen’s text criticism, however, is his most frequent response to textual variants – once noted, he passes by without comment. This is not because he is ignorant of their presence, nor because he considers his text to be flawless, but simply because the variants are “of no importance or use, and for the most part mere mistakes.”<sup>334</sup> Owen does not seek to prove that Stephanus’s text is a perfect replica of the original writing by the apostle (as proved by his comments on 9:1), he simply shows by

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<sup>330</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 20:255-256.

<sup>331</sup> Owen, *Causes, Ways, and Means*, 4:178.

<sup>332</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 20:4.

<sup>333</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 22:180-181.

<sup>334</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 20:4.

his usual neglect that the variants which do exist do not impact the meaning of the text – and the meaning is the important object in Owen’s study.

### 5.5 Rhetorical Argumentation

Finally, the influence of humanism on the seventeenth-century exegetical method is evident in the manner in which exegetes of the time present their material. One of the major advances gained through the Renaissance was a renewed concern and appreciation for *rhetorical skills and persuasive*, as opposed to demonstrative, *argumentation* – see, for instance, Voetius’s full bibliography on *Rhetorico, Oratorio, Epistolico*, and *Poetico*.<sup>335</sup> Protestant authors incorporated these developments into their works in varying amounts and in various ways. Calvin’s commentaries are well known for their discursive, verse by verse analysis presented *breviter et facilliter*.<sup>336</sup> Yet, other commentators adopted any number of differing styles – a combination of exposition and extended dogmatic discussion, the three-, four- or more- fold methods addressing textual, theological, and practical issues, paraphrases with brief or extended annotations, purely textual and linguistic studies, or little exegetical comment with an extensive theological treatment.<sup>337</sup> Owen’s *Exposition* hardly classifies as *brevitas et facilitas*, but neither does it intend to be a theological presentation. Like most other exegetical work done by the post-Reformation orthodox, his is an eclectic mixture of different expository styles. Every verse is presented in its Greek form, textual variants and linguistic anomalies are

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<sup>335</sup> Voetius, *Exercitia et Bibliotheca*, 308-325.

<sup>336</sup> See, for instance, Richard Gamble, “*Brevitas et facilitas*: Toward an Understanding of Calvin’s Hermeneutic,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 47 (1985):1-17.

<sup>337</sup> See the discussion of the style of commentaries in Sheppard, “Interpretation of the Old Testament between Reformation and Modernity,” 46; Muller, “William Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition,” 74-76. See also, J. W. Blench, *Preaching in England in the Late Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 100-112, 168-176; Gane, “The Exegetical Methods of Some Sixteenth-Century Puritan Preachers.”

noted, and a translation is provided. He then comments at length on the verse, usually countering objections and alternative interpretations. He occasionally digresses from a strict exposition of the text itself to give an expanded treatment of a doctrinal point, and he always sets aside significant space to speak to the contemporary church, identifying practical uses and observations. In general, Owen's style follows Perkins's preaching technique – a reading of the text, exposition to give the sense and understanding of the text as illuminated by Scripture itself and other commentators, the gathering of doctrinal concerns, answering objections, and the application of the meaning to the belief and practice of the church.<sup>338</sup>

The influence of seventeenth-century rhetoric is evident beyond the overall style of the commentary. Throughout Owen's exposition, individual rhetorical and persuasive arguments abound. His writings are full of exhortations for his readers, and he writes to influence not simply their thinking, but their emotions and conduct as well.<sup>339</sup> In disputing the claims of the Socinians in his *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, Owen notes that "we shall deal with him from Scripture itself, right reason, and the common consent of mankind."<sup>340</sup> Like other post-Reformation writers, Owen expresses disgust with "the schoolmen," – their speculations and their terminology:

The boldness and curiosity of the schoolmen, and some others, in expressing the way and manner of the generation of the Son, by similitudes of our understanding and its acts, declaring how he is the image of the Father, in their terms, are intolerable and full of offence. Nor are the rigid impositions of those words and terms in this matter which they or others have found out to express it by, of any better nature.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>338</sup> Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:673. Owen explains his "style" in the *Exposition* in the various "Prefaces" of his work, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:9, 14-15, 18-19, 22.

<sup>339</sup> E.g., Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:39, 115-116.

<sup>340</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:64.

<sup>341</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:91.

He also rejects the use of syllogisms (at least the outrightly false ones promoted by the Socinians!).<sup>342</sup> This does not, as explored above, indicate that Owen himself did not use scholastic terminology and argue in a syllogistic manner, for he certainly did. Rather, Owen sought to avoid the excessive speculation and formalism of the medieval scholastics. Here we see an example of how the post-Renaissance writers rejected the style and the speculative content of scholasticism, though not necessarily its methodology.

Heavily influenced by the linguistic character of humanism, Owen not only uses rhetorical and emotive arguments in his exegesis, he also identifies those elements in the biblical author's formation of the epistle itself. In seeking to strengthen the Hebrew Christians, the apostle opening words are intended to draw in his audience, to persuade them of the truth of his assertions without resorting to explicit demonstration:

From all these observations we may evidently perceive wherein the force of the apostle's argument doth lie, which he insists upon in this very entrance of his discourse, rather insinuating it from *their own principles* than openly pressing them with its reason, which he doth afterwards... whence it was easy for them to gather what a necessity of adhering to his doctrine and institutions, notwithstanding any contrary pleas or arguings, was incumbent on them.<sup>343</sup>

While an appeal to rational proofs is part of the epistle's later reasoning for Christ's divinity and salvific work, initially the apostle argues persuasively to the Hebrews from their own messianic expectations and sacred texts, that is, from the citations from the Old Testament found in the first chapter of the epistle.

This examination of the exegetical methodology promoted and employed by the post-Reformation orthodox biblical interpreters demonstrates their commitment to what we now call precritical hermeneutical presuppositions, as well as their acceptance and use of techniques influenced by both scholasticism and humanism. In Owen's theoretical

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<sup>342</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:41.

writings and throughout his examination of the scriptural text, the picture emerges of a theologian and biblical commentator thoroughly absorbed in, and shaped by, these factors. Owen thought as an exegete who was deeply tied (1) to precritical exegetical assumptions about the biblical text, (2) to scholastic techniques which stretch back to the centuries prior to the Reformation, and (3) to the humanistic advances of the post-Reformation era.

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<sup>343</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:34. See also, 46.

## Chapter III

# Hebrews 1:1-3 : The Doctrine of the Trinity

### 1. Seventeenth-Century Trinitarianism

In seventeenth-century England, the historic dogma of the Trinity came under vigorous attack from the Socinians who taught that the doctrine was contrary to the clear reading of Scripture and opposed to the natural use of reason.<sup>1</sup> This dual thrust against the doctrine, via Scripture and reason, is nicely illustrated in the structure of the Socinian work of Johann Crell, *The Two Books of John Crellius Francus, Touching One God the Father*.<sup>2</sup> In the first book, Crell refutes the doctrine from scriptural texts, and in the second he attempts to show that the doctrine is logically inconsistent and naturally falls into incoherence from within. While there have been numerous studies on the Socinian and other Antitrinitarian views the doctrine of God and their objection to the traditional Trinitarian formulation,<sup>3</sup> the articulation and development of the orthodox response to those attacks has largely gone unexamined. The doctrine itself, of course, continued to play a prominent role in seventeenth-century theologies and creeds. The Savoy

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<sup>1</sup> For a history, impact, and documents of Socinianism in England see H. John McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951); Earl Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism: Socinianism and its Antecedents*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947); Ephraim Emerton, *Unitarian Thought* (New York: MacMillan, 1911); K. R. Hagenbach, *A Text-book of the History of Doctrines*, trans. Henry Smith (New York: Sheldon, 1872), 332; Lech Szczucki, *Socinianism and its Role in the Culture of the XVIth to XVIIIth Centuries* (Warsaw, 1983).

<sup>2</sup> Johann Crell, *The Two Books of John Crellius Francus, Touching One God the Father* (London, 1665).

<sup>3</sup> McLachlan, *Socinianism in Seventeenth-Century England*; Wilbur, *A History of Unitarianism*; C. A. J. Coady, "The Socinian Connection: Further Thoughts on the Religion of Hobbes," *Religious Studies* 22 (1986):277-280; Alan Gomes, "De Jesu Christo Servatore: Faustus Socinus on the Satisfaction of Christ," *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993):209-231; Martin Greig, "The Reasonableness of Christianity? Gilbert Burnet and the Trinitarian Controversy of the 1690s," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993):631-651; William Babcock, "A Changing of the Christian God: The Doctrine of the Trinity in the Seventeenth Century," *Interpretation* 45 (1991):133-146; Irena Backus, "'Aristotelianism' in some of Calvin's and Beza's Expository Exegetical Writings on the Doctrine of the Trinity," in *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVIe siècle. Textes du Colloque International tenu à Genève en 1976*, ed. Olivier Fatio and Pierre Fraenkel (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978), 351-360.



Declaration, written by Congregationalists in 1658, well illustrates the way in which both orthodox dissent and Anglicanism stood towards Trinitarianism: “[The] doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence upon him.”<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, despite this foundational character, the orthodox explication of the doctrine has received little scholarly attention.

One notable exception to this lack of study has been the recent research on the writings of John Owen (1616-1683). Carl Trueman has analyzed Owen’s work, paying particular attention to his dynamic Trinitarianism and its influence over his whole theology.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Alan Spence has examined Owen’s understanding of divine agency in light of his orthodox Trinitarian views.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, a detailed look at the Protestant orthodox doctrine of the Trinity has yet to be produced.

This is especially true with regard to the exegetical material which provided the ground work for the theological development of the doctrine during the post-Reformation period. Even the surveys of orthodox Trinitarian dogma have in large part neglected the exegetical issues which gave rise both to the Socinian objections to the doctrine and the orthodox response in defense of its traditional formulation.<sup>7</sup> This itself is characteristic of the general neglect of seventeenth-century exegesis and the frequently pejorative assessment of the orthodox handling of the biblical material.<sup>8</sup> However, more recent

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<sup>4</sup> *Savoy Declaration*, II.3.

<sup>5</sup> Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998).

<sup>6</sup> Alan Spence, “John Owen and Trinitarian Agency,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43 (1990):157-173.

<sup>7</sup> Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated From the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thompson (London: Allen, 1950); Edmund Fortman, *The Triune God* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972); R. S. Franks, *The Doctrine of the Trinity* (London: Duckworth, 1953); Hagenbach, *A Text-book of the History of Doctrines*.

<sup>8</sup> Frederic Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: Dutton, 1886; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 358-377; Kemper Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority* (New York: MacMillan, 1919), 174-185; Howard Teeple, *The Historical Approach to the Bible* (Evanston: Religion and Ethics Institute, 1982), 65-66; Robert Grant, *The Bible in the Church* (New York: MacMillan, 1960), 115.

studies have emphasized the deeply integrated nature of the scriptural text with the post-Reformation theologians' doctrine.<sup>9</sup>

The exegetical conclusions reached by the orthodox in their interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews 1:1-3 form part of their scriptural support for their Trinitarian understanding of the Godhead. These verses are cited in support of the doctrine in numerous sixteenth and seventeenth-century creeds and credal expositions.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in examining the sixth question in Westminster Assembly's Shorter Catechism, the Puritan preacher John Flavel cites Hebrews 1:3 as support for his definition of a "person" in the Godhead:

Q.2. What is a person in the godhead?

A. It is the godhead distinguished by personal properties; each person having his distinct personal properties; Heb. i.3. Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, upholding all things by the world of his power.<sup>11</sup>

In applying this verse in this way, Flavel is not guilty of irresponsible proof texting – a charge frequently leveled against the post-Reformation orthodox; rather, he is reflecting the exegetical conclusions of numerous biblical expositions and commentaries.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of Reformation: The View of the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard Muller and John Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 3-22; Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the 16<sup>th</sup> & 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries," in *Historical Handbook of Major Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Donald McKim (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998), 135-140; Carl Trueman, "Faith Seeking Understanding: Some Neglected Aspects of John Owen's Understanding of Scriptural Interpretation," in *Interpreting the Bible*, ed. A. N. S. Lane (Leicester: Apollos, 1997), 147-162; W. Robert Godfrey, "Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 225-243.

<sup>10</sup> *Belgic Confession*, Article VIII; *Second Helvetic Confession*, Chapter XI; *Westminster Confession of Faith*, VIII.1; John Owen, *Two Short Catechisms, Wherein the Doctrines of Christ are Explained*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); Caspar Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation: An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. L. Bierma (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), Q22, pg. 18; John Flavel, *An Exposition of the Assembly's Catechism*, in *The Works of John Flavel*, vol. 6 (1695; repr. Cambridge: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), 159.

<sup>11</sup> Flavel, *An Exposition of the Assembly's Catechism*, 6:159.

<sup>12</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 21 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); David Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1649; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978); Obadiah Walker, *A*

The orthodox, however, were not the only ones to comment on the Hebrews pericope. The Socinians, both on the continent and in England, claimed that the passage supported their views of the Godhead, and cited the text in their catechisms, creeds, and polemical writings.<sup>13</sup> One of the earliest systematic treatments of Socinian doctrine, *The Racovian Catechism* (1609), refers to Hebrews 1:3 as evidence of a distinction between Christ and “the most high God:”

It cannot be proved from Christ's being the Word of God that he possesses a divine nature : indeed the contrary is the rather to be inferred ; for since he is the Word of the one God, it is evident that he is not that one God. And the same may be replied to those testimonies wherein Christ is called 'the image of the invisible God' and 'the express image of his person.'<sup>14</sup>

Like their orthodox opponents, Socinian supporters produced commentaries on the book of Hebrews, seeking to demonstrate the biblical foundation of their opinions through a thorough exegesis of Scripture.<sup>15</sup>

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*Paraphrase and Annotations upon the Epistles of St. Paul Written to the Romans, Corinthians, and Hebrews* (Oxford, 1675); George Lawson, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrewes wherein the Text is Cleared, Theopolitica Improved, the Socinian Comment Examined* (London, 1662); William Jones, *A Commentary vpon the Epistles of Saint Paul to Philemon, and to the Hebrewes* (London, 1635); Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979); Edward Dering, *XXVII Lectures, or Readings, vpon part of the Epistle to the Hebrewes* (London, 1614); William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (1655; repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980); John Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition Upon All the Epistles, and the Revelation of John the Divine* (London, 1647; repr. 1958); *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament, wherein the Text is Explained, Doubts Resolved, Scriptures Paralleled, and Various Readings observed. By the joynt-Labour of certain Learned Divines*, ed. Thomas Gataker, et. al. (London, 1645); David Paraeus, *Commentarius in Diui Pauli Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, in *Opera Theologica*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1628); *The Dutch Annotations upon the Whole Bible: or, All the Holy Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, together with, and according to their own Translation of all the Text: As both the one and the other were ordered and appointed by the Synod of Dort, 1618. And published by Authority, 1637*, 2 vols., trans. Theodore Haak (London, 1657).

<sup>13</sup> Jonas Szlichtyng, “Confession of Christian Faith Published in the Name of the Polish Churches Which Profess One God,” articles 5, 16, 18A, in *The Polish Brethern*, vol. 2, ed., George Williams (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1980), 385-418; *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees (1609; repr. London, 1818), Sect. IV.1, pg. 93; John Biddle, *A Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity, According to the Scriptures* (London, 1648), 12; Crell, *Two Books*, 107, 139-140.

<sup>14</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, 140.

<sup>15</sup> Johann Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica, didactica, et polemica. Sive ejus in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros commentarii. Maximan partem hactenus inediti*, in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, vols. 8-9 (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam]: Sumptibus Irenici Philalethii, 1656); Johann Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner in a Commentary vpon the Epistle to the Hebrewes* (London, 1646).

Thus, on both sides of the issue, hermeneutical considerations played a crucial role in the ongoing debate, and demonstrate again the intimate connection made in the post-Reformation era between theology and exegesis. This is particularly evident in the painstaking exegetical work on Hebrews by John Owen. One finds in his massive commentary, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, some evidence of the exacting scriptural work which serves as the foundation of Owen's pervasive Trinitarianism.

## **2. The Trinitarian Doctrine Which Emerges from Owen's Exegesis of Hebrews 1**

Throughout the course of Owen's exegesis of Hebrews 1:1-3, certain theological conclusions are reached which have a direct bearing upon his expression of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. Owen discusses the doctrine and all theological issues from an exegetical standpoint, and, consequently, a systematic presentation of the Trinity is not present here. Rather, an explanation of the inner workings of the Godhead naturally flows from the need to fully explicate the biblical text.

### **2.1 Person and Essence in the Godhead**

This relationship between the text and doctrinal formulation is vividly displayed in the very first stage of Owen's exegesis when he discusses the meaning of ὁ θεός. The subject is obviously the divine being, God, yet later in the sentence the Son is also described as a divine being. This distinction between the deity "God" and the deity of the Son forces Owen to explore more carefully what is intended by ὁ θεός, and to begin to formulate a clearer picture of God. Thus, the presence of two divine "persons" in the opening two verses leads Owen directly to a discussion of the Trinity.

Now, God being here spoken of in distinction from the Son expressly, and from the Holy Ghost by evident implication, it being he by whom he spake in the prophets, that name is not taken οὐσιωδῶς, substantially, to denote primarily the essence or being of the Deity, and each person as partaking in the same nature, but

ὑποστάτικως, denoting primarily one certain person, and the divine nature only as subsisting in that person. This is the person of the Father.<sup>16</sup>

Owen then defends the introduction of this distinction between person and essence based on the text itself:

And this observation is made necessary from hence, even because he immediately assigns divine properties and excellencies unto another person, evidently distinguished from him whom he intends to denote by the name God in this place; which he could not do did that name primarily express, as here used by him, the divine nature absolutely, but only as it is subsisting in the person of the Father.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, ὁ θεός in verse 1 refers not to the divine being, but to the divine person of the Father, and only by implication the divine essence of the Father. By making this distinction, Owen shows how God can be spoken of as acting in the Son, ἐν υἱῷ, while at the same time the Son is described as a divine being.

The distinction between person and essence in the Godhead is, of course, essential to the orthodox understanding of the Trinity, and Owen frequently resorts to this differentiation in all his Christological writings. In *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ, in his Person, Office, and Grace* (1684), Owen details the glory of Christ's person by showing how Christ is the glorious representative of God's own nature. This leads him to distinguish between the essence and the various persons of the Godhead.<sup>18</sup> The same distinction heads his exposition in his short work on the Trinity, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* (1669), where Owen summarizes the orthodox connection between substance (or essence/nature) and the person: "Every person hath distinctly its own substance, for the one substance of the Deity is the substance of each person, so it is still but one ; but each person hath not its own distinct substance, because the substance of them all is the same, as hath been

<sup>16</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:7.

proved.”<sup>19</sup> In his massive work, ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: *or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* (1674), Owen uses the difference between God’s essence and individual subsistence within that essence to define the person and nature of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> While Owen does not use the technical terminology, the unity of substance in the distinction of persons is foundational in his pastoral discourse, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost* (1657),<sup>21</sup> and is assumed throughout ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: *or, A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ – God and Man*.<sup>22</sup>

In his comprehensive attack against Socinianism, *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655), Owen leans heavily upon the scholastic division between divine essence and person, yet is well aware that in our finite experience this distinction is not readily observable:

Distinction of person (it being an infinite substance) doth no way prove difference of essence between the Father and the Son. Where Christ, as mediator is said to be another from the Father or God, spoken *personally* of the Father, it argues not in the least that he is not partaker of the same nature with him. That in one essence there can be but one person may be true where the substance is finite and limited, but hath no place in that which is infinite.<sup>23</sup>

Owen acknowledges that a difference between the two categories cannot be readily identified in the created world, yet maintains that the application of such observations from the finite realm to the infinite is absurd. In his preface to *Vindiciae Evangelicae*,

<sup>18</sup> John Owen, *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ, in his Person, Office, and Grace*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 293-296.

<sup>19</sup> John Owen, *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 409.

<sup>20</sup> John Owen, ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: *or, A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 3 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 66-69.

<sup>21</sup> John Owen, *Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 2 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 9-17.

<sup>22</sup> John Owen, ΧΡΙΣΤΟΛΟΓΙΑ: *or A Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ – God and Man*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 1 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), see esp. 45-47, 54-64, 70-75.

<sup>23</sup> John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae: or The Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated and Socinianism Examined*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 12 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 170-171.

Owen points out this illogical practice, and warns about Socinian insistence upon this form of reasoning:

The greatest triumphs which they set up in their own conceits are, when by any ways they possess themselves of any usual maxim that passes current amongst men, being applied to *finite, limited, created things*, or any acknowledged notion in philosophy, and apply it to the *infinite, uncreated, essence of God*; than which course of proceeding nothing, indeed, can be more absurd, foolish, and contrary to sound reason. That God and man, the Creator and creature, that which is absolutely infinite and independent, and that which is finite, limited, and dependent, should be measured by the same rules, notions, and conceptions, unless it be by way of eminent analogy, which will not further their design at all, is most fond and senseless, And this one observation is sufficient to arm us against all their profound disputes about “essence,” “personality,” and the like.<sup>24</sup>

In understanding ὁ θεός in Hebrews 1:1 as referring to the *person* and not the *essence* of the Father, Owen is following the lead of both the Westminster Assembly’s and the Synod of Dordrecht’s annotations on the Bible. *The Westminster Annotations* state that ὁ θεός “is the Father; for when the name [God] is mentioned in the Scriptures, with relation unto the Sonne, thereby we are to understand God the Father.”<sup>25</sup> However, not all Reformed exegetes fully endorsed this idea. William Gouge, the London preacher, held that, while the Father is primarily intended here, the other persons of the Trinity are not intentionally excluded: “The relation of this title *God*, ὁ θεός, to the Son, sheweth, that the first person in sacred Trinity, the Father, is in particular meant; yet the other persons are not excluded. For the Son, Exod. iii.2,6, and the Holy Ghost also, Acts xxviii.26, spake to the fathers.”<sup>26</sup> Matthew Poole states just the opposite opinion from Owen, “the God he speaks of is to be apprehended here personally, as well as essentially.”<sup>27</sup> Owen’s exegesis, however, is concerned with explaining how God can be

<sup>24</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae, Evangelicae*, 12:48.

<sup>25</sup> *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*, MM1r. See also, *The Dutch Annotations*.

<sup>26</sup> Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 8.

<sup>27</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:808.

spoken of in distinction from the Son, a question left open by the exegesis of Gouge and Poole.

Owen is, predictably, also at odds with the Socinian Johann Crell, who, like Owen, recognizes “God” in verse 1 as speaking of the person of the Father.<sup>28</sup> However, Crell does this because he denies that “God” can truly refer to anyone else. That is, Owen identifies ὁ θεός with the divine person of the Father to preserve the divinity of the Son, while Crell makes the identification to deny any divinity to the Son. The difference is in how the two men understand the relationship between person and essence; Owen can differentiate them, while Crell insists on their essential unity. In his *Two Books*, Crell rejects the orthodox definition of the Trinity asserting that “a person is in vain distinguished from his own essence.”<sup>29</sup> This is the logical force Crell finds so compelling throughout his work: it is logically impossible to have a difference in person without a difference in essence – Trinitarianism logically leads to tritheism. Crell here follows the teaching of the primary Socinian document, *The Racovian Catechism* (1609):

The essence of God is one, not in kind but in number. Wherefore it cannot, in any way, contain a plurality of persons, since a person is nothing else than an individual intelligent essence. Wherever, then, there exist three numerical persons, there must necessarily, in like manner, be reckoned three individual essences; for in the same sense in which it is affirmed that there is one numerical essence, it must be held that there is also one numerical person.<sup>30</sup>

Owen, of course, has a much more orthodox understanding of the relationship of essence and person in the Godhead, and he operates with a definition similar to that propounded by Gouge:

*Essence or nature* importeth a common being, as Deity or Godhead, which is common to the Father, Son, Holy Ghost. For the Father, is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God. But subsistence or person implieth a different, distinct, individual, incommunicable, property; such are these three, Father Son, Holy Ghost.

<sup>28</sup> Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 70; Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> Crell, *Two Books*, 140.

<sup>30</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, 33.



For the Father is different from the Son and Holy Ghost, so the Son from the Father and the Holy Ghost, and so the Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son; and every of those distinct in himself, and so incommunicable, as neither of these persons is, or can be, the other.<sup>31</sup>

Because of his concern to address only those issues which the text itself addresses, Owen at this point formally refuses “to enter into any dispute about the meaning of the word ὑπόστασις, or the difference between it and οὐσία... the consideration of these vexed questions tending not to the opening of the design of the apostle and meaning of the Holy Ghost in this place, I shall not insist upon them.”<sup>32</sup> He does explain the use of ὑπόστασις here as an essential “agreement, likeness, and conveniency between the Father and Son.”

The hypostasis of the Father is the Father himself. Hereof, or of him, is the Son said to be the ‘express image.’ As is the Father, so is the Son. And this agreement, likeness, and conveniency between the Father and Son, is essential; not accidental, as those things are between relations finite and corporeal. What the Father is, doth, hath, that the Son is, doth, hath; or else the Father, as the Father, could not be fully satisfied in him, nor represented by him.<sup>33</sup>

Owen does note the interplay between the person and the essence in the Godhead when commenting on the author’s description of Christ as ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης and χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ:

I say, whatever can be proved to be signified by them or contained in them, if we will keep ourselves within the bounds of that holy reverence which becomes us in the contemplation of the majesty of God, may be applied unto the nature of God as existing in the person of the Son. He is in his person distinct from the Father, another not the Father; but yet the same in nature, and this in all glorious properties and excellencies. This oneness in nature, and distinction in person, may be well shadowed out by these expressions.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 16.

<sup>32</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:95. See also, John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul, being fourteene* (London, 1631), 584.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:95.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:91.

## 2.2 The Divinity of Christ

The eternal divinity of Christ, especially as this impacted the nature and extent of his satisfaction, was, of course, the crux in the orthodox-Socinian debate. The Socinians, while bestowing lavish praise on the person, work, and exaltation of Christ, refused to see his divinity as essential to him, but rather believed that the most high God (the Father) bestowed divinity upon him. According to the *Racovian Catechism*, Christ is called “God” in the Bible because the true Creator and Ruler of the universe gave to him “some kind of superior authority either in heaven, or on earth among men, or power superior to all things human, or authority to sit in judgement upon other men, and is thus rendered in some sense, a partaker of the Deity of the one God.”<sup>35</sup> Commentating on this passage, the Socinian Jonasz Schlichting claims that “divinity” was simply a title given to Christ when he ascended into heaven.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Christ’s deity is considered in terms of standing, status, or office, but not essentially or according to his nature. One major defense of this position for the Racovians is the scriptural description of Christ being elevated to honor and glory by the Father. In their interpretation, the human Christ was adopted by God following his work on earth to a divine position; this involved, not a transformation of his human nature, but a change in his office.

In *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, Owen rejects this theory on theological and scriptural grounds. Owen acknowledges that the office of mediator which Christ held was different than that of the Father, yet denies that this implies a distinction in essence.

Distinction and inequality in respect of office in Christ doth not in the least take away equality and sameness with the Father in respect of nature and essence. A son

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<sup>35</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, 35. See also, 141; Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 17; Crell, *Two Books*, 107.

<sup>36</sup> Jonasz Schlichting, *Commentaria posthuma, in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros : cuncta hactenus inedita : in dous tomos distincta* (Irenopoli [Amsterdam], 1656), 345-346.

of the same nature with his father, and therein equal to him, may in office be his inferior, his subject.<sup>37</sup>

That Jesus Christ as mediator, and in respect of the work of redemption and salvation of the church to him committed, was made Lord by the appointment, authority, and designation of his Father, we do not say was the opinion of Paul, but is such a divine truth as we have the plentiful testimony of the Holy Ghost unto... That his condescension unto office is inconsistent with his divine essence is yet to be proved.<sup>38</sup>

As to the notion that Christ was only adopted as a divine being, and, while retaining a human nature, is nevertheless to be worshipped, Owen is repulsed : “Such miserable plunges doth Satan drive men into whose eyes he hath once blinded, that the glorious light of the gospel should not shine into them!”<sup>39</sup> After dismissing the inappropriate interpretation of the biblical texts the Socinians used in support of their “adoption theory,” Owen links, via the citation of numerous texts, Christ’s Sonship with his eternal generation, the generation of the Father’s own essence. “He who is the true, proper, only-begotten Son of God, of the living God, he is begotten of the essence of God his Father, and is his Son by virtue of that generation.”<sup>40</sup> “He who is the Son of God, begotten of his Father by an eternal communication of his divine essence, he is the Son begotten of the essence of the Father ; for these terms are the same, and of the same importance.”<sup>41</sup> Owen elaborated on this position numerous times in his Christological writings – most fully in his short work *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity* – consistently demonstrating the theological inadequacy and erroneous biblical interpretations of the Socinian opinion.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:171.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:173.

<sup>39</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:182.

<sup>40</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:184.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:189.

<sup>42</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, esp. 2:387-399. Owen, *The Person of Christ*, 1:97.

Now in his exposition of Hebrews, Owen again stresses the exegetical basis for asserting the divinity of Christ. In Owen's opinion, that basis is blatantly evident throughout the opening verses of the epistle.

The most visible example of Christ's divinity for Owen is found in the ascription of the phrase ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας to the Son in verse 2. Following from the previous descriptions of the Son as the vehicle of the Father's revelation, Owen explains this phrase as

that the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the great prophet of his church under the new testament, the only revealer of the will of the Father, as the Son and Wisdom of God, made the worlds, and all things contained in them. And therein, — we have an illustrious testimony given to the eternal Godhead and power of the Son of God; for 'he who made all things is God,' as the apostle elsewhere affirms.<sup>43</sup>

Thus the apostle having declared the honour of the Son as mediator, in that he was made heir of all, adds thereunto his excellency in himself from his eternal power and Godhead; which he not only asserts, but gives evidence unto by an argument from the works of creation.<sup>44</sup>

The Reformed exposition of this verse is nearly uniform in asserting that the divinity of Christ is directly implied by the author of the epistle in his description of the Son as creating the world. For most, the biblical phrase acts with an inescapable, logical force: if Christ created the world, then by definition (i.e., the world was created by God) Christ is divine.<sup>45</sup>

The force of this logic compelled opponents of the Trinitarian doctrine to explore alternative ways of understanding the passage, and Owen is determined to show that their efforts are exegetically unsustainable. He succinctly summarizes their efforts, "that which some men design in their wresting of this place, is to deface the illustrious testimony

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<sup>43</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:77.

<sup>44</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:76.

<sup>45</sup> See especially, Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 8; Jones, *A Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 57; Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 4; Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 14-15; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:809.

given in it unto the eternal deity of the Son of God.”<sup>46</sup> He first notes the proposition of the Transylvanian Unitarian György Enyedi (d.1597), who asserts that Christ was not the creator of the world, but that Christ was the intended beneficiary of that creation, that God created the world for Christ’s sake. Hugo Grotius, whose annotations on the Bible had previously received a scathing review by Owen,<sup>47</sup> follows this opinion by rendering the phrase δι’ οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας as *propter quem et mundum condiderat*, “on account of whom also he established the world.” Claiming Beza’s translation of Romans 6:4 as support, Grotius asserts that “Videtur δι’ οὗ hic recte accipi posse pro δι’ οὗ ; nam sicut διὰ cum accusativo interdum est *per*, ut alibi ostendimus, et amplius probatur per locum Apoc. 4:11, 12:11, 13:14, ita διὰ in genitivo interdum valet *propter*.”<sup>48</sup> Therefore, according to Grotius, the biblical phrase testifies to the love of God towards the Messiah, in that for his sake he made the world, and that the phrase says nothing about the Messiah himself. Owen replies,

It is manifest that the whole strength of this interpretation lies in this, that δι’ οὗ may be taken for δι’ οὗ, – “by whom,” instead of “for whom.” But neither is it proved that in any other place these expressions are equipollent; nor, if that could be supposed, is there any reason offered why the one of them should in this place be put for the other.<sup>49</sup>

Owen then goes on to list various grammatical reasons why reading δι’ οὗ as the accusative δι’ οὗ is inappropriate, frees Beza from misinterpretation, and concludes that, in the absence of “some cogent reason from the text” wherein this abnormal use should

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<sup>46</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:69.

<sup>47</sup> John Owen, *A Review of the Annotations of Hugo Grotius*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 12 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

<sup>48</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 7 vols. (Groningen: Zuidema, 1641; repr. 1829), 7:352.

<sup>49</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:69.

be asserted, any interpretation which fails to identify Christ as the creator of the worlds is brazenly false.<sup>50</sup>

Naturally enough, Owen also finds exception with the interpretation advanced by the Socinians. They held that the objects in mind here, which Christ created, are not the material worlds, but the new creation of the saints. Thus, Christ's creative sphere is rooted in the conversion of men's souls, the transformation of a sinner into a saint, the renewal of believer, but not the actual heavens and earth. *The Racovian Catechism* objects to citing this verse as proof of Christ's divinity, offering instead that the words "may be asserted in reference to mankind, or understood of the world to come."<sup>51</sup> Crell defends this interpretation at length:

God by the mediation or meane of Christ did reforme and restore mankinde who is the chiefest part of the world, by giving him a new state and condition by a new Covenant. For the Hebrews who have no or few compound verbs, say a thing is made, when in regard of some qualities it is altered or renewed, or made otherwise then it was before, by assuming a new forme or fashion for a better condition. So we are said to be created in Christ to good workes, and we are called a new creature; not in regard of any new creation, or new nature; but because of new relations unto God, or new qualities in our selves.<sup>52</sup>

As he did with Grotius's interpretation, Owen systematically proceeds to demonstrate the clear inadequacies of this exposition. He uses grammatical arguments, comparisons with other texts, a lexical search through the Hebrew and LXX Bibles, and an awareness of the original context of OT writings to refute the Socinian exegesis. Owen concludes that the Socinian handling of this passage "sinks under its own weakness and absurdity," and that consequently, there is no reason "to wrest from believers this illustrious testimony given to the eternal deity of the Son of God."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:69-70.

<sup>51</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, 94.

<sup>52</sup> Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 71-72; Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:73. See also, Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:278-279.

Owen cites five reasons advanced by Schlichting in support of the Socinian position, and then rejects each in turn, demonstrating their exegetical fallibility.<sup>54</sup> (1) Schlichting had argued that, unlike this ‘new’ creation, the old creation was not made by any intermediate cause. Owen counters that Hebrews 1:2 does not state that Christ was an intermediate cause – the Socinian was assuming that which he was trying to prove. (2) The apostle’s failure to mention specific elements of the Genesis record is a clear sign that the old creation is not intended here. Owen responds with the analogy of Scripture: references to the old creation are frequently made without any explicit allusion to the Genesis account. (3) The use of the article, τοὺς αἰῶνας, identifies a new creation, distinct from the old. But Owen demonstrates that such an assessment of the grammar cannot be sustained in light of other biblical usage. (4) In the LXX, Schlichting notes, אֲבִי־עֵד in Isaiah 9:5 is translated Πατήρ μέλλοντος αἰῶνας, or “Father of the world to come.” Owen argues that there is no connection between the two verses, except the use of the same word in different contexts for different purposes. In addition, Schlichting employs a corrupt translation – existing versions of the LXX do not render the verse as he has cited it. (5) Finally, in Isaiah 51:16, according to the Vulgate, the release of captives from Babylon is a “planting of the heavens and laying the foundations of the earth” by the prophet; so similarly in Hebrews, a new spiritual creation is made by Christ. Owen denounces this interpretation because of its use of the corrupt Vulgate as an authoritative exegetical source, the failure to grasp the context of the Isaiah passage, an inadequate understanding of the allegorical nature of the OT pericope, and an inaccurate linking of the two texts.

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<sup>54</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:71-72. See also, Schlichting, *Commentaria posthuma, in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros*, 345-348.

Further, Owen offers six reasons why the Hebrews' text cannot support the Socinian position:<sup>55</sup> first, the Socinian interpretation opposes the very scope and design of the apostle in this place – to express the excellency of the Son of God. Second, the passage is written in a didactic style, and should be understood “plainly,” the words in their “usual and proper” signification. Third, the grammar, especially the aorist tense of the verb, ἐποίησε, indicates action in the past. Fourth, nowhere in the OT or NT do the words αἰών and αἰῶνας, or the Hebrew עֶלְמִים and עֶלְמִים, taken absolutely as they are here, ever signify the new creation, but instead they always refer to the whole created world. And, fifth, whenever the Messianic age is referred to with the word αἰών, the specification, “to come,” is always added, an identifying label missing in 1:2. Sixth, the context of Hebrews 1 “utterly refuseth this gloss,” because the Socinian interpretation is contrary to the sense of the overall passage.

Finally, with regard to the apostle's use of the noun αἰών, Owen asserts that the word does speak of the creation; αἰών “denotes the fabric of the world by a metonymy of the adjunct” – a reference to the successive duration of the created universe. Owen supports this meaning by examining the lexical nuances of αἰών and עֶלְמִים, by identifying scriptural and Targumic use, and by tracing its definition through medieval Judaism.<sup>56</sup>

The orthodox exegetes, however, are careful to clear up a possible misinterpretation in the idea that the world was created by Christ. Contrary to Crell's exposition, where Christ acted as a “mediation” or “meanes” of God's creative act, the Puritan interpreters resisted this “instrumental” understanding of Christ's participation in creation. That is, Christ did not serve simply as the instrument through which God fashioned the worlds,

<sup>55</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:73-74.

<sup>56</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:74-76.



but was himself an equal efficient cause with the Father in creation. Owen notes that “in the creation of all things... God did immediately by the Son; not as a subordinate instrument, but as the principal efficient, being his own power and wisdom.”<sup>57</sup>

Δι’ οὗ, “by whom;” not as an *instrument*, or an inferior, intermediate, created cause: for then also must he be created by himself, seeing all things that were made were made by him, John i.3, but as God’s own eternal Word, Wisdom, and Power, Prov. viii.22-24, John i.1, – the same individual creating act being the work of Father and Son, whose power and wisdom being one and the same undivided, so also are the works which outwardly proceed from them. And as the joint working of Father and Son doth not infer any other subordination but that of subsistence and order, so the preposition διὰ doth not of itself intimate the subjection of an instrumental cause, being used sometimes to express the work of the Father himself, Gal. i.1.<sup>58</sup>

In making this distinction and asserting Christ as the efficient, not instrumental, cause, Owen stands with the bulk of the English Reformed expositors. *The Westminster Annotations* state, “It is not as by an instrument or inferior cause, but by Him as by his eternall wisdome, and by way of a conjoyned cooperating and equal cause.” Likewise, Gouge writes, “where it is said that God, *by him*, made the worlds, the Son is not set out as a mere instrument in this work, but as a primary and principal agent therein, together with the Father.” And so with other exegetes.<sup>59</sup>

The divinity of Christ is not only evident in this passage by virtue of his creation of the worlds; Owen also sees his divinity stressed in the author’s assertion that Christ was appointed heir over πάντων, “all things.” For Owen, “all things” necessarily includes all manner of persons and things. Since angels, both good and bad, are persons, they are part of the dominion of the risen Christ. His lordship over all angels lies “in his divine nature and his creation of angels, over whom as mediator he is made Lord.”<sup>60</sup> In addition,

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:97.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:74.

<sup>59</sup> *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*, MM2v; Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 14. Also, Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 5; Jones, *A Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 57; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:809.

<sup>60</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:51. See also, 52.

Christ's lordship over the angels is demonstrated by the fact that he sustains all the unfallen angels "to preserve the untainted part of the creation from ruin."<sup>61</sup> Owen goes on to make similar arguments concerning the fallen angels, both elect and reprobate man, and all manner of human institutions, over which he is Lord, in part by virtue of his deity.<sup>62</sup>

In claiming this expansive understanding of πάντων, Owen is explicitly rejecting the limitations placed on this word in *The Racovian Catechism*: "all things" does not mean "in this place, anymore than in many others, all things universally, without exception; but may be referred to those things alone that pertain to the kingdom of Christ, which is here, in the opinion of some very learned men, the subject of discourse."<sup>63</sup> That is, the Socinians argued that Christ was appointed heir over ecclesiastical matters alone, and that this is the proper way to understand πάντων here. Owen, however, shows that the neuter gender use of πᾶν denotes all things absolutely, and produces five arguments in support of this use of the word here. These five arguments reflect five different exegetical techniques which collectively are used by Owen to elucidate the text's true meaning. – 1. πᾶν is used similarly in other passages (linguistic/grammatical analysis), 2. this meaning best suits the author's purpose (discussion of the scope of the passage), 3. a broad understanding of the word properly fits the following phrase concerning the creation of the world (a concern for how the immediate context shapes meaning), 4. the inheritance fulfills God's promise to Abraham (using Scripture to interpret Scripture),

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<sup>61</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:52.

<sup>62</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:52-69. See also, Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 585, where "heir" is related to Christ's humanity not divinity.

<sup>63</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, 96.

and 5. it is consistent with the overall assertion of Christ's deity (the overarching control exerted on interpretation by the analogy of faith).<sup>64</sup>

### 2.3 The Hypostatic Union of Christ's Person

In expounding upon Hebrews 1:1-3 and its Trinitarian implications, Owen found it necessary not only to speak of the divinity of the Son, but also of the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ. Again, these are not ideas Owen seeks to impose upon the text as much as they are solutions to problems which naturally arise as he seeks to faithfully express the author's original intent. Additionally, Owen's appeal to this union serves as one more piece of evidence against the notion that Puritan exegetes were primarily concerned to use biblical texts simply to justify dogmatic issues, for although Owen refers to the human/divine natures in Christ numerous times, he never uses this text as a platform to expound upon the exact character of the union of Christ's natures – he simply assumes it. His unwillingness to explore the fundamental theological questions concerning the union of natures in Christ's person at this point derives from the fact that the text itself does not address these intricacies, and hence does not merit exposition at this point. In other words, for Owen the exegete, the text demands the use of the dual nature concept in order to properly understand the author, without giving him the right (or the proper material) to address the topic extensively.

Owen first has cause to mention the human nature of Christ in discussing how the Father reveals his will in these latter days through the Son. If, as Owen argued previously, the Son mentioned in verse 2 is the divine second person of the Trinity, why did the Father have to reveal his will through the Son? Certainly the Son would have had a full understanding of the Father's will. And when the Father spoke to the prophets in

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<sup>64</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:42-43.

the Old Testament, was the Son not present as a divine being as he was in the New Testament? These sorts of questions supported the Socinian notion that the Son was not divine in the first place. Thus, for Socinian exegetes like Johann Crell, the contrast between the Son in the New Testament and the prophets in the Old is a comparative difference, not a qualitative one: "Not that the prophets were no way the sons of God, but because in comparison of Christ they were not so accounted. For Christ by whom God spake the Gospel was more eminently the Son of God than any of the prophets."<sup>65</sup> Crell saw the difference between God's revelation via the prophets and God's revelation via the Son to be, not a matter of nature or substance, but of role. The title of "the Son" does not identify a different essence, but a different office. He states, "not that God hath not other sons, but that he hath none such as he."<sup>66</sup>

These same questions concerning the Father's revelation to the Son, however, enabled Owen to distinguish between Christ's human and divine natures.

There is a difference between the Son of God revealing the will of God in his *divine person* to the prophets, of which we have spoken, and the Son of God as *incarnate* revealing the will of God immediately to the church. This is the difference here insisted on by the apostle. Under the old testament the Son of God, in his divine person, instructed the prophets in the will of God, and gave them that Spirit on whose divine inspiration their infallibility did depend, 1 Pet. i. 11; but now, in the revelation of the gospel, taking his own humanity, or our nature hypostatically united unto him, in the room of all the "internuncii," or prophetic messengers he had made use of, he taught it immediately himself.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, Owen concludes that the Father revealed his will to the church via the *human* nature of Christ:

The Lord Christ discharged his office and work of revealing the will of the Father in and by his human nature, that nature wherein he "dwelt among us," John i. 14; for although the person of Christ, God and man, was our mediator, Acts xx. 28, John i.

<sup>65</sup> Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 70; Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 2.

<sup>66</sup> Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 71; Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:23.

14, 18, yet his human nature was that wherein he discharged the duties of his office, and the "principium quod" of all his mediatory acts, 1 Tim. ii. 5.<sup>68</sup>

While Owen does not discuss the specifics of how the union between Christ's two natures was achieved, the issue of God's revelation through the human Christ raised questions about their interaction which, in Owen's exegesis, was directly related to the interpretation of the text. Thus, he deals with the presence of divine knowledge in Christ's human nature. He rejects the idea that Christ's humanity held all possible knowledge by virtue of its personal union with the divine Word. "This is wholly inconsistent with the many testimonies, before rehearsed, of the Father's revealing himself unto him after that union."<sup>69</sup> Rather, Owen believes that Christ's knowledge was perfect, but limited.

The Lord Jesus Christ, by virtue of the union of his person, was from the womb filled with a perfection of gracious light and knowledge of God and his will. An actual exercise of that principle of holy wisdom wherewith he was endued, in his infancy, as afterwards, he had not; nor had he in his human nature an absolutely infinite comprehension of all individual things, past, present, and to come... but he was furnished with all that wisdom and knowledge which the human nature was capable of, both as to principle and exercise, in the condition wherein it was, without destroying its finite being and variety of conditions.<sup>70</sup>

Again, Owen's discussion of the union in Christ's person of the divine and human natures is a direct result of his attempt to explain the apostle's writing in verses 1-2. Having determined that the Son through whom the Father revealed his will was divine, Owen explains the need of the Father's role in revelation by discussing the limited character of the human nature of Christ. Thus, Owen understands God's revelation to the church as originating with the Father, progressively given to the humanity of the Son, and ultimately communicated to man through him.

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<sup>68</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:30.

<sup>69</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:29.

<sup>70</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:28.

Owen further distinguishes between Christ's human and divine natures in his exposition of the phrases ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης and χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, in verse 3. Whereas Owen's in-depth analysis of how the Father revealed his will through the humanity of Christ was unique among seventeenth-century exegetes, many contemporary expositors wondered if these phrases referred to Christ's humanity or his deity. The Socinians, of course, argued that the fact that the Son was God's brightness or his image by definition distinguished him from God, and hence meant that the Son was not divine. Crell writes,

no image is the same essence in number with that whereof it is the image, otherwise it would be the image of itself. Wherefore since Christ is the image of God, he cannot be the same substance in number with God, and consequently not be God, namely, the most high God.<sup>71</sup>

Crell anticipates the Reformed counter that Christ as the second person of the Trinity is the image of the first person. He answers that "a person is in vain distinguished from his own essence."<sup>72</sup> Similarly, *The Racovian Catechism* claims that it cannot be proved from Christ's being the image of God "that he possesses a divine nature : indeed the contrary is to be inferred."<sup>73</sup> It is evident, according to the Socinians, that as the image of God, Christ cannot be God himself. Rather, as the image of God, the Son is the perfect revealer of God and his will.

Orthodox exegetes, however, handled the issue not only by emphasizing the distinction between the Father and the Son, but sometimes by also differentiating between the human and divine natures in Christ. There was a wide variety of opinions concerning how Christ was the brightness of God's glory and the image of his person. A number of English Reformed commentators had insisted that these descriptions identified

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<sup>71</sup> Crell, *Two Books*, 139.

<sup>72</sup> Crell, *Two Books*, 140.

<sup>73</sup> *The Racovian Catechism*, 140.

the divine nature of Christ, that the second person of the Trinity was, *in essence*, the brightness and image of the first person. Thus, the Scottish exegete David Dickson writes,

The Father is one person, and the Son is one other person of the Godhead, having his own proper subsistence distinct from the Father. The Son resembleth the Father, fully, and perfectly; so that there is no perfection in the Father, but the same is substantially in the Son: as the Father is eternal, omnipotent, omnipresent, infinite in wisdom, goodness, mercy, holiness, and all other perfections; so is the Son omnipotent, eternal, and all that the Father is.<sup>74</sup>

Similarly, in his critique of Johann Crell's commentary, George Lawson notes that "to be the brightness of his Fathers Glory, and the express image of his person, agrees to Him from eternity. For in these words we may observe his eternal generation and production."<sup>75</sup> These opinions, that "brightness" and "image" refer primarily to the divine nature of Christ, is echoed in *The Dutch Annotations* and the commentaries of other prominent English Puritans.<sup>76</sup> Owen further identifies this position with such prominent Continental exegetes as Calvin, Brentius, Gomar, Pareau, Estius, "and sundry others."<sup>77</sup>

Matthew Poole, however, picks up a suggestion by Beza that the terms refer, not to the divine nature, but to the human nature of Christ. Thus, *in his humanity*, Christ is the brightness and image of the Father.

He is not the character of the Godhead, or of the Divine essence, but of the Father, the personal subsistence in the Deity. He is one and the same God with the Father, but his character as God is a Father, so that who seeth him seeth his Father.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 8-9.

<sup>75</sup> Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 5.

<sup>76</sup> *The Dutch Annotations*; Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 15; Dering, *XXVII Lectures*, B.ii; Jones, *A Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 58.

<sup>77</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:89.

<sup>78</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:810. See also, Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:89.

The Westminster Assembly's *Annotations* recognize that the phrases may be taken either for Christ's divine or human natures and consequently leave both options as possibilities.

Accordingly, ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης and χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, can be

taken either in respect of his deitie, thereby is signified, both the manner of his essentiall generation; viz. That it was eternall from his Father, as also his consubstantiality with the Father; that is, that he is of the same essence with him: or else in respect of his incarnation, or manifestation in the flesh, because in Christ manifest in the flesh the glory and majestie of God the Father shined forth, which otherwise was invisible, and could not be beholden.<sup>79</sup>

Owen, however, understands these biblical phrases in a different way. Maintaining that the intent of the author was not to discuss either of Christ's two natures, but rather his *person*, Owen believes that the phrases may in some sense have reference to either or both of Christ's natures, thus echoing the Reformed orthodox rendering of the *communicatio idiomatum in concreto*.

It is not the direct and immediate design of the apostle to treat absolutely of either *nature* of Christ, his divine or human, but only of his *person*. Hence, though the things which he mentioneth and expresseth may some of them belong unto, or be the properties of his divine nature, some of his human, yet none of them are spoken of *as such*, but are all considered as belonging unto his person... the truth is, he intends not to speak directly and absolutely of either nature of Christ; but treating *ex professo* of his person, some things that he mentions concerning him have a special foundation in and respect unto his divine nature, some in and unto his human, as must every thing that is spoken of him.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, Owen believes that the exegete cannot determine whether ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης and χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, deal specifically with the human or divine nature, since the author of Hebrews did not have either in mind. It is true, says Owen, that the descriptions speak of qualities which "in a great measure depended on and flowed from his divine nature,"<sup>81</sup> yet they are not inconsistent with Christ's humanity. Hence,

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<sup>79</sup> *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*, MM2v. See also, Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 585.

<sup>80</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:90.

<sup>81</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:90.



that the first application of the words, namely, to the divine nature of Christ, and ... the second, considering him as incarnate, are very well consistent... The first direction, then, given unto our faith in these words, is by what the Son is in respect of the Father, namely, “the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person;” whence it follows that in him, being incarnate, the Father’s glory and his person are expressed and manifested unto us.<sup>82</sup>

What one learns about the doctrine of the hypostatic union of Christ’s person from Owen’s exegesis of these verses is that in Christ’s person there is a union of the divine and human natures. This observation is necessary given his desire to properly understand the text he is examining. However, the details of that union are not fully developed by Owen here precisely because the biblical material does not warrant an in-depth discussion of every theological aspect of that union. Even in areas where such a discussion might be interestingly explored – such as which nature is best understood by the phrases ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης and χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, – Owen’s commitment to the true scope of the text limits the extent to which he investigates broader theological aspects of the issue. The comment by John Mayer is instructive in this regard:

The scope of this place is not to set forth the Trinity in it selfe, but how Christ hath beene exhibited unto us to bee seene, and the Father in him, yet the heresie of Arius and Sabellius may sufficiently be confuted hence, because Christ is plainly taught to bee God, and two hypostases and here set forth.<sup>83</sup>

This commitment to an exposition which stays within the bounds of the text itself is particularly evident when Owen’s obvious interest in the theological aspects of the person of Christ is recognized. Very frequently in his writings, Owen asserts that one’s understanding of the person of Christ is crucial to all Christian thought. He claims that this doctrine is “the head of all truth,” “the foundation of the church,” “the first and principal object of that faith wherewith we are required to believe in him,” and that all other doctrines are “to be esteemed fables, as the Socinians contend, if what we believe

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<sup>82</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:91.

<sup>83</sup> Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 585.

concerning the person of Christ be so also.”<sup>84</sup> In *The Person of Christ*, Owen explores in detail the fine nuances of the doctrine of Christ’s incarnation: the purpose and necessity of the incarnation, the assumption of human nature by the second person of the Trinity, the lack of personhood in the pre-assumed human nature, the active and passive aspects of the assumption, the character of the union of the two natures in that single person, the mutual communication of the distinct natures by virtue of that union, the limits of that communication, and other aspects of the doctrine.<sup>85</sup> Similar aspects of the incarnation doctrine are expressed and discussed at some length in *A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity, Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu: or the Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647), and *The Glory of Christ*, while Owen responds to the Socinian rejection of the orthodox position from both a theological and scriptural standpoint in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*. Owen also includes a section in his *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit* detailing the role of the Spirit in the Incarnation process.<sup>86</sup>

It is important to note, however, that Owen opposes the kind of speculation which he believes was characteristic of the medieval theologians – the very speculation which the post-Reformation orthodox theologians are frequently accused of falling into. Owen describes his intent this way:

I shall herein wholly avoid the curious inquiries, bold conjectures, and unwarrantable determinations of the schoolmen and some others. For many of them, designing to explicate this mystery, by exceeding the bounds of Scripture light and sacred sobriety, have obscured it. Endeavoring to render all things plain unto reason, they have expressed many things unsound as unto faith, and fallen into manifold contradictions among themselves. Hence Aquinas affirms, that three of the

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<sup>84</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:413; Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 1:311; Owen, *The Person of Christ*, 1:127, 84.

<sup>85</sup> Owen, *The Person of Christ*, 1:86-93, and especially, chapters 16-18.

<sup>86</sup> Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:413-418; John Owen, *Salus Electorum, Sanguis Jesu: or, The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 10 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 167, 174-175; Owen, *The Glory of Christ*, 1:309-322; Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:passim, esp. 12:73-76, 209-212; Owen, *Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 3:160-168. See also, Owen, *Of Communion with God*, 2:51.

ways of declaring the *hypostatical union* which are proposed by the Master of the Sentences, are so far from probable opinions, as that they are downright heresies. I shall therefore confine myself, in the explication of this mystery, unto the propositions of divine revelation, with the just and necessary expositions of them.<sup>87</sup>

At least in his own judgment, Owen's theological descriptions concerning the person of Christ did not stray from the biblical presentation of the material.

As demonstrated in his Hebrews commentary, Owen's willingness to look to established doctrine as a guide to proper exegesis did not mean that his biblical interpretation was simply a process of dogmatic proof texting, or scriptural analysis done simply to support some overarching theological grid. Rather, the analogy of faith – in this instance, the doctrine of the person of Christ – limited one's exegetical options; the nature of the biblical exposition remained grounded in, and restricted to an interpretation of, the literal words of the text itself.

#### 2.4 Unity and Economy in the Godhead

One of the major aspects of the doctrine of the Trinity which garners significant attention during the course of Owen's exegesis is the manner in which the separate members of the Godhead interrelate. Throughout his interpretation Owen refutes the Socinian understanding of subordination, where the most high God elevates the human Christ to divine status, making the Son a lesser deity than the Father himself. Crell summarizes this kind of relationship in the Godhead: "divinity or Godhead was bestowed on Christ, of the Father, and consequently that he was made a God by the Father. From whence it also followeth, that Christ is not the most high God."<sup>88</sup>

Alternatively, Owen, like most orthodox interpreters, saw the introduction of ἐν υἱῷ in

<sup>87</sup> Owen, *The Person of Christ*, 1:224.

<sup>88</sup> Crell, *Two Books*, 107. See also, Biddle, *A Confession of Faith*, 17; *The Racovian Catechism*, 33-35, 141.

verse 2 as a reference to the divine second person of the Trinity who shared the same essence with the Father and the Holy Spirit. The *Annotations* from Westminster well expresses the distinction between Christ as the Son and other humans as sons of God. Christ is “his naturall Sonne, coessentiall, or of the same essence with the Father, called therefore the onely begotten, for others are called the sonnes of God by grace and adoption.”<sup>89</sup>

In discussing the identity of the Son, Owen emphasizes the distinction which exists between the persons in the Godhead; but just as definitively he argues for the equality of the persons in their essence.

That Jesus Christ in his divine nature, as he was the eternal Word and Wisdom of the Father, not by a voluntary communication, but eternal generation, had an omniscieny of the whole nature and will of God, as the Father himself hath, because the same with that of the Father, their will and wisdom being the same. This is the blessed συμπεριχώρησις, or in-being of each person, the one in the other, by virtue of their oneness in the same nature.<sup>90</sup>

Pertaining to the doctrine of the Trinity, Owen makes three explicit points here: (1) the source of the Son’s divinity is not adoptionism, but eternal generation, (2) the Father and the Son share perfectly all the qualities of the divine nature, and (3) the manner of their inner-relation is their “in-being” of each other. The first two are traditionally held concepts and are echoed variously throughout other Reformed exegetical works on Hebrews. However, when it comes to discussing the nature of the interrelationship between the Father and Son in light of verses 1-3, most English orthodox commentators eagerly look to the “brightness” terminology of verse 3 and draw out the analogy between the sun and its beams with the Father and his Son. Dickson sees in the sun-beam

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<sup>89</sup> *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*, MM2v. Also, Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 12-13; Jones, *A Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 56; Dering, *XXVII Lectures*, B.ii.

<sup>90</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:30. See also his arguments of the unity of God in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:86-88, and in *The Vindication of the Trinity*, where God’s one-ness “may be

metaphor an illustration of the connection between the first and second persons of the Trinity. "As the beams of light have their original from the sun, so hath Christ his original of the Father, and is unseparable from him : for as the sun was never without its light, so neither was the Father ever without the Son; but coeternally with him."<sup>91</sup>

Owen, however, does not believe that the author of the epistle had this kind of analogy in mind, and therefore, even if suitable parallels can be drawn, they are not appropriate for the exegete to make in this context. Owen is content at this point in his exegesis to state the mystery of three in one without specifying the manner of the Godhead's inner relationship. "[The Son] is in his person distinct from the Father, another not the Father; but yet the same in nature, and this in all glorious properties and excellencies," and "that he is one distinct from God the Father, related unto him, and partaker of his glory is clearly asserted in these words; and more is not intended in them."<sup>92</sup>

While he does not feel as though the text allows him to explore explicitly the manner of the relation in the Godhead, Owen does state in more definitive terms his understanding of the inbeing of the Father and Son.

As is the Father, so is the Son. And this agreement, likeness, and conveniency between the Father and Son, is essential; not accidental, as those things are between relations finite and corporeal. What the Father is, doth, hath, that the Son is, doth, hath; or else the Father, as the Father, could not be fully satisfied in him, nor represented by him.<sup>93</sup>

All the glorious perfections of the nature of God do belong unto and dwell in the person of the Son. Were it not so, he could not gloriously represent unto us the

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uncontrollably evinced by the light of reason itself," as well as "confirmed unto us by divine revelation," 2:381, 407.

<sup>91</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 8. See also, Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 584.

<sup>92</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:91, 92.

<sup>93</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:95.

person of the Father; nor by the contemplation of him could we be led to an acquaintance with the person of the Father.<sup>94</sup>

And specifically Owen writes of

the essential inbeing of the Father and Son. This our Saviour expresseth, John x. 38, "The Father is in me, and I in him." The same essential properties and nature being in each of the persons, by virtue thereof their persons also are said to be in each other. The person of the Son is in the person of the Father, not as such, not in or by its own personality, but by union of its nature and essential properties, which are not alike, as the persons are, but the same in the one and the other.<sup>95</sup>

Thus, like other Reformed commentators and theologians, Owen stresses the one-ness of the divine essence and the three-ness of the divine persons with a strong emphasis on their mutual circumincession.<sup>96</sup>

In addition to finding cause to discuss the unity of the Godhead amid the distinction of persons, the economy of the Trinity is a frequent component of Puritan exegesis of Hebrews 1:1-3. Reformed commentators had cause to mention the order of divine action largely in connection with the phrase in verse 2, ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας. At this point, Matthew Poole notes that Christ acts not as the Father's instrument in creation, but as a principal agent with the Father, though "second in working as in relation."<sup>97</sup> When commenting here, David Dickson emphasizes three aspects of the author's words:

Then, 1. Christ is God, Creator of all things. 2. He is a distinct person from the Father; by whom the Father made all. 3. That which the Father doth, the Son doth

<sup>94</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:97.

<sup>95</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:98.

<sup>96</sup> See Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:408; Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:73. Also, Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. J. Dennison (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), III.xxiii.13 and III.xxv.1; Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity consisting of Three Bookes: The First of which Handling the Scripture or Word of God, Treateth of its Divine Authority, the Canonick Bookes, the Authentick Edition, and Severall Versions, the End, Properties, and Interpretation of Scripture: The Second Handling God Sheweth that there is a God, and What He is, in His Essence and Several Attributes, and Likewise the Distinction of Persons in the Divine Essence: The Third Handleth the Three Principall Works of God, Decree, Creation and Providence* (London, 1646), 136; Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Redelijke Godsdienst* (Utrecht, 1700; repr. *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, 4 vols., Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 1:145-146; Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity* (1692; repr. London: Banner of Truth, 1958), 77; all describe the mutual inbeing of the three persons.

<sup>97</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:809.

the same; yet so, as in order of working, the Father is first, and the Son is next; working with, and from the Father.<sup>98</sup>

The order of divine action in the Godhead plays an even more crucial role in Owen's understanding of Hebrews 1:1-3. This is because of Owen's insistence that  $\delta$   $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  refers to the person of the Father, and that he initiates all divine revelation. The way that Owen makes sense of the fact that God speaks through the Son, yet the Son is fully divine, is first, that  $\delta$   $\theta\epsilon\acute{o}\varsigma$  refers to the person of the Father, and second, that there is a definitive order of action within the Godhead. Revelation of God's will begins with the Father: "that the whole mystery of his will, antecedently to the revelation of it, is said to be *hid in God*; that is, the Father."<sup>99</sup> After noting the eternal presence of both the Son and the Spirit with the Father, yet Owen claims a certain primacy for the Father – not in terms of quality, but in terms of order both in subsistence and in action.

Yet the rise and spring of this mystery was in the Father; for the *order of acting* in the blessed Trinity follows the *order of subsistence*. As the Father, therefore, is the fountain of the Trinity as to subsistence, so also as to operation. He "hath life in himself;" and "he giveth to the Son to have life in himself," John v. 26. And he doth it by communicating unto him his subsistence by eternal generation. And thence saith the Son, "As my Father worketh, so I work," verse 17. And what he seeth the Father do, that doeth the Son likewise, verse 19; not by imitation, or repetition of the like works, but in the same works in order of nature the will and Wisdom of the Father doth proceed. So also is it in respect of the Holy Ghost, whose order of subsistence denotes that of his operation.<sup>100</sup>

Owen insists throughout his exposition that the revelation of God's will starts with the Father and is then communicated to men through the Son. This is not to minimize either the importance of the Son in revelation, nor to diminish his position in the Godhead. Owen simply finds this to be the most consistent explanation of the text, as well as supportable via the analogies of faith and Scripture.

<sup>98</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 8.

<sup>99</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:34.

<sup>100</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:34-35.

The commission, mission, and furnishing of the Son, as incarnate and mediator, with abilities for the declaration of the mind and will of God unto the church, were peculiarly from the Father... It was from the Father that he heard the word and learned the doctrine that he declared unto the church. And this is asserted wherever there is mention made of the Father's sending, sealing, anointing, commanding, teaching him; of his doing the will, speaking the words, seeking the glory, obeying the commands of him that sent him.<sup>101</sup>

The Son and the Spirit are full partners in revealing God's will to mankind, yet the economy of the divine action begins with the Father:

And therefore, though all declarations of God and his will, from the foundation of the world, were made by the Son, the second person of the Trinity, and his Spirit speaking in the prophets, 1 Pet. i. 11, 12, yet as it was not by him immediately, no more was it absolutely so, but as the great angel and messenger of the covenant, by the will and appointment of the Father.<sup>102</sup>

Owen also discusses the economy within the Godhead when he deals with the description of the Son as the maker of the worlds. Like the other orthodox exegetes, Owen notes that it was not as an instrument or as an inferior, intermediate, or created cause, but as the principal agent, "the same individual creating act being the work of Father and Son." There is an order within the divine acting in creation, but not a subordination – "the joint working of Father and Son doth not infer any other subordination but that of subsistence and order."<sup>103</sup>

Owen's fullest exposition of the economy within the Trinity, however, comes as he is explaining how the Son is the "brightness" of the Father's glory, and how via that brightness we might catch a glimpse of the *inbeing* of the Father and Son.

The Father being thus in the Son, and the Son in the Father, whereby all the glorious properties of the one do shine forth in the other, the *order and economy* of the blessed Trinity in subsistence and operation require that the manifestation and communication of the Father unto us be through and by the Son; for as the Father is the original and fountain of the whole Trinity as to subsistence, so as to operation he works not but by the Son, who, having the divine nature communicated unto him by

<sup>101</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:28-29. See also, 7, 34-35.

<sup>102</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:36.

<sup>103</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:74. See also, 97.



eternal generation, is to communicate the effects of the divine power, wisdom, and goodness, by temporary operation.<sup>104</sup>

As a result of his interpretation of the Son as the brightness of the Father, Owen has cause to note both the equality of persons in the Godhead and also emphasize the economy of the Father eternally generating the Son and initiating divine action. Once again, it is important to recognize that Owen's discussion of the operational subordination within the Godhead is restricted to that which evolves naturally from an exposition of the text. The importance of both the *ad intra* and *ad extra* order and economy of the Trinity is expressed in more detail in many of Owen's works: he distinguishes between the orthodox and Socinian understanding of order or subordination in the Godhead in *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, and argues for *ad intra* subordination in the Son's eternal generation in *The Person of Christ* and *Vindication of the Trinity*. He explicitly makes the connection between divine acts *ad intra* and *ad extra* in *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, where he also cites the general formula *Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa* which restricts the external operations of God so that each act is done by one person with the full concurrence of the other persons.<sup>105</sup> But in his exegetical exposition of this passage, he is carefully reserved; his theological comments are intentionally limited to what he believes is necessary to explore faithfully the true meaning of the text.

### 3. Summary of Trinitarian and Exegetical Observations

In his exegesis of Hebrews 1:1-3, there were numerous opportunities for Owen to find solid scriptural support for the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. In Owen's opinion, the only way to appropriately make sense of the author's words in this passage is to

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<sup>104</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:99.

<sup>105</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, 12:201, 214; Owen, *The Person of Christ*, 1:71, 144-145, 218-219; Owen, *Vindication of the Trinity*, 2:407-409; Owen, *A Discourse on the Holy Spirit*, 3:162. The importance

interpret them in light of classical Trinitarianism. The distinction between persons and the economy of subsistence and action in the Godhead enable him to explain how the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews could speak of God revealing his will through the Son who was himself divine and how the Son is the image and brightness of God. Similarly, the doctrines of the humanity of Christ and the hypostatic union of his person are biblically supported and intricately woven into a proper understanding of the opening verses of this epistle.

Owen's exegetical methodology in this commentary shows his deep ties to both the scholastic precritical interpretative techniques as well as the equally precritical humanistic developments of the prior centuries. His reliance upon the scope of the material and the *analogia fidei* to control his exegetical conclusions, his deductive argumentation, and his pedagogical approach all demonstrate the continuity of hermeneutical methods from the medieval era up through Puritan times. The influence of humanism upon Owen's exegesis is clear from his linguistic and grammatical focus, his attention to lexical, textual and Judaistic concerns, and his rhetorical approach to the entire interpretative process.

Owen's exegetical work demonstrates the seriousness with which at least one orthodox theologian and exegete confronted unorthodox views of the Godhead, and how his own Trinitarianism both guided his exposition of the Bible and was itself derived from the text of Scripture. Unlike the common accusation that the orthodox only used biblical citations to proof text their dogmatic conclusions, Owen's commentary on Hebrews 1:1-3 reflect a reluctance to speak on theological issues which are not directly

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of the order of the work of the Trinity in Owen's soteriology is noted by Carl Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 129-133.

related to the text, while still showing how certain classical theological constructions concerning the Godhead naturally flow from a careful analysis of Scripture.

## Chapter IV

# The Old Testament Citations Their Purpose and Text

### 1. The Purpose of the Old Testament Citations

“There is not any thing in this Epistle that is attended with more difficulty than the citation of the testimonies out of the Old Testament that are made use of in it.”<sup>1</sup> With this observation John Owen begins his analysis of the Old Testament citations which are found sprinkled liberally throughout the Epistle to the Hebrews. Owen, like most commentators ancient and modern, recognize in the epistle a wealth of information concerning the relationship between the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. Hebrews functions as a sort of commentary on the Levitical practices of the Old Testament, relating them to the work of Christ described in the New, and demonstrating the superiority of the Gospel message proclaimed by, and enacted through, Jesus over the message preserved in the writings of the Jewish Scripture (Hebrews 1:1-2). Because of the direct, verbal citations, the numerous allusions to Jewish cultic customs and the christocentric exposition of various practices and persons of the Old Testament, the historical study of the interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews has provided scholars an invaluable resource for exploring the development of the relationship between the testaments.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vols. 17-23, ed. William Goold (1854; repr. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 17:106.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. Dhôtel, “La ‘sanctification’ du Christ d’après Hébreux II.11. Interprétations des Pères,” *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 47 (1959):515-543 and 48 (1960):420-452; Rowan Greer, *The Captain of Our Salvation: A Study in the Patristic Exegesis of Hebrews* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1973); Ceslaus Spicq, *L’Épître aux Hébreux* (Paris, 1952); Kenneth Hagen, *A Theology of Testament in the Young Luther: The Lectures on Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1974); Kenneth Hagen, *Hebrews Commenting from Erasmus to Beze, 1516-1598* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1981); Bruce Demarest, “Hebrews 7:3 : A Crux Interpretum Historically Considered,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 49 (1977):141-162; Bruce Demarest, *The History of the Interpretation of Hebrews 7:1-10 from the Reformation to the Present* (Tubingen: Mohr, 1976).

In the latter portion of the first chapter of Hebrews, Owen confronts a series of Old Testament citations and the exegetical difficulties which inevitably follow. Examining Owen's explanation of these verses offers insight into his exegetical methodology on two levels: first, his interpretation of these verses in their New Testament context touches on his views of textual issues, typology, prophecy, the testament-covenant debate, and other Old/New Testament concerns. Second, Owen's examination of these citations, and the value he places on their use by the author, reflects his assumptions concerning the validity of apostolic exegetical methods – and their enduring usefulness as authoritative examples of the kind of scriptural application which should be normative for the church. His goal in the exposition of the Old Testament quotations is that “we may the better judge of his manner of proceeding in the citing of them, and what rule he observed therein.”<sup>3</sup> As he explores the motive and manner in which the author of the epistle cites Scripture, and the interpretation of the Old Testament texts which naturally accompany their use in his argument in the epistle, Owen identifies and defends the appropriateness of the apostle's exegesis, and by implication offers the apostle's work as an authoritative model for the practice of biblical interpretation.

### 1.1 Authoritative Proof Texts

Most Reformation and post-Reformation interpreters note that the author of Hebrews draws citations from the Old Testament in chapter 1 as proof of his assertion in verse 4 that Christ is far superior to the angels. John Calvin's comments are typical of many other biblical commentators: following his remarks on verse 4, he writes, “Hoc autem titulo Christum fuisse insignitum probat duobus scripturae testimoniis.”<sup>4</sup> However,

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<sup>3</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:113.

<sup>4</sup> John Calvin, *Ioannis Calvinii opera quae supersunt omnia*, 59 vols. (vols. 29-87 of *Corpus Reformatorum*), ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss (Brunswick: Schwetschke,

what most commentators simply note in passing, William Gouge explains in more detail, explicitly stating why such proof is definitive, and how the apostle's example is to direct our own thinking:

This causal particle *for*, γάρ, [from verse 5] sheweth that that which followeth is a proof of that which went before. The proof is from an induction of a special name. The proof is taken from testimonies of Scripture. A testimony of Scripture is a sound proof. This was it whereunto a prophet thus directed God's people: 'To the law and to the testimony,' Isa. viii.20... The Scripture is as a long continued, approved record, it is as a law written, and hath continued many generations, and thereby gained the greater confirmation. Thus this proof is more sure and sound than any logical or mathematical demonstration can be. Nothing more convinceth a believer, or more prevaieth with him, than a Scripture proof... We ought hereupon to have our judgements grounded on the Scriptures, our opinions ordered, and our doubts resolved thereby. Nothing ought to be taken as an article of faith, but that which may be proved thereby.<sup>5</sup>

The polemical edge concerning the sufficiency of Scripture evident in Gouge's comments becomes more pronounced in the conclusions drawn by the Scotsman David Dickson.

After noting that the author uses Scripture to justify his theological arguments, Dickson transfers the contemporary conflict with Rome concerning the authority of Scripture back to the apostolic church, and sees in the author's citations evidence of his view of authority.

Then, 1. In the primitive church, in matters of religion, all authority was silent, and Divine Scripture spake, and determined questioned points of truth. 2. The apostle counted it sufficient to bring Scripture for his doctrine; and permitteth no impugning of it, but by Scripture.<sup>6</sup>

A number of orthodox commentators point out that the apostle uses a "negative argument" from Scripture here; the author assumes that since the Scripture never records

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1863-1900), vol. 55, column 14; subsequent references to the *Calvini opera* will be cited *CO*, followed by volume and column numbers. See also, Calvin, *CO* 55, col.7; Johannes Coccejus, *Opera Omnia Theologica, Exegetica, Didactica, Polemica, Philologica*, 12 vols. (Amsterdam, 1701-1706), 6:19; Johannès Piscator, *Commentarii in omnes libros Novi Testamenti* (Herborn, 1613), 181; Annotations on these verses in *The Geneva Bible: The Annotated New Testament 1602 Edition*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard, *The Pilgrim Classic Commentaries*, vol. 1 (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (1655; repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> David Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1649; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 9.

God as addressing any angel as “my Son,” then this provides a valid and true point of contrast between the angels and Christ. Various seventeenth-century biblical interpreters asserted that this was a legitimate extension of the principle of the sufficiency of Scripture for all of faith and practice. Gouge sums up this principle as found expressed by the apostle’s OT exegesis in Hebrews 1:5:

In regard of an article of faith, a negative argument from Scripture is sound and good, because all articles of faith requisite to be believed are therein set down, so as if it be not to be found in the Scripture, we may well conclude that it is no article of faith.<sup>7</sup>

This kind of scriptural argumentation had direct relevance in the seventeenth-century adiaphoristic controversy between the Anglican and Puritan parties concerning the nature of worship. The Puritans objected to some of the assumptions which regulated what was allowable practices in the Church of England’s worship services. In common with the Lutherans, the Anglican church felt free to practice any specific act in weekly worship which the Scriptures did not specifically reject, labeling these things as *adiaphora*. This principle was stated in the first part of Article XX, *De Ecclesiae auctoritate*, in the Church of England’s *Thirty-Nine Articles*: “Habet Ecclesia Ritus statuendi ius, et in fidei controuersijs auctoritatem, quamuis Ecclesiae non licet quicquam instituere, quod verbo Dei scripto aduersetur, nec unum scripturae locum sic exponere potest, ut alteri contradicat.”<sup>8</sup> Puritan theologians at the Westminster Assembly countered with the Regulative Principle which states that, with regard to worship, whatever is

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<sup>7</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 29.

<sup>8</sup> From the Latin edition of 1563. Philip Schaff, ed., “The Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England,” in *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 500. The English edition of 1571 reads, “The Church hath power to decree Rites or Ceremonies, and auctoritie in controuersies of fayth: and yet it is not lawfull for the Church to ordayne any thyng that is contrarie to Gods worde written, neyther may it so expounde one place of scripture, that it be repugnaunt to another.”

commanded in Scripture is required, and whatever is not commanded is forbidden.<sup>9</sup> For Reformed expositors in England at this time, the apostle's use of a negative argument from Scripture in Hebrews 1:5 in drawing theological conclusions was nothing more than a biblical example of the Puritan Regulative Principle. Owen explicitly links his interpretation to the worship of the church, and states the lesson to be derived from the apostle's approach to Scripture's sufficiency, "An argument, then, taken negatively from the authority of the Scripture in matters of faith, or what relates to the worship of God, is valid and effectual, and here consecrated for ever to the use of the church by the apostle."<sup>10</sup>

The contemporary importance of the negative argumentation in the apostle's exegesis of the Old Testament here is even more vivid in Edward Dering's Lectures on the epistle in the mid-sixteenth century. The question of whether clerical vestments were adiaphora or not, and should be required garb for Anglican ministers, sparked the Vestiarian Controversy in England during the reign of Elizabeth I.<sup>11</sup> In the midst of this controversy, during which the "Puritan" party sought to distance the new Church of England from any papal elements, Dering comments on Hebrews 1:5 and its modern implications.

He proueth Christe to be the naturall sonne of God, by textes of Scripture witnessing it: he denieth that Angels are so, because God in his scriptures neuer spake it. . . . Because the scriputre saide it not, therefore he proueth it is not so: making his argument negatiuely from authoritie of scriputre: which in all things, whatsoeuer man is required to do or knowe in matters of religion, is euer a most

<sup>9</sup> *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, I.6, XX.2, and XXI; *The Larger Catechism*, Questions 108-109. The principle also underlies the Assembly's Directory for Public Worship. See also, R. J. Gore, "Reviewing the Puritan Regulative Principle of Worship," *Presbyterion* 20 (1994):41-50; 21 (1995):29-47; John Delivuk, "Biblical Authority and the Proof of the Regulative Principle of Worship in the Westminster Confession," *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (1996):237-256.

<sup>10</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:131.

<sup>11</sup> Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England*, book 1, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 40-75; John Primus, *The Vestments Controversy* (Kampen: Kok, 1960).



certain conclusion: God spake it, therefore we must do it: God spake it not: therefore we haue nothing to do with it.<sup>12</sup>

Dering sees the apostle's use of Scripture as an authoritative and necessary model for the Church's exegetical strategy:

By such manifest profe of scripture, the church of Christ doth iustitie all that shee doth. Thus the Apostle proueth here his doctrine. Thus we must do, if we will be the Apostles scholers. Marke well this reason, for it is worthie... In like maner we will dispute with them [Catholic sympathizers].<sup>13</sup>

With the apostle's example in mind, Dering assaults "papal" practices in English worship:

Where saide he, go a pilgrimage, or go visit the holie sepulchre... Where saide he, keepe vnto mee, Lent or Aduent, imber weekes, or saincts eeues ... Where saide he, eate now no fleshe, now no white meate: let not the minister marrie... Where saide he: the pope shall dispence against my apostles and Prophets... Where saide God: the ignorant men should praie in latine? With this verie argument are ouerthrowne all doctrines of men, all traditions, all poperie. And if this argument were good in the Apostle, why is it not good in vs?<sup>14</sup>

In emphasizing this aspect of the biblical passage, the orthodox commentators were not imposing their own dogma onto the text, yet the contemporary theological situation did influence their exegesis. Because of their sensitivity to an ongoing adiaphoristic debate, the seventeenth-century interpreters noted, and explicitly expressed, aspects of the apostle's use of the Old Testament Scriptures which had direct bearing upon their contemporary situation. This practice, far from calling into question the legitimacy of seventeenth century exegesis, is nothing more than a consistent application of the precritical assumption that the biblical text continues to speak to the ongoing community of faith.

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Dering, *XXVII Lectures, or Readings, vpon part of the Epistle to the Hebrues* (London, 1614), C.iii.v-C.iii.r.

<sup>13</sup> Dering, *XXVII Lectures*, C.iii.v.

<sup>14</sup> Dering, *XXVII Lectures*, C.iii.v-C.v.r.

## 1.2 Attention to the Occasion of the Writing

While numerous exegetes noted that the author of Hebrews employs Old Testament Scriptures as proofs for his theological assertions, few actually explain why the author choose such a method to support his claims. An examination of the reasons given by John Owen and various other seventeenth-century exegetes for why the Old Testament was quoted at this point highlights the limited, though crucial role which the exegete's understanding of the historical occasion of the epistle played in the proper interpretation of the text.

The historical circumstance of the writing of the Epistle to the Hebrews factored into most seventeenth-century interpreters' prolegomena, or "argument," portion of their exposition. That the epistle was written to Jewish believers (usually thought of as Jews residing in Judea), and that the author seeks to reassure them in the faith in the midst of persecution and possible reversion to Judaism, is generally recognized by most commentators. While many of the works on Hebrews written during this time briefly discuss such introductory issues as the epistle's author, recipients, original language, occasion of writing, and general argument or logical flow, the most detailed examinations of these topics were penned by William Gouge, Jacques Cappel, Johannes Coccejus, and the Catholic Libert Froidmont.<sup>15</sup> Yet even these extended treatments pale in comparison with the introductory work on the epistle prepared by Owen. In thirty-four preliminary exercitations of nearly 500 folio pages, Owen considers the canonical authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews, its author, the original language it was written in, and the time of its composition. However, the bulk of his exercitations are directed toward discussing the state of the "Judicial church" in the Apostolic age, and its expectations concerning the

coming of the Messiah.<sup>16</sup> These essays dramatically reveal Owen's great Hebraic interests including his knowledge and mastery of ancient extra-biblical, mediæval, and contemporary Jewish literature, his overall biblical theology whereby the church in the Old Testament is shown to be unified with that in the New,<sup>17</sup> and his understanding of the Mosaic institutions and worship practices under both the Old and New dispensations.

In his opening epistle to the reader in his first volume of his exposition, Owen identifies the general neglect in previous works on Hebrews of its complex Jewish-character which helped motivate him to write his own commentary. After acknowledging "the sedulous labours" of "many eminent and learned men, both of old and of late," and his hesitancy to comment where many others had also written,<sup>18</sup> Owen identifies numerous elements in the epistle where the author's argument depends upon a common understanding of certain Jewish practices – practices which Owen feels have not been adequately taken into account by modern expositors.

Many principles of truth he [the epistle's author] takes for granted, as acknowledged amongst the Hebrews during their former church-state, and makes them a foundation for his own superstructure; many customs, usages, ordinances, institutions, received sense of places of Scripture amongst the Jews, he either produceth or reflects upon; and one way or another makes use of the whole Mosaical economy, or system of divine worship under the law, unto his own purpose. The common neglect of these things, or slight transaction of them in most expositors, was that which principally relieved me from the fore-mentioned discouragement.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*; Jacques Cappel, *Observationes in Novum Testamentum* (Amsterdam, 1657); Coccejus, *Opera Omnia*; Libert Froidmont, *Commentaria in sacram scripturam : in duas partes distributa* (Rouen, 1709).

<sup>16</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, vols. 17 & 18. In addition, there was a separate treatise on the Sabbath originally published in 1671 which naturally functions as an additional series of exercitations and which was incorporated into the existing collection of Owen's works by one of Owen's early publishers, "an arrangement so obviously proper that we have not deviated from it in the present edition," 17:x.

<sup>17</sup> These exercitations have considerable parallels in Owen's massive Latin work, *Theologoumena Pantodapa* (1661), contained in volume 17 of the Goold's 1850s edition, and recently released in English translation, *Biblical Theology* (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:5.

<sup>19</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:6-7.

Thus, for Owen, the knowledge of the Jewish character of the epistle, and especially those elements which are assumed and not directly stated by the author, are necessary for the proper interpretation of the text.

Some great principles I observed that the apostle supposed, which he built all his arguings and exhortations upon; not directly proving or confirming the principles themselves, but as taking them for granted, partly from the faith of the Judaical church, and partly from the new revelation of the gospel, which those to whom he wrote did as yet admit of and avow... Not one line in the whole Epistle but is in an especial manner resolved into these principles, or deduced from them. These, therefore, I found it necessary to examine and confirm, to unfold, vindicate, and declare; that their influence into the apostle's discourse might be manifest, and his arguing from them be understood.<sup>20</sup>

The occasion of the epistle, then, for Owen holds an important key to grasping the significance and the depth of the author's message. Following his exercitations, and in his opening preface immediately before his commentary proper, Owen summarizes the important of the epistle's occasion aspects for proper interpretation:

He, then, that would come to a right understanding of this Epistle must always bear in mind, – 1. *To whom it was written*; which were the Jews of the several sorts before mentioned: 2. *To what end it was written*; even to prevail with them to embrace the gospel, and to persist in the profession of it without any mixture of Mosaical observations: 3. *On what principles the apostle deals with them in this argument*; which are no other, for the most part, than what were granted by the Jews of all sorts: 4. *What testimonies out of the Old Testament he insists on to prove his purpose*; namely, such as were commonly received in the Judaical church to belong unto the Messiah and his office...<sup>21</sup>

Owen's understanding of the original audience of the epistle directly explains the reasons why the author employed Old Testament texts to support his theological claims about Christ. In his second introductory exercitation where he argues for Pauline authorship of the epistle, Owen counters the argument that Paul nowhere announces himself as he does in other acknowledged Pauline epistles. Owen maintains that in the other epistles, written largely to Gentile believers, Paul identifies himself in the opening

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<sup>20</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:7.

<sup>21</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:13. See also, 9.

segment in order to clearly assert his apostolic authority, and “so intimating the absolute obedience that was due unto the doctrine by him revealed.”<sup>22</sup> However, in addressing the Hebrew believers,

the case was far otherwise. They who believed, amongst them, never changed the old foundation, or church-state grounded on the Scriptures, though they had a new addition of privileges by their faith in Christ Jesus, as the Messiah now exhibited. And therefore he deals not with them as with those whose faith was built absolutely on apostolical authority and revelation, but upon the common principles of the Old Testament, on which they still stood, and out of which evangelical faith was educed. Hence the beginning of the Epistle, wherein he appeals to the Scripture as the foundation that he intended to build upon, and the authority which he would press them withal, supplies the room of that intimation of his apostolical authority which in other places he maketh use of.<sup>23</sup>

In other words, since the Hebrew recipients of the epistle accepted the authority of the Scriptures above and beyond the authority of an apostle, the author chose to use the Old Testament witness as the basis of his argumentation to better establish the validity of his assertions.

This recognition of the importance of taking into account the original audience and occasion of the epistle’s writing, especially in explaining the prevalence of the Old Testament citations, was reiterated numerous times by Owen. In the preface immediately before the commentary Owen lists two reasons why the Old Testament is cited so frequently by the author – the first is to “incite them to the further search after Christ under the Mosaical veil and prophetic allegories whereby he is therein expressed,” and secondly, “because most of the testimonies he makes use of were generally granted by the Jews of all sorts to belong to the Messiah, his kingdom and offices; and his design was to deal with them chiefly upon their own concessions and principles.”<sup>24</sup> In his

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<sup>22</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:82.

<sup>23</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:82.

<sup>24</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:11. See also, 17:90, 119-120, 141-142.

comments on Hebrews 1:5 where he first confronts an Old Testament quotation, Owen's first observation concerns the Jews' relationship to the OT Scriptures:

That the testimony which in a matter of faith he insisted on is that of the Scripture. He refers the Jews unto that common principle which was acknowledged between them. Men had not as yet learned in such contests to make that cavilling return which we are now used unto, 'How do you know those Scriptures to be the word of God?' Nor, indeed, is it suitable unto common honesty for men to question the credit and prostitute the authority of their own most sacred principles, for no other end but to prejudice their adversaries'. But our apostle here confidently sends the Hebrews to the acknowledged rule of their faith and worship, whose authority he knew they would not decline, Isa. viii.20.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, we see in both his introductory material, and in the actual exegesis itself, the hermeneutical significance Owen places on the original circumstances of the epistle.

Owen, of course, was not the only expositor to draw attention to the connection between the Jewish recipients and the author's Old Testament proof texting. In his annotations on Hebrews, Jean Diodati notes that it was "because the Apostle had to deal with the Jews, well versed in holy Scripture, he brings many passages to confirm his argument or discourse."<sup>26</sup> Similarly, according to William Jones,

That Christ is the Sonne of God, hee doth not prove by his preaching, which made some to confesse it, *enver man spake as this man doth*: not by his miracles, the stilling of the Sea, and Windes, which made some come and worship him: not by his resurrections, ascension and sending of the Holy Ghost from heaven: the *Jewes* would have cavilled at these: but he proveth it by two places of Scripture.<sup>27</sup>

Nevertheless, this hermeneutical key in interpreting the epistle's Old Testament citations is most clear in Owen's exegesis.

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<sup>25</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:130-131.

<sup>26</sup> Jean Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible, plainly Expounding the Most Difficult Places Thereof* (London, 1648), 365.

<sup>27</sup> William Jones, *A Commentary vpon the Epistles of Saint Pavl to Philemon, and to the Hebrewes* (London, 1635), 62. See also, David Paraeus, *Commentarius in Diui Pauli Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, in *Opera Theologica*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1628), 2:839; Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 3:815; George Lawson, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrewes wherein the Text is Cleared, Theopolitica Improved, the Socinian Comment Examined* (London, 1662), 8.

The importance of the occasion, however, should not be overestimated in Owen's exegetical strategy. Owen uses historical information concerning the religious status of the Jewish recipients of the epistle to illuminate specific aspects of the text, to obtain a fuller grasp of the epistle's theological content. This important step, however, was not seen as the ultimate goal of his exegesis, nor does a full understanding of the historical circumstances of the writing comprehend the true extent of the divine purpose of the epistle itself. The recognition and assessment of the letter's historic circumstances is a necessary, but limited step in the complete exposition of the biblical text.<sup>28</sup> According to Owen's precritical hermeneutical assumptions, the scriptural text was directed not only to its original hearers, but ultimately for the continual benefit of the whole church; the "great end" of the Bible lies in its perpetual witness to modern believers. For Owen, the task of biblical interpretation was not complete until the text was communicated to the present Christian community; proper exegesis in precritical hermeneutics demanded a contemporary exposition of the text to the present-day church. Thus, Owen closes his description of his methodology with this final step:

The exposition of the text is attended with an improvement of *practical observations*, answering the great end from which the Epistle was committed over to all generations for the use of the church. If in some of them I shall seem to any to have been too prolix, I must only answer, that having no other way to serve the edification of the generality of Christians, I thought not so.<sup>29</sup>

This fundamental understanding of interpreting the ancient documents as containing God's present witness to contemporary situations, yet all the while acknowledging the importance of recognizing the historic context of the original writing, is best illustrated by William Gouge's assessment of "the general intendment" of the epistle:

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<sup>28</sup> For a fuller assessment of the hermeneutical use of the occasion of the text in Reformation and post-Reformation exegesis, see Gerald T. Sheppard, "Between Reformation and Modern Commentary: The Perception of the Scope of Biblical Books," in *A Commentary on Galatians*, William Perkins, ed. Gerald Sheppard (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), vii-xiii.

Quest. Was the epistle written for the Hebrews only?

Ans. Though it were in special manner directed to them, yet was it not written only for their use, but for the use also of the whole Christian church; and therefore it hath ever been read in all churches. The apostle giveth a charge to particular churches, to whom in special he directed his epistles, to cause them to be read in other churches, Col. iv. 16; for the matter of apostolical epistles consisted of general doctrines and directions, fit for all Christians to know, believe, and obey.<sup>30</sup>

Gouge then takes this precritical assumption and applies it to the Hebrews epistle with an eye on many of the major theological distinctions which separate the Protestant and Catholic Churches.

As for this epistle to the Hebrews, it may seem, in sundry passages thereof, to be written in a prophetic spirit, to meet with sundry heresies that were in further times to be broached, rather than such as at that time were discovered. Such as these: a true, real, propitiatory sacrifice to be daily offered up, yea, such a sacrifice to be unbloody; sons of men to be sacrificing priests properly so called; many intercessors and mediators to be under the gospel; and sundry other which have been published by papists, long since this epistle was written. So as this epistle, in sundry respects, may be as useful to us who live in the time of popery, as are much infested with popish heresies, as to the Hebrews, if not more.<sup>31</sup>

## 2. The Reasons for Owen's Textual Analysis of the Citations

### 2.1 The Challenge to Canonicity

Owen first confronts the difficulties surrounding the epistle's Old Testament citations when he deals with the question of the original language of the writing. As demonstrated in the medieval *Glossa Ordinaria*,<sup>32</sup> it was generally assumed since the early patristic period that Hebrews was initially penned by the Apostle Paul in Hebrew, and that its translation into Greek accounted for the obvious stylistic differences between it and the rest of the Pauline corpus. However, writing during the birth of the

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<sup>29</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:9.

<sup>30</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 6.

<sup>31</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 6.



Reformation, the Catholic scholar Tommaso de Vio Cajetan (1469-1534) critically attacked this assumption. Noting that in Hebrews 7:2 the author “translates” the Hebrew name Melchizedek, that he persistently uses the term *διαθήκη* for the hypothetical *מִלְכִּיזֶדֶק*, and that there is a complete absence of any textual evidence for a Hebrew original, Cajetan claims “ideo hanc epistolam non esse conditam Hebraico idiomate indubie credo.” He goes on to challenge the Pauline authorship of the epistle, and with it, in accordance with the late medieval homologoumena/antilegomena distinction, the epistle’s canonical authority: “dubia quoque redditur epistola: quoniam nisi sit Pauli, non perspicuum est canonicam esse. Quo fit ut ex sola huius Epistolae autoritate non possit, si quod dubium in fide accideret, determinari.”<sup>33</sup> Owen, of course, stoutly defends the epistle’s canonicity and supports Pauline authorship in his first two exercitations; yet in *Exercitation IV*, he rejects a Hebrew original, repeating in greater detail, but with no substantive additions, the arguments initially laid out by Cajetan.<sup>34</sup> However, Owen also comments on one argument against a Hebrew original which Cajetan only noted in passing: the assumption that the Old Testament citations in the epistle, and the particular force of the citations in the author’s argument, were taken from the Septuagint – an inconceivable situation if originally written in Hebrew.<sup>35</sup> While agreeing with the conclusion that the epistle was authored in Greek, Owen forcefully opposes the premise that the Septuagint lies behind the OT quotations. It is this proposition which initially

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<sup>32</sup> Nicolaus de Lyra, *Biblia Sacra cum glossa ordinaria et expositionibus*, vol. 4 (Lyon, 1545), 131r-131v.

<sup>33</sup> Tommaso Cajetan, *Opera Omnia Quotquot in Sacrae Scripture Expositionem Reperiumter* (Lyon, 1639), 329. Analysis of other issues addressed by Cajetan and other 16<sup>th</sup> century exegetes, see Hagen, *Hebrews Commenting From Erasmus to Beze*.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:102-105.

<sup>35</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:105. In commenting on the epistle’s use of *διαθήκη* in 8:10, Cajetan argues that the citation is from the LXX, and on 9:20 he notes that on this basis, “non paruum

prompted Owen to investigate the “Testimonies Cited by the Apostle out of the Old Testament” in *Exercitation V*.

Owen spends significant time examining the textual source for the author’s citations. One of the reasons why this occupies his attention in the prolegomena to his *Exposition*, as well as within the commentary itself, is the challenge to the epistle’s authority initially put forward by Erasmus in the final edition of his New Testament *Annotations* and taken up by others who for various reasons rejected the letter. Among his numerous objections questioning Pauline authorship, Erasmus disputes the author’s use of the Old Testament in the epistle. In part, he claims, citing Jerome, “quod in hac quaedam testimonia citentur ex ueteri testamento, quae non reperiuntur in Hebraeorum uoluminibus.”<sup>36</sup> The Unitarian György Enyedi, in his blistering attack upon the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, elaborates upon Erasmus’s arguments in order to negate any regulative force the epistle might have in theological formulations. He advances many reasons for rejecting its canonical authority: the uncertainty of its author, questions surrounding the language in which it was written, the hesitancy of the Latin church in accepting the epistle, and, “*quarto, quia citantur hic quadam ex veteri testamento, quae hodie in Bibliis non extant.*”<sup>37</sup> One clear example of this problem is in chapter 12:21 where Moses is quoted as saying, “ἐκφοβός εἰμι καὶ ἔντρομος,” a text not found in any extant Hebrew or Greek manuscript.<sup>38</sup>

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argumentum sumitur, & quod Graece scripta est epistola, & quod Paulus nonquam viderit illam,” Cajetan, *Opera Omnia*, 346, 348.

<sup>36</sup> Erasmus, *Erasmus’ Annotations on the New Testament: Galatians to the Apocalypse*, ed. Anne Reeve (New York: Brill, 1993), 735.

<sup>37</sup> György Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti : ex quibus Trinitatis dogma stabiliri solet* (Klausenburg, 1597), 379.

<sup>38</sup> See the critical comments by Erasmus and Cajetan at this point, Erasmus, *Annotations*, 733; Cajetan, *Opera Omnia*, 358.

Owen's response to this challenge is to note that the apostle's source of infallible information is not limited to the Bible. As an author of Scripture, the writer of Hebrews was inspired by the Spirit which allowed him access to truths which were not available to all. Consequently, Owen argues that certain facts and testimonies of ancient history which are not found in the Scripture were revealed to the apostle directly by God. Thus, at certain spots throughout the epistle,

the author quotes no book nor testimony of the Old Testament, but only relates a matter of fact, and one circumstance of it, which doubtless he had by divine revelation, whereof there is no express mention in the place where the whole matter is originally recorded... And it is an uncouth way of proving an author not to write by divine inspiration, because he writeth truths that he could no otherwise be acquainted withal. Neither is it unmeet for him that writes by divine inspiration to mention things recorded in other stories whose truth is unquestionable; as those are related in chap. xi.<sup>39</sup>

## 2.2 The Reliability of Scripture

In addition to the attacks on the epistle itself from Cajetan, Erasmus, and Enyedi, a second reason Owen dealt extensively with the verbal differences between the citations in Hebrews and the extant Hebrew Old Testament texts concerned the century old debate with Rome about the sufficiency of Scripture. Over and against the Roman insistence upon the priority of the Vulgate translation, especially in light of the growing consensus concerning the post-Jerome dating of the Hebrew vowel points,<sup>40</sup> Reformed exegetes and theologians argued that the authentic edition of the Scripture was that preserved in the extant Hebrew and Greek texts. Roman theologians asserted that the Hebrew text of the Old Testament had become corrupt and, therefore, that without ecclesiastical support the Scripture was unreliable. Consequently, the authenticity, authority, and integrity of the

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<sup>39</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:39.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, the arguments of Robert Bellarmine, *De verbo Dei*, in *Disputationum ven. Servi Dei Roberti Bellarmini, Soc. Jesu S.R.E. Cardinalis: De controversiis christianae fidei adversus haereticos*,

original language Scriptures was a key point in the Reformation and post-Reformation controversy with Rome, and was advanced by orthodox polemicists in a multitude of tracts and doctrinal works.<sup>41</sup>

Owen weighed in on this debate in his treatise, *Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-Evidencing Light, and Power of the Scriptures* (1659). While he has an eye on some Protestant linguists like Louis Cappel and Brian Walton who, in his mind, are advocating positions which ultimately would undermine the Reformed doctrine of Scripture and who are dealt with directly in the companion treatise, *A Vindication of the Purity and Integrity of the Hebrew and Greek Texts of the Old and New Testament*, Owen's main adversary here is the Roman Church. In his epistle dedication, Owen identifies the opposition he has in mind:

Many there have been, and are, who, through the craft of Satan and the prejudice of their own hearts, lying under the power of corrupt and carnal interests, have engaged themselves to decry and disparage that excellency of the Scripture which is proper and peculiar unto it... Those who in this business are first to be called to account – whose filth and abominations, given out in gross, others have but parcelled among themselves – are they of the synagogue of Rome.<sup>42</sup>

The dedication also includes a brief review of the recent history of the debate concerning the authenticity of the Scripture originals and the Catholic insistence upon the priority of the Vulgate. In this section, he notes Rome's formal position that the originals cannot be trusted, and then lists various theologians prior to and after Trent who have argue the position on one side or the other. He includes the recent history of Hebraic and textual

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*cum totius operis recognitione ab eodem facta* (1617-1620; repr. Rome: Typographia Bonarum Artium, 1840), II.ii.

<sup>41</sup> Broad summaries of the Reformed position in this debate can be found in Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 2:418-437, the Lutheran position in Robert Preus, *The Theology of Post-Reformation Lutheranism* (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1970), 1:296-309, and the Roman Catholic position in F. J. Crehan, "The Bible in the Roman Catholic Church from Trent to the Present Day," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: University Press, 1963), 3:199-237.

<sup>42</sup> John Owen, *Of the Divine Original of the Scriptures*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16, ed. William Goold (1854; repr. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 283

scholarship, the impact of the work of both Buxtorfs, and the developments which led to Cappel's *Critica Sacra* and the *London Polyglotta*.<sup>43</sup>

In the work itself, Owen asserts that the Scripture is to be received as an exercise of faith, and that the authority of revelation depends upon its divine origin.

The authority of God, the supreme Lord of all, the first and only absolute Truth, whose word is truth – speaking in and by the penmen of the Scriptures – evinced singly in and by the Scripture itself – is the sole bottom and foundation, or formal reason, of our assenting to those Scriptures as his word, and of our submitting our hearts and consciences unto them with that faith and obedience which morally respect him, and are due to him alone.<sup>44</sup>

The formal reason for our assent to their authority lies, not with the Church as Rome insists, nor in proofs brought to the text as advanced by later rationalists, but in the Author of the text itself.

The Scriptures of the Old and New Testament do abundantly and uncontrollably manifest themselves to be the word of the living God; so that, merely on the account of their own proposal of themselves unto us in the name and majesty of God, as such – without the contribution of help or assistance from tradition, church, or any thing else without themselves – we are obliged, upon the penalty of eternal damnation... to receive them, with the subjection of soul which is due to the word of God.<sup>45</sup>

As opposed, then, to the Roman doctrine, Owen insists upon the self-evidencing light of the Scripture as witness to its own absolute authority and sufficiency in all things.

Owen's elaboration on the doctrine of scriptural inspiration and its divine authority is driven by his clear intention to eliminate the possibility of any element of human fallibility.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, 16:285-292.

<sup>44</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, 16:307.

<sup>45</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, 16:307.

<sup>46</sup> See Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:239-270 for an analysis of the Reformed Orthodox doctrine of the divinity of Scripture. Note also the contrast with Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 218-223, who argue that Owen was a "transitional figure" between a dynamic Reformation view of Scripture and a more rigid "scholastic" post-Reformation view.

In light of this ongoing polemic concerning the authority and integrity of the Bible, the presence of unknown citations in the Epistle to the Hebrews (like 12:21) or significant deviations from the Hebrew original (as in 1:6 and 1:12) called into question either the purity of the contemporary Hebrew texts or the validity of the manner in which the author quotes the OT Scripture. Since neither option is acceptable to Owen, he spends considerable time analyzing the source of the apostle's citations seeking to demonstrate that the author properly cited the OT in his Epistle to the Hebrews.

### 2.3 The Question of the Use of Ancient Versions

However, one dominant reason for Owen's interest in the textual issues surrounding the source of the epistle's citations is found in his participation in the Hebrew vowel-point controversy of the seventeenth century.<sup>47</sup> Owen's contribution to this debate is found in his treatise, *A Vindication of the Purity and Integrity of the Hebrew and Greek Texts of the Old and New Testament; In Some Considerations on the Prolegomena and Appendix to the Late "Biblia Polyglotta"* (1659), in which he defends the antiquity, and consequently the authority, of the Hebrew punctuation against the claims of the *Polyglotta's* editor, Brian Walton, that the points were of Masoretic origin.<sup>48</sup> Walton's work was similar to, and built upon, Louis Cappel's *Critica Sacra* (1650) who advocated

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<sup>47</sup> For an overview and analysis of the consequences of this debate see Theodore Letis, "John Owen Versus Brian Walton: A Reformed Response to the Birth of Text Criticism," in *The Majority Text*, ed. T. Letis (Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987), 145-190; Richard A. Muller, "The Debate over the Vowel Points and the Crisis in Orthodox Hermeneutics," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 10 (1980):53-72; Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:418-446; Martin Klauber, "Jean-Alphonse Turretini and the Abrogation of the Formula Consensus in Geneva," *Westminster Theological Journal* 53 (1991):325-338; Martin Klauber, "The Helvetic Formula Consensus (1675): An Introduction and Translation," *Trinity Journal* 11 (1990):103-123; John Bowman, "A Forgotten Controversy," *Evangelical Quarterly* 20 (1948):46-68; François Laplanche, *L'Écriture, le sacré et l'histoire: Érudits politiques protestants devant la bible en France au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Amsterdam: APA-Holland University Press, 1986).

<sup>48</sup> Brian Walton, "Prolegomena," in *Biblia Sacra Polyglotta*, vol. 1 (London, 1657), III.38-41, pgs. 23-25.

the theory of Elias Levita for a late dating for the Hebrew points.<sup>49</sup> While modern scholars generally agree with Walton concerning the dating of the punctuation, and believe that he had the best of the controversy in his response, *The Considerator Considered* (1659), biographers of the two men differ greatly in their evaluation of the spirit and value of the material.<sup>50</sup> Walton's biographer, Henry Todd, claims that Owen's entrance into this debate shows him to be a "dunce," "a blunderer who surely deserves to be schooled," and "a trifler provoking derision," while William Orme, Owen's eighteenth-century biographer, writes that Walton's response to Owen "breathes a tone of defiance and contempt" and is "bitter and unchristian."<sup>51</sup>

However, neither the specifics of the vowel point debate nor the spirit in which it was conducted has direct bearing on Owen's assessment of the origin of the epistle's Old Testament citations. While Owen occasionally discusses the impact of potential variations in the vowel points in his commentary on specific verses of Hebrews, the question of the antiquity of the points does not factor into his analysis of the source of the Old Testament citations in either his exposition or the introductory exercises. What is important at this point is the companion issue which Owen discusses as a corollary to the question of the vowel point dating in his *Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Texts* – the validity of promoting textual emendations on the basis of the ancient versions. As a result of his understanding of the recent addition of the vowel points, and the corruptions he identified in the original texts, Cappel had advanced a new hermeneutical

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<sup>49</sup> Louis Cappel, *Critica Sacra, sive de variis quae in Vetus Testamentum lectionibus occurrunt* (Paris, 1650).

<sup>50</sup> Brian Walton, *The Considerator Considered: or, A Brief View of Certain Considerations upon the Biblia Polyglotta, The Prolegomena, and Appendix Thereof* (London, 1659).

<sup>51</sup> Henry Todd, *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of the Right Rev. Brian Walton, D.D.* (London, 1821), 314; William Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen* (1840; repr. Choteau: Gospel Mission, 1981), 272-273. See also, William Goold's more balanced view in his "Prefatory Note," 16:345-347; Letis, "John Owen Versus Brian Walton," 151-157.

principle; offering innovations to the corrupt Hebrew text on the basis of the ancient versions, on the grounds that the ancient translations frequently preserved the original, uncorrupted reading. This gave unexpected support to Roman theologians who, on similar grounds, were arguing the priority of the Vulgate – Owen retorts, “Papists have ploughed with their heifer to disparage the original, and to cry up the Vulgar Latin.”<sup>52</sup> While the *Polyglot* steered clear of such hermeneutical excesses, Owen still felt that Cappel’s assumptions and the resulting variant readings had crept dangerously into Walton’s work.<sup>53</sup>

In the *Polyglot*, Walton had collected, and placed in parallel fashion to the original language editions, the existing ancient translations, including the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Vulgate and Syriac translations, the Chaldee paraphrase, and especially, the Septuagint. In addition, in the Appendix, the sixth volume of the work, Walton included all the diverse readings known for each version. Presented with this mass of textual variations, especially given the uncritical manner in which every discrepancy, no matter how blatantly inaccurate, was included in the Appendix, Owen was concerned about its impression upon the laity who were unfamiliar with the developing textual studies.

The voluminous bulk of various lections, as nakedly exhibited, seems sufficient to beget scruples and doubts in the minds of men about the truth of what hath been hitherto by many pretended concerning the preservation of the Scripture through the care and providence of God.<sup>54</sup>

Nevertheless, Owen’s concern with the *Polyglot*, which in many ways he acknowledges as a valuable asset, was not primarily pastoral, but hermeneutical. Owen strongly

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<sup>52</sup> John Owen, *Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 16, ed. William Goold (1854; repr. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 362. See the Catholic argument in Bellarmine, *De verbo Dei*, II.ii.

<sup>53</sup> Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:351, 407. Also, 346. Walton, “Prolegomena,” VI.8-10, pgs. 37-38; VII.12, pgs. 41



opposed the new exegetical technique, implicitly and in some cases explicitly promoted in the *Polyglot*, of proposing alterations to the Hebrew Scripture based on information gained from non-Hebrew versions.

Thus, in seeking to defend the authority and authenticity of the original language texts, Owen confronted two separate, yet related, issues : (1) the question of whether the Hebrew points are a novel invention of the later Judaical Rabbis or an integral part of the divine originals, and (2) the appropriateness of using information from the ancient versions to propose corrections and emendations to the Hebrew texts of the Old Testament. In Owen's mind, the two questions were related; he critiqued the *Polyglot's* Prolegomena for advocating:

that the points or vowels, and accents, are a late invention of the Tiberian Masorettes, long after sundry translations were extant in the world... [and] that considering how oftimes, in likelihood, translators read the text before the invention of the points and accents, the present reading may be corrected and amended by them, and that because the old translators had other copies, or different copies from them which we now enjoy.<sup>55</sup>

Owen jealously guarded the divinity of Scripture and opposed any intrusion of human reason which appeared to place it in a position of authority over the text. This was precisely what he saw emerging from this new hermeneutic, and he saw no end to its potential abuse; in addition to advocating for textual corrections based on the validity of the ancient versions, Cappel suggested that, in the absence of any textual evidence, men can, with the wise application of their own reason, offer corrections to the received text. Owen vehemently objected to any effort to amend the sacred text merely on the basis of one's own opinion, seeing such attempts as the assertion of faulty human reason over divine authority. As Owen acknowledged, Walton also rejected aspects of Cappel's

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<sup>54</sup> Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:352. See also Owen's assessment of the uncritical manner in which every diverse reading was included in Walton's *Polyglot*, and the suggestions he makes for limiting the obviously superfluous variants, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:364-367.

hermeneutic, expressly limiting any textual emendation to instances only where there is manuscript support. Walton recognized with Owen the potential of great abuse:

At ex mera conjectura, varias colligere lectiones, (cum scil. nulla codicum vel interpretum discrepantia adferri possit, nec lectio recepta quicquam in se falsum & absurdum contineat)... salvo aliorum iudicio, vix tutum est... Hoc vero concesso, lata fenestra aperietur luxuriantibus ingeniis Scripturam depravandi, & in quemlibet sensum flectendi.<sup>56</sup>

On this level, Owen finds no fault with the *Polyglot*, for he also strenuously rejects the principle, “that where any gross faults or corruptions are befallen the originals, men may by their faculty of critical conjecturing, amend them, and restore the native lections that were lost.” It is, however, this very thing which Owen accused Hugo Grotius of doing, and the *Polyglot* of implicitly authorizing by including his emendations in the Appendix.<sup>57</sup>

It should be noted that Owen did not object in principle to textual criticism. He openly acknowledged the various readings which existed in the copies of the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts – though “where there is any variety it is always in things of less, indeed of no importance”<sup>58</sup> – and praised the work of text critics like Erasmus, Stephen, Beza and Arias Montanus as “the first and most honest course” of textual work.<sup>59</sup> In his Exposition, he frequently noted the variant readings from other manuscripts, and often demonstrated support for one reading over another.<sup>60</sup> He undoubtedly had access to various manuscripts at Oxford and Cambridge, and a few codices are even listed in his

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<sup>55</sup> Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:368.

<sup>56</sup> Walton, “Prolegomena,” VI.12, pg. 38.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:352. See, 368, 407, 420-421; Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, 16:290. Also, Walton’s response to this critique in *The Considerator Considered*, 121-123, where he defends including Grotius’s textual emendations.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, 16:301; Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:355, 363.

<sup>59</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, 16:290. See also, Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:362.

<sup>60</sup> E.g., Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:84, 177-178, 195.

Library Catalogue.<sup>61</sup> Owen saw a spiritual purpose in the presence of these minor variants: “God by his providence preserving the whole entire, suffered this lesser variety to fall out, in or among the copies we have, for the quickening and exercising of our diligence in our search into his Word.”<sup>62</sup> In addition, Owen’s resistance to haphazard amending of the text, and his strong support of the divine originals, did not derive from blind attachment to any single text or codex presently available to the church, such as the so called Textus Receptus. Owen did not oppose the careful collation and comparison of codices as a way of approximating the closest reading to the *autographa*; indeed, he was open to the discovery of other ancient copies, and claimed that “they deserve to be considered.”<sup>63</sup>

Owen also had a great appreciation for the use of the ancient versions in proper exegetical work; his hermeneutical methodology included the careful analysis of the versions as an important step in accurate biblical interpretation – as is evident for almost every verse he handles in his Hebrews exposition.<sup>64</sup> Their appropriate use however had a distinctly limited role:

The great and signal use of various translations, which hitherto we have esteemed them for, was the help afforded by them in expositions of the Scripture. To have represented unto us in one view the several apprehensions and judgments of so many worthy and learned men as were the authors of these translations, upon the

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<sup>61</sup> Edward Millington, ed., *Bibliotheca Oweniana, sive Catalogus librorum... Rev. Doct. Vir. D. Joan. Oweni...* (London, 1684), 32 hereafter, “Owen, BO,” followed by the section (I or II) and page number.

<sup>62</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, 16:301.

<sup>63</sup> Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:359, 346. See the similar treatment in William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng, or, A Treatise Concerning the Sacred and Onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister... William Perkins*, vol. 2 (London, 1616-1618), 749-750. See, Muller, “The Debate over the Vowel Points,” 66-70, with Letis, “John Owen Versus Brian Walton,” 160-161.

<sup>64</sup> E.g., Owen references the ancient translations, usually, the Syraic, Latin Vulgate, the LXX, and other Greek translations, in the textual-grammatical comments on twelve of the fourteen verses of chapter 1, Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:passim. Note especially his use of the versions to draw definitive interpretative conclusions where exegetical questions exist, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:152.

original words of the Scripture, is a signal help and advantage unto men inquiring into the mind and will of God in his word.<sup>65</sup>

In this evaluation of the proper exegetical value of the versions, Owen was joined by many other Reformed exegetes,<sup>66</sup> including Walton, who in his *Prolegomena*, spoke of the “use and utility” of his collection of ancient versions:

Praeterea Versionum antiquarum, & quae auctoritatem in Ecclesia pura & primaeva obtinebant, collatio, ad verum Scripturae sensum in dubiis & obscuris eliciendum, multum lucis adferre, nemo negaverit, qui animo perpendit, Verbum Dei non in literis, sive scriptis sive impressis, sed in vero verborum sensu proprie consistere : quem nemo melius explicare potest, quam Ecclesia vera, cui sacrum hoc depositum Christus commisit : quae per versiones varias genuinum ejus sensum quasi per manus traditum ad Apostolis, & ad Ecclesiarum rectoribus acceptum, fideliter posteris transmittit.<sup>67</sup>

Thus, though Owen often appears to indiscriminately include the *Polyglot* in his criticism, he and Walton agreed as to the true exegetical usefulness of the ancient versions – it was with Cappel and his hermeneutical suggestions that Owen had true difficulty.<sup>68</sup>

Owen’s harsh critique of the ancient versions in *Of Divine Original* and *Of the Integrity and Purity* reflect, in part his rejection of the Roman argument for the priority of the Vulgate, but more importantly, his objection to Cappel’s use of the versions to

<sup>65</sup> Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:406. See also, 419.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, the comments by John Weemse, in *Exercitationes Divinae. Containing diverse Questions and Solutions for the right understanding of the Scriptures...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1632), Exercitation XV; John Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, in *The Workes of Mr. John Weemse of Lathocker in Scotland, in these volumes. Containing these eight bookes... Serving generally for a helpe to the understanding of all that desire to know and obey the will of God in holy writt...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1636), book 1, chapter V; William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, trans. William Fitzgerald (1610; repr. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), Question 2, esp. chapters 1-9; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. J. Dennison (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), II.xiii.

<sup>67</sup> Walton, “Prolegomena,” V.3, pg. 34. See also Walton, *The Considerator Considered*, 92-97.

<sup>68</sup> It should, however, be pointed out that Walton was not absolutely opposed to making alterations to the originals based upon the readings of the versions. He was, indeed, much more cautious than Cappel in their use, and insisted upon additional reasons and evidence to demonstrate that the original “contains something false and absurd, and cannot possibly stand,” but he did not outrightly reject the possibility as Owen did. See Walton, “Prolegomena,” VII.22-25; *The Considerator Considered*, 94-96, 99-101.

propose textual corrections to the originals. Owen saw the relationship between the originals and the versions in just the opposite manner:

These copies, we say, are the rule, standard, and touchstone of all translations, ancient or modern, by which they are in all things to be examined, tried, corrected, amended; and themselves only by themselves. Translations contain the word of God, and are the word of God, perfectly or imperfectly, according as they express the words, sense, and meaning of those originals. To advance any, all translations concurring, into an equality with the originals, – so to set them by it as to set them up with it on even terms, – much more to propose and use them as castigating, amending, altering any thing in them, gathering various lections by them, is to set up an altar of our own by the altar of God, and to make equal the wisdom, care, skill, and diligence of men, with the wisdom, care, and providence of God himself.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, in Owen's hermeneutic, the versions are useful for interpretative insights, yet their validity depends upon the originals, not the other way around. An exegete benefits from the ancient translations to the extent that they are used to suggest additional exegetical possibilities concerning the correct understanding of a text; they are misused when they call into question the integrity and purity of the text itself.

For Owen, the proper exegetical use of the ancient translations of the Hebrew Old Testament is limited to assisting the expositor in understanding the true sense of the original text. In light of this hermeneutical position, the source from which the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews drew his own Old Testament citations is of crucial importance to Owen. Owen naturally viewed the apostle's exegesis of these OT texts as a model for our own exegesis, and, consequently, the author's textual choice here guides our own. If, as Owen's contemporaries stated, the author directly cited from the Septuagint or other Greek translation and not from the Hebrew original, then this would appear to sanction the authoritative role of the ancient versions for exegetical use. On the other hand, Owen could argue for the priority of the original Hebrew over the ancient versions, if it is shown that the author of the epistle bypassed the common Greek Old Testament

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<sup>69</sup> Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:357.

translations and made his citations directly from the Hebrew. It was to this question that Owen directed his attention in *Exercitation V*.

### 3. The Results of Owen's Textual Analysis of the Citations

In his preliminary work, Owen acknowledges that there are two main questions concerning the epistle's Old Testament citations : first, "what concerns the matter of them, and the wisdom of the apostle in their application," and second, "the words also wherein they are expressed, varying frequently from the original, yield some difficulty in their consideration."<sup>70</sup> *Exercitation V* is limited to the textual question, seeking to determine what source text the author used in quoting Scripture – "what respect the apostle's expression have unto the original and the old translations thereof" so as to "remove some false inferences that have been made on the consideration of them."<sup>71</sup>

Owen asks whether the author made his own Greek translation from the Hebrew original, used an extant Greek translation such as the Septuagint version, or cited the texts from memory. Rather than deal with this question every time a quotation occurs in the epistle, "this concernment of the apostle's citations, to prevent a further trouble in the exposition itself of the several places, may be previously considered."<sup>72</sup> The primary concern, that of the suitability of the citations in the author's argument and the appropriateness of their application to the NT context, Owen deals with in the body of his commentary as occasion offers.

To discover the source of the citations, Owen embarked on a rather detailed and rigorous textual comparison of the epistle's quotations and various Old Testament texts. Although he recognizes that the author alludes to or expounds upon numerous OT texts,

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<sup>70</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:106.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107.

Owen focuses upon the twenty-five different places in the epistle where the Hebrew Scripture is cited “κατὰ ῥητόν.”<sup>73</sup> After identifying each quotation in the epistle and its OT referent, Owen discusses the correspondence of the citation in its Greek form with the OT Hebrew, seeking to determine if the translation is an accurate rendering of the original. Owen then compares the Greek text of the quotation with the Septuagint version, noting similarities and differences. He frequently consults the Greek versions prepared by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, as well as known variant readings of each version. On this level, Owen’s textual work was thorough, exact, and meticulous, especially when compared with the non-existent or relatively superficial analysis discussed in most of commentaries of his time.<sup>74</sup> He is careful to note the presence or absence of an article, minor variations of word order, and the use of synonyms between versions, regardless of whether the differences significantly effect the sense of the words.

Throughout this analysis, Owen persistently draws attention to every difference which exists between the author’s citations and the renderings of the Greek translations. For instance, the diverse readings of Psalm 104:4’s אֵשׁ לִהְיוֹת among the Septuagint, Aquila, Symmachus, and the apostle is attributed to that which “often falls out amongst good translators rendering peculiar Hebraisms, such as this,” even though the rest of the citation perfectly follows the LXX.<sup>75</sup> In Hebrews 1:6, where the quoted Psalm 97:7 reads אֱלֹהִים, both the Septuagint and the apostle translate as ἄγγελοι, however, the Septuagint

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<sup>72</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:106-170.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:113.

<sup>74</sup> Francis Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia* (Amsterdam, 1644); Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*; and Coccejus, *Opera Omnia*, mention textual issues in exegeting Hebrews 1 without significant textual analysis.

<sup>75</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107.

adds the genitive αὐτοῦ, while the apostle adds θεοῦ.<sup>76</sup> For Owen, this minor difference between the LXX and the author reflects the author's reliance upon the Hebrew original, and not that Greek translation.<sup>77</sup> It is interesting to note that in his commentary on this verse, Owen uses the LXX's (and the Targum's) reading as partial justification for the apostle's interpretation of the Psalm as addressing ἄγγελοι θεοῦ; both the apostle and the LXX translators understood the Psalm this way as proved by their similar renderings of the Hebrew אֱלֹהִים.<sup>78</sup> In so exegeting the text, Owen is simply following his own theory concerning the value and limitations of the ancient versions: they assist the exegete (both the apostle when writing Hebrews, and now Owen in interpreting the epistle) in coming to a correct understanding of the text, yet the versions themselves were not used as the basis for the apostle to write Scripture.

In his zeal to distinguish the apostle's citations from the LXX translation, Owen, along with Robert Rollock and Francis Junius, identifies the quotation in the later half of verse 5 as coming from 1 Chronicles 22:10, as opposed to the majority of commentators who connect it with 2 Samuel 7:14 and 1 Chronicles 17:13.<sup>79</sup> Where in the latter two passages the LXX version reads identically with the apostle's quotation, in 1 Chronicles 22:10 the order of the words is inverted in both the Hebrew original and in the Septuagint translation. Thus, by linking the citation to 1 Chronicles 22:10, Owen is able to claim that the author of the epistle was not using the LXX, but was citing the Hebrew freely and

<sup>76</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107.

<sup>77</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107.

<sup>78</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:150, 163-164.

<sup>79</sup> See, Robert Rollock, *Analysis logica in epistolam ad Hebraeos* (Edinburgh, 1605), 8; Franciscus Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum libri tres: id est, Comparatio locorum Scripturae Sacrae, qui ex Testamento Vetere in Novo* (Heidelberg, 1588), 214; Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:811; Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 7 vols. (Groningen: Zuidema, 1641; repr. 1829), 7:356; Gouge, *Hebrews*, 36; Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 9; Jones, *Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 62; Piscator, *Commentarii*, 185.



inverting the phrases on his own account. Interestingly, in the actual commentary on these verses later in the same publication which included the preliminary *Exercitations*, Owen claims that these words in Hebrews 1:5b are taken from 2 Samuel 7:14, and his interpretation of them is built upon that Old Testament context (along with the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 17:13). No mention is made in the exposition of either 1 Chronicles 22:10 or the questions concerning the textual source of the citation.<sup>80</sup>

From his analysis, Owen determines that the author of the epistle made his own translation from the Hebrew original, and that he did not draw upon the existing Greek translations in quoting the Old Testament, concluding time and again that “the apostle’s expression is his own, not borrowed from the LXX.”<sup>81</sup> With an eye toward those who argue that the Septuagint is the source of the author’s citations, particularly with the intent to advocate for the authority of ancient versions (i.e., in Rome’s argument for the priority of the Vulgate Rome, and in Cappel’s textual hermeneutic), Owen claims:

it is evident that they are exceedingly mistaken who affirm that the apostle cites all his testimonies out of that translation of the LXX., as we intimated is by some pleaded. . . This the first prospect of the places and words compared will evince. Should he have had any respect unto that translation, it were impossible to give any tolerable account whence he should so much differ from it almost in every quotation, as is plain that he doth.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, Owen concludes that the author of Hebrews, in citing and expounding upon the Old Testament, turned to the Hebrew originals as the authoritative source for his quotations – although the Septuagint might have been used for interpretative purposes, the epistle’s citations reflect Owen’s reliance upon the Scripture in the original languages and gives no support to the authority of the versions.

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<sup>80</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:139ff.

<sup>81</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107. See also, 112, 113; 19:161, 173, 196.

<sup>82</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:113.

Owen is virtually alone among seventeenth-century commentators in reaching and advocating the conclusion that the Septuagint or similar version was not the textual source of the author's OT quotations. Exegetes from such varying theological positions as the Reformed David Paraeus, Jacques Cappel, and Johannes Coccejus, the Socinian Johann Crell, the Catholic Libert Froidmont and the enigmatic Hugo Grotius all assume that the author used the Greek version.<sup>83</sup> Even those commentators who theologically agree with Owen concerning the priority of the originals over the existing versions claim that the author cited the LXX in this epistle. Matthew Poole is aware of the questions surrounding the use of the versions in exegesis, and the implications of the author's use of the Septuagint here. Yet he believes that the apostle cited from the LXX for pastoral reasons, since, "that translation was commonly used by the dispersed Graecising Hebrews." Furthermore, in these specific instances, Poole believes that the author of the epistle cites from the LXX with the Spirit's warrant, thus granting 'divine authorization' to this portion of the Septuagint.<sup>84</sup> George Lawson is also cognizant of the theological issues at hand, but goes in another direction. In commenting on the citation in Hebrews 1:6 and its referent to Psalm 97, he notes

These seem to differ much, but here you must take notice, that the Apostle useth the words of the Septuagint, and that which is strange, the words of the Septuagint as used in Deut. 32.45 rather than those we read Psal.97.7... And its certain, that the Greek Translators either followed an Hebrew copy different from ours, or else they understood the word *Malachin, Angels*, and expressed it in their Version. For that Translation is not wording, but rather a Paraphrase, and many times gives the sense; and sometimes where they are most blamed; as forsaking the Original, they are most excellent, and give greatest light, as the *Chaldee Paraphrase* many times doth. But not to insist upon the Translations, nor upon the word *Elohim*, which is said to

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<sup>83</sup> Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:839; Cappel, *Observationes*, 64-66; Coccejus, *Opera Omnia*, 6:21; Johann Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica, didactica, et polemica. Sive ejus in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros commentarii. Maximam partem hactenus inediti*, in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, vols. 8-9 (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam]: Sumptibus Irenici Philalethii, 1656), vol. 9, fol. 77; Johann Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner in a Commentary Vpon the Epistle to the Hebrevvves* (London, 1646), 7; Froidmont, *Commentaria in sacram scripturam*, 305; Grotius, *Annotationes*, 7:356-357, 359.

<sup>84</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:811.

signify God, Angles, Princes, excellent men, Idols : The words of the Apostle following the Septuagint are plain, and inform us.<sup>85</sup>

Lawson here claims that the Septuagint should be understood as a paraphrase, and that the apostle, by citing it, was not forsaking the original, but was simply employing the wording which best brought forth the sense of the Hebrew text. William Gouge appears to be the only contemporary expositor who agrees with Owen, and his comments are not altogether clear. On the one hand, Gouge asserts that the insertion of the title, κύριε, in verse 10 was taken from the Hebrew Psalm and not from the LXX, and that the citation in verse 7 is the apostle's own translation of Psalm 104:4.<sup>86</sup> However, he also implies that the apostle at least had on hand Greek translations and that he followed them in his writings.<sup>87</sup>

In arguing that the author made his own translation from the original Old Testament texts in his epistle, Owen is not unaware of the various differences which separate the epistle's wording from the original. Numerous times, Owen notes that the author's citations differ both from the known Greek translations as well as from a strict word for word translation of the Hebrew. Owen gives various reasons for this verbal divergence. First, in both the *Exercitations* and in the commentary itself, he frequently notes that there is "much variety, with little or no difference" in the sense of the text, and that the apostle uses his own liberty in varying the form or order of the words.<sup>88</sup> Thus, Owen is unconcerned about the validity of the apostle's citation in 1:6 where the second person

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<sup>85</sup> Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 10. See also, Henry Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture, Containing the several Tropes, Figures, Proprieties of Speech used therein; with other Observations, necessary for the right Understanding thereof* (London, 1669), 118-120; T[homas] W[ilson], *Theologicall Rules, to Guide Vs in the Vnderstanding and Practice of Holy Scriptures: two centuries: drawne partly out of Scriptures themselues: partly out of ecclesiasticall writers old and new* (London, 1615), 37, sometimes erroneously attributed to Thomas Walkington.

<sup>86</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 71, 45-46. See also, 84.

<sup>87</sup> E.g., Gouge, *Hebrews*, 42-43, 77, 84.

<sup>88</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 17:107. See also, 17:108, 113; 19:161, 196.

imperative hishtaphel Hebrew verb **הִשְׁתַּחֲוֶה** is rendered as a third person imperative *προσκυνησάτωσαν* – in contrast to Enyedi who sees this as invalidating the authority of the citation – because, the passage is expressed by the apostle “with a very small variation in the words, and none at all in the sense.”<sup>89</sup> As Francis Gomarus says at this point, the alteration in grammatical form represents “*diversa quidem persona, sed eodem omnino sensu.*”<sup>90</sup> Secondly, Owen asserts that, in quoting the Old Testament, the apostle’s design “was not exactly to translate, but faithfully to apply the sense of the place unto his own purpose.”<sup>91</sup> This, for instance, allowed the author in 1:10-12 to render the Hebrew **תְּחַלֵּץ** with *ἐλίξεις* instead of the LXX’s *ἀλλάξεις*.<sup>92</sup> Similarly, the apostle rearranges the passage, adds to the text or leaves out certain phrases as suits his purpose.<sup>93</sup> Owen is satisfied to show that “the apostle expresseth exactly the sense of the Holy Ghost, but observes not the first, exact signification of the word” and that “the sense and intendment of the Holy Ghost is preserved.”<sup>94</sup> As long as the true sense of the original Hebrew is maintained, Owen is unaffected by variations in the wording.

It is also undeniably manifest, from this view of his words, that the apostle did not scrupulously confine himself unto the precise words either of the original or any translation whatever, – if any other translation, or targum, were then extant besides that of the LXX. Observing and expressing the sense of the testimonies which he thought meet to produce and make use of, he used great liberty, as did other holy writers of the New Testament, according to the guidance of the Holy Ghost, by whose inspiration he wrote, in expressing them by words of his own. And who shall blame him for so doing? Who should bind him to the rules of quotations, which sometimes necessity, sometimes curiosity, sometimes the cavils of other men, impose upon us in our writings? Herein the apostle used that liberty which the Holy

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:161. Cf. Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 79-80, 386.

<sup>90</sup> Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 303.

<sup>91</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:108.

<sup>92</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:108.

<sup>93</sup> As in the citations at 1:10-12, 3:7-11, 4:4, 9:20, and 12:5-6; Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:108, 110, 112, 113.

<sup>94</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:112.

Ghost gave unto him, without the least prejudice unto truth or the faith of the church.<sup>95</sup>

Unexpected support for Owen's position is found in the Catholic exegete Libert Froidmont's citation of Jerome concerning the freedom of the biblical authors in quoting Scripture, preserving the sense of the text without strict adherence to the words: "sed observandum est quod apostoli & evangelistae in iis qua transferunt ex veteri testamento in novum, sensu reservato, tempora & modos saepe ac ordinem verborum commutent, imo etiam detrahant, aut addant aliqua verba."<sup>96</sup>

If the verbal variance of the author's citations from the Hebrew did not greatly concern Owen, the verbal conformity of those citations to the LXX certainly did. Of the twenty-five different quotations Owen analyzes, eleven times he acknowledges that the epistle's words are identical with the Septuagint (twelve, if the quotation in 1:5b would have been identified with 2 Samuel 7:14 instead of 1 Chronicles 22:10). It was on the basis of this remarkable conformity that previous commentators had identified the Septuagint as the author's textual source for the citations; given the verbal flexibility which naturally accompanies the process of translation, it is virtually impossible that the epistle's author would have independently rendered the Old Testament Hebrew in the exact wording of the translators of the Greek versions. Consequently, most of Owen's exegetical predecessors and contemporaries believed that the apostle was indebted to one of those versions for his wording. Owen also acknowledges this surprising feature, especially when both the apostle's expression and the LXX differ in identical ways from the Hebrew. In light of these instances, Owen realizes that "the principal difficulty about

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<sup>95</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:113-114.

<sup>96</sup> Froidmont, *Commentaria in sacram scripturam*, 305.

these citations, lies in those wherein the words of the apostle are the same with those now extant in the Greek Bible, both evidently departing from the original.”<sup>97</sup>

Owen’s solution to this difficulty, however, is precisely the opposite of his fellow exegetes: he believes that the later transcribers of the Greek Bibles made the versions to conform to the apostle’s wording. Thus, the citations in the epistle reflect the author’s own rendering of the Hebrew Old Testament, and later scribes altered the LXX to match the epistle.

I say, then, it is highly probable that the apostle, according to his wonted manner, which appears in almost all the citations used by him in this Epistle, reporting the sense and importance of the places in words of his own, the Christian transcribers of the Greek Bible inserted his expressions into the text; either as judging them a more proper version of the original, whereof they were ignorant, than that of the LXX., or out of a preposterous zeal to take away the appearance of a diversity between the text and the apostle’s citation of it. And thus, in those testimonies where there is a real variation from the Hebrew original, the apostle took not his words from the translation of the LXX., but his words were afterwards inserted into that translations.<sup>98</sup>

This is not just wishful thinking on Owen’s part; he does not simply assert this belief, but seeks evidence from the actual text of the citations. Owen demonstrates that the correspondence between the author and the present texts of the Septuagint is better explained by the extant LXX copies’ reliance upon the Epistle to the Hebrews than the other way around. His argument is largely an internal one, though he does make a few external or textual arguments for his theory of textual dependence.

Anticipating how he will be interpreting the citations so to show that their extraction from the OT context as well as their employment in the Hebrews epistle is “most proper and cogent,”<sup>99</sup> Owen believes that he can prove that the peculiarities of the

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<sup>97</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:114.

<sup>98</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:115.

<sup>99</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:114.

readings which are alike in the epistle and the LXX are present in support the author's argument in the epistle, whereas they are unnecessary and/or superfluous in the LXX.

Whereas the reasons of the apostle for his application of the testimonies used by him in his words and expressions are evident, as shall in particular be made to appear; so no reason can be assigned why the LXX. (if any such LXX. there were) who translated the Old Testament, or any other translators of it, should so render the words of the Hebrew text.<sup>100</sup>

One of Owen's clearest examples is the citation of Psalm 102:25-27 in Hebrews 1:10-12.

The Septuagint and the author agree in reading the vocative, κύριε, in the beginning of the verse where no corresponding Hebrew exists in the original. Whereas Owen can find no exegetical or textual reason for the insertion of this word by the Greek translators, it does fulfill a necessary role in the New Testament citation.

The word κύριε, "O Lord," inserted by the apostle, is also undoubtedly taken from hence into the Greek Bible; for as the inserting of it was necessary unto the apostle to denote the person treated of, so it is not in the original, nor will the context of the psalm admit of it; so that it could no otherwise come into that place but from this of the apostle.<sup>101</sup>

Another instance explored at length by Owen is the proper referent of the citation in Hebrews 1:6. Like most other Reformed commentators of his time, Owen identified this citation with Psalm 97:7, even though there are numerous differences "both in form of speech and words," and the words appear identically in the Greek versions of Deuteronomy 32:43.<sup>102</sup> Owen claims that these words were inserted by Christian scribes into the LXX copies at this point to harmonize the Old Testament with the apostle's

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<sup>100</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:115.

<sup>101</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:108.

<sup>102</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107. See also, Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 10; Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 303; *The Dutch Annotations upon the Whole Bible: or, All the Holy Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, together with, and according to their own Translation of all the Text: As both the one and the other were ordered and appointed by the Synod of Dort, 1618. And published by Authority, 1637*, 2 vols., trans. Theodore Haak (London, 1657); Diodati, *Annotations*, 365; Obadiah Walker, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon the Epistles of St. Paul Written to the Romans, Corinthians, and Hebrews* (Oxford, 1675), 10; Rollock, *Analysis logica*, 8; Gouge, *Hebrews*, 42-43; Piscator, *Commentarii*, 187-188; Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:839.

words: “some could not conjecture from whence it should be taken, yet finding it urged by the apostle as a testimony out of the Old Testament, is inserted in another place of the text than that from which he took it.”<sup>103</sup> Following Junius’s grounds for rejecting the Deuteronomic insertion, Owen lists three reasons for denying the validity of the verse: (1) there is no corresponding phrase in any original text, (2) the verse is out of place in the Deuteronomy context, and (3) the citation in Hebrews draws upon the whole context of Psalm 97, thus locating the source of the quotation in that psalm.<sup>104</sup> Thus, in Owen’s mind, the only way to explain their presence in the Greek translations of Deuteronomy is to ascribe it to an inappropriate attempt to conform the LXX with the Hebrews epistle. Given these and other examples, Owen concludes concerning these harmonizations that “the common reading which is now fixed in the Greek Bible was translated thither from this place of the apostle.”<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, Owen provides some evidence to prove that the extant copies of the LXX have been altered from their original wording. Earlier in *Of the Divine Original*, in countering the willingness of some to appeal to the Septuagint in order to reconstruct the original text, Owen had claimed,

That this translation – either from the mistakes of its first authors, (if it be theirs whose name and number it bears,) or the carelessness, or ignorance, or worse, of its transcribers – is corrupted and gone off from the original in a thousand places twice told, is acknowledged by all who know aught of these things. Strange that so corrupt a stream should be judged a fit means to cleanse the fountain; that such a Lesbian rule should be thought a fit measure to correct the original by.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:116.

<sup>104</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107, 116; 19:160-161; Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum*, 214-215.

<sup>105</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:109.

<sup>106</sup> Owen, *Of the Divine Original*, 16:301. See also, Owen’s expanded argument on this point in *Integrity and Purity*, 16:408-410, 416-418; John Owen, *The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 4 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 233. Other post-Reformation orthodox claimed the LXX texts were errant at places, see Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Redelijke*



In his analysis of the citation in Hebrews 2:6-8, Owen quotes Chrysostom's comments on Psalm 8 where he mentions different Greek renderings of the Hebrew – even though in the extant LXX copies of the seventeenth century, the LXX uniformly reflected the apostle's wording in the epistle. Owen cites this as evidence that some Greek versions have been altered to correspond to the apostle sometime between Chrysostom's time and the present.<sup>107</sup> Owen also points out variant readings of Jeremiah 31:31-34 in the Septuagint: some copies of the LXX read πολίτην and some πλησίον in harmony with Hebrews, which in Owen's judgment, "makes it evident that there hath been tampering, to bring them to uniformity."<sup>108</sup>

Given both the internal evidence concerning the propriety of the apostle's wording to his argument, and the external evidence of variant readings in some texts of the LXX, Owen concludes

I judge there is much more ground to suppose that the apostle's expressions, which he had weighty cause to use, were by some person inserted into the Greek text of the Old Testament, than that a translation which those that made it had no cause so to do, evidently forsaking the proper meaning of very obvious words, and their sense, known to themselves, should be taken up and used by the apostle unto his purpose.<sup>109</sup>

Once again, Owen stands virtually alone among sixteenth and seventeenth-century exegetes in concluding that the harmony between the apostle and the LXX was due to the alteration to the Greek version to conform to the apostle's wording.

For Owen, the hermeneutical significance of the foregoing analysis is to demonstrate the fallacy of assuming that the LXX was the source text for the author's citations. This itself is a concern for Owen primarily because of his passion for defending

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*Godsdienst* (Utrecht, 1700; repr. *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, trans. Bartel Elshout, 4 vols. Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1992), 1:71-72.

<sup>107</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:109.

<sup>108</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:111.

<sup>109</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:116.

the authority and purity of the original texts, especially against the emerging text criticism of fellow Protestants like Louis Cappel and Brian Walton. Owen assumed that the apostle's handling of the OT Scripture in his citations should serve as a model for our own exegesis. Thus, the question of the textual source was an important one. If it could be shown that the apostle in writing the epistle referred to an existing translation and not the original Hebrew text, then this would undercut Owen's insistence upon the priority of the originals. It was a small step in Owen's mind, from allowing that the author drew upon the Septuagint for his citations, and using the Septuagint to make alterations to the original texts of the Old Testament.

Thus, in light of the verbal conformity of the Greek version and the author's citations,

many confidently affirm that the apostle waived the original, and reported the words from the translation of the LXX. Cappellus with some others proceed further, and assign the rise of this difference unto some other copies of the Hebrew text, used by the LXX., varying from those which now remain... so this boldness in correcting the text, and fancying, without proof, testimony, or probability, of other ancient copies of the scripture of the Old Testament, differing in many things from them which alone remain, and which indeed were ever in the world, may quickly prove pernicious to the church of God.<sup>110</sup>

Owen objects to this form of text criticism because it is ultimately based on the wisdom of human conjectures – a form of wisdom which for Owen is vastly overrated compared with the wisdom of God – and such conjecture is completely unsupported by any textual evidence, “without proof, testimony, or probability, of other ancient copies of the scripture.”<sup>111</sup> While Owen's argument might make sense given the orthodox theological assertion of the providential preservation of the Scripture, it is ironic that much of Owen's own “evidence” for the corruption of the Septuagint in the post-apostolic age

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<sup>110</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:115.

<sup>111</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:115. See also, Owen, *Integrity and Purity*, 16:407-408.

lacks any textual support, and that he frequently acknowledges that in many instances the extant Septuagint manuscripts bear no mark of his hypothetical alterations.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:107, 109, 111.

## Chapter V

# The Old Testament Citations Their Use by the Apostle

### 1. Owen's Approach to the Question of the Citations' Content

#### 1.1 The Problem

Having vindicated the apostle from questions regarding his choice of sources from which to draw his citations, Owen then confronts a second critique concerning the Old Testament quotations – one which was equally damaging to his interest in upholding the apostle's exegetical approach to Scripture. Some commentators including Erasmus, Cajetan, Schlichting, and Enyedi had questioned the authority of the epistle based upon the dubious verbal correspondence of the citations to their Old Testament referents. However, a more damaging critique raised by these same interpreters concerned the exegetical legitimacy of using these citations in support of the author's thesis. In their judgment, the author of the epistle had inaccurately applied the OT Scripture to support his argument, ignoring the literal sense of the text for a more far-fetched meaning which could not be justified on the basis of the grammatical words.<sup>1</sup> The way in which the author employed the citations appeared to reflect an exegesis of those texts which betrayed proper hermeneutical principles as formulated throughout the Reformation and post-Reformation periods. Rather than an analysis of the literal sense of the text, these

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<sup>1</sup> Erasmus, *Erasmus' Annotations on the New Testament: Galatians to the Apocalypse*, ed. Anne Reeve (New York: Brill, 1993), 707-713 and 735-736; Tommaso Cajetan, *Opera Omnia Quotquot in Sacrae Scripture Expositionem Reperimur* (Lyon, 1639), 331-332; Jonasz Schlichting, *Commentaria posthuma, in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros : cuncta hactenus inedita : in dous tomos distincta* (Irenopoli [Amsterdam], 1656), 423-424; György Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti : ex quibus Trinitatis dogma stabiliri solet* (Klausenburg, 1597), 379.

critics accused the author of “spiritualizing” the Old Testament passages and applying them to Christ.

This critique is succinctly stated by Enyedi as his fifth reason for rejecting the canonicity of the epistle, and therefore denying the legitimacy of its Trinitarian statements:

*Quinto*, quia illa testimonia quoque, quae ex veteri testamento citantur, etsi ibi legantur, tamen non in eo sensu, neque recte adducuntur, ut verbi gratia, cap 2 vers 6 citatur locus ex Psal 8 in contrarium sensum. Cum enim David ibi loquatur, de excellentia generis humani, iste scriptor inde vult probare dejectionem, & vilem Christi conditionem et cap 9 vers 2 ea de tabernaculo scribit, quae refelli ex veteri testamento possunt. Cap 1 vers 6.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, in his critique of how Trinitarians understand Hebrews 1:6, Jonasz Schlichting argues that the citation does not even apply to Christ: “quem citas ex epist: ad Hebraeos locum, is nihil huc pertinet, in quo ne in mundum quidem hunc missus dicitur Christus.”<sup>3</sup>

Owen’s initial reaction was to be shocked by the audacity of men who claim to know the fullness of God’s intention in the Scripture. Owen challenges both their ability to know “the particular intention” of the Hebrew’s author “in the assertions which he produceth these testimonies in the confirmation of,” and the true meaning of the Old Testament which the author quotes. For this critique of Enyedi and others to hold, they must

better understand the meaning and importance of the testimonies so produced out of the Old Testament than he did by whom they are here alleged... They must, I say, take upon themselves to know the true meaning of them, and that in the uttermost extent of signification and intention, as given out by the Holy Ghost, before they can charge their misapplication on this author. How vain, unjust, arrogant, and presumptuous, this supposition is, needs little labour to demonstrate. The understandings of men are a very sorry measure of the truth, with the whole sense and intendment of the Holy Ghost in every place of Scripture.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 379.

<sup>3</sup> Schlichting, *Commentaria posthuma*, 423-424.

<sup>4</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vols. 17-23, ed. William Goold (1854; repr. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 17:39-40.

Two assumptions are necessary if one is to insist that the testimony from the Old Testament is not rightly produced or applied to Christ, and in both Owen sees the elevation of human reason above its limited and sinful state:

First, That whatever any man might or could apprehend concerning the right application of this testimony, he himself [the modern exegete] might and could so do; for otherwise he might have acknowledged his own insufficiency, and have left the solution of the difficulty unto them to whom God should be pleased to reveal it. Secondly, That when men of any generation cannot understand the force and efficacy of the reasonings of the penmen of the Holy Ghost, nor discern the suitability of the testimonies they make use of unto the things they produce them in the confirmation of, they may lawfully reject any portion of Scripture thereon. The folly and iniquity of which principles or suppositions are manifest.<sup>5</sup>

In this analysis, Owen's understanding of the limitations of human ability, as well as the divine sense of Scripture, is clear. If it is granted that man has the capability of knowing as much or more about the true sense of Scripture as does the divine author himself, if it is assumed that man's reason is capable of fully comprehending the divine, then Owen foresees the collapse of biblical authority and the reign of subjective interpretation: "it may be easily imagined how able some men will quickly think themselves to question other allegations in the New Testament, and thereby render the authority of the whole dubious."<sup>6</sup>

But Owen also recognizes the methodological seriousness of this charge and spends significant time in his *Exposition* defending the author's use of the passages. In asserting the apostolic authority and canonicity of the epistle, Owen could not accept Enyedi's conclusion that the evidence in the epistle of poor exegesis meant that the letter was not divine Scripture. Neither could he accept that the apostles, in writing Scripture, improperly handled the Old Testament. Thus, Owen sought to overthrow Enyedi's premise that the epistle's citations depict poor exegesis, and to vindicate the apostle's

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<sup>5</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:138.

<sup>6</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:39.

exegetical conclusions, demonstrating that the author had indeed accurately expressed the divine sense of the text. Owen is convinced that “in our exposition of the places themselves, we shall manifest that his application of them is every way suitable to the very letter of the text and the manifest intention of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>7</sup>

Whereas any one of these testimonies, or any part of any one of them, may appear at first view to be applied by him unsuitably unto their original importance and intention, we shall manifest not only the contrary to be true against those who have made such exceptions, but also that he makes use of those which were most proper, and cogent, with respect unto them with whom he had to do.<sup>8</sup>

Rather than an example of poor exegesis, Owen believes that a proper analysis of the author’s argument in Hebrews will reveal that the author choose OT texts which were completely suitable to his purpose, and that he handled them in a manner which serves as a model for all churchly interpretation.

Owen is committed to defending the apostle’s exegetical methodology in citing Old Testament texts to support his theological conclusions in Hebrews 1. Owen’s own hermeneutical principles are visible in his analysis of the apostle’s exegesis. As with his emphasis on the apostle’s textual use, the exegetical issues Owen focuses on reveal as much of his own exegetical concerns as it does of the apostle’s. He demonstrates that the author of Hebrews cites the Old Testament’s literal sense, and that the context of the citation is crucial to understanding the author’s use of the passage. By examining his analysis of the author’s exegesis, Owen’s own commitment to the literal sense of the text, his understanding of what the literal sense involves, his grammatical and contextual concerns, and other exegetical issues can be better understood.

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<sup>7</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:41.

<sup>8</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:114.

## 1.2 Owen's Approach to the Citations

In order to justify the apostle's use of the Old Testament in his epistle to the Hebrews, Owen needed to demonstrate two things : first, that it was appropriate to apply the Old Testament text to Christ (or in the case of verse 7, to the angels), that is, that in its literal sense, the OT passage dealt with the material/person which the apostle says it does, and second, that the text correctly advances the argument of the apostle in the epistle, that is, that the passage actually says what the apostle wants it to say. The first question deals with the "who" of the OT text, and the second with the "what." Thus, in the midst of his exposition of Hebrews, when confronted with an OT citation, Owen examines it in light of these two questions – does it literally refer to Christ, and does its OT meaning fit the NT context? Depending upon the citation, Owen spends varying amount of time dealing with each question. Occasionally, the answer to one or the other is apparent, and sometimes, the answer to the second question is obvious if the first is clarified. But the method and goal remain the same – to show that the apostle correctly understood and applied the literal sense of the OT passage.<sup>9</sup>

In light of this approach to the text, a central aspect of Owen's examination of the citations was an analysis of the Old Testament context. Given the nature and style of their commentaries, a number of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century exegetical works paid little or no attention to the original context of the citations.<sup>10</sup> To other commentators, the appropriateness of applying an OT quotation to Christ is proved simply by the fact that the apostle so used it: if the apostle said that the source was christological, then it was.

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<sup>9</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:131, 139-140, 151, 179, 196-197.

<sup>10</sup> William Jones, *A Commentary vpon the Epistles of Saint Paul to Philemon, and to the Hebrewes* (London, 1635); Anthony Godeau, *Eleuations a Jesus-Christ, et meditations chrestiennes sur le texte de l'Epistre aux Hebreux* (Paris, 1660); Robert Rollock, *Analysis logica in epistolam ad Hebraeos* (Edinburgh, 1605); John Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition Upon All the Epistles, and the Revelation of*



Edward Deering's comments on the use of Psalm 97 in verse 6 reflect this kind of thinking:

touching the alledging of this text out of the Psalme, we neede not doubt, this doing of the Apostle is prooffe ynough, that that Psalme is a prophecie of the kingdome of Christe, of which the psalme saith, that God with greate power and glorie woulde establishe it in earth.<sup>11</sup>

And on verse 7, Deering writes concerning Psalm 104, "now for the allegation of this text, the Apostle is a sufficient witness to me, that this verse of the 104. Psalm, is ment of the angels of God: and not of the windes: and I see no reason to the contrarie."<sup>12</sup>

Owen's contemporary, William Gouge stated the same principle:

It is sufficient for us Christians to persuade us, that the Son of God and his excellency is set out in this psalm, because an apostle guided by the same Spirit that the psalmist was, doth so directly and expressly apply it to Christ, as here it is applied.<sup>13</sup>

Owen holds the same view of apostolic and scriptural authority as these commentators, and thus acknowledges the force of this argument. Yet asserting this position and proving it to others are two different things, and Owen is committed, not just to affirm the apostle's exegetical methodology, but to demonstrate its validity.

With them that acknowledge the divine authority of this epistle, it is sufficient in general, to give them satisfaction, to observe that the place is applied unto Christ, and this passage [Psalm 97] unto the ministering angels, by the same Spirit who first wrote that Scripture. But yet there is room left for our inquiry how these things may be evidenced, whereby the strength of the apostle's reasonings, with them who were

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*John the Divine* (London, 1647; repr. 1958); David Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1649; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978).

<sup>11</sup> Edward Dering, *XXVII Lectures, or Readings, vpon part of the Epistle to the Hebrues* (London, 1614), C.v.v.

<sup>12</sup> Dering, *XXVII Lectures*, C.vi.r.

<sup>13</sup> William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (1655; repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 57. See also Franciscus Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum libri tres: id est, Comparatio locorum Scripturae Sacrae, qui ex Testamento Vetere in Novo* (Heidelberg, 1588), 216; George Lawson, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrewes wherein the Text is Cleared, Theopolitica Improved, the Socinian Comment Examined* (London, 1662), 12; *The Dutch Annotations upon the Whole Bible: or, All the Holy Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, together with, and according to their own Translation of all the Text: As both the one and the other were ordered and appointed by the Synod of Dort, 1618. And published by Authority, 1637*, 2 vols., trans. Theodore Haak (London, 1657) on Hebrews 1:8.

not yet convinced of the infallibility of his assertions, any further than they were confirmed by testimonies out of the Old Testament and the faith of the ancient church of the Hebrews in this matter, may be made to appear; ass also a check given to their boldness who, upon pretence of the impropriety of these allegations, have questioned the authority of the whole epistle.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, Owen's investigation is an attempt to give evidence for the apostle's exegetical faithfulness, even though the divine authority which underlies the Epistle to the Hebrews is the formal proof of that faithfulness.

### 1.3 The Controlling Scope of Hebrews 1:4-14

Once the application of the Old Testament citation to Christ has been vindicated, Owen's next step is to demonstrate its function in its New Testament context. Because of its importance to his overall strategy to substantiate the apostle's exegetical approach to the Old Testament, Owen spends significant time identifying and defining the proper scope of the latter half of the first chapter of Hebrews. Owen had earlier described the overall design of the apostle as "to evince the necessity of abiding in the doctrine of the gospel, from the excellency of the person by whom it pleased God to reveal it unto us."<sup>15</sup> In the first three verses of the first chapter, this was done by asserting Christ's supremacy over the Old Testament prophets and their message. In the latter portion of the chapter, the author's intention is now to demonstrate Christ's pre-eminence over the angels. A comparison between Christ and the angels could be made either with respect to their natures – who has a superior nature, Christ or the angels – or their status and office – who has greater esteem, glory, and authority.

The truth is, the apostle hath no design to prove by arguments and testimonies the excellencies of the divine nature above the angelical. There was no need so to do, nor do his testimonies prove any such thing. Besides, speaking of angels, the other part of the comparison, he treats not of their nature, but their office, work, and

<sup>14</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:160.

<sup>15</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:121.

employment, with their honourable and glorious condition therein. Whereas, therefore, the apostle produceth sundry testimonies confirming the deity of the Son, he doth it not absolutely to prove the divine nature to be more excellent than the angelical, but only to manifest thereby the glorious condition of him who is partaker of it, and consequently his pre-eminence above angels or the equity that it should be so.<sup>16</sup>

For Owen, the passage clearly deals with the declarative character of Christ and his role; he forcefully argues that the apostle does not intend to speak of a comparison of natures, but a comparison of condition or status. Thus, Owen does not use this portion of Scripture to further define or describe the ontological nature of Christ. Rather, the passage speaks to Christ's standing and the excellencies which accrue to him as a result. In Owen's opinion, the main purpose of the pericope deals not with Christ's divine eternal generation, or with his deity at all, but with the exalted status with which Christ is to be viewed.

In defining the intention of the author of this section in this fashion, Owen opposes the conclusions of most of the other exegetes of his time. A few of his contemporaries recognized the declarative force of the quotations, that they spoke of Christ's excellencies above the angels in terms of what is declared of him, as opposed to what is inherent because of his divine nature. Hints of this distinction finds its way into the work of George Lawson and Francis Gomarus, though they nevertheless speak frequently of Christ's eternal generation in their expositions.<sup>17</sup> However, the common exposition of this pericope understands it as describing Christ's superiority over the angels as grounded in a comparison of the divine and angelic natures. Most commentators either assume or assert that the apostle is seeking through the testimonies of the Old Testament to demonstrate the divine nature of Christ, and its superiority over that of the angels. Some

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<sup>16</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:122.

<sup>17</sup> Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 9; Francis Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia* (Amsterdam, 1644), 295-296.

even interpret these verses in light of the hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine natures. Thus, David Dickson describes how Christ is superior to the angels

both as God by eternal generation, and as man by assumption of our nature in unity of one person; according to which he is not the adopted, but the natural Son of God: *filius natus, non filius factus*... Christ, as God, is called God's Son, because by eternal generation he is so : as man he is called God's Son, because by assumption of the human nature unto the personal union of his Godhead, he is made so to be.<sup>18</sup>

And Matthew Poole notes, "A more excellent person he is beyond any comparison for his Divine nature, and in his human transcending the angelical, on account of the hypostatical union."<sup>19</sup> William Jones sees only the divine nature in view: "What Sonne? The naturall Sonne of God, begotten of Gods essence: the Angels are made by God, but not begotten of God, as Christ is."<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in commentating on the use of Psalm 2 in verse 5, Johannes Piscator asserts, "Christus nominatur filius Dei, quia a Deo est genitus: sicut verba Psalmi secundi expresse declarant."<sup>21</sup> And so with other commentators, Reformed and non-Reformed, in England and on the continent.<sup>22</sup>

Owen sees this faulty identification of the author's design for this section of the epistle as causing some of the interpretative problems other commentators generally associate with these Old Testament citations. If one assumes that the citations are intended to prove Christ's divinity or his dual natures, then the value of the quotations is often difficult to understand.

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<sup>18</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 9.

<sup>19</sup> Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 3:810.

<sup>20</sup> Jones, *Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 62.

<sup>21</sup> Johannes Piscator, *Commentarii in omnes libros Novi Testamenti* (Herborn, 1613), 182.

<sup>22</sup> Dering, *XXVII Lectures*, C.ii.v; Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (1706-1710; repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 6:717; Gouge, *Hebrews*, 26, 31-36; John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul, being fourteene* (London, 1631), 580; Jean Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible, plainly Expounding the Most Difficult Places Thereof* (London, 1648), 356, 365; David Paraeus, *Commentarius in Diui Pauli Epistolam ad Hebraeos, in Opera Theologica*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1628), 2:838; Jacques Cappel, *Observationes in Novum Testamentum*

The main difficulty which in this place [the quotations in verse 5] expositors generally trouble themselves withal ariseth purely from their own mistake. They cannot understand how these words should prove the natural sonship of Jesus Christ, which they suppose they are produced to confirm, seeing it is from thence that he is exalted above the angels. But the truth is, the words are not designed by the apostle unto any such end. His aim is only to prove that the Lord Christ hath a name assigned unto him more excellent, either in itself or in the manner of its attribution, than any that is given unto the angels.<sup>23</sup>

The actual eternal generation of the Son is, of course, important here; but Owen's emphasis is that the natural sonship of Christ lies behind the apostle's use of the testimonies, not as the intended object of their application.

There is, indeed, included in this reasoning of the apostle an intimation of a peculiar filiation and sonship of Christ. Had he not been so the Son of God as never any angel or other creature was, he never had been called so in such a way as they are never so called. But this the apostle at present doth not expressly insist upon; only, he intimates it as the foundation of his discourse.<sup>24</sup>

The ontological relationship of Christ to the Father is implied by the testimonies, but their force is to state Christ's declarative standing as the Son, not his divine nature. Thus, Owen's conclusion concerning the purpose of the quotations in verse 5 is that

they intend not the eternal and natural relation that is between the Father and Son, which neither is nor can be the subject of any promise, but the *paternal care* of God over Christ in his kingdom, and the dearness of Christ himself unto him. If it be asked on what account God would thus be a father unto Jesus Christ in this peculiar manner, it must be answered that the radical, fundamental cause of it lay in the relation that was between them from his eternal generation; but he manifested himself to be his father, and engaged to deal with him in the love and care of a father, as he had accomplished his work of mediation on the earth and was exalted unto his throne and rule in heaven.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, his perception of the true scope of the whole pericope powerfully influences how Owen proceeds to demonstrate the validity of each citation in the design of the chapter. The citations are one part of an overall argument, whose intention is not to prove Christ's

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(Amsterdam, 1657), 115-116; Libert Froidmont, *Commentaria in sacram scripturam : in duas partes distributa* (Rouen, 1709), 305; Godeau, *Eleuatiens a Iesus-Christ*, 20-23.

<sup>23</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:139.

<sup>24</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:135.

<sup>25</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:145, his emphasis.

divine nature, but simply to show Christ's pre-eminence over the angles. By limiting the chapter's scope in this manner, Owen is able to justify the role the quotations play, as well as emphasize the appropriateness of their employment by the apostle.

## 2. Owen's Evaluation of the Use of the Old Testament in the New

Owen's English translation, the Greek text he used (Stephanus's edition, probably taken from Walton's *Polyglot*), and the *Polyglot's* Septuagint and Hebrew renderings (clarified when necessary from the modern BHS), precede his evaluation of the apostle's use of each citation.

### 2.1 Hebrews 1:5a and Psalm 2:7

Hebrews 1:5a Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

Hebrews 1:5a Υἱός μου εἶ σύ, ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε;

Psalm 2:7 υἱός μου εἶ σύ ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκά σε.

בְּנִי אַתָּה אֲנִי הַיּוֹם יְלִדְתִּיךָ: Psalm 2:7

Once he has dealt with the opening words in Hebrews 1:5, Owen's first task in regard to the citation of Psalm 2:7 is to prove that Christ is "peculiarly intended therein."<sup>26</sup> In this pursuit, he first had to deal with those who insisted that the psalm was principally, and even solely, intended for King David alone, and should be understood simply of him. This interpretation was advanced by Jewish commentators in reaction to the Christian application of the psalm to Christ. David Kimchi, one of the medieval Jewish expositors who was popular in the growing Hebraic movement of the seventeenth century, interpreted the psalm in this way.<sup>27</sup> Kimchi does acknowledge that some earlier Jewish Rabbis understood the psalm as referring to the coming Messiah, but "the better

<sup>26</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:131.

[explanation] is that David uttered it concerning himself.” He goes on to assert that the interpretation of the “Nazarenes” is incoherent, since a son “must necessarily be of His species, and be God like Him,” a prospect which clearly violates Kimchi’s understanding of monotheism.<sup>28</sup>

The psalm’s messianic use by the apostles in Acts forced the antitrinitarian György Enyedi to admit that the psalm could be understood of Christ. However, he did so in a way which separated himself from the mainstream of Protestant biblical interpretation. He asserted that “duos esse praecipuos interpretandi scripturam modes. Unum, literalem & historicum, alterum mysticum & spirituale.”<sup>29</sup> Having distinguished between a literal/historical and a mystical/spiritual interpretations, and giving examples of this dual hermeneutic in the New Testament, Enyedi claims that “Psalm secundum, literaliter de David, spiritualiter de Messia, seu Christo loqui.”<sup>30</sup> Supporting the identification of this psalm with David with citations from Bucer, Calvin, Musculus, Tremellius, and others, Enyedi concludes, “unde liquet, literaliter haec, de Christi non fuisse scripta.”<sup>31</sup> Since David is the literal referent of the psalm, and what applies to Christ of the psalm also applies to David, the “sonship” of David and Christ must be identical – and thus, the sonship must be metaphorical, not natural. “Eo non significari physicam generationem, quasi deus naturaliter, ex sua essentia aut natura genuisset Davidem; sed hoc intelligendum esses, de gratia, favore, & amore dei paterno, quo Davidem amplexus est, honore, dignitate, & beneficio affecit.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> David Kimchi, *The Longer Commentary of R. David Kimhi on the First Book of Psalms* (London: Macmillian, 1919), 16-19.

<sup>28</sup> Kimchi, *The First Book of Psalms*, 18.

<sup>29</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 56.

<sup>30</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 57.

<sup>31</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 58-59.

Most Protestant exegetes rejected the rigid separation between the literal and spiritual interpretations which Enyedi employs, and although some like Hugo Grotius explain this text's New Testament use in light of its "mystico sensu" as opposed to its "sensu vulgari,"<sup>33</sup> others saw these two "senses" as dual aspects of a single typological psalm. For Calvin the psalm undeniably refers to David as a type of Christ:

Non est negandum quin de Davide hoc praedicetur: nempe quatenus Christi personam sustinuit. Ergo quae habentur in hoc psalmo, in Davide oportuit adumbrari: sed in Christo sunt expressa.<sup>34</sup>

Like Calvin, most Reformed exegetes including David Paraeus, Francis Junius, Francis Gomarus, David Dickson, Matthew Poole and the authors of *The Westminster Annotations*, understood the psalm as referring to David typologically, and to Christ as the antitype.<sup>35</sup>

A few commentators, however, assert that Christ is the direct referent of the psalm, and that David should not even be viewed in this text as a type for Christ. Johannes Piscator writes that "qui totus propheticus est, continens prophetiam de exhibitione Christi & ordinatione in regem & prophetam & summum sacerdotem Ecclesiae."<sup>36</sup> Thus, in the citation of verse 7 in Hebrews 1:5 "esse verba Dei patris ad Christum, quibus illi aperte tribuit nomen Filii."<sup>37</sup> Based on the extent of the promises and the vision of the kingdom expressed in the psalm, William Gouge and Jacques Cappel similarly deny any

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<sup>33</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 7 vols. (Groningen: Zuidema, 1641; repr. 1829), 7:355-356.

<sup>34</sup> John Calvin, *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, 59 vols. (vols. 29-87 of *Corpus Reformationum*), ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss (Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863-1900), vol. 55, column 14; subsequent references to the Calvini opera will be cited *CO*, followed by volume and column numbers.

<sup>35</sup> Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:838; Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum*, 213-214; Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 298; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 9; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:810; *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament, wherein the Text is Explained, Doubts Resolved, Scriptures Paralleled, and Various Readings observed. By the joynt-Labour of certain Learned Divines*, ed. Thomas Gataker, et. al. (London, 1645).

<sup>36</sup> Piscator, *Commentarii*, 182.



interpretation of this psalm in Davidic terms, and assume its direct prophetic application to Christ.<sup>38</sup> Citing Theodore Beza, John Mayer argues it is improper “to apply this unto David, who though he were a more excellent Sonne of God, than other Princes, yet begotten of God he was not, and a great hyperbole must be admitted to be here, if it be understood of him, ‘the uttermost part of the earth for they possession.’”<sup>39</sup>

Owen forcefully argues for this position in his exposition of the citation. He rejects the interpretation of the Jews that the psalm refers only to David as being motivated simply to distort the true Christian understanding, a plan “so wickedly corrupt and partial.”<sup>40</sup> He also questions why David and his kingdom need be intended in this psalm at all, noting three things: first, the NT clearly applies the text to Christ and so has the stamp of authority of the Spirit who wrote both the psalm and the New Testament Scripture; second, as Kimchi and other Jewish Rabbis acknowledge, the ancient and Talmudic Jews themselves understood the passage messianically; and third, “there are sundry things spoken in the psalm that could never truly and properly be applied unto David.” In Owen’s opinion, the whole context of the Psalm argues against its application to David – it speaks of things which could not refer to David or were not fulfilled by him, such as the promises of verses 8-9 or the universal Gospel proclamation in verse 12.

And we have a rule given us by the Holy Ghost, – That where any thing seems to be spoken of any one to whom it doth not properly belong, there the person is not at all to be understood, but the Lord Christ himself immediately.<sup>41</sup>

Consequently, it is impossible for David to be the literal object of the Psalm, and the only proper way to explain the Psalm is seeing it as a prophecy of Christ.

<sup>37</sup> Piscator, *Commentarii*, 183.

<sup>38</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 30; Cappel, *Observationes*, 115.

<sup>39</sup> John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 580.

<sup>40</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:132.

<sup>41</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:133.

Owen does acknowledge that in some respects David is a type of Christ, but he is unwilling to see Psalm 2 as typologically speaking of David. Rather, he sees the psalm as directly addressed to Christ, and then only because of the typical relationship between the king and Christ can one say that there is any reflection upon David. "We may then grant, as that about which we will not contend, that in this psalm consideration was had of David and his kingdom, but not absolutely, but only as a type of Christ."<sup>42</sup> This exposition differs greatly from that of most Reform commentators who hold the application of the psalm to David and his typological relationship to Christ to be the key to its interpretation. In Owen's opinion, the apostle's use of Psalm 2 in Hebrews is not a matter of typology, but of recognizing the psalm's true direct reference to the Messiah.

Having shown that Christ is the intended person spoken of in the psalm, Owen then demonstrates how the citation is cogently used in the apostle's argument in Hebrews 1. The quotation gives the name "Son" to Christ, and to vindicate the author's choice of this citation, "this name must be such as either absolutely, or by reason of its peculiar manner of appropriation unto the Messiah, proves his pre-eminence above the angels."<sup>43</sup> Owen anticipates the objection that the angels as well are called "sons of God" in the Scripture – in what way does the title "Son" prove Christ as superior to the angels? This inquiry led many of Owen's contemporaries to distinguish between Christ's natural sonship and the angels' sonship by creation.<sup>44</sup> David Dickson, for instance, explains the difference between Christ as Son and the angels as sons of God, by pointing to Christ's eternal generation:

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<sup>42</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:133.

<sup>43</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:134-135.

<sup>44</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 30-36; Johannes Coccejus, *Opera Omnia Theologica, Exegetica, Didactica, Polemica, Philologica*, 12 vols. (Amsterdam, 1701-1706), 6:19-20; Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum*, 213-214; Jones, *Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 62.

Only of Christ, saith God, I have begotten thee. Then, 1. Howsoever God hath many sons by creation, by office, by grace, and adoption ; yet a Son by generation, a native son, hath he none but Christ. 2. Christ is of the same nature and essence with the Father, consubstantial with him ; because begotten of him in himself, without beginning ; the son being eternally in the Father, and the Father eternally in the Son, of the self-same nature and Godhead.<sup>45</sup>

Owen, however, refuses to draw such ontological conclusions about Christ's sonship from this verse. For Owen, it is not the title nor the ontological reality which is in view, but the particular manner in which the name, "Son," is given to Christ – and this both fits the scope of the chapter and properly explains the exegetical adjunct, "This day have I begotten thee."

It is not, then, the general name of a son, or the sons of God, that the apostle instanceth in; but the peculiar assignation of this name unto the Lord Jesus on his own particular account, with the reason of it annexed, "This day have I begotten thee," which is insisted on... Again, the appropriation of this name unto him in the manner expressed proves his dignity and pre-eminence above all the angels. For it is evident that God intended thereby to declare his singular honour and glory, giving him a name to denote it, that was never by him assigned unto any mere creature, as his peculiar inheritance; in particular, not unto any of the angels. Not one of them can lay any claim unto it as his peculiar heritage from the Lord.<sup>46</sup>

The citation furthers the apostle's argument in that it highlights, not Christ's natural sonship, but his distinction from all other beings in all creation. And it is in this distinction that Christ's superiority above the angels (and all others) is evident.

It is not being called by this or that name in common with others that is intended, but such a peculiar assignation of a name unto him as whereby he might for ever be distinguished from all others... In this way it is that the Messiah hath his name assigned unto him. God decreed from eternity that he should be called by that name... God peculiarly and in a way of eminency gives this name unto him.<sup>47</sup>

Being labeled God's Son, when no other being shares this designation in the same manner in which it applies to Christ, elevates Christ to a standing and status far above

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<sup>45</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:135.

<sup>47</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:134.

that of the angels – “and this is the whole that was incumbent on the apostle to prove by the testimony produced.”<sup>48</sup>

## 2.2 Hebrews 1:5b and 2 Samuel 7:14

Hebrews 1:5b I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son?

Hebrews 1:5b Ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν;

2 Samuel 7:14 ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱόν

אֲנִי אֶהְיֶה-לוֹ לְאָב וְהוּא יִהְיֶה-לִּי לְבֵן 2 Samuel 7:14

The apostle then cites another testimony from the Old Testament to further confirm the Messiah’s superiority above the angels. Once again Owen’s approach is to show how the testimony refers to Christ and how that testimony is relevant to the argument of Hebrews.

The manner in which this text from the Old Testament can properly be applied to Christ is a matter of much concern to Owen and to biblical expositors in general. Cajetan’s critique, picked up by other writers who were opposed to the apostolic authority of the Epistle to the Hebrews, was the foil used by orthodox exegetes to defend the apostle’s exegetical strategy at this point. Owen critiques Cajetan for arguing that “this testimony is not rightly produced nor applied as it ought,” and therefore, rejecting “the whole epistle as not written by the apostle, nor of canonical authority.”<sup>49</sup> Like Enyedi after him,<sup>50</sup> Cajetan claimed that the author of Hebrews applied this text to Christ in a mystical sense and ignored its literal sense: “Propter quod autor huius Epistolae hanc traxit auctoritatem ad suum propositum in sensu mystico, ut non solum ex sensu

<sup>48</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:135.

<sup>49</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:138.

<sup>50</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 56-59.

literali, sed etiam ex mystico monstraret propositum.”<sup>51</sup> If Cajetan was correct, this would demonstrate that the author practiced an exegetical methodology which was shunned by the Reformers – a methodology which ignored the literal sense of a text and assumed some mystical or spiritual sense which was not linked with the actual grammatical words of the passage.

Because of the damaging nature of this critique, orthodox commentators spent considerable time demonstrating the appropriateness of applying the text from 2 Samuel 7 to Christ. Almost universally, the expositors turned to typology to explain the connection between the Old Testament text – which as Cajetan notes and even orthodox expositors admitted, “ad literam dicta sunt de Salomone, vt ipse Dauid testatur”<sup>52</sup> – and its application in the New Testament to Christ.<sup>53</sup> The method and value of their typological explanation of the apostle’s citation will be further examined below.<sup>54</sup> At this point, it is sufficient to note that Owen, as well as almost all other commentators, was satisfied that the text in 2 Samuel 7 spoke literally of Solomon, David’s son, and typologically of Christ, God’s Son.

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<sup>51</sup> Cajetan, *Opera Omnia*, 332.

<sup>52</sup> Cajetan, *Opera Omnia*, 332.

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *CO* 55, col. 15-16; John Weemse, *Exercitationes Divine. Containing diverse Questions and Solutions for the right understanding of the Scriptures...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1632), l.xix (pg. 182-183); Piscator, *Commentarii*, 185; Grotius, *Annotationes*, 7:356; Froidmont, *Commentaria in sacram scripturam*, 305; Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum*, 214; Michael Walther, *Harmonia Biblica, sive Brevis & plana conciliatio locorum Veteris et Novi Testamenti apparenter sibi contradicentium* (1626; repr. Nuremberg, 1696), 598; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:811; *The Dutch Annotations*; Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 9; Jones, *Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 62-63; Diodati, *Annotations*, 365; Dering, *XXVII Lectures*, C.iii.r-C.iii.v; *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*; Gouge, *Hebrewes*, 36-38; Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 297; Johann Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica, didactica, et polemica. Sive ejus in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros commentarii. Maximam partem hactenus inediti*, in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, vols. 8-9 (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam]: Sumptibus Irenici Philalethii, 1656), vol. 9, fol. 78; Johann Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner in a Commentary Vpon the Epistle to the Hebrewes* (London, 1646), 6.

<sup>54</sup> Owen’s typological analysis of this citation is the subject of the following chapter in this study.

After Owen has demonstrated that the text “originally intended of him to whom he doth apply it,” he then proceeds to show that the passage assigns a name to Christ which is “more excellent than any ascribed unto the angels.”<sup>55</sup> As with the previous citation, Owen links this quotation to the scope of the chapter by emphasizing that it does not deal with the natural sonship of Jesus Christ – the two citations in this verse do not prove Christ’s divine nature, nor do they signify it. Rather, “the apostle insists on this testimony merely in confirmation of his former argument for the pre-eminence of the Son above the angels, taken from that more excellent name which he obtained by inheritance.”<sup>56</sup> These words from 2 Samuel

contain a great and signal privilege; they are spoken unto and concerning the Messiah; and neither they nor any thing equivalent unto them were ever spoken of any angel; especially the name of the Son of God, so emphatically, and in way of distinction from all others, was never assigned unto any of them. And this, as hath been already showed, proves an eminency and pre-eminence in him above all that the angels attain unto.<sup>57</sup>

God has promised in these words to be a father, “in love, care and power, to protect and carry him on in his rule unto the end of the world,” and it is in this promise that Christ’s elevation over the angels is apparent.<sup>58</sup> Once again, it is careful attention to the true scope of the epistle which guides Owen in assessing the validity of the application of this Old Testament citation to the author’s New Testament context.

### 2.3 Hebrews 1:6 and Psalm 97:7

Hebrews 1:6 Let all the angles of God worship him.

Hebrews 1:6 προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ.

Psalm 96:7 προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ

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<sup>55</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:139.

<sup>56</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:144.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:145.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:145.

הַשְׁתַּחֲוֹו לּוֹ כָּל-אֱלֹהִים: Psalm 97:7

The author of the epistle then proceeds to offer another Old Testament testimony to further demonstrate Christ's superiority over the angels, this one taken from Psalm 97:7. The first two citations were intended to show his supremacy by emphasizing the name given to him by the Father. This citation shows his authority over the angels by stating their requirement to worship him – the obvious implication being the lesser worships the greater;

Now this is a matter so full and clear an evidence that it will not at all detain us; for it is impossible that there should be any more clear or full demonstration of this truth, that the Lord Christ hath an unspeakable pre-eminence above the angels, than this, that they are all appointed and commanded by God himself to adore him with divine and religious worship.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, once Owen has successfully shown that the citation properly belongs to Christ, its function in the author's argument is clear.

However, before analyzing the author's citation, Owen's exposition of the preface to the quotation reveals again the variety of exegetical techniques he employs in reaching exegetical conclusions – including the importance he attaches to the scope of the *Old Testament context* in properly understanding the New Testament passage. In introducing the citation, the author of Hebrews prefaces his quotation with the phrase, ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγη τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην, λέγει, “and again when he brings in the first born into the world, he says...” The order of the words gives rise to various interpretations – should πάλιν be joined with εἰσαγάγη so that a “coming again” or “bringing again” is in view? Or should it be linked with λέγει and so serve simply as a conjunction with the previous Old Testament testimonies? After noting the vast majority of commentators who hold to the first option, and the various ways in which Christ's

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<sup>59</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:164.

“coming again” is understood, Owen offers three reasons why the latter option is exegetically preferable. First, he notes, with approval, the way in which the ancient translations, including the Syraic, Arabic and the Vulgate, universally understood the words. Second, Owen draws upon his knowledge of Greek grammar to note that the particular order of the words does not automatically determine meaning: “Such trajections are not unusual, and that in this place hath a peculiar elegancy.”<sup>60</sup> The elegancy Owen alludes to leads to his third exegetical reason for taking the phrase ὅταν δὲ πάλιν as πάλιν δὲ ὅταν, and this reason highlights Owen’s humanistic environment: he views the transposition of the words as a simple rhetorical device employed by the author to vary the introduction of this citation with the previous quotation. “The apostle having immediately before used the word πάλιν, ‘again,’ as his note of producing a second testimony, and placing it here in the entrance of a third, it must needs be used equivocally.”<sup>61</sup>

Owen uses the Old Testament context of Psalm 97, which the author later cites, to further support his assertion that ὅταν δὲ πάλιν should not be understood as referring to a “second” coming of the Son. Owen lists three things in the psalm which indicate that the day of judgment, which accompanies the return of the Messiah, is not the intended focus of this pericope: (1) In verse 1, the Jews and Gentiles, earth and isles, are called to rejoice. Owen adds that this rejoicing is in the salvation brought by Christ, which is not part of the judgment day. (2) The call for idolaters to worship him in verse 7 is a call which occurs prior to the last day, not at it. (3) The exhortation to abstain from sin and the promise of deliverance are all things which “are unsuited unto his coming at the day

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<sup>60</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:152.

<sup>61</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:152.



of judgment,” and “expressly belong unto the setting up of his kingdom in this world.”<sup>62</sup> Thus, understanding the phrase, ὅταν δὲ πάλιν, as suggesting the time of Christ’s coming in glory at the final judgment “is inconsistent with the scope of the place from whence the testimony is taken, and consequently the design of the apostle himself.”<sup>63</sup> It is important to note here that Owen ties the design of the apostle to the scope of the Old Testament text he cites – the implication being that the author would not use the Old Testament passage unless its NT usage properly fits the scope of the original pericope. The coming into the world, then, that is spoken about in the preface to the citation Owen understands as Jesus Christ’s whole earthly experience from birth to death and resurrection. “That which was intended in the Old Testament in the promises of his coming into the world, is that which is here expressed by the phrase of bringing him in.”<sup>64</sup> Owen ends this analysis by showing how each verse in Psalm 97 contributes to the scope which the apostle assumes in his New Testament citation, concluding “this is the Father’s bringing of the Son into the world, described by the psalmist and intended by the apostle.”<sup>65</sup> As William Gouge writes of Psalm 97,

it is a prophecy of Christ’s royalty, the magnificence whereof being set out in the six first verses, in the seventh he denounceth confusion on such as worship false gods, and chargeth all that, by reason of any divine excellency conferred on them, have this glorious title *gods* attributed unto them, to worship this true God, the Lord Christ so exalted.<sup>66</sup>

Here we see the scope of the Old Testament citation powerfully influencing the interpretation of the New Testament context in which it occurs.

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<sup>62</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:154.

<sup>63</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:154.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:156.

<sup>65</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:157.

<sup>66</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 40, See also, *The Dutch Annotations; Diodati, Annotations*, 365.

Before addressing whom the psalm speaks of, Owen first reiterates his identification of this citation with this psalm and not with the Septuagint's version of Deuteronomy 32:43.<sup>67</sup> Having located the citation with Psalm 97, Owen then confronts the question of whether the Son is even intended and spoken of in the psalm. All expositors recognize the verse in question as addressing the divine being; however, it is debatable whether the person of the Father or the Son is view. Hugo Grotius, Jonasz Schlichting, and György Enyedi are among the commentators who insisted that in the original psalm the verse recounted the command for the angels to worship God.<sup>68</sup> And, especially for the Socinians Schlichting and Enyedi, this meant God the Father. Thus, as Calvin notes, "Verum videri possit perperam hoc ad Chirstum torquere quod simpliciter de Deo praedicatur."<sup>69</sup> That the text is misapplied to Christ in the epistle is one reason critics such as Erasmus, Enyedi, and Schlichting reject the canonicity of the whole work.<sup>70</sup> One common response of Reformed exegetes to this critique is to claim that, since Christ is truly the divine God, the psalm properly applies to him.<sup>71</sup> Calvin himself, however, recognizes that this, while true, is not a fully satisfactory answer to those who would question the apostle's exegetical method:

Si respondeamus Christum esse Deum aeternum, ideoque iure in eum competere quaecunq; Dei sunt: nondum omnibus satisfactum erit. Parum enim ad rei dubiae probationem valeret, ex communibus Dei elogiis in hac causa argumentari.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:160-161.

<sup>68</sup> Grotius, *Annotationes*, 7:356; Schlichting, *Commentaria posthuma*, 423-424; Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 387-389.

<sup>69</sup> Calvin, *CO* 55, col. 16.

<sup>70</sup> Erasmus, *Annotations*, 735; Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 379; Schlichting, *Commentaria posthuma*, 423-424.

<sup>71</sup> Cappel, *Observationes*, 116; Piscator, *Commentarii*, 188; Coccejus, *Opera Omnia*, 6:22; Rollock, *Analysis logica*, 8; Gouge, *Hebrews*, 43-45.

<sup>72</sup> Calvin, *CO* 55, col. 16.

However, a number of Reformed exegetes, including Calvin and Owen, believe that the most accurate way to understand both Psalm 97:7 and the citation in Hebrews 1:6 is not as a command for the angels to worship God, but as a command to worship the divine Messiah. David Paraeus and David Dickson both take this for granted, Paraeus arguing the point in opposition to “the heretics,” Enyedi and Schlichting.<sup>73</sup> George Lawson and Francis Gomarus both interpret Psalm 97:7 as calling the angels to worship Christ in his glory at his final coming. Lawson claims, “The 97<sup>th</sup> Psalm is to be understood of Christ, as King and Lord Redeemer reigning in Glory,” and that in this verse, “God by this Command and Edict subjected all his Angels to Christ.”<sup>74</sup> Calvin recalls the original scope of the psalm in demonstrating its application to Christ: “Si deinde totum psalmum percurras, nihil aliud videbis quam regnum Christi, quod ab evangelii publicatione coepit. Nec aliud est argumentum psalmi quam veluti solenne diploma, quo in eius regni possessionem mittitur Christus.”<sup>75</sup> However, Calvin differs from Lawson and Gomarus by interpreting the psalm as speaking of the Messiah’s first coming into the world, not his second coming to reign here in glory. In this, Calvin is followed by Owen.

Owen also looks to the Old Testament context in order to determine the true referent of the angels’ worship in Psalm 97:7. In addition to exploring the overall scope of the psalm as Calvin does, Owen also observes that this psalm functions as an appendix to the previous one which was generally recognized by Jewish interpreters, including David Kimchi, to be messianic. As further evidence of the messianic nature of this passage, Owen notes that the Targumist titled this work as תְּשֻׁבַּח נְבוֹאָה, “A

<sup>73</sup> Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:839; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 10.

<sup>74</sup> Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 10. See also, Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 302; John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 581.

<sup>75</sup> Calvin, *CO* 55, col. 16. See also, Calvin, *CO* 32, col. 42.

prophetical psalm,” that is, a psalm about the Messiah and his kingdom.<sup>76</sup> Finally, add the clear evidence that the psalm speaks of the coming of the Messiah into the world to grant salvation, and the reference to Christ is undeniable.

A kingdom is described wherein God would reign, which should destroy idolatry and false worship; a kingdom wherein the isles of the Gentiles should rejoice, being called to an interest therein; a kingdom that was to be preached, proclaimed, declared, unto the increase of light and holiness in the world, with the manifestation of the glory of God unto the ends of the earth: every part whereof declareth the kingdom of Christ to be intended in the psalm, and consequently that it is a prophecy of the bringing in of the first-begotten into the world.<sup>77</sup>

Thus, drawing upon the Old Testament context from which the citation was taken, along with the ancient and medieval Hebraic traditions, Owen is able to assert that Christ is indeed the one spoken of in the psalm and that that clearly proves his supremacy over the angels.

#### 2.4 Hebrews 1:7 and Psalm 104:4

Hebrews 1:7 Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

Hebrews 1:7 Ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πῦρ φλόγα

Psalm 103:4 ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πῦρ φλέγει

עֲשֵׂה מִלְאָכָיו רוּחֹת מְשָׁרְתָיו אֵשׁ לֵהֵט Psalm 104:4

In the author’s third argument to prove the superiority of Jesus Christ over the angels, he compares their natures and roles in God’s kingdom, again drawing his material from the Old Testament Scriptures. In verse 7, the author cites Psalm 104:4 to describe the role and employment of the angels. Once again, Owen asks (1) whether the original psalm properly refers to the angels, and (2) how this text furthers the author’s argument in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

<sup>76</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:161-162.

Modern Jewish exegetes rejected the author's identification of this verse with the angels. They interpret רוחות and אש להט as the subjects of the verse, and say that the "winds" and the "flaming fire" act as God's ministers in this world.<sup>78</sup> This interpretation is obviously directly contradictory to the use of this verse by the Hebrews' author, and various Reformed commentators including Owen strive to point out the exegetical inadequacies of this interpretation.<sup>79</sup>

One common response, advocated by Calvin, Junius, Piscator, Grotius, among others, is to acknowledge the winds and fire as principally intended in the psalm, yet to interpret them as referring to the angels in a metaphoric sense; as the winds and fire do God's bidding, so also do the angels.<sup>80</sup> Expositors differ as to whether the angels were really the subjects David had in mind and he spoke metaphorically of them, or if David simply meant the winds and fire, and the apostle allegorically built upon this description in his Hebrews' citation. The allegorical explanation would seem to betray the idea of literal exegesis promoted as by the Reformers, and Calvin attempts to distance himself from that view while nevertheless understanding the text metaphorically.

Nihil hoc [the winds, fire, messengers, etc., of Psalm 104] ad angelos pertinet. Quidam ad allegoriam confugiunt, quasi apostolus apertum et literalem (ut vocant) sensum allegorice de angelis exponeret. Mihi autem magis placet hoc testimonium sic adductum esse, ut per similitudinem angelis accommodetur, hoc modo, David angelis comparat ventos, ut hic in mundo idem exerceant officium quod in coelo angeli: sunt enim venti quasi visibiles spiritus.<sup>81</sup>

For many orthodox exegetes, however, this interpretation does not significantly differ from that of the Jews who deny any reference to the angels at all – for if the angels were

<sup>77</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:162.

<sup>78</sup> See, Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:171.

<sup>79</sup> Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:839; Cappel, *Observationes*, 116; Piscator, *Commentarii*, 189-190; Gouge, *Hebrews*, 46; Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum*, 216; Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 11.

<sup>80</sup> Calvin, *CO* 55, col. 17; Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum*, 216; Piscator, *Commentarii*, 189; Grotius, *Annotationes*, 7:357; Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:839.

not intentionally spoken of by David in the psalm, then the apostle misapplied this verse in his citation in Hebrews. For instance, William Gouge rejects this interpretation for the following reasons:

1. It is best and safest to take the Scriptures literally, when the text will well bear it.
2. Similitudes are no sound proof; they are usually produced rather to illustrate a point, than to prove it. But here the apostle citeth the testimony for a proof of the inferiority of angels to Christ; as to the like purpose he cited the former testimony out of Ps. xcvi.7.
3. The apostle being guided by the same Spirit that the psalmist was, was not ignorant of the true sense of the psalmist's words. We ought therefore to interpret them both in one and the same sense, the rather because in the letter they do punctually agree.<sup>82</sup>

Similar arguments are made (or assumed) by George Lawson, David Dickson, William Jones, and Matthew Poole.<sup>83</sup>

Likewise, Owen rejects both the interpretation proposed by modern Jews, and the "metaphorical" one opted for by Calvin and other Protestant exegetes for seven reasons: (1) The scope and design of the psalmist focuses upon the glory of God in creation and providence, declared in his employing his angels as his servants. "Neither doth it at all suit his method or design, in his enumeration of the works of God, to make mention of the winds and tempests, and their use in the earth... So that these senses are excluded by the context of the psalm."<sup>84</sup> (2) Owen again refers to the ancient Jewish translators and expositors as testimony against the modern Jewish interpretation and for an understanding of the verse as referring to angels: "Both the old translations either made or embraced by them expressly refer the words unto angels."<sup>85</sup> (3) From a purely lexical

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<sup>81</sup> Calvin, *CO* 55, col. 17.

<sup>82</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 47.

<sup>83</sup> Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 11; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 10; Jones, *Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 64; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:811.

<sup>84</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:172.

<sup>85</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:172.

standpoint, “the word מְלֹאֲכָיו doth usually denote the angels themselves, and no reason can be given why it should not do so in this place.”<sup>86</sup> (4) Again looking to the ancient Septuagint translation, Owen notes that both that translation and the apostle prefix ἀγγέλους and λειτουργούς with an article, thus denoting them as the subject of the clause. (5) In the Hebrews context, the apostle clearly is talking about real angels, and so here the reference cannot be to them metaphorically, either as to their nature or their function. (6) The New Testament purpose for which the apostle employs this citation demands that the angels be seen as the subject of the phrase in the psalm:

The design and scope of the apostle requires this construction of the words; for his intention is, to prove by this testimony that the angels are employed in such works and services, and in such a manner, as that they are no way to be compared to the Son of God, in respect of that office which as mediator he hath undertaken: which the sense and construction contended for alone doth prove.<sup>87</sup>

(7) Owen’s last reason is drawn from his understanding of Hebrew grammar; given the order of the words in the Hebrew phrase, it is most appropriate to assume that מְלֹאֲכָיו and מְשֻׁרְתָיו function as the subjects of the respective clauses. Thus, Owen shows how grammatically the “winds” and “flaming fire” are not the subject of the verse in question, but serve as predicate modifiers of the “angels” and “ministers.” He concludes, “From what hath been said, I suppose it is made evident both that the psalmist expressly treats of angels, and that the subject spoken of by the apostle is expressed in that word, and that following, of ministers.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:172.

<sup>87</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:173.

<sup>88</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:173.

Finally, as to how this citation fits with the overall argument by the author in Hebrews 1, Owen again looks to the scope of the psalm to shed light on the quotation's function in its New Testament context.

This is the plain intendment of the psalm, – that God useth and employeth his angels in effecting the works of his providence here below, and that they were made to serve the providence of God in that way and manner. 'This,' saith the apostle, 'is the testimony which the Holy Ghost gives concerning them, their nature, duty, and work, wherein they serve the providence of God. But now,' saith he, 'consider what the Scriptures saith concerning the Son, how it calls him *God*, how it ascribes a *throne* and a *kingdom* unto him' (testimonies whereof he produceth in the next verses), 'and you will easily discern his pre-eminence above them.'<sup>89</sup>

The psalm speaks of how the angels serve God in his administration and providential care of this world. This is the first part of a two stage argument intended to show that, while the angels serve God, Christ himself is God. The second part is found in Hebrews 1:8-9 and the accompanying citation from Psalm 45.

## 2.5 Hebrews 1:8-9 and Psalm 45:6-7

Hebrews 1:8-9 Thy throne, O God, is forever; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a sceptre of righteousness. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; wherefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Hebrews 1:8-9 'Ο θρόνος σου ὁ θεός εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος, ῥάβδος εὐθύτητος ἢ ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου. ἠγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν· διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισέ σε ὁ θεός ὁ θεός σου ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιᾶσεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου.

Psalm 44:7-8 ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεός εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος ῥάβδος εὐθύτητος ἢ ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου ἠγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισέν σε ὁ θεός ὁ θεός σου ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιᾶσεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου

Psalm 45:7-8 אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וְעַד שִׁבְט מִיֶּשֶׁר שִׁבְט מַלְכוּתְךָ:

אֶהְבֶּתָּ צְדָקָה וְתִשְׁנֵא רָשָׁע עַל-כֵּן מִשְׁחָךְ אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהֶיךָ שָׁמֵן שֶׁשֶׁן

מִחֲבֵרֶיךָ:

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:174.



In contrast with the ministering role that the Old Testament Scripture assigns to the angels, the author of Hebrews cites Psalm 45:7 and its witness to Christ's pre-existence and pre-eminence. Whereas Owen believes that "there is little or no difficulty to prove that this testimony belongs properly unto him to whom it is applied by the apostle,"<sup>90</sup> many expositors, including various commentators from the Reformed tradition, struggled to demonstrate how Christ could be properly understood as the object of this psalm. The chief difficulty lay in the appellation, ὁ θεός, "O God," in the psalm and in the citation – given this title, can Christ properly be understood as the one spoken to or of in the psalm?

Aware of the difficulty, in his annotations, Erasmus suggests an alternative reading, "incertum est, an hic sit sensus, o deus sedes tua est in seculum seculi : an hic, Ipse deus est tibi thronus in seculum seculi."<sup>91</sup> In the later interpretation, "God" could be understood as the person of the Father, thus removing the difficulty, but also making the apostle's use of this quotation suspect. Likewise, Hugo Grotius, sounding very much like the Socinian orthodox critics claimed him to be, understands the Hebrew, אֱלֹהִים, as short for אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהִים, "the God of gods," which in his interpretation would only apply to the Father. Reading the text this way,

*Sensus ergo est: Deus ipse est sedes tua perpetua, id est, si Salomonem respicimus, sicut sedes inconcussos tenet homines, ita Deus te semper in regno sustentabit: si vero Christum, Deus ipse te sustentabit in regno nunquam desituro.*<sup>92</sup>

A similar reading is given by Enyedi in his attempt to discount this epistle and its Trinitarian interpretation: "Deus est thronos tuus in seculum: id est; Deus tibi thronum sustentabit usque in seculum."<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:179.

<sup>91</sup> Erasmus, *Annotations*, 705.

<sup>92</sup> Grotius, *Annotationes*, 7:358.

<sup>93</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 389.

By such manipulation or glossing of the text which is “expressly contrary to the grammar, both in Hebrew and Greek,” Matthew Poole claims that “some heretics” seek “to elude this proof of Christ’s Deity.”<sup>94</sup> Along with John Calvin, Johannes Coccejus and David Paraeus,<sup>95</sup> Owen vigorously attacks this interpretation, first on the grounds that no ancient translation supports it; second, because it is “contrary to the received sense of the Jews and Christians of old, and in especial of the Targum on the psalm;”<sup>96</sup> third, because it goes against the apostle’s design; fourth, this interpretation makes no sense, “neither can they who embrace it declare in what sense God is the throne of Christ;”<sup>97</sup> next, according to the *analogia Scripturae*, whenever the throne of Christ is spoken of, God the Father is never intended; and finally, because this interpretation demands alterations to the original text, “makes a new text, or leads the old utterly from the intention of the words.”<sup>98</sup>

Numerous expositors understood the psalm as immediately referring to Solomon on the occasion of, and to celebrate, his marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh. According to this interpretation, the psalm describes Solomon’s wedding as a type of Christ’s marriage to the Church, and for the apostle in Hebrews, then, the citation is validly applied to Christ on the basis of this typology. John Calvin comments on this citation:

Fatendum est quidem de Salomone hunc psalmum fuisse compositum instar epithalamii: quia illic celebratur eius coniugium com filia regis Aegypti. Sed negari rursus non potest quod hic refertur, multo esse excelsius quam ut in Salomonem competat... Quisquis ergo composito animo, et citra rixandi studium hunc versum leget, non infitiabitur Messiam vocari Deum.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:811.

<sup>95</sup> See, Calvin, *CO 55*, col. 17; Coccejus, *Opera Omnia*, 6:22; Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:840.

<sup>96</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:181.

<sup>97</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:182.

<sup>98</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:182.

<sup>99</sup> Calvin, *CO 55*, col. 17.

Other Reformed expositors followed Calvin in viewing the text as applying to Solomon as a type of Christ. At this point in his annotations, Obadiah Walker observes, "Much of the Book of Psalmes, both concerning Glory, and sufferings, and promises, is spoken Typically only of David, Solomon, or others, but principally by the Spirit, that dictated it, understood of, and fulfil'd in, our Lord Christ and his Church."<sup>100</sup> Like Calvin, Johannes Piscator specifically expresses the typology between Solomon's marriage and Christ's relationship to the Church: "in quo Psaltes adhibito passim typo connubii Salomonis cum filia Pharaonis, nuptias Christi cum Ecclesia praedicat, & inter alia sponsum Christum iis verbis affatur, que hoc loco recitat Apostolus."<sup>101</sup> This citation is handled similarly by David Paraeus, William Jones, and the authors' of *The Westminster Annotations*.<sup>102</sup>

Non-orthodox exegetes seized upon this typological approach to advance their own agendas. György Enyedi argued that the only true literal reading of the text applied solely to Solomon and that any application to Jesus Christ is a false interpretation which ignores the literal sense of the psalm. In any case, he argued that any relationship between Solomon and Christ expressed in this psalm and its citation in Hebrews refers to Christ's humanity: "certe non Deum, sed hominem describat... non Deus aeternus, cui ista pugnant, sed homo, vel certe creatura sit, necesse est."<sup>103</sup> The Socinian Johann Crell strongly emphasizes the distinction between the passage's literal application to Solomon, and the "mystical" one to Christ. Aside from failing to show how the two "senses" are really joined together in one literal sense as most Reformed exegetes understood typology, Crell's interpretation at first glance appears orthodox; he does not shy away

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<sup>100</sup> Obadiah Walker, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon the Epistles of St. Paul Written to the Romans, Corinthians, and Hebrews* (Oxford, 1675), 10.

<sup>101</sup> Piscator, *Commentarii*, 190.

<sup>102</sup> Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:819-840; Jones, *Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 56; *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*.

<sup>103</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 389.

from acknowledging that this text, as applied in Hebrews, assigns the name of God to Christ – indeed, Crell stresses this:

And therein Solomon is said to have a throne, and called God, for the royalty of his throne, and sublimitie of his power over Gods people. And therefore Christ, of whom Solomon was but a shadow, is by a farre greater right called God, because the Throne of Christ is farre more royall, in being seated at the right hand of God.<sup>104</sup>

He goes on then to draw the parallels between Solomon and Christ, showing how Christ is more superior in every aspect. However, as is evident in the citation above, Crell viewed the apostrophe, ὁ θεός as applicable to Christ in *the exact same sense* as it is applied to Solomon – while there is a quantitative difference between Solomon and Christ, Crell explicitly denies a qualitative one. Whereas most orthodox exegetes interpreted the phrase as expressing Christ's deity, Crell and other Socinians saw it simply as a glorious title given to a glorious human – in the Old Testament to the king, Solomon, and in the New Testament to the human savior, Jesus.<sup>105</sup> Rather than drawing the implication that Christ is divine from this verse, the Socinians believed that it proved Christ to be human, just like Solomon.

It was in part because of this line of thinking that various exegetes rejected the typological approach, and insisted that the psalm dealt directly with Christ and his Church. As Cajetan notes: “Ad Messiam diriguntur ac literam haec verba. In quibus Messias appellatur Deus regnans; & propterea describitur a throno.”<sup>106</sup> Likewise, Jacob Cappel insists the psalm applies to Christ and not others: “Series Psalmi docet satis haec,

<sup>104</sup> Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 8; see Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 81.

<sup>105</sup> Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 81; Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 8-9; Schlichting, *Commentaria posthuma*, 345-346; *The Racovian Catechism*, trans. Thomas Rees (1609; repr. London, 1818), 35; John Biddle, *A Confession of Faith Touching the Holy Trinity, According to the Scriptures* (London, 1648), 17; Johann Crell, *The Two Books of John Crellius Francus, Touching One God the Father* (London, 1665), 107.

<sup>106</sup> Cajetan, *Opera Omnia*, 332.

neque Solomoni convenire, neque Deo Patri, sed Filio.”<sup>107</sup> These commentators treat the psalm as being spoken to the Son by the Father – it is God the Father himself who addresses the Son as θεός and speaks of the Savior’s everlasting and righteous reign. Matthew Poole comments, “It was not to Solomon or David, but to the Son God-man, spoken by the Father. The whole Psalm is written of him, and incompatible to any other is the matter of it. It represents him and his mystical marriage to the church.”<sup>108</sup> Weemse, Coccejus, Mayer, Dickson, Gouge and Gomarus all treat the passage similarly.<sup>109</sup>

Owen believes there are important reasons for rejecting the typological approach: first, because marriage to foreigners was forbidden to the Old Testament Jews, and because the marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh’s daughter had particularly negative consequences for the Davidic kingdom, “it is not probable that the Holy Ghost should so celebrate that marriage.”<sup>110</sup> Second, Owen can find very little in the psalm which can be properly applied to Solomon – a key component of proper typological exegesis. The psalm speaks of two main things, the righteousness of the king in his administration, and the enduring quality of his kingdom. Neither applies to Solomon’s reign in any meaningful way; “there is scarce any thing in the psalm that can with propriety of speech be applied unto Solomon.”<sup>111</sup> That the psalm does directly address Christ, Owen cites again the opinions of the Jewish rabbis and the evidence of the ancient translations,

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<sup>107</sup> Cappel, *Observationes*, 116.

<sup>108</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:811.

<sup>109</sup> John Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, in *The Workes of Mr. John Weemse of Lathocker in Scotland, in these volumes. Containing these eight bookes... Serving generally for a helpe to the understanding of all that desire to know and obey the will of God in holy writt...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1636), II.i (pg. 230); Coccejus, *Opera Omnia*, 6:22; John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 582; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 10; Gouge, *Hebrews*, 57; Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 304.

<sup>110</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:179.

<sup>111</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:180.

especially the Targum, which applies the whole psalm to the Messiah.<sup>112</sup> And since, then, both Jewish and Christian expositors grant that the Messiah is principally intended in the psalm, either directly or by way of typology, Owen questions where there is any “cogent reason to prove that he is not solely intended in this psalm.” He grants the possibility that in minor ways some of what is said of the Messiah may perhaps have some reflection in the kingdom and magnificence of Solomon, “yet it is certain that most of the things mentioned, and expressions of them, do so immediately and directly belong unto the Lord Christ as that they can in no sense be applied unto the person of Solomon.”<sup>113</sup>

Having shown that the citation properly applies to Christ, Owen then asks what the apostle intended to prove by this quotation. And in this, he again offers an interpretation which intentionally differs from his contemporary exegetes: “Now, this is not, as some have supposed, the *deity of Christ*; nor doth he make use of that directly in this place.” In Owen’s opinion, this verse cannot be separated from the previous one where the apostle spoke of the duty and ministry of the angels in the world, nor from the overall scope of the first chapter. Therefore, Owen determines that this citation is intended to show Christ’s superiority over the angles by stating his superior role and stature.

That which he designs to evince is this only, that he whom they saw for a time made ‘lower than the angels,’ chap. ii.9, was yet in his *whole person*, and as he discharged the office committed unto him, so far *above* them as that he had power to alter and change those institutions which were given out by the *ministry of angels*. And this he doth undeniably by the testimonies alleged, as they are compared together: for whereas the Scripture testifies concerning angels that they are all servants, and that their chiefest glory consists in the discharge of their duty as servants, unto him a throne, rule, and everlasting dominion, administered with glory, power, righteousness, and equity, are ascribed.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:179.

<sup>113</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:180.

<sup>114</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:180.

In Owen's exegesis, we again see the controlling power of the scope of the text (both in the Old and New Testaments) in guiding him to his exegetical conclusions. In his hermeneutical methodology, the whole context of the Old Testament citation must be examined to determine the proper referent of a single citation, and a proper interpretation of the function of any citation must clearly conform to the scope of its New Testament context.

## 2.6 Hebrews 1:10-12 and Psalm 102:25-27<sup>115</sup>

Hebrews 1:10-12 Σὺ κατ' ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας, καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ οὐρανοί· αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμένεις, καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται, καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἐλίξεις αὐτούς, καὶ ἀλλαγῆσονται· σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἔτη σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν.

Psalm 101:26-28 κατ' ἀρχάς σύ κύριε τὴν γῆν ἐθεμελίωσας καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ οὐρανοί αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται σὺ δὲ διαμένεις καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἀλλάξεις αὐτούς καὶ ἀλλαγῆσονται σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ καὶ τὰ ἔτη σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν

Psalm 102:26-28  
 לְפָנִים הָאֲרָץ יִסְדָּתָהּ וּמַעֲשֶׂיהָ יְדִיָּךְ שָׁמַיִם: הִמָּה יֵאבְדוּ  
 וְאַתָּה תַעֲמֹד וְכֹלֶם כִּפְגַּד יִבְלוּ כַּלְבוֹשׁ תַחֲלִיפֶם  
 וַיִּחַלְפוּ: וְאַתָּה הוּא וְשָׁנוֹתֶיךָ לֹא יִתְמוּ:

The pre-eminence and superiority of the one spoken of in this citation above the angels merits little demonstration in Owen's exegesis of this text: "There is no question but that these words do sufficiently prove the pre-eminence of him of whom they are spoken, incomparably above all creatures whatever."<sup>116</sup> What lies before Owen, then, is to show that these words were originally spoken of Christ. The two main views which oppose this designation arise from those who believe that the psalm is addressed to God without any reference to Christ, such as modern Jewish exegetes, and those of Socinian persuasion who assume that only part of the citation applies to Christ.

<sup>115</sup> Owen did not make an English translation of these verses, an oversight, I assume.

<sup>116</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:196.

Owen claims that, while modern Jews may deny the messianic thrust of the psalm, this very interpretation was held by the ancient Hebrews. This is evidenced, among other things, by the apostle's dealing with original recipients of the epistle "on their own principles, urgeth them with the testimony of it."<sup>117</sup> More definitively, however, Owen notes that the psalm itself is prophetic in the following three ways: (1) The psalm speaks of a redemption of the people and a revitalization of spiritual worship in verses 13 and 16. (2) The calling of the Gentiles to worship God, fulfilled in the ministry of the New Testament, is predicted in verses 15 and 21-22. (3) And, in verse 18, the creation of a new people and a new world is described. All three things, Owen identifies with the work of Christ: "they all respect things everywhere peculiarly assigned unto the Son, who was to be incarnate, or the days of the Messiah, which is all one."<sup>118</sup>

Jewish commentators, however, were not the only ones to argue that the psalm properly applies to God without any immediate reference to Christ. Hugo Grotius asserts that the apostle accommodated to Christ what was spoken in the psalm of God: "Rursum quod de Deo dictum fuerat, Messiae aptat,"<sup>119</sup> and Johannes Coccejus makes a similar argument, though in his rebuttal of Schlichting's critique, he is quick to claim that the apostle's application of this text to Christ was completely valid.<sup>120</sup> In his explanation of how this text applies to Christ, William Gouge draws upon the trinitarian tradition, claiming that what is appropriately spoken of one person of the Trinity equally applies to the others. Thus, even if this psalm is addressed directly to God as the Father, it by trinitarian definition applies to the Son. In addition, the works of God *ad extra* in reference to creatures are most properly the acts of the Son, therefore, the psalm

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<sup>117</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:197.

<sup>118</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:197.

<sup>119</sup> Grotius, *Annotationes*, 7:359.



implicitly speaks of the Son when it speaks of creation.<sup>121</sup> David Paraeus similarly argues from a trinitarian perspective, “quomodo ad Christum trahat apostolus, de Iehoua Psaltes dixit? Respon. Non trahit, sed rectissime applicat, tanquam diuinus scripturae interpres, ad filium, quod tribuitur Iehouae: quia filius cum patre est ide Iehoua.”<sup>122</sup> This view is predictably rejected by the Unitarian Enyedi who asserts that “negent hac verba de Christo, sed de Deo Patre esse dicta, & accipienda.” To interpret the citation so that Christ is the creator of the worlds would contradict what the author wrote in verse 2 where he ascribes creation to God *through* Christ his Son: “si haec de Christo intelligantur, scriptor epistolae sibi contrariabitur, quisupra vers. 2 dixit Deus Patrem creasse Mundum per Filium.”<sup>123</sup> Jonasz Schlichting, understanding the elevation of Christ from humanity to his divine position in a Socinian manner, also rejects the equating of the Creator in the citation with Christ.<sup>124</sup>

John Calvin is among those Reformed commentators who recognize that the citation appears to speak of God and not Christ, and that it therefore appears to be “applied ineptly” to him, but who nevertheless assert the messianic thrust of the psalm as a whole.

Hoc testimonium prima specie ad Christum inepte trahi videri posset, praesertim in causa dubia qualis hic tractatur. Neque enim disputatio est de gloria Dei, sed quid proprie Christo conveniat. Atqui nulla illic Christi mentio, sed nuda proponitur Dei maiestas. Fateor quidem, toto psalmo non nominari Christum: sed palam est ita designari, ut nemo dubitet, ex professo nobis commendari eius regnum. Itaque accommodanda sunt eius personae quaecunque illic habentur. Non enim hoc nisi in Christo impletum est.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Coccejus, *Opera Omnia*, 6:23-24.

<sup>121</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 71.

<sup>122</sup> Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:840.

<sup>123</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 390.

<sup>124</sup> Schlichting, *Commentaria posthuma*, 345-346, 469.

<sup>125</sup> Calvin, *CO* 55, col. 18.

Piscator, Poole, Mayer, Gomarus, Lawson, Jones, and *The Dutch Annotations* all assert that the psalm directly and immediately addresses Christ.<sup>126</sup> Most of these exegetes note, as Owen does, that the psalm appears to speak of the reign of the Messiah, and therefore that the “God” in question is Christ the Messiah.

Owen’s Socinian opponent, Johann Crell admits that the psalm may be applied to Christ, but only in part, only some of the phrases, and not the entire psalm or even the whole citation as quoted by the apostle in Hebrews. This “new and peculiar evasion,” seized upon by the Socinians who realize that if the words “are wholly understood of him, there is an end of all their religion,” is vehemently attacked by Owen.<sup>127</sup> Crell had argued that

here wee must note, that this Testimony doth so farre onely belong to Christ, as it conduceth to the scope of the Author; which as appeares at the fourth verse of this chapter, is to prove, that Christ after that he was seated at the right had of God, was made better then the angels. To which purpose the Creation of heaven and earth makes nothing at all : For that cannot be referred to Christ, unlesse the Author had taken it for granted, and for a ground that Christ is the supreme God; because all this testimony out of that Psalm is manifestly spoken of the suprem God; but that Christ should be that God is not intimated by any word in all that Psalm.<sup>128</sup>

Given this approach, then, Crell proceeds to show how the three individual clauses of the citation apply either to Christ or solely to God. All three are spoken principally and supremely of “the supreme God.” The first speaks of the creation of the world, and “can no way be referred to Christ.”<sup>129</sup> The third refers to both Christ and God since it speaks of the duration of the kingdom, yet because the angels also endure eternally, this clause also

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<sup>126</sup> Piscator, *Commentarii*, 190; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:812; John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 583; Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 304; Jones, *Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 70; *The Dutch Annotations*; Lawson at this point states that “the whole Psalm is a prayer directed to God Redeemer by Christ” (my emphasis). However, his further comments make it obvious that he understands the psalm as addressed to Christ, not spoken by Christ, Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 12.

<sup>127</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 19:198.

<sup>128</sup> Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 10; see Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 82.

<sup>129</sup> Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 10; see Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 82.

does not suit the purpose of the author of Hebrews. Therefore, it is in the middle clause which speaks of the destruction of the world, which Crell sees

refers to God supremely and primarily, and to Christ subordinately or secondarily; for God by Christ will destroy the world; God hath given to Christ a transcendent power to destroy and abolish heaven and earth. And this makes fully to the Authors purpose, and proves Christ clerely better then the angels; who have not this power granted to them.<sup>130</sup>

Thus, Crell sees the citation from Psalm 102 as having a mixed reference – while the supreme God is always intended by the psalmist, part of the psalm also applies to Christ, and part does not. Interestingly, this “mixed” interpretation is shared by the orthodox Jacob Cappel; of the citation he writes, “ibi quaedam de Filio dici, quaedam de Patre,” though Cappel explicitly resolves this issue by reference to the Trinity – a solution Crell stoutly rejects.<sup>131</sup>

Owen attacks Crell’s interpretation on a number of levels. His main objection is directed against the manner in which his opponent handles the use and application of testimonies out of the Old Testament in the New. Crell’s typological and allegorical hermeneutic will be compared below with Owen’s own exegetical strategy.<sup>132</sup> Owen also emphasizes the inadequacy of Crell’s understanding of the scope of the overall Hebrews passage and its influence over his interpretative conclusions. Owen notes that, even given the scope as stated by Crell, his interpretation lacks cogency and contradicts the Socinian belief that Christ was called “the Son of God” only after being raised to his kingly throne. More fundamentally, Owen believes that Crell has misunderstood the true design of the text, and that misunderstanding has led to the errors in his exposition:

This analysis of the apostle’s discourse agreeth not to the mind of the apostle or his design in the place, nor to the principles of the men that formed it, nor is indeed any

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<sup>130</sup> Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 10; see Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 82.

<sup>131</sup> Cappel, *Observationes*, 116-117.

<sup>132</sup> See the following chapter in this study.

thing but vain words, to persuade us that the apostle did not say that which he did say, and which is written for our instruction.<sup>133</sup>

And again,

The true and proper design of the apostle we have before evinced; which is to prove the excellency of the person by whom the gospel was revealed, and his pre-eminence above men and angels; which nothing doth more unquestionably demonstrate than this, that by him the world was created, whence the assignation of a divine nature unto him doth undeniably ensue.<sup>134</sup>

Owen believes that these are the more damaging exegetical and presuppositional errors which has led to Crell's faulty exposition of this citation.

Owen further demonstrates the appropriateness of understanding this psalm as properly referring to Christ. Earlier he had mentioned the ancient Hebrews' acceptance of this psalm as messianic. Owen then looks to the apostle's authority; in this chapter, the citation in verses 10-12 is tied with the conjunction *καί* to the introduction to verses 8-9, *πρὸς δὲ τὸν υἱόν*, "But unto the Son he says." Next, Owen claims that "the whole testimony speaks of the same person, there being no colour of thrusting another person into the text not intended in the beginning... One person is here certainly and only spoken unto." Owen's concern for defending the apostle's exegesis is openly expressed here: if the one person spoke of here is "the Father, the words concern not Christ at all, and the apostle was deceived in his allegation of them; if the Son, the whole is spoken of him, as the apostle affirms."<sup>135</sup> Finally, Owen can find no cogent reason for assigning one clause to Christ, and not the others. He points out both the logical and exegetical inadequacies of asserting this position. If Crell is correct, Owen sees no hope for the author: "Nor was it ever heard of, that any man in his right wits should cite a testimony to confirm his purpose, containing words that were never spoken of him to whom he applies

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<sup>133</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:205.

<sup>134</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:199.

<sup>135</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:206.

them.”<sup>136</sup> Given Owen’s confidence that the apostle was indeed in his right mind, “it is evident that this whole testimony belongs to Christ, and is by the apostle asserted so to do.” And, as he has stated earlier, once this citation is shown to apply to Christ, then its function in the author’s argument, demonstrating Christ’s pre-eminence above the angels, is self-evident.

## 2.7 Hebrews 1:13 and Psalm 110:1

Hebrews 1:13 Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

Hebrews 1:13 Κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου, ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου;

Psalm 109:1 κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον τῶν ποδῶν σου

שׁב לְיְמֵינִי עַד־אֲשִׁית אִיבֶיךָ הָרֶם לְרַגְלֶיךָ: Psalm 110:1

As with the previous citation, Owen is convinced that the value to the author’s argument in demonstrating Christ’s superiority over the angels is manifest once this testimony from Psalm 110 is shown to apply properly to Jesus.

That the testimony itself doth clearly prove the intendment of the apostle, provided the words were originally spoken of him or to him unto whom they are applied, is beyond all exceptions; for they contain an eulogium of him of whom they are spoken, and an assignation of honour and glory to him, beyond whatever was or can be ascribed unto any angel whatever. It remains, therefore, that this be first proved, and then the importance of the testimony is self-explained.<sup>137</sup>

Owen’s didactic and scholastic thinking is evident as he distinguishes the different aspects of the citation to expound upon. He individually considers 1. the person speaking, 2. the person spoken to, 3. “the nature and manner of this speaking,” 4. what was spoken, 5. “the end hereof as to work and operation,” and 6. the extend and duration of it.<sup>138</sup> In all

<sup>136</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:207.

<sup>137</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:219.

<sup>138</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:224-233.

these things, Owen is intent on demonstrating how the apostle aptly applies this Old Testament citation to further his design in the first chapter of Hebrews.

There is little difference in opinion among orthodox commentators, and even the Catholic expositors, Libert Froidmont and Thomas Cajetan, the Socinian Johann Crell, and the frequently controversial Hugo Grotius all agree concerning the meaning of the citation and in its proper application to Christ.<sup>139</sup> Most writers explicitly note that this psalm is a prophecy containing the Father's words to the Son, and concerning the accomplishment of his earthly work.<sup>140</sup> Only a few, however, like Johannes Piscator, deal with an alternative interpretation which would see David as the one addressed by God in the psalm. György Enyedi specifically argues for this explanation of the psalm, claiming that "psalmum literaliter de Davide loqui," on the grounds that the psalm was written many years before the birth of Christ and that any mystical interpretation given by "trinitarians" is a result of invalid exegesis.<sup>141</sup> Piscator rejects this view, believing the psalm to be prophetic, not typological. He notes that David himself recognized this psalm as spoken to Christ: "Quod autem Deus Pater iis verbis alloquatur Christum, ipse David indicat hac praefatione, *Dixit Jehovah domino meo.*"<sup>142</sup>

Owen's attempts to show the validity of applying this quotation to Christ include countering the suggested interpretations of various Jewish commentators. He quotes from two versions of the Targum, one by Buxtorf and the other printed in Arias's Bible, which identify the psalm as being sung by David. However, Owen accuses this Arabic

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<sup>139</sup> Froidmont, *Commentaria in sacram scripturam*, 307; Cajetan, *Opera Omnia*, 333; Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 86; Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 13; Grotius, *Annotationes*, 7:360.

<sup>140</sup> Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:843; Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum*, 219; Rollock, *Analysis logica*, 9; John Mayer, *A Commentarie upon All the Epistles of the Apostle Saint Paul*, 583; Gouge, *Hebrews*, 80-81; Lawson, *An Exposition of Hebrewes*, 13; Jones, *Commentary vpon Hebrewes*, 138; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 11.

<sup>141</sup> Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 82.

<sup>142</sup> Piscator, *Commentarii*, 191.

translation of the psalm of being “openly malicious, against evident light and conviction,” for making David “also to be the subject of it, to be spoken of in it.”<sup>143</sup> This blatant alteration of the sense of the text is proof to Owen that the Targum was made after the controversies between the Christians and the Jews, and reflects a Jewish attempt to gloss out all the messianic testimonies from the Old Testament claimed by the Church. The medieval Jewish exegete, David Kimchi, avoids this problem by asserting that the psalm was not written *by* David, but *to* David. He argues that the inscription of the psalm, **מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד** should be understood as “a psalm *to* David.”<sup>144</sup> Owen responds with grammatical and biblical evidence. First, he shows that semantically, the preposition **לְ** in the inscriptions in the Psalter denotes the genitive case, not the dative, and that Kimchi himself understands the preposition in this manner in many other places and inscriptions in the Psalter. Second, he asks what it means biblically for David to have been promised to be a priest in the order of Melchizedek. The roles of priest and king were expressly separated in the Old Testament, and Uzziah, the only king to encroach upon the office of priest, was struck with leprosy and forfeited his rule to his son (2 Chronicles 26). Consequently, “the Jews knew well enough that David had nothing to do with the priesthood. So that David had no concernment in this psalm, but only as he was the penman of it.”<sup>145</sup> Other Jewish interpretations assigned the psalm to Abraham or Hezekiah, though “not one word in it can rationally be conceived to respect him.” Owen is content to point out how these options lead to a nonsensical explanation of the text, and asks how the psalm could possibly be understood from this perspective. “These things

<sup>143</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:219.

<sup>144</sup> David Kimchi, *The Commentary of David Kimhi on the Fifth Book of the Psalms* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1954), 66-68.

<sup>145</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:220.

deserve not to be insisted on, but only to manifest the woful pretences of the present Judaical infidelity.”<sup>146</sup>

To prove the messianic nature of this psalm, Owen offers three pieces of positive evidence. First, the content of the Old Testament passage points in this direction. As noted earlier, the union of the kingly and priestly offices in one person described in this psalm can apply to no other person than to Christ. Further, the human author of this work, David, refers to the subject of the psalm as τῷ κυρίῳ μου; again, the possible referents are minimal, with Christ as the only one which Owen sees as being consistent with the biblical witness.<sup>147</sup> Second, in addition to the Targum’s corrupted witness, Owen also cites various Jewish scholars to show that “we have many of their own masters concurring with us in the assignation of this psalm unto the Messiah; and to that purpose they freely express themselves when their minds are taken off the consideration of the difference that they have with Christians.”<sup>148</sup> Owen then quotes five separate ancient Jewish sources including the Mishna and the Midrash, citing and translating the unpointed text, all of which view the psalm as referring to the Messiah and his reign. Consequently, “we have a sufficient suffrage from the Jew themselves unto our assignation of this prophetic psalm to the Messiah; which is enough to stop the mouths of their modern gainsayers, who are not able to assign any other person unto whom it should belong.”<sup>149</sup> Finally, and most definitively, “for those that believe the gospel, the authority of the Lord Christ and his apostles applying this testimony unto him is sufficient for their conviction.”<sup>150</sup> For Owen, the most certain proof that this psalm refers

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<sup>146</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:221.

<sup>147</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:220, 224-225.

<sup>148</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:222.

<sup>149</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:223.

<sup>150</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:219.



to Christ is that the apostles three times so apply it (Acts 2:34-35; 1 Corinthians 15:25; and here), and especially, that Jesus himself claimed this psalm as his own (Matthew 22:44).

Once again, through a combination of grammatical analysis, an examination of the scopes of both the Old and New Testament pericopes, and the study of biblical, intertestamental, and Jewish literature, Owen confidently claims that Psalm 110 properly applies to Christ; consequently, its citation in Hebrews 1:13 by the author proves definitively that Christ's standing, honor, and glory far surpasses that of the angels.

### **3. Methodological Observations**

From Owen's analysis of the Old Testament citations in the first chapter of Hebrews, a number of important insights can be drawn concerning his own hermeneutical assumptions.

- (1) The importance of understanding a text within its original context. Owen's consistent approach is to explore the meaning of the quotation in its Old Testament context, showing how its role in the Old Testament provides necessary insight into its usage in the New Testament. Owen assumes that a citation is used in the Epistle to the Hebrews because in its own OT context it promotes the point the author is seeking to make. The quotation is not taken out of context, nor is it used in a way which ignores or alters its meaning in its original place in the Old Testament.
- (2) The Old Testament text is to be understood in its literal sense – any interpretation of a citation which separates the New Testament use from the text's literal meaning assumes that the apostle inappropriately handled the Old Testament and, consequently, must be rejected. However, this literal sense is not a simple, wooden historical sense, but a scriptural sense which takes into account the whole scope of biblical revelation. Thus, the literal sense of a text allows for a typological

interpretation – the implication being that both the apostle in his exegesis and the church in her exegesis can apply the hermeneutic of typology to properly explore the depth of meaning in the Scripture.

- (3) Once again, the controlling nature of the scope of the work is crucial for proper interpretation. Owen's analysis of the true scope of the first chapter of Hebrews and its consistent application in determining the intended use of the citations shows how important to Owen its use is in exegesis. Equally, in Owen's analysis of the apostle's use of the Old Testament, he persistently focuses upon the true design of the Old Testament context, seeking to prove how that OT scope was important to the apostle's exposition of these places.
- (4) The humanistic emphasis on grammatical analysis of the original text, the comparative use of the ancient versions and the application of insights from Hebraic scholarship in determining exegetical conclusions consistently factor into Owen's exposition. His demonstration of the validity of the apostle's exegesis frequently relies upon an examination of the Hebrew grammar of the Old Testament and he almost always is able to find support for his arguments from the writings of Talmudic and post-Talmudic rabbis.
- (5) Finally, one thing that is clear from his examination of these verses is Owen's familiarity with the writings of other commentators and theologians. Throughout his work, Owen interacts with other exegetes and their conclusions, and is not hesitant to disagree with other Reformed writers, including Calvin himself. His knowledge of the work of modern as well as ancient Hebrew rabbis is extensive, and he frequently uses them as either a foil or as support for his own conclusions. At every opportunity he rejects the opinions of the Socinians and refutes the annotations of Hugo Grotius. Owen's exegesis is informed and controversial, gathering insights

from others, yet he is prepared and willing to present a contrasting view if he deems it necessary.

## Chapter VI

# Owen's Analysis of the Role of Typology in Hebrews

### 1. Puritans and Typology

#### 1.1 The Presence of Typology in Puritan Biblical Exegesis

In five of the seven Old Testament citations from the first chapter of Hebrews, Owen addresses the use and misuse of typology as an exegetical technique. In the quotation of Psalm 102 he disputes the typological interpretation of Johann Crell, he attacks the conclusions of György Enyedi's typological analysis of the quotation from Psalm 110, and, on two other occasions – the citations of Psalms 2 and 45 – he rejects the application of typology made by other Reformed exegetes. His own typological hermeneutic is rigorously employed in his examination of the quotation from 2 Samuel. In examining these verses, Owen interacts with the typological explanations offered by nearly every major biblical expositor of his time – clearly reflecting the popularity of the typological approach to interpretation in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century thought.

Despite this and much other evidence of the typological method in the post-Reformation period, Perry Miller claims that the Puritans, following the Protestant Reformers, were “very explicit in their condemnation” of the practice of typology as a hermeneutical method, and regarded it as simply “another variant of the allegorical.” He states that the English Reformers “were furiously hostile to all typological speculations,”<sup>1</sup> and that the Puritans, and their Anglican opponents, were both deeply distrustful of either allegorical or typological exegesis. Although he acknowledges that the Puritans in New England did not entirely condemn typology and recognized a very limited, controlled use

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<sup>1</sup> Perry Miller, *Roger Williams* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), 34-35.

of the technique, he nevertheless holds that "almost to a man the New England theologians saw in typology only a fantastic creation of the imagination which had no place in sound scholarship or in orthodox society."<sup>2</sup>

Recent studies, however, have demonstrated that the type-antitype construction used by the Puritan exegete was far more influential and complex than it appears at first glance, and that this construction is crucial in understanding basic Puritan beliefs. This is especially true of academic work focusing on the biblical presentations of the New England Puritans.<sup>3</sup> These studies show that the Puritans operated under the same hermeneutical assumptions as their Reformed brethren: a complete rejection of Alexandrian-styled allegorical interpretations as the "fancies" of men, yet all the while recognizing that some biblical texts demand a typological reading in order to elucidate its full literal sense.

The English Reformers accepted the Protestant *sola Scriptura* principle as axiomatic and held firmly to the understanding that Scripture is its own key to interpretation. The literal sense of the text was to dominate interpretation, and grammatical tools were indispensable in this regard. However, the true meaning of any word was understood, not as being rooted in etymology, but in the biblical context itself.

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<sup>2</sup> Miller, *Roger Williams*, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Mason Lowance, "Typology and the New England Way: Cotton Mather and the Exegesis of Biblical Types," *Early American Literature* 4 (1969):15-37; Mason Lowance, "Introduction," in *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, Samuel Mather (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969), v-xxiii; Sacvan Bercovitch, *Typology and Early American Literature* ([Amherst]: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972); Perry Miller, "Introduction," in *Images or Shadows of Divine Things*, Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 1-41; Thomas Davis, "Edward Taylor and the Traditions of Typology," *Early American Literature* 5 (1970):27-47; Wallace Anderson, "Editor's Introduction to 'Images of Divine Things' and 'Types,'" in *Typological Writings*, Jonathan Edwards (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 3-33; Harry Stout, *The New England Soul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 45; Emory Elliott, "From Father to Son: The Evolution of Typology in Puritan New England," in *Literary Uses of Typology: From the Late Middle Ages to the Present*, ed. Earl Minor (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 204-227; Victor Harris, "Allegory to Analogy in the Interpretation of Scriptures," *Philological Quarterly* 45 (1966):1-23; Charles Cannon, "William Whitaker's *Disputatio de Sacra Scriptura*: A Sixteenth-Century Theory of Allegory," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 25 (1962):129-138.

This general principle led to the guiding hermeneutic of *analogia fidei* where the whole Scriptural context helps control the interpretation of a text.<sup>4</sup>

Insisting upon a harmonious interpretation between the Old and New Testaments, and guided by the ancient, orthodox standards of faith, the post-Reformation writers began vigorously to employ the hermeneutical principle of typology, a method of interpretation where one explains Old Testament events, persons, and practices, as prefiguring the coming person and ministry of the Messiah and his covenant people. In his famous work on typology, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament* (1683), Samuel Mather provides a definition for a type which summarizes the seventeenth-century use of the term: "it is a shadow of good things to come: Or if you would have it more at large, you may take it thus, A type is some outward or sensible thing ordained of God under the Old Testament, to represent and hold forth something of Christ in the New."<sup>5</sup> Thus, in addition to the historical meaning which is found in the lexicography and grammar of the words, a "mystical meaning" was also present, a meaning which pointed toward the coming ministry of Christ and his church.

## 1.2 Typology and Reformation Hermeneutics

Critics of Puritan exegesis claim that typology, in effect, actually admits that there is more than one sense to the Bible and that the historical sense is not equated with the

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<sup>4</sup> For an elaboration of Puritan interpretative practices in Thomas D. Lea, "The Hermeneutics of the Puritans," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (1996):271-284; J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1990); Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 147; Robert A. Coughenour, "The Shape and Vehicle of Puritan Hermeneutics," *Reformed Review* 30 (1976):23-34; Stanley Gundry, "John Owen on Authority and Scripture," in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John Hannan (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 212-217.

<sup>5</sup> Samuel Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament, by which Christ and the Heavenly Things of the Gospel were Preached and Shadowed to the People of God of Old* (Dublin, 1683; repr. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969), 52.

full meaning of the passage.<sup>6</sup> According to these scholars, instead of following the Reformers who emphasized the literal sense of the text, the exegetes in the orthodox period, through their typological interpretation, had in effect reverted to a form of allegory which was not too dissimilar from the medieval *quadriga* hermeneutical practice. As a result, in the actual interpretive exercise there was little difference between the medieval allegorical exegesis and the use of post-Reformation typological exegesis.<sup>7</sup> Through the application of the analogy of faith and typology in hermeneutics, the Reformation principle of exegesis – that is, the grammatico-historical literal sense of the text – was in the way of being completely abandoned. This betrayal of the great gains of the Reformers came as a result of dogmatists' attempt to support their "Biblical Supernaturalism" which was "an immense disservice" to the "cause of truth and of religion."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the irony of the post-Reformation exegesis – in order to preserve their rigid doctrine of the authority of Scripture, the orthodox theologians were forced to abandon the strict grammatico-historical sense of the text and revert to a mystical interpretative methodology. Fullerton claims that an examination of the results of orthodox exegesis demonstrates that "the post-Reformation dogma completely triumphed over Reformation exegesis."<sup>9</sup>

Other scholars, however, have pointed out that this criticism of Puritan and continental Reformers is flawed in crucial ways. As Richard Muller, Brevard Childs, and others have pointed out, it is inaccurate to view the Reformers' insistence upon the literal

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<sup>6</sup> Kemper Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 175; Thomas Davis, "The Traditions of Puritan Typology," in *Typology and Early American Literature*, ed. S. Bercovitch ([Amherst]: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 43.

<sup>7</sup> Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, 179, 185.

<sup>8</sup> Frederic Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: Dutton, 1886; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1961), 369.

<sup>9</sup> Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, 182.

sense of the text as a radical break with the previous Biblical expositors.<sup>10</sup> Already in the late medieval times the complexity of the fourfold "allegorical" method was being challenged as churchmen pushed in other directions. With the medieval exegetes, the Reformers further emphasized a "spiritual" meaning of the text, but sought to tie it closely to the literal wording. Though they rejected the medieval *quadrige* hermeneutic principle, and much of the exegetical conclusions derived from using the *quadrige* practice, the Reformers did not categorically reject the notion of a spiritual interpretation of the Scriptures.<sup>11</sup> While the Protestants disagreed with the typical medieval exegetes in finding a distinct *sensus spiritualis*, the Reformed exegetes held that a figurative or spiritual meaning was often an integral dimension of the literal text itself. The literal text could point beyond itself to a symbolic meaning. Nevertheless, the key to this "deeper" sense of the text resided in and was controlled by the grammatical text.<sup>12</sup>

The canonical character of the whole Bible, being inspired and unified through the one divine author, caused the Reformers' understanding of the literal sense to be expanded to include a meaning which acknowledges the entirety of the Scriptural revelation. In this way, typology continued to play a crucial role in the hermeneutical

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<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2: *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 2:470; Richard A. Muller, "Biblical Interpretation in the Era of Reformation: The View of the Middle Ages," in *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation*, ed. Richard A. Muller and John Thompson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 8-13; Brevard Childs, "The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem," in *Beitrage zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie*, ed. Donner, Hanhart, and Smend (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 80-93; David Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," *Theology Today* 37 (1980-81):27-38; Christopher Ocker, "Medieval Exegesis and the Origin of Hermeneutics," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999):328-345.

<sup>11</sup> Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:484-488; David Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis of the Old Testament* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1995), 88.

<sup>12</sup> Donald Dickson, "The Complexities of Biblical Typology in the Seventeenth Century," *Renaissance and Reformation* 11 (1987):258; Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:491; Richard A. Muller, "The Hermeneutic of Promise and Fulfillment in Calvin's Exegesis of Old Testament Prophecies of the Kingdom," in *The Bible in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. David Steinmetz (London: Duke University Press, 1990), 73.



practice of the sixteenth-century exegetes.<sup>13</sup> In his classic work on typology, Patrick Fairbairn claims that, in spite of their avowed principles of interpretation, “the writers of the Reformation period not infrequently fell into the old method of allegorizing, and threw out typical explanation of a kind that can not stand a careful scrutiny.”<sup>14</sup> Others, however, note that Calvin was at pains to distinguish his typological approach from allegory.<sup>15</sup> Typology, while providing a legitimate method for emphasizing the unity of Scripture, is grounded in the historical meaning of the text and a proper typological exegesis does not deny a historical referent for the type in the Old Testament times. With this historical emphasis in mind, Calvin’s exegesis frequently understands the literal grammatical meaning of a passage to have a direct bearing upon promise and fulfillment issues.<sup>16</sup>

Thomas Davis notes that Tyndale used typology sparingly, Luther employed it haphazardly as one of numerous exegetical tools, but that it was central in Calvin’s thinking and hermeneutical approach to the text – apart from typology, “Calvin would not be Calvin.”<sup>17</sup> Calvin insisted that the literal sense often had a literal and spiritual meaning together in one place – not *through* the text, but *in* the text. There was no tension between the historical and the theological meanings because the work of the

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<sup>13</sup> Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:488; Richard A. Muller, “Perkins and the Protestant Exegetical Tradition,” in *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses: Commentary on Hebrews 11*, William Perkins, ed. J. Augustine (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991), 75.

<sup>14</sup> Patrick Fairbairn, *The Typology of Scripture*, vol. 1 (Baker: Grand Rapids, 1975), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Puckett, *John Calvin’s Exegesis*, 113-119; Richard Davidson, *Typology in Scripture* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1981), 28-31; Childs, “The Sensus Literalis,” 87.

<sup>16</sup> See for example Calvin’s Commentary on Psalms 2, 109:6, and Isaiah 50:4. On Psalm 2, John Calvin, *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia*, 59 vols. (vols. 29-87 of Corpus Reformationum), ed. Guilielmus Baum, Eduardus Cunitz, and Eduardus Reuss (Brunswick: Schwetschke, 1863-1900), vol. 31, columns 41-52; subsequent references to the Calvini opera will be cited CO, followed by volume and column numbers; on Psalm 109:6, Calvin, CO 32, col.148-149; on Isaiah 50:4, Calvin, CO 37, col.218-219. See, Muller, “Calvin’s Exegesis,” 73; Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:485; Puckett, *John Calvin’s Exegesis*, 114-5.

<sup>17</sup> Davis, “Traditions of Puritan Typology,” 38.

Spirit insured unity.<sup>18</sup> Childs argues that, "the Reformers' achievement was to offer an interpretation of the literal sense which, at least for a short time, held together the historical and the theological meaning."<sup>19</sup> The dichotomy which Fullerton sees between Calvin's insistence on the unity of the Scriptures and his actual historical exegetical method simply does not exist.<sup>20</sup>

### 1.3 Typology and the Literal Sense

Numerous studies have examined the Reformed orthodox understanding of the literal sense of Scripture in light of the emphasis placed there by their theological predecessors in the Reformation period.<sup>21</sup> An examination of the interpretative principles laid down by orthodox theologians and exegetes shows that, at least in theory, both the continental Reformed and English writers of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century followed the Reformers' understanding of the literal sense. Treatises on, or including sections about, biblical interpretation by William Perkins, William Ames, and Edward Leigh bear this out.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See Calvin's comments on Psalms 2:1-3, *CO* 31, col.41-44, and 109:6, *CO* 32, col.148-149.

<sup>19</sup> Childs, "The Sensus Literalis," 87.

<sup>20</sup> Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, 183; Cf. Puckett, *John Calvin's Exegesis*, 43.

<sup>21</sup> Jai-Sung Shim, "Biblical Hermeneutics and Hebraism in the Early Seventeenth Century as Reflected in the Work of John Weemse," Ph.D. diss. (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1998), 254-316; Charles Cannon, "William Whitaker's Disputatio de Sacra Scriptura: A Sixteenth-Century Theory of Allegory," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 25 (1962):129-138; Childs, "The Sensus Literalis"; Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated From the Sources*, trans. G. T. Thompson (London: Allen, 1950), 37-39; Lea, "The Hermeneutics of the Puritans"; Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*; Note the studies in Richard A. Muller and John Thompson, *Biblical Interpretation in the Era of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); Ocker, "Medieval Exegesis and the Origin of Hermeneutics"; Gerald Sheppard, "Between Reformation and Modernity: The Perception of the Scope of Biblical Books," in *A Commentary on Galatians*, William Perkins, ed. Gerald Sheppard (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1989), vii-xiii; Gerald Sheppard, "Interpretation of the Old Testament between Reformation and Modernity," in *A Cloud of Faithful Witnesses: Commentary on Hebrews 11*, William Perkins, ed. J. Augustine, 46-70 (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991).

<sup>22</sup> William Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng, or, A Treatise Concerning the Sacred and Onely True Manner and Methode of Preaching*, in *The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister... William Perkins*, vol. 2 (London, 1616-1618); William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* (1629; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker,

One of the most comprehensive and useful works on biblical hermeneutics produced in the early seventeenth century was John Weemse's *The Christian Synagogue* (1623), which along with his *Exercitations Divine* (1632) provides a fairly elaborate discussion of post-Reformation interpretive strategy and tools. Weemse argues in *Exercitations* that "there is but one literall sense in the Scriptures," and that literal sense is "that which the words beare eyther properly or figuratively, therefore he sayd well who sayd, *bonus grammaticus, bonus theologus*: for we can never come to the true meaning and sense, unlesse the words be unfolded."<sup>23</sup> Weemse then defines the "figurative literall sense" as "eyther *in verbis vel in rebus*, eyther in the words or in the matter."<sup>24</sup> The literal sense of the text, then, is either that which the word means "properly" or some form of a figurative meaning. Figurative, according to the words, when the author is using figurative language; figurative, according to "the matter," when the author is using typology; yet all the while retaining its "literal" character.

Changing terminology, in *The Christian Synagogue*, Weemse writes that the sense of Scripture is either simple or compound. "A Simple sense, is the sense, which agrees to one onely, and hath but one part (to wit, the literall sense) to make up one sense." A compound sense "is that whereof there are two parts, literall and figurative, to make up one sense, which is fulfilled two manner of wayes, Historice and Prophetice in the type,

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1997), I.xxxiv.14-33, esp. 22; Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity consisting of Three Bookes : The First of which Handling the Scripture or Word of God, Treateth of its Divine Authority, the Canonick Bookes, the Authentick Edition, and Severall Versions, the End, Properties, and Interpretation of Scripture : The Second Handling God Sheweth that there is a God, and What He is, in His Essence and Several Attributes, and Likewise the Distinction of Persons in the Divine Essence: The Third Handleth the Three Principall Works of God, Decree, Creation and Providence* (London, 1646), 171-175.

<sup>23</sup> John Weemse, *Exercitations Divine. Containing diverse Questions and Solutions for the right understanding of the Scriptures...* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1632), I.xix (pg. 177, 178-9).

<sup>24</sup> Weemse, *Exercitations Divine*, I.xix (pg. 179).

and literally in the thing signified.”<sup>25</sup> Weemse’s vocabulary in this section fluctuates as he speaks of a historical, an allegorical, a mystical, or a spiritual sense. However, these are not different senses, but simply an imprecision in his terminology, for, even after dividing the mystical sense of Scripture into “Allegoricall, Tropologicall, or Anagogicall,” Weemse stresses that “these are not properly diverse senses, but divers applications of one sense to our instruction, faith, and manners.”<sup>26</sup> In his definition of the multifaceted character of some scriptural texts, Weemse insists that the compound sense “is not taken here to make two Senses out of one scripture (for that were contradictory:) but onely it shewes the diverse wayes how the severall parts of a Scripture have beene fulfilled, either literally or figuratively.”<sup>27</sup> The crucial point here is the insistence by Weemse that Scripture has but one literal sense, even amidst the presence of typology and figurative language.

At the end of his chapter on the single literal sense in *Exercitations Divine*, Weemse speaks directly to the question of Old Testament citations in the New Testament. He insists that there is only one literal sense present: “When the testimonies of the old Testament are cited in the new, the Spirit of God intendeth *propinquius & remotius*, something nearer and something farther off; yet these two make not up two diverse senses, but one full and intire sense.”<sup>28</sup> This literal sense may be composed of literal/literal, historical/allegorical, literal/tropological, or historical/mystical parts. Yet,

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<sup>25</sup> John Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue: wherein is contained the diverse reading, the right poynting, translation, and collation of Scripture with Scripture: with the customes of the Hebrewes and proselytes, and of all those nations, with whom they were conversant*, in *The Workes of Mr. John Weemse* (London: Thomas Cotes for John Bellamie, 1636), II.i (pg. 229, 230).

<sup>26</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, II.i (pg. 234). See also the identical conclusions in Perkins, *The Arte of Prophecyng*, 2:737; Leigh, *A Treatise of Divinity*, 171-174; T[homas] W[ilson], *Theologicall Rules, to Guide Vs in the Vnderstanding and Practice of Holy Scriptures: two centuries: drawne partly out of Scriptures themselues: partly out of ecclesiasticall writers old and new* (London, 1615), 39, sometimes erroneously attributed to Thomas Walkington

<sup>27</sup> Weemse, *The Christian Synagogue*, II.i (pg. 229).

still, “a Scripture diversely applied, doth make up but one literall sense.”<sup>29</sup> Weemse gives examples of various uses of Old Testament citations in the New, yet continues to return to his main point – regardless of how the citations function in the New Testament context, they do so retaining the one, single sense intended by the Holy Spirit.

Like John Weemse, Francis Turretin, in his work, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology* (1679-1685), asserts that Scripture only has one true and genuine sense, though that may be either simple or compound. The simple pertains to the historical without any reference to other significant issues. The “composite” is a mixed sense in that part of the meaning is present in the type or prophecy and part of the meaning is found in the antitype.<sup>30</sup> Fullerton acknowledges Turretin’s understanding of the literal sense as being either simplistic or composite, yet he declares such ideas to be “mere trifling with the theory of the one grammatico-historical sense,” and accuses Turretin as trying to avoid the consequences of his own theory.<sup>31</sup> But Turretin is explicit in his insistence that the composite sense is not two different senses, but one which is only completely understood when both the promise and the fulfillment are taken together. The true meaning of a “composite” text involves both a typical and antitypical exegesis. The unity of the Scripture is the guiding principle in expounding texts with this compound sense.<sup>32</sup> The other “senses” of the medieval *quadriga* – the allegory, anagogy, and tropology – “are not so much diverse senses as application of one literal sense.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Weemse, *Exercitations Divine*, I.xix (pg. 182).

<sup>29</sup> Weemse, *Exercitations Divine*, I.xix (pg. 183, margin).

<sup>30</sup> Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. J. Dennison (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1992), II.xix.ii.

<sup>31</sup> Fullerton, *Prophecy and Authority*, 178; see also Davis, “Traditions of Puritan Typology,” 43.

<sup>32</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xii.

<sup>33</sup> Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.vi.

A generation earlier in England, William Whitaker's *Disputation on Holy Scripture* (1588), expressed much the same ideas, although without using the simple/composite labels. In denying the Roman insistence on the fourfold sense of Scripture, Whitaker argues for only one real sense which is located in the grammatical text. But this literal sense is not simply that which the words immediately suggest; rather, the true sense of a passage is that which arise from the words.<sup>34</sup> Allegories, tropes, and anagoges are not different senses of the text, but are "various collections from one sense, or various applications and accommodations of that one meaning."<sup>35</sup> In texts which must be understood typologically, "the whole entire sense is not in the words taken strictly, but part in the type, part in the transaction itself. In either of these considered separately and by itself, part only of the meaning is contained; and by both taken together the full and perfect meaning is completed."<sup>36</sup> Drawing on the example of Psalm 95:11, where God declares that Israel "shall never enter my rest," Whitaker exegetes this statement typologically as referring to the realm of Canaan and also to the kingdom of heaven, yet with one literal sense, not two (or more): "this is not a twofold sense; but, when the sign is referred to the thing signified, that which was hidden in the sign is more openly expressed. When we proceed from the sign to the thing signified, we bring no new sense, but only bring out into light what was before concealed in the sign."<sup>37</sup> Once again, *analogia fidei* underlies Whitaker's exegetical principles. Typology is not only possible, but demanded since all interpretation must agree with the principle of the analogy of faith, that is, "the constant sense of the general tenour of Scripture in those clear passages

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<sup>34</sup> William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture, against the Papists, especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, trans. and ed. by William Fitzgerald (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1849), V.ii.405.

<sup>35</sup> Whitaker, *Disputation*, V.ii.404, 409.

<sup>36</sup> Whitaker, *Disputation*, V.ii.406.

<sup>37</sup> Whitaker, *Disputation*, V.ii.407.

of Scripture,” and in agreement with the basic creedal statements (the Creed, Lord’s prayer, Decalogue and “the whole Catechism”) since they can all be supported by the clear biblical texts.<sup>38</sup>

In the opening chapter of his *Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, James Durham describes the literal sense in an allegorical setting, again stressing the crucial role of the scope and the analogy of faith in avoiding “multiple senses.”

I grant [the Song] hath a literal meaning; but I say, that literal meaning is not immediate, and that which first looketh out, as in historical scriptures, or others which are not figurative; but that which is spiritually, and especially meant by these allegorical and figurative speeches, is the literal meaning of this Song: so that its literal sense is mediate, representing the meaning, not immediately from the words, but mediately from the scope, that is, the intention of the Spirit, which is couched under the figures and allegories, here made use of: for, a literal sense (as it is defined by Rivet out of the school-men) is that which floweth from such a place of scripture, as intended by the Spirit in the words, whether properly or figuratively used.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the sense of the words which correspond to the scope of the text is the literal sense.

From these representative writings, it is clear that the post-Reformation theologians followed the Reformers in identifying one genuine sense of the Scripture – a sense directly tied to the grammatical letter. Yet this literal sense may have a composite meaning, one which looks not just at the historical moment, but also at its fulfillment. In opposition to medieval allegory, Reformed typological exegetes sought to ground their “spiritual” conclusions in the historical types of the biblical revelation.<sup>40</sup> This historicity in no way was diminished by the understanding that the type foreshadowed the antitype and that the antitype in turn gave further illumination to the type. The Old Testament types, therefore, involved multiple meanings, but those meanings were limited

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<sup>38</sup> Whitaker, *Disputation*, V.ix.472.

<sup>39</sup> James Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon* (1668; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 28-31. See Dickson, “Complexities of Biblical Typology,” 259.

exclusively to Scripture and were evidence, not of the expositor's ability, but of the fullness of the providence of God. God intentionally planned events in the lives of the OT community in order that their present significance would prophetically point toward a future grander fulfillment. Understood in the Reformed sense, the application of typology, built upon the analogy of faith, is not a deviation from the literal sense, for the literal sense is that very sense of the words which reflects the full intent of the primary Author.<sup>41</sup>

In light of the analogy of faith and the concept of the simple/complex, yet literal sense of a text, typology became increasingly recognized in Puritan circles as the fundamental mode whereby the Bible should be interpreted. Exegetes began to use typology in a fuller way than simply matching OT types with NT antitypes; the hermeneutical method was used to link the history and drama of Christ's life with the salvation of each believer throughout the whole span of sacred history. The Bible was Christ's story, but a story which encompassed the whole redemptive history, from the creation and fall, through redemption and into the eschaton. Thus, the application of typology in biblical hermeneutics enabled the exegete to understand the Scriptures primarily as Christological, yet also as ecclesiological and eschatological.<sup>42</sup> Whereas medieval exegetes tended to limit their allegorical interpretation to Christ's mission, the Puritans and other Protestants expanded their use of typology to include the entire pattern of salvation for the individual in imitation of Christ's life (both foreshadowed in the OT and fulfilled in the NT). As Donald Dickson notes, "the Bible – when read typologically – was understood to tell one story, Christ's, but through him the story of all the

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<sup>41</sup> Muller, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2:499.

<sup>42</sup> Dickson, "Complexities of Biblical Typology," 254.



faithful.”<sup>43</sup> Typological exegesis was one manner whereby the individual Christian’s life and experiences were related to Christ’s.

Nevertheless, the Puritans were anxious to distinguish their work from the allegorical abuses of much medieval exegesis. In O. R. Johnston’s estimation, the English Reformers, while liberally applying typological insights to Old Testament passages, “never did violence to history with exaggerated typology, but they sought their principles and then turned naturally to the New Testament for more light.”<sup>44</sup> One verse was never to be taken out of its context, and the Puritan exegete was to follow the model set forth by the New Testament authors’ treatment of the Old Testament. Thus, by maintaining an emphasis upon the historical background of a passage the Puritans attempted to avoid fanciful interpretation of the types they expounded upon. Mason Lowance notes that, “despite attempts to allegorize or spiritualize the types by destroying their historical foundations, conservative exegetes had always tried to distinguish between typology and ingenious or invented devices such as tropes and allegories, which they did not regard to be instituted by God.”<sup>45</sup>

## **1.4 Puritan Guidelines for the Use of Typology**

### **1.4.1 General Principles**

The Reformed biblical expositors were not unaware of the dangers of typological interpretation, and they were determined that proper exegetical method be clearly distinguished from allegorical excess. Consequently, various manuals were produced during this time period to guide the hermeneutical endeavor. In addition to the general

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<sup>43</sup> Dickson, “Complexities of Biblical Typology,” 264.

<sup>44</sup> O. R. Johnston, “The Puritan Use of the Old Testament,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 23 (1951):201.

<sup>45</sup> Lowance, “Typology and the New England Way,” 16.

exegetical principles laid down by theologians and exegetes like Weemse, Turretin, and Whitaker, various authors advanced specific guidelines for the proper handling of types and antitypes. The most significant of these works were written by Samuel Mather, Benjamin Keach, and Thomas Taylor.<sup>46</sup> From these works, three basic theoretical principles which guided Puritan typological exegesis are discernable: (1) both the type and the antitype involve real, historical, persons and events; (2) the type foreshadowed something which would be fulfilled in the NT, the time of the law pointed toward the fullness of grace; and (3) the antitype is the fulfillment of the promises inherent in the type.<sup>47</sup>

#### 1.4.2 Mather's Rules for Types-Antitypes

As the application of typology grew in popularity through the seventeenth century, these three principles were expanded, reorganized, and codified by biblical theologians who sought a balance between appreciation for the exegetical gains derived from typology, and the risk of finding meaning in biblical allegories, rather than in the literal

<sup>46</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*; Benjamin Keach, *Tropologia; A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (1682; repr. London: William Hill Collingridge, 1856); Thomas Taylor, *Christ Revealed: or The Old Testament Explained. A Treatise of the Types and Shadowes of our Saviour contained throughout the whole Scripture: All Opened and Made Usefull for the benefit of Gods Church* (London, 1635; repr. Delmar: Scholars' Facsimilies & Reprints, 1979). See also the hermeneutical manuals which focus on typology of John White, *A Vvay to the Tree of Life Discovered in sundry Directions for the Profitable Reading of the Scriptvres: wherein is described occasionally the nature of a spiritual man, and in A digression, the morality and perpetuity of the Fourth Commandment in every circumstance thereof, is discovered and cleared* (London, 1647); Michael Walther, *Harmonia Biblica, sive Brevis & plana conciliatio locorum Veteris et Novi Testamenti apparenter sibi contradicentium* (1626; repr. Nuremberg, 1696); John Smith, *The Myserie of Rhetorique Unveil'd: wherein above 130 the tropes and figures are severally derived from the Greek into English* (London, 1665); Durham, *An Exposition of the Song of Solomon*, 23-61; Henry Lukin, *An Introduction to the Holy Scripture, Containing the several Tropes, Figures, Properities of Speech used therein; with other Observations, necessary for the right Understanding thereof* (London, 1669).

<sup>47</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 227-232; Mather, *The Figures and Types of the Old Testament*, 72-79; Also, William Guild, *Moses Unveiled: or, Those Figures which Served unto the Pattern and Shadow of Heavenly Things, Pointing Out the Messiah Christ Jesus* (1626; repr. Edinburgh, 1755); Taylor, *Christ Revealed*; Edward Taylor, *Upon the Types of the Old Testament* (1693; repr. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989); Salomon Glass, *Philologia Sacra, qua totius sacrosanctae Veteris et Novi Testamenti scripturae* (Jena, 1623). See, Dickson, "Complexities of Biblical Typology," 260-1.

sense of the text. In *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament* (1683), Samuel Mather lists four rules for understanding and handling types. "Rule 1. That God is the only Author of the Types."<sup>48</sup> Here, Mather attempts to distance the practice of typology from the allegorizing of medieval exegetes. He argues that types are established by God alone, and that the expositor merely discovers what God has instituted. Alternatively, allegories arise in the mind of the expositor, quite apart from any divine intention. Additionally, whereas allegories are built upon superficial similarities, types parallel the antitype in significant ways, "there is something of Christ stamped and ingraven upon them by Divine Institution."<sup>49</sup> Mather then describes how one distinguish between superficial and important similarities – "we cannot safely judge of this but by the Scripture."<sup>50</sup> First, we can be confident of the presence of a type when the Scripture expressly identifies it, as when Adam is identified as a figure of Christ in Romans 5:14. Secondly, typology is present when the application of the name of the type to the antitype, as when Christ is called "David." Finally, "when... there doth appear an evident and manifest Analogy and parallel between Things under the Law, and things under the Gospel, we may conclude, that such legal Dispensations were intended as Types, of those Gospels Mysteries whose Image they bear."<sup>51</sup> Identifying and expounding upon types of the third category, the implicit types, and successfully distinguishing them from allegories, are what generate the most debate within exegetical circles, both in the seventeenth century as well as in the contemporary time.

Mather's second rule states that the types served in the Old Testament as both a sign pointing toward the coming Messiah, and as a seal or promise for the people:

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<sup>48</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 53.

<sup>49</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 53.

<sup>50</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 53.

The Types were visible Promises, and not only Signs, but Pledges and Assurances of the good they represented. They did represent those great Mysteries not only by way of resemblance to the understandings, but by way of assurance to the Faith of God's People.<sup>52</sup>

The exegetical value of this rule for Mather appears to concern the exposition of the type in its Old Testament context; not only does it point ahead to Christ, but the Old Testament saints should have been able to recognize its typical quality, and draw evangelical assurances from it. An Old Testament type not only pointed toward the Gospel times, it promised and gave assurance of their coming.

“Rule 3. The Types relate not only to the Person of Christ; but to his Benefits, and to all Gospel Truths and Mysteries, even to all New-Testament Dispensations.”<sup>53</sup> With this rule, Mather reflects the growing seventeenth-century belief that, via typology, the Scriptures speak directly to the contemporary church, addressing it in the midst of its typological representation of Old Testament people and events. Thus, though types are frequently referred to as “types of Christ,” this is not to be taken exclusively of the Person of Christ, but also including the benefits and other “good things” of Christ.

For as the Types look chiefly and principally at Christ and his Benefits, in the clear, and full Exhibition and Communication of them under the Gospel: So they represent other things also, tho' not by way of Primacy and principal intention; but by way of concomitancy and illustration of the Principal.<sup>54</sup>

Mather's fourth rule respects the manner in which the similarities and dissimilarities between the type and antitype are to be handled. “Rule 4. As there is a Similitude, a Resemblance and Analogy between the Type and Antitype in some things: So there is ever a dissimilitude and a disparity between them in other things.”<sup>55</sup> The extent of the

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<sup>51</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 54.

<sup>52</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 55.

<sup>53</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 56.

<sup>54</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 57.

parallel between the type and antitype must be carefully acknowledged and constrained. Once again, the concern is to prevent the interpreter from moving beyond divine instituted typology to human inspired allegories. “Hence we must take heed of straining the Types too far, to make them agree in that wherein indeed there is a disparity or disagreement: If the Type go with us one Mile, or rather with the Antitype one Mile, we must not constrain it to go twain.”<sup>56</sup> As a sub-category of this rule, Mather argues that personal types in the Old Testament were all godly men – “No Wicked Man individually considered, ever was, or could be a Type of Christ” – yet even with godly men, “they were not types of Christ in regard of their sinful Failings; but only in their Graces and Excellencies.”<sup>57</sup>

#### 1.4.3 Keach’s Canons for Types-Antitypes

Benjamin Keach’s *Tropologia: A Key to Open Scripture Metaphors* (1682), which became the standard work in typology for English Protestants, provides a specific list of rules for understanding and employing typology in exegesis. The canons for properly expounding a biblical type as codified by Keach are summarized as follows:

1. “In prophetic types we must exactly take notice where Christ manifests himself with respect to his office and merit ; and where he sets forth other divine things, as judgments and blessings.”<sup>58</sup> Biblical types are found where an Old Testament text reveals Christ’s office or work, God’s grace, redemption, judgment or the like, and a New Testament text sheds greater light upon it.

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<sup>56</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 58.

<sup>57</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 63-64.

<sup>58</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 233.

2. "There is oftentimes more in the Type than in the Antitype."<sup>59</sup> That is, the type is not exactly replicated in the antitype, especially since no fallen part of creation can truly model the perfect Christ (a type's sin does not foreshadow sin in Christ).
3. "There is oftentimes more in the Antitype than in the Type."<sup>60</sup> The opposite of canon 2 is also true: the antitype embodies more than the type. Since the antitype fulfills the type as well as many others, it will contain more of the truth.
4. "There must be a fit application of the Type to the Antitype."<sup>61</sup> An accurate comparison or application of the type to the antitype must be present, according to the analogy of faith. The typological relationship between the OT type and the NT fulfillment cannot violate other principles of faith.
5. "When there are many partial Types of one and the same thing, then we are to judge not from one Antitype, but of all jointly taken."<sup>62</sup> When a single antitype is foreshadowed by numerous types, all the types are to be taken together to accurately develop a picture of the typological relationship. To form a right judgment of a prefigured antitype, one must examine, not a single type, but many types together.
6. "In expounding the types of the Old Testament we are to examine accurately, whether the shadow, or the truth, represented by a shadow, be proposed; that is, whether the prophets prophesy of Christ under the umbrage or shadow of types, or in express terms, viz., speaking of our Saviour in a literal sense."<sup>63</sup> In searching for types, one must distinguish between historical foreshadowings of New Testament realities, and direct prophecies which point toward fulfillment apart from any historical referent.

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<sup>59</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 233.

<sup>60</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 234.

<sup>61</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 234.

<sup>62</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 235.

<sup>63</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 235.

7. "The wicked, as such, are by no means to be made types of Christ, etc."<sup>64</sup> Wicked persons and actions in the Old Testament do not foreshadow righteous antitypes in the New.
8. "One thing is sometimes a Type and figure of two things, even contrary things, but in diverse respects."<sup>65</sup> One type can foreshadow two different, even contrary, things: for example, the deluge during Noah's time prefigured both the faithfuls' baptism and the reprobates' judgment.
9. "In Types and Antitypes an enallage, permutation or change sometimes happens, as when the thing figured and adumbrated takes to itself the name of the figure, shadow, or type: and on the contrary, when the type and figure of the thing represented takes to itself the name of the Antitype."<sup>66</sup> Sometimes the sign of the type is substituted for that of the antitype and vice versa. Thus, Christ is often called David in later OT writings, drawing upon that excellent type King David. Similarly, the NT Church is sometimes called Jerusalem or Zion because they were OT types of the NT reality.

#### 1.4.4 Taylor's Characteristics of Types-Antitypes

In his study on types, entitled *Christ Revealed* (1635), Thomas Taylor speaks of the unique properties of the type-antitype relation. From his analysis of the way the proleptic Jewish ceremonies were fulfilled in Christ, he draws out four aspects of how the type and antitype reflect upon each other.<sup>67</sup> Though he does not set these four up as general characteristics of the typological relationship, they serve as a good guide in what to expect when typology is properly applied as an exegetical strategy.

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<sup>64</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 235.

<sup>65</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 236.

<sup>66</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 236.

<sup>67</sup> Taylor, *Christ Revealed*, 4.

(1) "The body is the cause of the shadow, and the cause more excellent than the thing caused." Here Taylor is simply echoing the standard typological understanding that the antitype is greater than, and is the source of, the type.

(2) "The shadow representeth the shape of the body, with the actions and motions." That is, one should expect parallels and correspondences to connect the type and its antitype. This is, of course, expected in typology, but Taylor reminds us that it is not the parallels which initiate the comparison, but the institution of the type by God which underlies the type-antitype motif.

(3) "The shadow is but an obscure resemblance in respect of the body." Though there are important parallels between the type and antitype, the New Testament fulfillment is clearer, brighter, more substantial, more "real."

(4) "The body is solid, firme, and of continuance, even when the shadow is gone." Here Taylor emphasizes the independence of the antitype – its existence does not depend upon the continued presence of the type – and the temporally limited character of the Old Testament type – when the fulfillment appears, the usefulness of the type in prefiguring the antitype is gone. In redemptive history, the antitype replaces the type, making it obsolete.

Adherence to these rules enabled the Puritan expositor to avoid the excessive allegories which ignored the literal sense of the text. A comparison of an author's exegetical work with these generally accepted hermeneutical canons would determine how other seventeenth-century critics would have judged his conclusions.

## **2. Owen's Critique of Others' Typological Conclusions**

Owen's interpretation of the Old Testament citations gathered together in the first chapter of Hebrews reflects his knowledge, understanding, and acceptance of these established canons of typology. In light of these rules, a study of Owen's own use of



typology, and especially his critique of others' typological conclusions, demonstrates how closely he adhered to the exegetical thought of his day, and reflects his own exegetical theory with regard to promise-fulfillment motifs.

### 2.1 Hebrews 1:5a/Psalm 2:7 and Hebrews 1:13/Psalm 110:1

Owen first has cause to speak to the exegetical issues surrounding typology when he examines the interpretive conclusions drawn by other commentators on the first part of Hebrews 1:5. Most orthodox expositors, including David Paraeus, Francis Junius, Francis Gomarus, Matthew Poole, and David Dickson, follow Calvin in understanding Psalm 2 as addressing David directly, and Christ typically. For instance, concerning this psalm and the citation that follows it from 2 Samuel 7:19, Dickson claims, "these places, it is true, were spoken of David and Solomon, as types of Christ, typically in a slender resemblance."<sup>68</sup> Owen, however, questions why David and his kingdom should be viewed as the intended subjects of this psalm at all. Although he has other reasons, his primary objection to this identification concerns the exegetical manner in which typology is used. Owen argues that Psalm 2 addresses numerous issues which have no connection with the historical David; that is, the subject and circumstances of the psalm are not applicable to David's time. "There are sundry things spoken in the psalm that could never truly and properly be applied unto David. Such are the promises, verses 8, 9, and the invitation of all men to put their trust and confidence in him, verse 12."<sup>69</sup> Thus, Owen

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<sup>68</sup> David Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1649; repr. Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1978), 9. See also, Calvin, *CO* 55, col.14; David Paraeus, *Commentarius in Dni Pauli Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, in *Opera Theologica*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1628), 2:838; Franciscus Junius, *Sacrorum Parallelorum libri tres: id est, Comparatio locorum Scripturae Sacrae, qui ex Testamento Vetere in Novo* (Heidelberg, 1588), 213-214; Francis Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia* (Amsterdam, 1644), 298; Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (1685; repr. London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 3:810.

<sup>69</sup> John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vols. 17-23, ed. William Goold (1854; repr. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 19:133.

insists that there is no valid reason to assume that the cited text speaks of a historical person or event. Accordingly, without a historical basis, typology cannot be applied as an exegetical technique. This assumption of historicity underlies the very theory of typology, and is the foundation for the canons expressed by Mather, Keach, and others.<sup>70</sup> Without it, typology cannot be properly applied as an interpretive tool by the expositor.

This is not to say that Owen denied the typological aspects of David's person, rule, and kingdom; indeed, he affirms this.

We grant that David was a type of Christ, and that as he was king of the people of God. Hence he is not only often signally called "The son of David," but "David" also... And the throne and kingdom promised to David for ever and ever, that it should be as the sun, and established for ever as the moon... had no accomplishment but in the throne and kingdom of his Son, Jesus Christ. Thus also many other things are said of him and his kingdom, which in property of speech can no way be applied unto him but as he was a type of Christ, and represented him to the church.<sup>71</sup>

Here, Owen affirms Keach's first and ninth canons, as well as the content of Mather's first rule - specifically the latter two ways of identifying a type: typology is at work when the name of the type (David) is applied to the antitype (Christ), and when "there doth appear an evident and manifest Analogy and parallel between Things under the Law, and things under the Gospel."<sup>72</sup> Owen has no objection to linking David with Christ; he simply sees no reason to link David with Psalm 2, especially the portion of the psalm which was cited by the apostle in Hebrews 1:5.

In refuting a typological meaning for Psalm 2:7, Owen is by no means accusing the author of Hebrews of misusing the Old Testament. Instead, along with a few other Reformed expositors, Owen claims that the psalm is prophetically speaking directly to Christ. While other exegetes tie Christ to the text through typology, Owen argues that the

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<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 52; Keach, *Tropologia*, 227-232.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:133.

<sup>72</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 54.

text applies directly to the New Testament Messiah. In support of this assessment, Owen notes that there is no possible historical referent for the psalm, and then he cites an exegetical principle which guides him to the conclusion that Christ is the intended subject of the psalm:

We have a rule given us by the holy Ghost - That where any thing seems to be spoken of any one to whom it doth not properly belong, there the person is not at all to be understood, but the Lord Christ himself immediately. This rule Peter gives us in his interpretation of the 16th psalm, and his application of it unto the Lord Jesus, Acts ii. 29-31.<sup>73</sup>

Thus, Psalm 2 does speak prophetically of Christ, but in a direct, verbal manner – not typologically. This kind of differentiation is exactly what is called for by Keach’s sixth rule: types are historical realities foreshadowing future events, verbal prophecies look forward to their fulfillment independent of any historical parallel.

Concerning the citation of Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 1:13, Owen uses the same arguments to reject the interpretation of György Enyedi who claimed that “psalmum literaliter de Davide loqui.”<sup>74</sup> Once again, Owen shows that the content and circumstances of this psalm make it impossible for David or any other figure in biblical history to be the one addressed in the psalm. First, David is identified as the author of the psalm, not its subject. Second, the Scripture never equates David or any other king as a priest, nor is there a proper referent (besides Christ) for one in the order of Melchizedek.

Evident, then, it is that David is not treated of in this psalm, in that he, being the penman of it, calleth him his Lord concerning whom he treats. Besides, to omit other instances of a like cogency, how or when did God swear unto David that he should be a priest, and that for ever, after the order of Melchizedek? The Jews know well enough that David had no concernment in this psalm, but only as he was the

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<sup>73</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:133.

<sup>74</sup> György Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti : ex quibus Trinitatis dogma stabiliri solet* (Klausenburg, 1597), 82. Cf. Johannes Piscator, *Commentarii in omnes libros Novi Testamenti* (Herborn, 1613), 191.

penman of it. He was not herein so much as a type of the Messiah, but speaks of him as his Lord.<sup>75</sup>

Without a solid historical person or event to be immediately identified as the subject of the psalm, the psalm's use in the New Testament cannot be typological. Once again, Owen's strict insistence on the historicity of the proposed type forces him to abandon typology as a possible explanation for why the Hebrew's author cited Psalm 110. Along with most other orthodox exegetes, Owen insists that the psalm's application to Christ by the apostle results from viewing the psalm as a verbal prophecy.

## 2.2 Hebrews 1:8-9/Psalm 45:6-7

John Calvin again heads a list of orthodox exegetes who understood the citation of Psalm 45:6-7 in Hebrews 1:8-9 as typological. He identifies the marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter as the historical event which "contained things too high" to be solely applied to Solomon.

Fatendum est quidem de Salomone hunc psalmum fuisse compositum instar epithalamii: quia illic celebratur eius coniugium com filia regis Aegypti. Sed negari rursus non potest quod hic refertur, multo esse excelsius quam ut in Salomonem competat... Quisquis ergo composito animo, et citra rixandi studium hunc versum leget, non infitiabitur Messiam vocari Deum.<sup>76</sup>

Johannes Piscator concurs with this assessment and goes on to state that this marriage foreshadowed Christ's own relationship to the New Testament Church: "in quo Psalter adhibito passim typo connubii Salomonis cum filia Pharaonis, nuptias Christi cum Ecclesia praedicat, & inter alia sponsum Christum iis verbis affatur, que hoc loco recitat Apostolus."<sup>77</sup> Taken in this light, these expositors justify the apostle's application of

<sup>75</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:220.

<sup>76</sup> Calvin, *CO* 55, col.17.

<sup>77</sup> Piscator, *Commentarii*, 190. Also, Obadiah Walker, *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon the Epistles of St. Paul Written to the Romans, Corinthians, and Hebrews* (Oxford, 1675), 10; Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:819-840; Jean Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible, plainly Expounding the Most Difficult Places Thereof* (London, 1648).

Psalm 45 to Christ by claiming that the psalm was typologically prophetic of Christ's marriage to his redeemed people. Owen is similarly concerned to defend the apostle's exegetical methodology; however, he believes that these typological assessments are flawed on two levels.

Similar to the previous examples, Owen believes that the identification of this psalm with any historical event is inaccurate. In opposition to Calvin, Piscator and others, who claim Solomon and his marriage was the occasion for the initial writing of the psalm, Owen is joined by other orthodox commentators in rejecting this association.<sup>78</sup> Only Owen and William Gouge, however, spend time detailing why the link between Solomon's marriage and this psalm is inadequate. Owen claims that there is very little in this psalm which can be properly applied to Solomon – a key component of proper typological exegesis. The psalm speaks of two main things: the righteousness of the king in his administration, and the enduring quality of his kingdom. "How the first of these can be attributed unto him whose transgressions and sins were so public and notorious, or the latter to him who reigned but forty years, and then left his kingdom broken and divided to a wicked, foolish son, is hard to conceive."<sup>79</sup> Given Solomon's moral collapse during his reign, and the rending of his kingdom in two under his son's administration, it is difficult to reconcile the promises of the psalm with Solomon's time period. Consequently, following the basic typological rules which insist upon a historical event or person to act as the type, Owen rejects any typological explanation for the apostle's use of this text.

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<sup>78</sup> Jacques Cappel, *Observationes in Novum Testamentum* (Amsterdam, 1657), 116; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:811; Johannes Coccejus, *Opera Omnia Theologica, Exegetica, Didactica, Polemica, Philologica*, 12 vols. (Amsterdam, 1701-1706), 6:22; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 10; William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (1655; repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 57; Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 304.

<sup>79</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:180.

Another reason why Owen does not believe that Solomon's marriage can function as a type for Christ's relationship with his people concerns the moral and religious quality of that OT marriage. Owen notes that marriage to foreigners was forbidden to Old Testament Jews, and that this marital union of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter had particularly negative consequences for the Davidic kingdom. In light of this, Owen believes that "it is not probable that the Holy Ghost should so celebrate that marriage."<sup>80</sup> In other words, as Keach's seventh canon states, the wicked cannot be types of the righteous. This is simply an extension of Mather's limitations upon the similarities and dissimilarities between a type and antitype discussed in his fourth rule for guiding typological exposition. Recognizing that no type is perfect (i.e., no type is identical with the antitype), nevertheless, something unrighteous cannot foreshadow something righteous. If indeed Psalm 45 was written to commemorate Solomon's unrighteous marriage to a foreigner in violation of God's law, then the apostle's typological application of this psalm to Christ was inappropriate. However, as demonstrated above,<sup>81</sup> Owen frees the apostle from this accusation by asserting that Psalm 45 speaks, not prophetically via the type-antitype construction, but as a direct and immediate verbal prophecy of Christ's union with his Church.<sup>82</sup>

Owen's critique of other expositors' typological explanations of the apostle's use of Psalm 45 demonstrates two important elements in Owen's own typological exegesis: first, the necessity of firmly grounding the type in history; no matter how extensive the parallels between things might appear, typology is only a viable exegetical strategy when the type is a historically verifiable person, place, or event. Second, every thing rooted in

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<sup>80</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:179.

<sup>81</sup> See chapter 5, section 2.5 of this work.

<sup>82</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:180.

history with verbal or allegorical similarities to a New Testament phenomena does not necessarily constitute a type; for an unrighteous thing cannot type a righteous antitype, nor can a righteous thing be used to foreshadow an unrighteous fulfillment.

### 2.3 Hebrews 1:10-12/Psalm 102:25-27

Typology was not used by seventeenth-century expositors in assessing the apostle's use of Psalm 102 in Hebrews 1:10-12. The primary exegetical issue in these verses is the question of how the cited text applies to Christ even though it appears in the original psalm to be addressed to God. William Gouge and David Paraeus rely on the Trinitarian doctrine and the *analogia fidei* to assert that, as the second Person of the Godhead, any text addressed to God implicitly includes Christ.<sup>83</sup> Hugo Grotius and Johannes Coccejus believe that the original text speaks to God the Father without any immediate reference to Christ – the text being accommodated to Christ by the apostle.<sup>84</sup> However, the bulk of the orthodox exegetes, including Owen, point to the overall messianic message of the psalm, and therefore claim that the apostle correctly interpreted the psalm in its application to Christ. That is, since the psalm speaks to the reign of the Messiah, it is best to understand Christ as the one given the title “God” in the text.<sup>85</sup>

Against this rather unified position concerning the application of the psalm to Christ, Owen's Socinian opponent, Johann Crell, maintains that the bulk of the cited text applies solely to God (by which he means to exclude Christ), and that only the second phrase, verse 11, “they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment,” speaks to Christ. To justify this conclusion, which Owen dubs a “new and peculiar

<sup>83</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 71; Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:840.

<sup>84</sup> Hugo Grotius, *Annotationes in Novum Testamentum*, 7 vols. (Groningen: Zuidema, 1641; repr. 1829), 7:359; Coccejus, *Opera Omnia*, 6:23-24.

<sup>85</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:197-198; Calvin, CO 55, col.18; Piscator, *Commentarii*, 190; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:812; Gomarus, *Opera Theologica Omnia*, 304.

evasion,”<sup>86</sup> Crell launches into a long digression concerning the use and application of Old Testament testimonies in the New. It is in response to part of this discourse by Crell that Owen expresses his own ideas concerning the theory and application of typological exegesis.

Crell begins by listing the various reasons why the New Testament authors quoted the Old Testament. His first reason expresses his understanding of the authors’ view of typology: Old Testament citations

are made use of by the writers of it, either because of some agreement and likeness between the things intended in the one and the other, or because of some subordination. In the former way, that which is spoken of the type is applied unto the antitype: and sometimes, for likeness’ sake, that which was spoken of one thing is applied unto another; as, Matt. xv.7, 8, our Saviour applies those words of Isaiah to the present Jews which were spoken of their forefathers.<sup>87</sup>

Owen takes Crell to task for defining typology as based on “some agreement and likeness between the things intended in the one and the other.” Types do not exist, in Owen’s mind, because the expositor can draw parallels between it and something else, but because the types are intentionally placed in history and in the text by God himself to foreshadow the work of Christ.

What is spoken of any type and of Christ jointly is not so spoken for any natural conveniency, similitude, or subordination, but because of God’s institution, appointing the type so to represent and shadow out the Lord Christ, that what he would teach concerning him should be spoken of the type whereby he was represented.<sup>88</sup>

Given Owen’s response to the definition, he seems to accuse Crell of basing typology on verbal, superficial, or accidental similarities between the proposed type and antitype, rather than a deep divinely intended connection. Basing the type-antitype correspondence

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<sup>86</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:198.

<sup>87</sup> Johann Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica, didactica, et polemica. Sive ejus in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros commentarii. Maximam partem hactenus inediti*, in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, vols. 8-9 (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam]: Sumptibus Irenici Philalethii, 1656), vol. 9, fol. 82; English as translated by Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:199.



simply upon some natural comparison of two different things is rejected as bad methodology by most typologists because the distinction of typology from allegory then becomes lost.<sup>89</sup> True typological exposition explores the parallels set forth in Scripture between persons, places, or events, as instituted by God. Allegorical interpretation is more a matter of human wisdom, ability, and insight.<sup>90</sup> Crell's definition leaves open that possibility that anything which shows "some agreement and likeness" could be classified as a type, whereas Owen insists that typology is rooted in God's intended overall redemptive plan as recorded in the Scriptures.

Owen's critique of Crell at this point demonstrates an understanding of the nature of typology such as that implicit in Keach's first canon and explicitly expressed in Mather's first rule: that God is the only true author of types in the Old Testament.<sup>91</sup> Typology and allegory differ exactly at this point: typology explores a foreshadowing instituted by God, while allegory draws upon parallels which were not specifically planned for by God; with typology, "there is something of Christ stamped and ingraven upon them by Divine Institution,"<sup>92</sup> while allegories are built upon verbal or superficial similarities alone.

Along similar lines, Owen disapproves of Crell's definition because it fails to express the intention of the type-antitype motif. For the true typologist, types were divinely instituted, not simply to show the parallels with the antitype, but to teach something about the antitype. Our understanding of the antitype grows because of God's care in providing illuminating parallels in the Old Testament. Thus, in expounding upon

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<sup>88</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:200-201.

<sup>89</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*; Keach, *Tropologia*; Whitaker, *Disputation*, V.ii.405-408; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.iii-vii.

<sup>90</sup> Anderson, "Editor's Introduction," 5.

<sup>91</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 233; Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 53; Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, II.xix.xvi.

the meaning of a type, the content and words have a “double application” – both to instruct us as to the type itself in its historical context, and ultimately to guide us into a better understanding of the type’s fulfillment in the New Testament era.

That which is spoken in the first place of an instituted type is also spoken of the antitype, or thing prefigured by it, so far as it is represented by the type, so that one thing teaches another; and thereon the words have a double application, first to the type, ultimately to the antitype.<sup>93</sup>

A superficial correspondence is not enough to take what is addressed to one person and apply it to another. The connection must be grounded in God’s appointment of the Old Testament person to serve as a type for a future fulfillment. “That what is spoken of one person should, because of some similitude, be affirmed to be spoken of another, and in nothing agree properly unto him, is untrue, and not to be exemplified with any seeming instance.”<sup>94</sup> Thus, a transfer of meaning, whereby the promise illuminates the fulfillment, occurs, and is suppose to occur, in a proper type-antitype relationship, whereas any similar transfer of meaning outside of a divinely instituted typological situation betrays the literal sense of the text and becomes an exegetically fallacious allegory.

In arguing along these lines, Owen again gives definition to the standard principles of typological exegesis. While the similarities and parallels between types and antitypes are an evident characteristic of typology, Owen moves beyond the these superficial aspects to stress the value of the type – it foreshadows the antitype in such a way as to shed light upon its deeper, divine-given meaning. And, in so doing, the type is surpassed by the antitype. According to Keach’s third rule: there is often more in the antitype than in the type. Since the antitype fulfills the type, it will contain more of the truth. The type is a shadow of the real thing – real in itself, but still only a dim reflection of the richness

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<sup>92</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 53. See also, Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:200.

<sup>93</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:199.

of its New Testament fulfillment. This follows closely with Taylor's observations concerning the surpassing excellencies of the antitype over the type.<sup>95</sup> Owen's interests in typology are not simply to recognize parallels between the Testaments, nor to buttress arguments for the unity of Scripture. Rather, typology serves as a useful exegetical tool because it gives insight into the redemptive realities which comprise the scriptural record, the Old Testament type shedding light on the far surpassing greatness of its fulfillment in the New Testament antitype.

Owen takes issue with one more aspect of Crell's typological theory. Crell addresses the limitations of the use of a type in the New Testament. Not everything about a type cited by the apostles applies to its New Testament context – only that which furthers the intention of the author at that particular point is relevant.

That all the words, or things signified by them, in any testimony, which are firstly spoken of one, and then are, for some of the causes mentioned [that is, conveniency, similitude, or subordination] applied unto another, are not to be looked on as proper to him to whom they are so applied; but so much of them is to be admitted as agrees to the scope of him by whom the testimony is used.<sup>96</sup>

In Crell's opinion, the usefulness of an Old Testament type is limited by the scope of the New Testament context in which the type is invoked. Given the importance of the scope of a text in Owen's own hermeneutic, it is surprising to note his rejection of this aspect of Crell's theory. Yet, he is entirely consistent in his own typological viewpoint in objecting to this formulation. Once again, according to Crell's thought, the type's origin and historicity is of no consequence; instead, what makes a type a type is the author's identification of some parallel in the Old Testament which is suitable to the author's present writing. In contrast, Owen again stresses that the origin of every type-antitype lies

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<sup>94</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:199.

<sup>95</sup> Taylor, *Christ Revealed*, 4.

<sup>96</sup> Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica*, vol. 9, fol. 82; English by Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:200.

in its ordination by God – the types expanded upon by the NT authors exist because God grounded them in history.<sup>97</sup> From the moment of their historical existence, the Old Testament types were foreshadowing their coming antitypes.

Owen is, of course, well aware of the limitations inherent in properly handling the type-antitype motif. Faithful again to the accepted canons of typological exegesis (e.g., #2, 4, and 7 of Keach's rules and Mather's fourth rule), Owen argues that the sinfulness of a type does not devolve onto the antitype. However, he goes further in providing theological and exegetical grounds for why these typological limits exist. He does this by carefully distinguishing between the Old Testament person's role as a type, and their own personal moral capacity.

Now, no person that was appointed to be a type of him being in all things a type, it is not necessary that whatever was spoken of him was also spoken of Christ, but only that was spoken of him under that formal consideration of an instituted type. This we showed the case to have been with Solomon... Other things are added in that same place, that belonged unto him in his own personally moral capacity; and therefore those things (as that, "If he offend against me") are not at all mentioned by the apostle, as not being spoken of him as a type.<sup>98</sup>

Thus, according to Owen's typological theory, Solomon, as a king in Israel, typed the office of Christ's kingship, yet his moral failings belonged to his person alone and have no "fulfillment" in Christ.

### 3. Owen's Typological Exegesis of Hebrews 1:5/2 Samuel 7:14

While certain insights into Owen's theory of typology can be gained by looking at his rejection of others' typological conclusions, Owen's own use of the technique is the best indicator of his approach to the exegetical tool. Owen turns to typology to explain

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<sup>97</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:200.

<sup>98</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:201.

how the author of Hebrews can appropriately apply the words of 2 Samuel 7:14 to Christ in the latter part of Hebrews 1:5.

Cajetan's critique of the apostle's use of this citation, and the reaffirmation of this critique by non-orthodox interpreters in the century and a half following Cajetan, was devastating to the Protestant view of the Bible, and therefore, received specific attention from post-Reformation exegetes.<sup>99</sup> Cajetan had claimed that this testimony could not be literally understood of Christ and was therefore misapplied to him by the author of the epistle. Consequently, Cajetan (and some other critics) rejected the canonical authority of the epistle. At the beginning of his response, Owen faults Cajetan for two assumptions: first, Cajetan's supposition that if the apostle could properly understand a text's application to Christ, then Cajetan could as well, and second, that if one cannot discern the suitability of a particular testimony, then it is proper to reject that portion of Scripture as holy writ. Owen notes that "the folly and iniquity of which principles or suppositions are manifest."<sup>100</sup>

Almost universally, Reformed expositors turned to typology to justify the apostle's use of this citation with regard to Christ, and to maintain the apostolic authority of the epistle as a whole. A typical example of this typology, and the theory which underlies it, is expressed by John Weemse in his *Exercitations Divine*. Addressing the questions surrounding the literal sense and the interpretation of types and antitypes, John Weemse uses this passage as an example, both to stress the typological meaning as the true literal sense of the text, and to make clear his own typological hermeneutic:

The Lord maketh a promise to David, *I will set up thy seed after thee which shall proceede out of thy bowels*. This promise looked both *ad propius & remotius*, yet it

<sup>99</sup> Tommaso Cajetan, *Opera Omnia Quotquot in Sacrae Scripture Expositionem Reperiumter* (Lyon, 1639), 332; Enyedi, *Explicationes locorum Veteris & Novi Testamenti*, 56-59; and note almost all exegetes specifically respond to Cajetan's critiques at this point.

<sup>100</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:138.

made up but one sense, *propius* to Salomon, and *remotius* to Christ... And he applyeth this promise literally to his sonne Salomon, and figuratively to Christ his Sonne; taking the promise in a larger extent; and the matter may be cleared by this comparison. A father hath a sonne who is farre from him, he biddeth the Tailor shape a coate to him, and to take the measure by another child who is there present, but withall hee biddeth the Taylor make it larger; because his child will waxe taller: So this promise made to David was first cut out (as it were) for Salomon his sonne, but yet it had a larger extent: for it applied to Christ who is greater than Salomon... So the Lord eye was principally upon the Messias, but hee did cast a looke, as it were, also to Salomon.<sup>101</sup>

Especially instructive is Weemse's tailor analogy: the type (coat) originates with the father; the type serves as a model for the real thing (the child present for the absent son); the real thing is greater than the type (the child's measurements are increased to accommodate the bigger son); and the principal object of the type is its fulfillment (the present child is used only as a temporary stand-in for the real son). All these elements factor into Owen's own typological hermeneutic, and they are in turn developed in greater detail in his exegesis.

Owen's first step in demonstrating that the apostle used typology here is to conclusively prove that the Old Testament text dealt with a real historical person – in this case, with Solomon. He does this first by rejecting the arguments of those who would deny that Solomon is intended at all in the 2 Samuel text and instead insist that the pericope is a direct and immediate prophecy of Christ.<sup>102</sup> The basis of their refusal to acknowledge Solomon as intended in the Old Testament passage is four-fold: (1) the text can be understood as implying that David's son, the object of this passage, was not yet born, whereas Solomon was already born at the time of Nathan's prophecy. (2) The prophesied son is thought to reign after David died, while Solomon's reign began before David's death. (3) Whereas Solomon's posterity eventually lost the throne, the prophecy indicates an everlasting reign. (4) The title given the prophesied one by Nathan indicates

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<sup>101</sup> Weemse, *Exercitations Divine*, lxix (pg. 182).

that he is preferred above all angels – something which clearly does not suit Solomon. Owen responds to each of these, in part through his typological exegesis, and shows that “these observations, though they want not some appearance and probability of reason, come short of proving evidently what they are produced for.”<sup>103</sup> He concludes that there is no good reason for denying Solomon as the intended subject of Nathan’s promise.

After rejecting these arguments, Owen then attempts to show positively that Solomon is the one historically intended in the oracle. He does this by looking at the context of the Old Testament passage and assessing it on its face value, that is, its literal sense.

David inquired of Nathan about building a house or material temple unto God. Nathan returns him answer from God that he shall not do son, but that his son should perform that work. This answer David understands of his immediate son and of a material house, and thereupon makes material provision for it and preparation in great abundance, upon the encouragement he received in this answer of God. Now, if neither of these were at all intended in it, – neither his son nor the material temple, – it is evident that he was led into a great mistake, by the ambiguity and equivocation of the word; but we find by the event that he was not, God approving and accepting of his obedience in what he did.<sup>104</sup>

Once again, in Owen’s brief examination of the Old Testament context, his commitment to the literal sense of the text is clear: “to affirm Solomon not at all to be intended in this oracle, nor the house or temple which afterwards he built, is to make the whole answer of God by the prophet unto David to be equivocal.”<sup>105</sup> Since there is no good reason for looking beyond the historical-grammatical meaning of the words, the literal sense clearly reveals that “Solomon firstly and immediately is intended in these words.”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:140-141.

<sup>103</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:140.

<sup>104</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:141.

<sup>105</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:141.

<sup>106</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:141.

Having provided the first necessary step in advancing typological explanations – that of demonstrating the historicity of the type – Owen then seeks to show that the bare historical “sense” of the text inadequately expresses the true extent of the scriptural meaning. He does this, however, not by showing how the text itself points both to and beyond Solomon to something greater, but simply by countering those exegetes who would limit the text simply to Solomon with no true reference to Christ. The main reason this opinion is promoted is because the text which follows the quoted phrase speaks of the possibility of the prophesied one committing iniquity and being chastised by God – something which clearly has no parallel with Christ. The apostle’s application of this text to Christ, then, is allegorical, not literal or typological.<sup>107</sup> Owen counters this argument on both theological and typological grounds. First, he notes that the ultimate promise of this text applies to Christ, but as the representative head of his people, it also evolves covenantally to the “whole mystical Christ, head and members,” and that the warning about committing iniquity then is passed on to Christ’s covenant people.<sup>108</sup> Second, from a typological standpoint, Owen points out that everything concerning a type does not automatically pass on to the antitype. Thus, Solomon’s personal failings are his alone and do not transmit to Christ. The warning against falling into sin and experiencing God’s punishment thereof is directed to Solomon the person, not Solomon the type.<sup>109</sup>

Since Solomon is undeniably the historical referent of Nathan’s prophecy, and yet the New Testament uses this prophecy to describe Christ, Owen concludes with most other exegetes that typology is at work here: “both Solomon and the Lord Christ are intended in this whole oracle; Solomon literally, and nextly as the type; the Lord Christ

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<sup>107</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:141.

<sup>108</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:141-142.

<sup>109</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:142-143.



principally and mystically, as he who was typed, figured, and represented by him.”<sup>110</sup>

From this typological assessment, Owen expounds upon five characteristics of the type-antitype construction.

First, Owen recognizes that any one type has a limited ability to represent the fullness and greatness of the messianic realities; thus, multiple types are necessary to properly prefigure Christ and his benefits.

That there never was any one type of Christ and his offices that entirely represented him and all that he was to do: for as it was impossible that any one thing or person should do so, because of the perfection of his person and the excellency of his office, which no one thing that might be appointed to prefigure him as a type, because of its limitedness and imperfection, could fully represent; so had any such been found out, that multiplication of types which God in his infinite wisdom was pleased to make use of, for the revelation of him intended in them, had been altogether useless and needless.<sup>111</sup>

Different types represented different aspects of one single antitype. In this instance, Owen concludes that this oracle of Solomon foreshadows the Father’s covenantal, eternal, unchangeable love for his Son, Christ.<sup>112</sup>

Second, every type prefigured the antitype only so far as the typology was intended by God. That is, not everything about a certain person who serves as a type foreshadows something about Christ. “That no type of Christ was in all things that he was or did a type of him, but only in that particular wherein he was designed of God so to be, and wherein he hath revealed him so to have been.”<sup>113</sup> There are lots of things recorded about David, Isaac, Solomon, and other personal types which have no bearing on their typological affiliation with Christ. They serve as types simply to map out those parallels which God himself planned for them to do.

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<sup>110</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:142.

<sup>111</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:142.

<sup>112</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:144.

<sup>113</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:142.

Owen's third characteristic flows from the previous one: even in the role which is specifically designated as typological, not everything about a type looks forward to the antitype.

That not all things spoken of him that was a type, even therein wherein he was a type, are spoken of him as a type, or have any respect unto the thing signified; but some of them may belong unto him in his personal capacity only. And the reason is, because he who was a type of God's institution might morally fail in the performance of his duty, even then and in those things when and wherein he was a type. Hence, somewhat may be spoken of him, as to his moral performance of his duty, that may no way concern the antitype, or Christ prefigured by him.<sup>114</sup>

Thus, Solomon prefigured Christ's rule and administration of his kingdom, not "in any moral department in the observance of them," but simply in its existence.<sup>115</sup> As a type, Solomon's kingdom foreshadowed the reality of Christ's reign, not the morality of it.

Fourth, Owen promotes the idea that the shadow of the type is far surpassed in the fullness of the antitype. In his discussion at this time, the reason he gives for this is because the glories hinted at in the type do not actually belong to the type but to the antitype. This is not, obviously, to deny the historicity of the type, but simply to stress that, in its typological function, the type serves as only as a hint of what is truly coming.

That what is spoken of any type, as it was a type, and in respect of its institution to be such, doth not really and properly belong unto him or that which was the type, but unto him who was represented thereby. For the type itself, it was enough that there was some resemblance in it of that which was principally intended, the things belonging unto the antitype being affirmed of it analogically, on the account of the relation between them by God's institution.<sup>116</sup>

Owen uses the example of the scapegoat to make his point. The scapegoat instructions in the Old Testament typed the manner in which Christ was going to remove the sin of his people. But whereas Christ himself truly did bear the burden of sin, the scapegoat did not in reality, in the substance of the matter, carry sin. The scapegoat was but a poor

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<sup>114</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:142.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:143.

<sup>116</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:143.

reflection of the glories of the fulfillment in Christ. With respect to the particular text in 2 Samuel, the full meaning of the passage regards the Messiah, the words spoken directly of Solomon solely to prefigure their appropriation to Christ.

The words applied by the apostle to prove the Son to have a more excellent name than the angels, and consequently to be preferred above them, do not at all prove that Solomon, of whom they were spoken merely as he was a type, should be esteemed to be preferred above all angels, seeing he did only represent Him who was so, and had these words spoken unto him, not absolutely, but with respect unto that representation.<sup>117</sup>

Again with this description, Owen provides substance and weight to the common typological theory – expressed, for instance, in Keach’s third rule and in Taylor’s description concerning the excellencies of the antitype<sup>118</sup> – that, in the messianic era, the antitype surpasses the type in greatness and glory.

Finally, Owen compares the temporal nature of the type with the lasting quality of the antitype. The Old Testament types had by creation a temporally limited function – once the antitype appeared, the type was displaced in favor of its fulfillment. Not only was the New Testament reality more excellent than the Old Testament type, but the type was intended to foreshadow and then give way to the antitype. Owen addresses this in relation to the endurance of David’s heirs’ kingdom and Christ’s own.

That there is a twofold perpetuity mentioned in the Scripture, the one limited and relative, the other absolute; and both these are applied unto the kingdom of David. First, there was a perpetuity promised unto him and his posterity in the kingdom, as of the priesthood of Aaron, – that is, a limited perpetuity, – namely, during the continuance of the typical state and condition of that people; whilst they continued, the rule by right belonged unto the house of David. There was also an absolute perpetuity promised to the kingdom of David, to be made good only in the kingdom and rule of the Messiah.<sup>119</sup>

The type serves its purpose by looking forward to the coming of the antitype; once the fulfillment is present, the value of the type is gone. When the foreshadowing of the

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<sup>117</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:143.

<sup>118</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 234; Taylor, *Christ Revealed*, 4.

Davidic kingdom is fulfilled in Christ, the perpetual nature of the typical kingdom passes to the Messiah's; David's kingdom had a limited perpetuity, fulfilled eternally in Christ's.

In light, then, of these five typological characteristics expounded upon by Owen, he draws the following conclusion:

These considerations being premised, I say, the words insisted on by the apostle, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son," belonged first and nextly unto Solomon, denoting that fatherly love, care, and protection that God would afford unto him in his kingdom, so far forth as Christ was represented by him therein; which requires not that they must absolutely and in all just consequences from them belong unto the person of Solomon. Principally, therefore, they intend Christ himself, expressing that eternal, unchangeable love which the Father bore unto him, grounded on the relation of father and son.<sup>120</sup>

#### 4. Owen's Analysis of the Typology in Hebrews 7:1-3

Hebrews 7:1-3 For this Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; to whom also Abraham divided out a tenth part of all; first, being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is King of peace; without father, without mother, without pedigree, having neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually.

Hebrews 7:1-3 Οὗτος γὰρ ὁ Μελχισέδεκ, βασιλεὺς Σαλήμ, ἱερεὺς τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ὑψίστου, ὁ συναντήσας Ἀβραάμ ὑποστρέφοντι ἀπὸ τῆς κοπῆς τῶν βασιλέων καὶ εὐλογήσας αὐτόν, ᾧ καὶ δεκάτην ἀπὸ πάντων ἐμέρισεν Ἀβραάμ, πρῶτον μὲν ἐρμηνευόμενος βασιλεὺς δικαιοσύνης ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ βασιλεὺς Σαλήμ, ὃ ἐστὶν βασιλεὺς εἰρήνης, ἀπάτωρ ἀμήτωρ ἀγενεαλόγητος, μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων, ἀφωμοιωμένος δὲ τῷ Υἱῷ τοῦ θεοῦ, μένει ἱερεὺς εἰς τὸ διηνεκές.

<sup>119</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:143.

<sup>120</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 19:144.

Because of the unusual character of the text, John Owen's exegesis of Hebrews 7:1-3 offers unique insights into the Puritan's use and proper exposition of typological material in the New Testament. The text itself links an event recorded in the Old Testament with the person and work of Christ in the New Testament – the ancient figure of Melchizedek discussed in Genesis 14 is set forth by the author of Hebrews as a paradigm of Christ.

The interpretative questions forced on the expositor by this passage are (1) the manner in which the author's description of Melchizedek are applicable to his historical time, and (2) in what sense may that description of Melchizedek be applied to Christ. The complexities of these questions were obvious to seventeenth-century expositors, and the difficulties presented by this passage were acknowledged as a "strange riddle."<sup>121</sup> Owen himself complained that "there are almost as many different analyses given of this chapter as there are commentators upon it; and sometimes the same person proposeth sundry of them, without a determination of what he principally adheres unto."<sup>122</sup> His own interpretation of this pericope again reflects his rigorous application of the exegetical methodology of his time, particularly with regards to his typological explanations.

#### 4.1 The Scope and Purpose of Typology

Like most expositors who wrote at some length on a passage, Owen begins his discussion of this chapter with an analysis of the scope of the section within the purpose of the epistle as a whole. According to Owen, the design of the apostle is not to talk about the nature or the exercise of the Christ's priesthood, but "it is of its *excellency* and *dignity* that he discourseth in this place; and that not absolutely neither, but in comparison with

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<sup>121</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *The Knowledge of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Nichol, 1861-1866), 446.

<sup>122</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:291.

the Levitical priesthood of the church under the Old Testament.”<sup>123</sup> The author of Hebrews desires to contrast Christ’s priesthood with Aaron’s and therefore to demonstrate the superiority of the former. Owen’s understanding of the scope of this chapter is not unique, and is nearly identical with his contemporary William Gouge’s.<sup>124</sup> However, Owen’s exegesis of the chapter is controlled by an awareness of this scope in a much more precise and extensive way. Owen’s conclusions reflect a constant awareness of what the apostle was attempting to do – his understanding of the apostle’s purpose in this passage limits the range of exegetical options available to Owen. Gouge, on the other hand, does not always clarify why the apostle included in his argument some of the conclusions which Gouge himself finds in the passage. Owen assumes that the first three verses were written by the apostle in order to give an account of Melchizedek and to relate the typological connection between his priesthood and Christ’s.<sup>125</sup> Owen’s discussion grows out of his concern for keeping the overall context of the pericope firmly in mind when making exegetical observations.

Owen is aware of the importance of typology to his coming discussion, so he makes some preliminary comments concerning the nature of typology and God’s purposes in writing the Old Testament. God gave the Israelites the Old Testament ceremonial code and the information “whereby they might see, know, and believe that they were all to cease and issue in something better, afterwards to be introduced.”<sup>126</sup> These Old Testament truths, while in great measure hidden, are brought to light in the New Testament. Consequently, any “ordinary” believer is now better able than even the wisest of Jews to understand the mysteries of the OT because of the clarifying work of the NT.

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<sup>123</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:291.

<sup>124</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 7, 466.

<sup>125</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:293.

However, prior to the giving of the Sinaiic law and the institution of the Aaronic priesthood, God gave a typical prefiguration which “undeniably manifests the certain future introduction of another and a better priesthood.”<sup>127</sup> Thus, the introduction of Melchizedek into sacred Scripture is “a signal instance of the sovereignty and wisdom of God.”<sup>128</sup> Owen frequently returns to this theme throughout his exposition of these verses; never is the reader to miss the sovereign design of God’s control over history and the writing of Scripture. “Everything in the Scripture is significant, and hath its especial design, the whole being inlaid with truth by infinite wisdom, whether we apprehend it or no.”<sup>129</sup> Consequently, the full depth of the meaning of the Melchizedek story in the Genesis account, as well as other Old Testament mysteries, is found only in perceiving their fulfillment in the New. “They do but deceive themselves and others, who, in the interpretation of mystical passages and prophecies of the Old Testament, do neglect the accomplishment of them and light given unto them in the New.” For Owen, the analogy of Scripture, and in this case its typological application, does not hinder good exegesis, but is rather at its core; “the clear revelations of the New Testament ought to be our principle rule in the interpretation of difficult passages in the Old.”<sup>130</sup>

#### 4.2 Searching for the Historical Identity of Melchizedek

With this perception concerning the relationship of the Testaments, Owen proceeds to speculate concerning the historical identity of Melchizedek. The Scotsman, David Dickson, and Benjamin Keach were two exegetes who appear to have understood that the

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<sup>126</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:292.

<sup>127</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:293.

<sup>128</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:299.

<sup>129</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:322.

<sup>130</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:323.

absence of any known identification of Melchizedek was actually essential to the apostle's typological argument, and therefore refuse to hypothesize further.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, the search for Melchizedek's "real" identity was common practice in Puritan expositions, and rarely does a commentator not theorize about this. Owen's purpose in this examination is clear: the correspondence between Christ and Melchizedek, which is what the Hebrews' author builds his argument upon, is rooted in the historical character and events surrounding the biblical record of Melchizedek. For typological purposes, it is important to acknowledge that Melchizedek was a real historical person, and not just a literary figure; if robbed of his historicity, Melchizedek ceases to serve as a type of Christ and instead becomes a source for New Testament allegorizing.

Owen notes in passing that other commentators have advanced the idea that Melchizedek was some form of an appearance of the Holy Spirit, God himself, or an angel. He briefly rejects these notions, but spends significant time refuting the assumption that Melchizedek was some preincarnate manifestation of Christ himself. This opinion was held by some prominent Puritan writers. Edward Fisher asserted that "if we search out this truth without partiality we shall find that this Melchizedek who appeared unto Abraham was none other than the Son of God manifest by a special dispensation and privilege unto Abraham in the flesh."<sup>132</sup> Matthew Henry leans in this direction as well thinking that there is good evidence for equating Melchizedek with Christ, though he wonders why Christ would type himself in this manner.<sup>133</sup> To Owen,

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<sup>131</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 33-34; Keach, *Tropologia*, 973. See also, Thomas Manton, *Jesus Christ, True God and True Man in One Person*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 1 (London: Nisbet, 1870), 479.

<sup>132</sup> Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645; repr. Glasgow: Bryce and Son, 1902), 43.

<sup>133</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (1706-1710; repr. Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 6:738-739.



arguing in this manner is exegetically unsound since it ignores the reason Melchizedek is introduced in the first place: “all such opinions which make him more than man are wholly inconsistent with the design of the apostle.”<sup>134</sup> Context must control one’s exegetical conclusions, and the apostle’s purpose in the chapter is to demonstrate that even among man there is a priesthood which is superior to that of the Law. In Owen’s mind, maintaining that Melchizedek was anything other than a mere man undercuts the very point of Paul’s argument.

Many prominent Puritan commentators agreed with William Gouge who leans toward the identification of Melchizedek with Shem, the son of Noah. Gouge produces eight arguments in favor of this linkage, and insists that the apostle’s description of Melchizedek in verses 1-7 apply directly to Shem.<sup>135</sup> Andrew Willet provides twelve reasons to support this claim, while answering numerous objections, and Henry Ainsworth cites various Rabbinic sources who defend it.<sup>136</sup> However, the connection between Melchizedek and Shem was not without contemporary critics – Matthew Poole joins Owen in objecting to this suggestion because such an identification with Shem is inconsistent with the apostle’s claim in 7:3 that Melchizedek was without father or mother (Shem’s father, Noah, and mother are named in Scripture).<sup>137</sup> Against this objection, Willet argues that the apostle’s words only mean that Melchizedek’s lineage was not known to his contemporaries.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:297.

<sup>135</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 467-468.

<sup>136</sup> Andrew Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis* (Cambridge, 1605), 161-3; Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the Five Bookes of Moses, the Booke of the Psalmes, and the Song of Songs*, 7 vols. (London, 1626-1627; repr. Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1991), 1:56.

<sup>137</sup> Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1:35 (on Genesis 14:18), and 3:835 (on Hebrews 7:1); Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:297. Note also that Calvin rejects this identification, Calvin, *CO* 55, col.84.

<sup>138</sup> Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis*, 162.

Owen also refutes the idea that Melchizedek was a Canaanite king or that he was some other descendent of Ham, and bases his rejection of this theory on typological grounds. The Scriptural record indicates that, due to Ham's impropriety toward his father Noah, the Canaanites were cursed, and Owen argues that

although he lived and dwelt in Canaan, then and afterwards principally possessed by the posterity of the son of Ham, so called, yet he was none of the seven nations or peoples therein that were in the curse of Noah devoted unto bondage and destruction. For whereas they were therein, by a spirit of prophecy, anathematized and cast out of the church, as also devoted unto destruction, God would not raise up among them, that is, of their accursed seed, the most glorious ministry that ever was in the world, with respect unto typical signification.<sup>139</sup>

This is an important point, for it highlights Owen's strict interpretation of, and commitment to, the rules for typology – as well as demonstrating how those rules are intertwined with the analogy of Scripture. As expressed in Samuel Mather's fourth rule and Benjamin Keach's seventh canon, the standard seventeenth-century typological theory held that the wicked could not be types for the godly. Someone who, according to Scripture, is cursed by God could not foreshadow Christ. Thus, because the New Testament makes it clear that Melchizedek was a type for Christ and in Genesis 9:20-27 the Scripture is understood by Owen to place all the descendants of Ham outside the bounds of the church, it is impossible for Melchizedek to have been of Ham's posterity. To Owen, this is an obvious conclusion, if one is to take seriously proper typological hermeneutics, and he expresses his surprise that "no expositors did ever take any notice of it, seeing it is necessary to be granted from the analogy of sacred truth."<sup>140</sup> Regardless of how one judges the exegetical soundness of Owen's argument, it gives another example of how seventeenth-century exegetes applied the theories of typology and the

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<sup>139</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:298.

<sup>140</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:298-299.

analogy of Scripture, and how those theories limited the interpretative options available to the commentator.

Owen himself advances the suggestion that Melchizedek was actually a descendent of Japheth, “who was principally to be regarded as the father of the Gentiles that were to be called.”<sup>141</sup> He argues that, in response to the promise made to Japheth of blessing through Shem (Genesis 9:27), some of Japheth’s posterity came to Canaan (which Owen assumes the ancients knew was the promised land) in search of that blessing. Rather than pin down Melchizedek’s identity, however, the truly important thing for Owen is the marvelous work of God in raising up this “great type of Christ” in the midst of a sinful and idolatrous people. It is the actions of God and the foreshadowing of the Savior which is crucial to Owen.<sup>142</sup>

#### **4.3 The Apostle’s Description of Melchizedek**

Having sought to establish Melchizedek’s historical identity, expositors now proceeded to explain the importance of the descriptions made by the apostle concerning Melchizedek. William Gouge again represents the exegetical majority in believing that the full description of Melchizedek by the apostle is intended to correspond to the person and work of Jesus Christ. These commentators assume that, if the apostle bothered to mention some particular characteristic of Melchizedek, either his person, actions or title, then he does so only to draw out a specific relationship with Christ. Gouge’s list of the typological features of this text is very similar to that of many other respected Puritan exegetes; the parallels observed by Dickson and Henry are nearly identical with

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<sup>141</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:299.

<sup>142</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:300.

Gouge's,<sup>143</sup> and the lists of Keach and Willet are very similar – although both also emphasize Melchizedek's unique calling into the priesthood, one parallel with Christ which Gouge does not stress.<sup>144</sup> It appears that most Puritan exegetes assumed that each aspect of Paul's description of Melchizedek in Hebrews 7:1-3 was specifically written by the apostle to highlight Melchizedek's typological role.

Accordingly, Gouge identifies a number of ways in which Melchizedek was intentionally used by God to foreshadow the coming of Christ from the apostle's statement in verse 1 that Melchizedek was king of Salem and priest of God. As a king, Melchizedek typed Christ's kingship, and as a priest, he typed Christ's priesthood.<sup>145</sup> However, unlike other kings and priests in the Old Testament, Melchizedek was "herein a peculiar type of Christ, who was all in all to his church, both King, Priest, and Prophet."<sup>146</sup> That is, Melchizedek, like Christ, did not hold one office, but two, and therefore, he was an extraordinary type by virtue of both his kingly and priestly function. In the blessing Melchizedek gave to Abraham, Gouge finds another correspondence with Christ – the act of Christ whereby he blesses his faithful followers is prefigured in Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham, the father and primary representative of believers. By blessing Abraham, Melchizedek typed and confirmed the promise made to Abraham and his seed that Christ would ultimately bless the church.<sup>147</sup>

In the second verse Gouge again expounds upon every description of Melchizedek and relates it to Christ. The verse begins by recounting the historical event of Abraham's

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<sup>143</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 33-34; Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6:738-739.

<sup>144</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 973; Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis*, 168. See also the comparable lists in Guild, *Moses Unveiled*, 25-27; Walther, *Harmonia Biblica*, 96-97.

<sup>145</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 469.

<sup>146</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 470, See also, 475.

<sup>147</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 474-5; see also, Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity*, 43.

giving a tenth of all his war spoils to Melchizedek. In Gouge's eyes, the apostle includes this comment because Abraham's tithing emphasizes the typical nature of Melchizedek. Abraham was moved to do this "to shew that of Christ he held whatsoever he had; in testimony whereof he gives a part to him that was a type of Christ and stood in his room."<sup>148</sup> In other words, Abraham himself understood the typological nature of Melchizedek and responded to him, not as he was, but according to who he represented. While it was unusual for seventeenth-century exegetes to assume that the persons and events in the Old Testament were aware of their typological significance, Samuel Mather and other typologists agreed that Abraham knew Melchizedek to be a figure for Christ.<sup>149</sup>

The apostle's explanation of the meaning of Melchizedek's name was the basis for finding other typological connections. The name, Melchizedek, means "king of righteousness." Therefore, simply through etymology, Melchizedek foreshadowed Christ as the true King who reigned in righteousness. At this point, Gouge introduces a distinction between a "type" and a "pattern." He reserves the term "type" for historical elements which point directly to Christ, but by serving as a "pattern," Melchizedek also served as a model for all future ages. In addition to pointing toward Christ, Melchizedek "patterned" that (1) men may be kings, and (2) kings must rule in righteousness.<sup>150</sup> In moving down this path, Gouge tends toward the tropological exegesis of the medieval *quadriga*. This, however, does not invalidate his typology since Gouge explicitly distinguishes between his "type" and "pattern." Rather, this approach reflects Gouge's desire (as well as other Reform and post-Reformation exegetes) to demonstrate how the biblical text continues to speak authoritatively to the contemporary church. The apostle

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<sup>148</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 475.

<sup>149</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 110.

<sup>150</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 478.

also declares that Melchizedek's name "king of Salem" means "king of peace." This reference is taken by Gouge to refer to Christ's role as the Prince of Peace: as a type, Melchizedek prefigured Christ who brought "1. that peace which he made betwixt the Creator and creatures. 2. That which he made among creatures themselves."<sup>151</sup> Gouge's discussion on this two-fold description of Christ's work as peacemaker flows from his understanding of the typological nature of the place where Melchizedek reigned. In all, Gouge identifies at least nine different ways in which Melchizedek served as a type of Christ – a king, a priest, both a king and priest, blessed the faithful, received gifts from the faithful, the king of righteousness, prince of peace, the union of two natures, and eternal priesthood.

Owen's analysis of the typological features of the apostle's description of Melchizedek, however, is much more constrained than those of his contemporaries. Instead of interpreting each of Melchizedek's characteristics as foreshadowing some aspect of Christ's person or mission, Owen limits the typological correspondence by what he understands is the scope of the author at this point. For instance, contrary to what many other Puritans believed, Owen did not see Melchizedek's kingship as being typological. That is, Owen did not believe that a typological correspondence exists between the fact that Melchizedek was a king and the kingship of Christ. "This [Melchizedek kingship] doth not belong unto that wherein he was principally to be a type of Christ, nor is the Lord Christ anywhere said to be a king after the order of Melchisedec, nor doth the apostle make any use of the consideration of this office in him."<sup>152</sup> He did not deny the significance of the parallel, but claimed that "there might be

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<sup>151</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 479.

<sup>152</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:300.

a moral resemblance between them," but not a typological one.<sup>153</sup> To Owen, this distinction is important. While it might be convenient for Melchizedek to have been a king, it was not necessary for the purpose of prefiguring Christ. The central core of that typology lay in their corresponding role as priests, not as kings.<sup>154</sup> Once again, the importance of the overriding scope of the material guides Owen's exposition.

The apostle's comments concerning Melchizedek's kingship, however, were not without purpose, for although they do not indicate a typological connection with Christ, they do fulfill other purposes. Owen asserts that Melchizedek was a king as well as a priest so that his actions might be more noticeable, and therefore carry greater significance for the people who were present at the historical event.<sup>155</sup> However, even more importantly, while not a type for Christ, there nevertheless is an *analogical* relationship to be explored here. As a king, Melchizedek refreshed Abraham the father of the faithful with wine and food following his combat. In a similar way, Christ refreshes the Church in his role as King. Owen stresses that this parallel (and others like it which he later comments on) does not flow from typology, but rather from a secondary similarity between the two. Further on in his exposition, Owen indicates that while the passage calls upon believers to come to Christ merely on account of his priestly office, those who do will also benefit from his kingly office. Thus, a certain aspect of analogy in Scripture is possible though it goes beyond the typological. The type is what the scriptural author intended to parallel, while the analogical is visible on account of *analogia fidei*. In light of this, Owen records this insightful and instructive comment:

So hath the wisdom of God disposed of things in the Scripture unto a fitness to give instruction, even beyond what they are firstly and principally designed unto. And

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<sup>153</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:300.

<sup>154</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:301.

<sup>155</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:301.

although this and the like considerations should give no countenance unto men's curiosity in the exposition and application of any passages in the Scripture beyond the severest rules of interpretation, yet may it encourage us unto a diligent search into them, whilst we are duly steered by the analogy of faith.<sup>156</sup>

Owen's exposition of this passage frequently reflects the presence of analogical concepts within the text, though the analogies he discusses are never seen as a separate sense of the text itself – he still insists on the one literal meaning, although like other orthodox that literal meaning may be figurative, typological, etc.

Owen, however, does allow typology to play a larger role in understanding this passage than simply identifying Melchizedek as a priestly forerunner of Christ. In the course of his exposition, Owen discusses various options concerning the location where Melchizedek was king. He reports that others have used typological reasoning to show that Salem was indeed Jerusalem. They argued that since Christ began his priestly office in Jerusalem, it is only fitting that Melchizedek also be from that place. Owen cautiously relates this as an analysis of others, yet he nevertheless indicates that this reason, among others, prevails upon him to accept Jerusalem as the site of Melchizedek's reign.<sup>157</sup>

Owen also argues that the typology of the passage should not be limited to Melchizedek. In the Genesis account, and therefore implied in the apostle's writing, Abraham was also a type of Christ, though a type of Christ's power and presence in his church and not absolutely of his person or office as was Melchizedek. That is, while Melchizedek foreshadowed the person and work of Christ, Abraham foreshadow those who would benefit from Christ's priestly ministry.<sup>158</sup> From these typological parallels, Owen explores the possibility that the kings Abraham defeated in battle represent the monarchs of the world who will ultimately be defeated by Christ and his Church. Owen

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<sup>156</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:301.

<sup>157</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:302-303.

<sup>158</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:314.



claims he will “neither approve of nor reject that conjecture,” though he later asserts that “Abraham’s conquest of them was not only a pledge of the final success of the church in the world, but also a representation of the usefulness of the church unto the world.”<sup>159</sup> It is not clear here if Owen has in mind a typological or analogical parallel. Indeed in this section, Owen either loses sight of his previous distinction or ignores it, for he wraps up his comments concerning Abraham by stating that the “congress of Melchizedek and Abraham, after Abraham had gotten the victory over all his adversaries, was a type and representation of the glorious congress and meeting of Christ and the church at the last day.”<sup>160</sup> It is hard to reconcile Owen’s use of the word “type” here with his previous distinction between typology and analogy since the exegetical link he is exploring here seems to fit much more with his analogical description than with his typological one.

#### 4.4 The Limits of Typology in Hebrews 7:1-3

While many Puritan commentators freely sought typological connections between Melchizedek and Christ, as did Owen in a more limited sense, all Reformed commentators nevertheless sought to exercise some control over what one could declare as typological. Accordingly, they universally reacted against the typological conclusions of this passage which were advanced by the Roman Church. The Catholic theologian, Robert Bellarmine, had argued that, because of the linkage between Melchizedek and Christ, Melchizedek’s offering of bread and wine to Abraham and his company was to be understood typologically as foreshadowing the sacrificial offering of Christ. Melchizedek’s act prefigured the body and blood of Christ as the appropriate action of

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<sup>159</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:314-315.

<sup>160</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:315.

sacrifice which is characteristic of a priest.<sup>161</sup> According to Bellarmine, Melchizedek's primary typology lies in the fact that Melchizedek instituted the mass by offering bread and wine to Abraham. In the eyes of Puritan critics, however, this exegesis reveals a fatal flaw in properly expounding Old Testament types. In his work on typology, Benjamin Keach distinguished between innate and inferred types. *Innate types* were those which were explicitly expressed in the New Testament, such as, the snake in the wilderness and the Passover lamb. *Inferred types*, on the other hand, are those which "are consequently gathered to be such by interpreters; this is either by fair probabilities agreeable to the analogy of faith, or extorted, and without any foundation in, or shadow of sense, from the literal sense of the text."<sup>162</sup> Most seventeenth-century exegetes, regardless of how freely they applied typological methods, were wary of inferred types. For William Gouge, and other Protestant interpreters who objected to Bellarmine's conclusions, the apostle's failure to mention Melchizedek's providing wine and food to Abraham meant that there was no real typological significance to the act.<sup>163</sup> Furthermore, Puritan exegetes and theologians argued that supplying Abraham with wine and food was a royal and not a priestly act.<sup>164</sup>

Owen echoes many of these arguments when he attacks the abuse of typology present in the Roman Catholic (i.e., Robert Bellarmine's) view of Melchizedek. On numerous exegetical grounds, Owen objects to Bellarmine's assertion that the typology of this passage centers on the fact that Melchizedek offered bread and wine to

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<sup>161</sup> Robert Bellarmine, "de Eucharistia, qui est primus de sacrificio missae," in *Disputationum Roberti Bellarmini* (Cologne: Gualtheri, 1617-1620), I.vi.

<sup>162</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 232.

<sup>163</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 482.

<sup>164</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 470; Thomas Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, vol. 4 (Edinburgh: Nichol, 1861-1866), 59-60; Poole, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 1:35 (on Gen 14:18); Ainsworth, *Annotations*, 1:56. See the extended rebuttal on grammatical, lexical, and theological grounds of the Roman position in Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis*, 166-167.

Abraham.<sup>165</sup> First, he notes that the Hebrews passage, and by extension the Genesis 14 account, deals with parallels which exist between the offices of Melchizedek and Christ, and not their “offerings.” Next, Owen claims that Rome’s interpretation of this account fails because it interferes with the intention of the apostle in citing Melchizedek in the first place; if the parallel was based on offering wine and bread, then the Aaronic priesthood, which also makes those offerings, would be similar with Christ’s not dissimilar as the apostle asserts. Third, in the Genesis account itself, there is no notion of sacrifice in Melchizedek’s providing nourishment, but simply an expression of hospitality. Furthermore, there is no reason for assuming that the conjunctive *waw* which joins the phrase **וְהוּא כֹהֵן לְאֵל עֵלְיוֹן**, “he was priest of God most High,” with the preceding **וּמֶלֶךְ-צֶדֶק מֶלֶךְ שָׁלֵם הוֹצִיא לֶחֶם וַיִּין**, “Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine,” is redditive (i.e., providing a reason). Instead, it should be seen as a simple conjunction linking in logical parallel the two phrases. Fifth, the Hebrew word used here for “brought forth,” **וּצָא**, is not a sacred word nor is it ever used in Scripture with any cultic associations. Finally, and most powerfully for Owen, “the apostle’s silence in this matter casteth this pretense out of all consideration.”<sup>166</sup> Since the apostle’s design is to prove the excellency of Christ’s priesthood above Levi’s, there is no accounting for his silence concerning this fundamental link between the priesthoods of Melchizedek and Christ – if indeed the parallel concerning sacrifice is valid. By debunking the Roman view of Melchizedek’s role in Scripture, Owen demonstrates the importance of applying typology in a carefully, controlled manner. Following strict rules

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<sup>165</sup> Bellarmine, *Disputationum*, I.vi.

<sup>166</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:304-307.

like those codified by Keach, Owen limits the appropriate use of typology to what the historical context, the literal sense of the words, and the fulfillment in the NT allows.

Owen further counters an interpretation advanced by many of his orthodox contemporaries that he believes falls outside the bounds of proper typological exegesis of this text. He recounts the theory that the apostle's description of Melchizedek as ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ, "without father, and without mother," points toward the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ. This explanation of these two terms was popular in both Puritan exegetical and doctrinal works. In Thomas Goodwin's theological tract, *The Knowledge of God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ* (1683), the author draws upon this passage to prove the hypostatic union of the divine and human natures in Christ. Hebrews 7:3 states that Christ was without a father and without a mother, or, as Goodwin explained it, born without a father as to his human nature and born without a mother testifying to his divine nature.

That he was God, and in that respect had a Father, the evangelist John doth in a special manner inculcate; that he had a mother, the story of his birth, by the other three, doth inform us; that he was born of a virgin, without a father, those three evangelists do tell us. And yet that Paul here should tell us, he was without a mother, doth necessarily import another kind of generation of his, wherein there was no mother concurred, and so another divine nature met in this one person; in respect of which he was as substantially begotten of him without a mother, as that as a man he had been conceived of the substance of his mother, even Son of the living God.<sup>167</sup>

The passage, built upon the correspondence between Christ and Melchizedek, was seen as offering direct confirmation concerning the union of two natures in one person, Christ. Since, Goodwin insists, this passage speaks of Christ, it can "no otherwise be unfolded than by a differing respect had to the two natures God and man."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> Goodwin, *Knowledge of God the Father*, 4:446.

<sup>168</sup> Goodwin, *Knowledge of God the Father*, 4:446.

The Hebrews text, with its typological understanding of Melchizedek, was similarly employed by Thomas Manton to advocate the dual nature of Christ. In a series of sermons expounding Christ's redemption and eternal existence, Manton defends the doctrine that "Jesus Christ is true God and true man in one person."<sup>169</sup> Following the citation of numerous Old and New Testament proof texts, Manton demonstrates the dual nature of Christ through the explication of Scriptural types, the first type of which is drawn primarily from the apostle's interpretation in Hebrew 7:2-3. In parallel with the Mosaic account of Melchizedek, Christ is "as God without mother, as man without father; as God without beginning, as God-man without ending of life."<sup>170</sup> This interpretation of the text as alluding to the hypostatic union of Christ's natures through the typological use of Melchizedek was not limited to doctrinal works, but was a popular exegetical option in the seventeenth-century. William Gouge agreed with Manton, Goodwin, and others concerning the meaning of the apostle's description of Melchizedek as ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ. He explained that "without a father" applied to the human nature of Christ and that "without a mother" referred to his divine nature. In this way, Melchizedek prefigured the hypostatic union of Christ's two natures.<sup>171</sup> Andrew Willet, Matthew Henry, David Dickson, and even Benjamin Keach himself, all acknowledge that the absence of a lineage for Melchizedek, especially given the author's use of ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ, is intended to bring forward the unique union of Christ's two natures.<sup>172</sup>

John Owen, however, was one of a few authors who challenged the appropriateness of this theological interpretation, and he does so in part on typological grounds.

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<sup>169</sup> Manton, *Jesus Christ*, 1:476.

<sup>170</sup> Manton, *Jesus Christ*, 1:479.

<sup>171</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 480.

<sup>172</sup> Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis*, 162; Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6:738; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 34; Keach, *Tropologia*, 973.

According to proper exegetical theory, a type is grounded in history, and, as Owen observes, historically, “it must not be denied that, on the other side, he had both a father and mother, – a father as to his divine, and a mother as to his human nature.”<sup>173</sup> The overall scope of the chapter also speaks against interpreting the use of ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ as a reference to Christ’s dual natures. As he strongly emphasized, Owen believed the intent of this passage to address Christ’s priestly nature, a goal which is not furthered by the introduction of the constitution of Christ’s person.<sup>174</sup> Consequently, Owen doubts that these epitaphs are included by the apostle to highlight that particular doctrinal point.

#### 4.5 Owen’s Assessment of Typology in Hebrews 7:1-3

Given these considerations, Owen finally turns to examine exactly how the apostle intended to parallel Melchizedek and Christ. Though he rejects the interpretation that ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ refer to Christ’s dual natures, he is not prepared to think that these comments have no bearing at all upon the typology. Coupled with the phrases ἀγενεαλόγητος and μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων, the assertion that Melchizedek was “without father” and “without mother” demonstrate “wherein Melchisedec was typical of Christ” and “that ‘he was made like unto the Son of God;’ that is, so described as that he might have a great resemblance of him.”<sup>175</sup> Recalling again the scope of the pericope, Owen argues that the principle correlation between Melchizedek and Christ deals with the appearance, in the Old Testament record, of Melchizedek’s unbounded priesthood. It was not with Christ’s natures that the apostle

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<sup>173</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:336.

<sup>174</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:337.

<sup>175</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:336.

sought a parallel with Melchizedek, but with his priestly office, and the specific connection between the two is the timeless character of that office.

Wherefore it must be granted, as that which the plain design of the apostle exacteth of us, that Melchisedec even in these things in the story, – that he was “without father, without mother, without genealogy, having neither beginning of days nor end of life,” – was a type and representative of Christ. But it is not of the person of Christ absolutely, nor of either of his natures distinctly, that our apostle treateth, but merely with respect unto his office of priesthood. And herein all the things mentioned do concur in him, and make a lively representation of him... In this respect he had neither father nor mother from whom he might derive any right or title unto his office; and this was for ever sufficient to exclude him from any interest in the priesthood as it was established by law.<sup>176</sup>

Unlike the Aaronic office, Melchizedek’s priesthood came to him apart from any inheritance (hence the terms, ἀπάτωρ, ἀμήτωρ, and ἀγενεαλόγητος), and, unlike the Levitical priesthood, it did not cease with the death of the priest, which for Melchizedek is not recorded (μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων). In this regard, Melchizedek typed Christ, for like Melchizedek,

the Lord Christ was “without beginning of days and end of life.” For although in his human nature he was both born and died, yet he had a priesthood which had no such beginning of days as that it should be traduced from any other to him, nor shall ever cease or be delivered over from him unto any other, but abides unto the consummation of all things.<sup>177</sup>

Consequently, Melchizedek foreshadowed Christ in that he prefigured *the eternal quality of Christ’s priestly function*. It is in this way, with regard to this character of the priestly office, that the typology between Melchizedek and Christ is principally concerned.<sup>178</sup>

Owen is not alone in arguing that the typology is intended to emphasize the enduring nature of Christ’s priestly office. Although William Gouge listed many typological correspondences between Melchizedek and Christ, and although he believed that ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ referred to Christ’s dual natures, he also recognized that the

<sup>176</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:337-338.

<sup>177</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:338.

<sup>178</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:308.

primary connection probed in this pericope by the apostle is the timeless scope of Christ's priesthood. Gouge is aware that it is this emphasis which later dominates Paul's argument in the following verses of chapter seven: "the most especial and principal thing wherein Melchizedek was made like unto the Son of God was in this, that *he abideth a priest continually*."<sup>179</sup> Therefore, in his exposition, the epitaphs of verse 3 were used by the apostle to explain how Melchizedek prefigured both Christ's two natures and his eternal priesthood. Similarly, Thomas Goodwin and Matthew Poole acknowledge that the eternal character of Christ's priestly function is the central antitype explored by the apostle in this section.<sup>180</sup>

#### 4.6 Typology as a Literary-Historical Device

One other aspect of Owen's typological analysis is of interest at this point, a feature which he shares with most other orthodox interpreters of this pericope. In keeping with the accepted standards of typological exegesis, Reformed expositors insisted that the type be identified as a historical person or event, so as to avoid the excesses of the allegorical component present in much medieval exegetical work. This accounts for the extremes with which orthodox exegetes sought some historical identity for Melchizedek. However, though the interpreters insisted that Melchizedek was a historical person, it was his presentation in Genesis – the manner in which Melchizedek's meeting with Abraham was recorded – which served as a basis for the apostle's typological assessment in Hebrews 7. Sixteenth and seventeenth-century expositors argued that the apostle's identification of Melchizedek as a foreshadowing of Christ was built upon Melchizedek's description in the Old Testament text, not necessarily the absolute qualities of his historical person.

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<sup>179</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 482, his emphasis.

<sup>180</sup> Goodwin, *Knowledge of God the Father*, 4:411-412; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:836.



Thus, though the historicity of the type remained crucial for proper typological exegesis, the use of Melchizedek by the apostle in Hebrews 7 was dependent upon how Melchizedek appears as a figure in the literary text.

According to Owen, the text explicitly states that Melchizedek had no parents, no genealogy – ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ. Now this does not imply that Melchizedek was something other than a mere man with a human father and mother, for Owen has already argued the importance of the humanity of Melchizedek. Rather, Owen believes that the apostle uses the terms ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ to simply indicate that Melchizedek's lineage was not written down in the Bible. To Owen this is a significant point, for every man has a pedigree, and the fact that the Scriptures introduce Melchizedek without one is important and emphasizes that he is unique in some way. According to Owen, Moses intentionally did not record the genealogical record of Melchizedek so that he might more perfectly parallel Christ.<sup>181</sup> His history was hidden in the Old Testament so that “we should know no more of him nor any of his concerns but what is expressly written.”<sup>182</sup>

Drawing upon the specific lexical meaning of ἀγενεαλόγητος, Owen again shows how this term highlights the literary nature of Melchizedek's description, and not the actual genealogy of the historic person himself. He argues that γενεαλογία refers to “a ‘generation, a descent, a pedigree,’ not absolutely, but ‘rehearsed, described, recorded.’ Γενεαλόγητος is he whose stock and descent is entered upon record.”<sup>183</sup> Thus, the point is not that Melchizedek was “without descent,” but that whatever descent he might have had was not recorded – the emphasis being on the absence of any literary record.

Thus was Melchisedec without father or mother, in that the Spirit of God, who so strictly and exactly recorded the genealogies of other patriarchs and types of Christ,

<sup>181</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:332-4.

<sup>182</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:298.

<sup>183</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:332.

and that for no less an end than to manifest the truth and faithfulness of God in his promises, speaks nothing unto this purpose concerning him. He is introduced as it were one falling from heaven, appearing on a sudden, reigning in Salem, and officiating the office of the priesthood unto the most high God.<sup>184</sup>

Owen similarly treats the phrase μήτε ἀρχὴν ἡμερῶν μήτε ζωῆς τέλος ἔχων, “without beginning of days and end of life.”

For as he was a mortal man he had both. He was assuredly born, and did no less certainly die, than other men ; but neither of these is recorded concerning him. We have no more to do with him, to learn from him, nor are concerned in him, but only as he is described in the Scripture, and there is no mention therein of the beginning of his days, or the end of his life. Whatever, therefore, he might have in himself, he had none to us.<sup>185</sup>

He concludes,

Concerning Melchisedec none of these things are spoken. No mention is made of father or mother, no genealogy is recorded of what stock or progeny he was ; nor is there any account of his birth or death. So that all these things are wanting unto him in this historical narration, wherein our faith and knowledge are alone concerned.<sup>186</sup>

The purpose of the unprecedented manner in which Melchizedek is presented in the Scripture is to establish a correspondence between himself and Christ – a purpose which the apostle wisely picked up on in his typological use of Melchizedek in this passage. The particular correspondence in view here is the everlasting quality of their priestly work. Because there is no such record of Melchizedek’s descendants, or his father or mother, his birth or death, Melchizedek the priest, *as he is presented in the Scripture*, prefigures the eternity of Christ’s own priesthood. “The true cause of the omission of all these things was the same with that of the institution of his priesthood, and the introduction of his person in the story. And this was, that he might be the more express and signal representative of the Lord Christ in his priesthood.”<sup>187</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:332.

<sup>185</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:332.

<sup>186</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:333.

<sup>187</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:334.

Throughout his exegesis, Owen is careful to emphasize the literary character of the typology, noting, for example that the apostle refers to “the story” of Melchizedek and not his person, that Melchizedek is “so described” (i.e., in Scripture), “as that he might have a great resemblance of him,” and, that the qualities listed in Hebrews 7 are “spoken by our apostle with respect unto the narration of Moses.”<sup>188</sup> In similar manner, Owen distinguishes between the actual person of Melchizedek (of whom nothing typological is asserted), and the Melchizedek of the biblical account, the historical-literary figure of the Genesis record who gave rise to the apostle’s typological association with Christ.

In arguing for the literary-historical nature of typology at this point, Owen is echoing similar arguments from a vast number of his exegetical and theological colleagues. Thomas Goodwin asserts that in Hebrews 7:1-3 the perfect mind of God is clearly at work behind the writing of the Scriptures. Moses, the human author of Genesis, always recorded the parenthood of special people, but in the account of Melchizedek, he did not. In order to form a parallel with Christ’s eternity, there is nothing in the story that hints at Melchizedek’s lineage or death. Melchizedek, as a creature, actually did not exist from everlasting; however, his purpose in the biblical record is to signify the eternity of Christ’s person and priesthood and, therefore, the Genesis account is intentionally silent about Melchizedek’s origins.

It is the manner and custom of all historians, yea, and of Moses in that sacred story of his, if they bring in any person more eminent, and as performing any more excellent exploit, to relate his parents, his descent, whom he came of, and what become of him. And this Moses had been careful and diligent to relate of al the patriarchs... Now when Moses had in his story brought upon the stage a man thus heightened and sublimated, which would for ever set all curious thoughts on longing to know who and what this man was, what his original was, what his end, who his parents, etc., he causeth him, as it were on a sudden to vanish, contrary to his wont concerning other persons, as if he had been a man dropped out of the

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<sup>188</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:334, 336, 337.

clouds, telling (as we say) neither whence he came, nor wither he would go. Paul, that observed this, tells us plainly, that it was *consulto*, or on purpose done.<sup>189</sup>

Goodwin argues that everything about Christ was typed in one form or another in the Old Testament. “God having his Son, and all he was and should be, in his eye, did all along the Old Testament draw his picture in the examples of all eminencies in any person that was extraordinary and transcendent; Christ being really the abstract of them all.”<sup>190</sup> If, as in the case of Christ’s eternity, some aspects of Christ’s person and/or work could not be matched in history, it was typed as nearly as possible: for example, the blood of animals serving as types for Christ’s sacrifice. Thus, in order to type Christ’s eternity, “an historical eternity is given him [i.e., Melchizedek], by way of silence concerning his birth, etc.”<sup>191</sup> While other types brought out different aspects of the person and work of Christ, it fell to Melchizedek to foreshadow his eternity.

Thomas Manton similarly argues that it is “needless to dispute” who and what Melchizedek actually was. For the writer of Hebrews, Melchizedek is considered only as he is represented in Genesis 14.

What Melchisedec was is needless to dispute. The apostle considereth him only as he is represented in the story of Moses, who maketh no mention of his father or mother, birth or death. Certainly he was a very man ‘ but as he standeth in scripture there is no mention of father or mother, beginning or end, what he was, or of whom he came.<sup>192</sup>

Manton does not deny that Melchizedek actually existed as a man, nor that he had a genealogy, nor that his genealogy was known to his contemporaries. For Manton, the fact that the Mosaic account did not record his genealogy is sufficient grounds for the author of Hebrews to make use of Melchizedek as a type of Christ. Thus, Manton does not see

<sup>189</sup> Goodwin, *Knowledge of God the Father*, 4:411.

<sup>190</sup> Goodwin, *Knowledge of God the Father*, 4:412.

<sup>191</sup> Goodwin, *Knowledge of God the Father*, 4:412.

<sup>192</sup> Manton, *Jesus Christ*, 1:479.

Melchizedek *the person* as a type of Christ, but simply Melchizedek *as he is represented in Genesis*. The typology is literal, that is, it is tied to the written account, though this does not deny Melchizedek's historicity.

Many other biblical exegetes, when confronted with the oddity of the Hebrews' assertion that Melchizedek had no mother or father, insisted that the author meant that no lineage was recorded in Genesis. William Gouge affirmed that, while Melchizedek was indeed a mere man, his lineage was "concealed in the history of this man, purposely to imply a mystery."<sup>193</sup> He cites Beza, Erasmus and the Syriac manuscript for evidence that in using the terms ἀπάτωρ and ἀμήτωρ, Paul was actually indicating, not that Melchizedek did not have parents, but that his parents were *unknown* to Melchizedek's contemporaries. The Spirit, who wrote this mystery into the Genesis account, also revealed it to Paul. Samuel Mather, the New England typologist, stated that Melchizedek's genealogy and history are "unknown to sacred history, where he metaphorically has none."<sup>194</sup> Willet, Dickson, and Keach all asserted that Melchizedek's history was not more fully expressed in Scripture in order to heighten the comparison with Christ.<sup>195</sup> Matthew Poole gives good expression to orthodox thought at this point:

In this verse is a mystical description of the eternity of Christ's person and priesthood, set out by the Spirit in the silence and omission of things that concerned Melchisedec and his glory ; so that here is represented to be typically and in shadow, that was Christ really and substantially; for he gives no account of his father, mother, genealogy, birth, or death; the Spirit either not revealing it to him, or ordering him to leave it out, that he might appear the more lively and perfect type of Christ, being represented in all things different from all the men that ever were or shall be.<sup>196</sup>

<sup>193</sup> Gouge, *Hebrews*, 480.

<sup>194</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 111.

<sup>195</sup> Willet, *Hexapla in Genesis*, 163; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, 32-33; Keach, *Tropologia*, 973.

<sup>196</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:836.

Matthew Henry summarizes this difference in viewing Melchizedek from a biblical rather than a historical viewpoint: "Scripture has chosen to set him forth as an extraordinary person, without giving us his genealogy, that he might be a fitter type of Christ."<sup>197</sup> These authors are largely agreement with Reformation exegesis, as shown by Calvin's comments on the absence of a description of Melchizedek's lineage or history: "Nec vero fortuito vel per incogitantiam id videri omissum debet, quod nulla illi cognatio tribuitur, nullus habetur de morte sermo: verum id potius consulto fecit spiritus ut nos supra vulgarem hominum ordinem attolleret."<sup>198</sup>

In light of this literary-historical typology, one of Owen's practical observations concerns the "sovereign wisdom of the Holy Ghost" to teach the church that "the Scripture superseded all tradition that might be."<sup>199</sup> Any tradition which sought to speculate on Melchizedek's parentage, life and death, actually was opposing the very purposes of God in the Scripture. The exegetical and theological value of acknowledging the literary character of the apostle's typology here is best expressed by John Calvin, who emphasized that all proper knowledge of Christ and his types comes from Scripture alone:

Certum quidem est, a parentibus fuisse progenitum. Sed hic de eo tanquam privato homine apostolus non disputat: quin potius illum induit persona Christi. Itaque nihil aliud sibi in eo intueri permittit quam quod scriptura docet. Nam in omnibus, quae ad Christum pertinent, tractandis, ea adhibenda est religio, ut nihil sapiamus nisi ex verbo Domini. Nunc quum spiritus sanctus regem sui temporis praestantissimum inducens, de ortu eius taceat, nec postea mentionem ullam faciat mortis: nonne hoc perinde valet ac si commendata esset eius aeternitas?<sup>200</sup>

With this emphasis upon the literary nature of the type, and not strictly on the type's historical character, John Owen, like most other orthodox exegetes, gives an interesting

<sup>197</sup> Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6:738.

<sup>198</sup> Calvin, *CO 55*, col.84.

<sup>199</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:335.

<sup>200</sup> Calvin, *CO 55*, col.83.

twist to the typological rules and principles codified by Keach and others – the historicity of Melchizedek is not the basis of his correspondence with Christ; rather, it is the manner in which Melchizedek's historically accurate, though selectively presented, story is recorded in the biblical revelation which provides the link. While this is unusual, Reformed commentators clearly felt justified in arguing this based upon the presentation of Melchizedek in the Hebrews' account.

### **5. Conclusions Concerning Owen's Typological Methodology**

Throughout his analysis of the Old Testament citations in the first chapter of Hebrews, and especially in his explanation of the apostle's use of Melchizedek as a foreshadowing of Christ in chapter 7, Owen's commitment to, and application of, the accepted standards of typological exegesis is clearly evident. While not a formal treatise on typology, Owen provides a lot of detail concerning typological hermeneutics in this exposition. Not only does he employ the technique extensively in his handling of Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 7, but he also describes various characteristics of the technique, giving greater clarity and definition to this aspect of seventeenth-century exegetical practice.

Owen's basic typological strategy is evident: he insists upon grounding any typological exegesis in an historical event or person described in the Old Testament Scripture; he recognizes that every type foreshadows only a portion of its fulfillment; he is cautious in constraining how much of what is said of the type can be properly said of the antitype, limiting it especially to that aspect of the OT figure which the NT claims is typological; and he draws out the effects of the more excellent nature of the antitype, both in terms of quality and endurance. His commentary reflects a strict adherence to the principles as codified by typological theorists such as Benjamin Keach, John Weemse, and Thomas Taylor. It is, however, this very strict application of typological theory

which distinguishes Owen's work from other orthodox and non-orthodox commentators. Owen was not hesitant to disagree with exegetes who based their conclusions on what he saw as a failure to faithfully abide by proper exegetical practice, including the appropriate handling of biblical types.

Through Owen's own interpretation of typological texts, the following principles clearly dominate his methodological approach:

- ◆ *The historicity of the type.* The historical nature of the type is crucial in typology; it is what distinguishes proper typological technique from allegory. Orthodox interpreters were intent on avoiding any association with the medieval allegorical method, and insisted upon their hermeneutical principle of the literal sense. The orthodox exegetes could claim that their promise-fulfillment paradigm followed the literal sense of the Old Testament text by asserting the historicity of their typological interpretations. As stated in numerous works on typology, acknowledging the type as a historical person, place or event is central to proper typological exegesis.<sup>201</sup> Yet, as Owen's assessment of others' exegetical work on Hebrews 1 and Melchizedek demonstrates, the insistence on the type's historical reality was frequently overlooked. The failure of various exegetes to show that some of the texts cited by the apostle in Hebrews 1, especially Psalm 2 and Psalm 110, apply immediately and directly to some historical person (i.e., David) negates their typological conclusions in Owen's mind. With no historical referent, typology is not possible; since no historical person or event can be linked with the psalm's original construction, its application to Christ in the New Testament is based, not on typology, but upon its original prophetic intent. In commenting on the second quotation in Hebrews 1:5, Owen's first step is to discuss

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<sup>201</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 227-232; Mather, *The Figures and Types of the Old Testament*, 72-79; Taylor, *Christ Revealed*; Guild, *Moses Unveiled*.



the historical circumstances surrounding Solomon and 2 Samuel 7. This insistence upon the type's historicity underlies Owen's own speculation as to Melchizedek's origins in Hebrews 7 – even when such speculation appears to run counter to the apostle's whole point.

- ◆ *The divine institution of the type.* Typology discovers scriptural mysteries hidden by God himself in the record of redemptive history. Allegorical interpretation is a human enterprise where one creates and expresses similar characteristics or verbal connections between scriptural things. The difference is between the divine and the human, between commenting on the literal sense as intended by the Spirit and expressing the allegorical insights of human reasoning and creativity. Works on typology sought to emphasize this distinction: see, Mather's first rule, Keach in his first canon, and Taylor's second characteristic.<sup>202</sup> Crell's appeal to typology to exegete the apostle's citation of Psalm 102:25-27 is denounced by Owen precisely on this basis; while Crell sought to explain the citation by appealing to certain similarities between God, the subject of the psalm, and Christ – similarities drawn by the apostle – Owen insists that any parallel which exists was intentionally placed in the psalm by God himself. Thus, it is not the author's creative process that typology explores, but the very mind of God. It was this divine oversight of the Scriptures which many orthodox exegetes, including Owen, emphasized concerning the written record of Melchizedek in Genesis – the limited information provided in Genesis was just what God intended so as to foreshadow the eternal priesthood of Christ.
- ◆ *Typology has a literary as well as historical aspect.* A distinctive feature of Owen's theory of typology, especially in Hebrews 7, is his assertion and defense of a literary

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<sup>202</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 53; Keach, *Tropologia*, 233; Taylor, *Christ Revealed*, 4.

character of the apostle's typological approach. While many orthodox commentators noted that the basis of the apostle's argument in Hebrews 7 – the correspondence between Melchizedek and Christ – was dependent upon the specific wording of the Old Testament text, Owen develops this aspect of typology, and attempts to justify it. Owen argues that, while the historical nature of the type is indispensable to typology, the type-antitype construction is also dependent upon the presentation of the historical persons/events in the scriptural accounts. The point is not that Melchizedek *as a historical person* foreshadowed Christ, but that *in the presentation of Melchizedek in Scripture*, God typed the eternal priesthood of his Son. The Old Testament types are recognizable, not from their historical existence, but from the written account of their historical existence. For Owen, this is a necessary corollary of the fact that true typology arises from God's initiative and God's Word.

- ◆ *The wicked cannot type the godly.* This directly follows Keach's seventh canon,<sup>203</sup> and in the first and seventh chapters of Hebrews, Owen twice refers to it in his exposition. Contrary to some exegetes who understand the apostle's citation of Psalm 45 in Hebrews 1:8-9 typologically – Solomon's marriage typing Christ's relationship to his Church – Owen argues against a typological explanation, since the historical marriage of Solomon to Pharaoh's daughter was condemned by God and a source of great trouble for the godly. Similarly, Owen rejects the speculation of some exegetes (including some of his orthodox contemporaries) that Melchizedek was a descendant of Ham on the basis that Ham and his descendants were cursed by God. Thus, on both the analogy of Scripture and the rules of typology that the wicked cannot type the godly, Melchizedek, as a type of Christ, could not have come from the line of Ham.

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<sup>203</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 235.

- ◆ *Multiple types foreshadowing a single antitype.* Owen argues, like Keach in his fifth canon,<sup>204</sup> that many types are necessary to properly prefigure Christ and the new covenant realities. The fullness and greatness of the messianic age far surpass anything available in the Old Testament era, and thus, each individual Old Testament type is intended by God to foreshadow only a limited portion of the New Testament reality. The typological prophecy in 2 Samuel 7:14 uses Solomon to type the Father's covenantal, eternal love for his Son, Christ, while the Melchizedek account in Genesis 14:18-20 prefigured Christ's eternal priesthood – both persons serving as a pattern for different aspects of the same antitype, Christ. Recognizing this canon of typology enabled the exegete to avoid multiplying fanciful parallels between the old covenant and the new, focusing instead on the typical aspects of the Old Testament history which highlight a specific characteristic of the antitype.
- ◆ *Not everything in the type applies to the antitype.* As the antitype contains more than the type, thus requiring multiple types to satisfactorily foreshadow the antitype, so the reverse is also true: all that is of the type does not evolve onto the antitype. Seventeenth-century typologists strive to stress this point<sup>205</sup> – especially when confronted by the sinfulness of a person who serves as a type of Christ. Thus, as Owen points out, Solomon was a type of Christ as he was a king of his people, yet not in his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, nor in his own personal failings. An Old Testament type's foreshadowing of an antitype functioned only so far as that intended by God – everything mentioned concerning a person who serves as a type does not have typological significance. This is central to Owen's exegesis of the typology in Hebrews 7, and distinguishes him from many contemporary expositors – while others

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<sup>204</sup> Keach, *Tropologia*, 235.

<sup>205</sup> Mather, *The Figures or Types of the Old Testament*, 57; Keach, *Tropologia*, 233-234.

sought to parallel every action and aspect of Melchizedek as recorded in Genesis 14 with Christ and his ministry, Owen focused specifically on that characteristic which the apostle identifies as typical – i.e., the timelessness of his priesthood.

- ◆ *The antitype far surpasses the type.* This forms the basis of Thomas Taylor's typological characteristics.<sup>206</sup> The glories hinted at in the type are but shadows of the fullness in the antitype; the antitype far surpasses the pattern established by the type. Thus, Owen says that there is an analogical relationship between the type and the antitype. In 2 Samuel 7, for instance, the type, Solomon, only prefigures the more excellent qualities of the antitype over angels, he himself should not be viewed as greater than the heavenly beings. The fullness of the analogy comes when Christ appears and is indeed the angels' superior. Melchizedek prefigured Christ's true and real eternity, yet Owen and other exegetes acknowledged that Melchizedek's own "eternity" was only apparent. Similarly, on a temporal level, the type is only valuable prior to the coming of the antitype. Whereas the type has a limited role, the antitype continues on in its fullness. Solomon, David, and the other Old Testament types of Christ have immense value as precursors to the Messiah, but when Christ appears, the importance of the type is surpassed by the presence of its fulfillment.

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<sup>206</sup> Taylor, *Christ Revealed*, 4. See also, Keach, *Tropologia*, 234.

## Chapter VII

# John Owen's Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4-6

### A Study of the Saints' Eternal Perseverance in Puritan Exegesis

#### 1. The Issue in the Seventeenth Century and in Modern Scholarship

The exposition of the Reformed doctrine of the saints' eternal perseverance was an important aspect of Puritan preaching and underwent crucial development in seventeenth-century England. Various historical studies have noted the abiding importance of this issue, along with the parallel teaching on assurance, as expressed in English Puritan theology. Orthodox churchmen saw teaching on the gift of perseverance, and the accompanying formation of assurance in the mind of the believer, as a primary concern of their pastoral ministry.<sup>1</sup>

Although most modern discussions of the saints' perseverance and the assurance which accompanies a believer's faith frequently ignore their historical treatment,<sup>2</sup> the doctrines were important issues in the seventeenth-century. The development of the perseverance doctrine in England reflects the English Reformed debt to the continental

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Beeke, *Assurance of Faith* (New York: Lang, 1994); Louis Berkhof, *The Assurance of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939); G. C. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, trans. Robert Knudsen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952); Milton Doornbos, "The Perseverance of the Saints in Relation to Human Responsibility," Th.M. thesis (Calvin Theological Seminary, 1967); John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 155; John von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," *Church History* 34 (1965):195-203; Baird Tipson, "A Dark Side of 17th Century English Protestantism: The Sin Against the Holy Spirit," *Harvard Theological Review* 77 (1984):301-330; Richard Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52 (1990):248; Gordon Keddie, "'Unfallible Certainty of the Pardon of Sinne and Life Everlasting': The Doctrine of Assurance in the Theology of William Perkins" *Evangelical Quarterly* 48 (1976):230-244; Jon von Zens, "The Doctrine of Assurance: A History and an Application," *Baptist Reformation Review* 5 (1976):34-64; G. T. Thomson, "Assurance," *Evangelical Quarterly* 14 (1942):2-8.

<sup>2</sup> Henry Ironside, *Eternal Security* (Neptune: Loizeaux Brothers, 1986); I. Howard Marshall, *Kept by the Power of God: A Study of Perseverance and Falling Away* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1969); Roger Nicole, "Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Perseverance of God," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 355-364; Arthur Pink, *Eternal Security* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974); Robert Shank, *Life in the Son: A Study of the Doctrine of Perseverance* (Springfield: Westcott, 1975); Robert Peterson, "Christian Assurance: Its Possibility and Foundations," *Presbyterion* 18 (1992):10-24.

thinkers regarding its theological formulation. Perhaps more than on the continent, however, the doctrine in English churches centered on its practical impacts on the life of the believer. Nevertheless, the experiential component emphasized by the Puritans should not obscure the great continuity found between their position and that expounded upon by the Reformers. There is a distinct influence of the thought of Musculus, Vermigli, Calvin, and other continental theologians upon William Perkins, one of the earliest Puritan preachers who stressed the “experimental” component of assurance.<sup>3</sup> Perkins’s formative effect concerning perseverance upon seventeenth-century Puritan thinking is most evident in the publication of popular sermons on the sin against the Holy Spirit – many of which duplicate his thinking and language concerning assurance and apostasy.<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately, the studies which attempt to locate the discussion in terms of its historical context – those which look at the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints in light of the sixteenth- and seventeen-century controversies with the Roman church, the Arminians, and the Lutherans<sup>5</sup> – have frequently ignored the exegetical questions which gave rise to much of the debate. Even many of the treatises written during the Puritan period which discuss assurance and perseverance at length omit much explicit reference to detailed exegetical work. Numerous prominent works on perseverance fail to mention

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<sup>3</sup> The most thorough historical analysis of this doctrine both on the continent and in England is Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*. Keddie briefly examines the positions of various Reformers and demonstrates their influence upon Perkins, Keddie, “Unfallible Certenty,” 230-244; Zens provides a sweeping overview of assurance from its pre-formulated stage prior to the Reformation, through the Reformation and Orthodox periods, and its deterioration in the modern period, von Zens, “The Doctrine of Assurance,” 34-64. Thompson explores the links between the Reformed formulation and the medieval scholastics, Thomson, “Assurance,” 2-8. See also, Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace*, 155-180; Tipson, “A Dark Side,” 301-310.

<sup>4</sup> Perkins’ thoughts concerning the sin against the Holy Spirit can be found in *The Golden Chain, in The Workes of that Famous and Worthy Minister... William Perkins*, vol. 1 (London, 1616-1618), 105-107, 378, 467. Examples of vernacular sermons and treatises include Sebastian Benefield, *The Sinne Against the Holy Ghost Discovered* (Oxford, 1615), and Thomas Bedford, *The Sinne Vnto Death* (London, 1621). Cf. Tipson, “A Dark Side,” 310-330; Hawkes, “The Logic of Assurance.”

<sup>5</sup> Berkhof, *The Assurance of Faith*; Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*; Doornbos, “The Perseverance of the Saints in Relation to Human Responsibility”; Beeke, *Assurance of Faith*; Zens, “The Doctrine of Assurance.”

such controversial pericopes as Hebrews 6:4-6 or 10:26-29 or mention them only in passing without dealing with the exegetical issues raised by the texts.<sup>6</sup> For instance, the popular treatise by Thomas Danson (d. 1694) on the saints' perseverance, *The Saints Perseverance*, while mentioning Hebrews 6:4-6, fails to deal with any specific exegetical issues, but simply argues against the false syllogism: "if those that are partakers of the divine nature may fall away totally and finally, then some true believers may fall away totally and finally from grace."<sup>7</sup> The absence of explicit exegetical work in these popular dogmatic treatises, however, does not mean that the doctrine lacked contemporary exegetical support – indeed, various Reformed biblical commentators frequently demonstrated the scriptural basis for the belief in the infallible security of true believers in their biblical commentaries and expositions.

However, with the rise and development of Arminianism in England,<sup>8</sup> the Reformed doctrine of perseverance increasingly came under attack from those who felt that it undercut the motivation and responsibility of believers to pursue a godly life. One of the main arguments used by opponents of the Reformed belief was the numerous biblical texts which call believers to strive for holiness. Particularly useful to the Arminian insistence upon the possibility of believers' losing their salvation were the texts such as Hebrews 6:4-6 which warn against the possibility of apostasy. Thus, in addition to arguing for the saints' eternal perseverance upon theological grounds (i.e., by evidence

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth: A Treatise on Christian Assurance* (London, 1654; repr. Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1961); Thomas Danson, *Kletoi Teteremenoi, or, The Saints Perseverance* (London, 1672); Elisha Coles, *A Practical Discourse of God's Sovereignty: with other Material Points Derived Thence* (1680; repr. Philadelphia, 1796); Richard Resbury, *Some Stop to the Gangrene of Arminianism Lately Promoted by M. John Goodwin* (London, 1651).

<sup>7</sup> Danson, *The Saints Perseverance*, 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> The course of the Arminian controversies in England, with their theological and political impact has been sketched by Dewey Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 79-157; Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1987); and the bibliographies contained therein.

drawn from logical deductions and Scriptural inferences concerning the nature of God, soteriology, redemptive history), the Puritans and their continental brethren were forced to counter the exegetical arguments of the Arminians.

A particularly important biblical passage in this discussion was the text in Hebrews 6:4-6 which warns against the possibility of apostasy:

It is impossible for those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace.  
(NIV)

Comments by Jacob Arminius on this text and the exegetical conclusions of the English Arminian author John Goodwin in *Redemption Redeemed* provide the background for examining the interpretive strategy and methodology employed by the Reformed theologian and exegete John Owen. His conclusions and the exegetical reasons why he draws them are recorded in his dogmatic and polemical response to Goodwin, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, and, in a fuller exegetical manner, in his comprehensive work, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*.<sup>9</sup>

## 2. Arminian Exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6

Jacob Arminius himself was not ready to reject completely the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. "Those persons who have been grafted into Christ by true faith... provided they stand prepared for the battle, implore his help, and be not wanting to themselves, Christ perseveres them from falling."<sup>10</sup> He recognized the validity

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<sup>9</sup> John Goodwin, *Apolytroasis Apolytroseos, or Redemption Redeemed* (London, 1651); John Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 11 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991); John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 21 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Jacob Arminius, *Declaration of Sentiments*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 664.



of the biblical witness concerning God's enduring power in salvation, yet was troubled by texts such as those in Hebrews which call such an idea into question.

Though I here openly and ingenuously affirm, I never taught that a true believer can either totally or finally fall away from the faith, and perish; yet I will not conceal, that there are passages of Scripture which seem to me to wear this aspect; and those answers to them which I have been permitted to see, are not of such a kind as to approve themselves on all points to my understanding. On the other hand, certain passages are produced for the contrary doctrine which are worthy of much consideration.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, in his reflections upon Hebrews 6:4-6 found in his *Letter on the Sin Against the Holy Ghost*, Arminius is careful never to indicate that a true saint could completely apostatize. He identifies the persons discussed by the author as "they who embrace Christ even with a temporary faith," who "have been granted *some* 'taste'," and yet have fallen "from the truth which they have acknowledged, and from the confession of the name of Christ which they have made."<sup>12</sup> Thus, while Arminius does not explicitly specify if the persons discussed in Hebrews 6 are true believers or not, his implication given the phrases, *gustus quidam* "some taste" and *fide temporali* "temporary faith," is that the text addresses those who profess Christ yet are lacking the fullness of union with him.

Initially, Arminius' followers held a similar position, refusing to speak definitively on the possibility of a true saints' apostasy. *The Five Arminian Articles* drawn up by his supporters following his death clearly echo Arminius' own thoughts: for true believers, "it is ever through the assisting grace of the Holy Ghost that Jesus Christ assists them though his Spirit in all temptations, extends to them his hand, and if only they are ready

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<sup>11</sup> Arminius, *Declaration of Sentiments*, 1:667. See also Jacob Arminius, *Apology Against Thirty-One Defamatory Articles*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 741-742.

<sup>12</sup> Jacob Arminius, *Epistle 45*, in *Praestantium ac eruditorum virorum epistolae ecclesiasticae et theologicae*, ed. Christian Hartsoeker and Philip van Limborch (Amsterdam, 1660), 93; Jacob Arminius, *A Letter on the Sin Against the Holy Ghost*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), 742.

for the conflict, and desire his help, and are not inactive, keeps them from falling.”<sup>13</sup> However, the logic of the Arminian position, coupled with persistent challenges from their opponents, finally forced the Remonstrants to define more fully their thinking on eternal perseverance. Their understanding of the freedom of the human will, and its implications concerning the independence of faith from grace, led the Remonstrants to the conclusion that true believers have the spiritual ability finally and completely to desert the faith. Pressed by the Synod of Dort for a more definitive statement, Arminius’s supporters outlined their thinking in *Sententia Remonstrantium*, speaking not just of falling into sin (something everyone agreed could and does happen), but a fall away totally from the faith. “True believers can fall from true faith and can fall into such sins as cannot be consistent with true and justifying faith; not only is it possible for this to happen, but it even happens frequently.”<sup>14</sup> In England, in the middle of the seventeenth-century, these arguments were used by devout Puritans who were afraid that the doctrine of perseverance would only lead to carnal security, a mind-set detrimental to piety and holiness.

### 3. John Goodwin’s *Redemption Redeemed*

One such Puritan was John Goodwin (1593-1665). Goodwin was one of the foremost of the sectarian Arminians – those who separated from the Church of England, retaining much of its Laudian Arminianism, yet sharing the Puritan notions of piety, spirituality and ecclesiastical reform. According to one nineteenth-century critic, Goodwin “was one of the most extraordinary men of the age. He was an Arminian and a

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<sup>13</sup> Philip Schaff, ed., “Five Arminian Articles,” in *Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 548-549.

<sup>14</sup> *Remonstrantie en Sententiae Remonstrantium*, J. N. Bakhuizen Van Den Brink, *De Nederlandsche Belijdenisgeschriften* (Amsterdam, 1940), V.iii, 287. Cf. Berkouwer, *Faith and Perseverance*, 40; Berkhof, *The Assurance of Faith*, 25-30.

republican; a man of violence both in politics and religion and whose controversial powers were of the highest order.”<sup>15</sup> William Goold, the editor of John Owen’s collected works, notes that Goodwin lived his life “estranged, by singular idiosyncrasy of opinions, from all the leading parties of his time” and placed himself “against every man, and had almost every man against him.”<sup>16</sup>

His major work, *Redemption Redeemed*, discusses two points of the conflict between Arminians and Calvinists, universal redemption and the perseverance of the saints; the latter naturally arising out of the former when Goodwin attempted to demonstrate that Christ died for some who ultimately perish, even though for a while they appear as part of the elect. Goodwin objected to the inconsistency between the promises of perseverance and the exhortations used by the Scriptures and its expositors whereby perseverance may be assured.<sup>17</sup> He was further concerned with the moral consequences of the kind of Calvinism promoted by the more orthodox Puritans. This was especially true of the doctrine of eternal perseverance which he claimed led to a false confidence and moral declension in Christians. “That doctrine which asserteth a possibility even of a final defection from faith, in true believers, well understood, riseth up in the cause of godliness with a far higher hand, than the common opinion about their perseverance.”<sup>18</sup> According to one critic, Goodwin’s attack on perseverance in *Redemption Redeemed* was “plausible and imposing, but more showy than solid,” and

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<sup>15</sup> William Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen* (1840; repr. Choteau: Gospel Mission, 1981), 91.

<sup>16</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:2. For further biographical information on Goodwin, see Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, 108, 130-133; Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen*, 90-92; *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 22, ed., Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (London: University Press, 1986), 145-148.

<sup>17</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:461.

<sup>18</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 364.

“like most Arminian writers, he caricatures Calvinism in order to expose it to the dislike of his readers.”<sup>19</sup>

Goodwin’s *Redemption Redeemed* generated numerous responses from the Reformed camp in England. The preacher Richard Resbury’s two works, *Some Stop to the Gangrene of Arminianism* and *The Lightless-Starre* primarily assert the orthodoxy of limited atonement and neglect Goodwin’s exegetical arguments altogether. George Kendall, the prominent Presbyterian, opposed Goodwin’s main thesis concerning the universal nature of redemption in *Theokratia, or, A Vindication of... Gods Intentions of Special Grace and Favour to His Elect*. The following year, he published *Sancti Sanciti*, a response to Goodwin’s attack on perseverance. Having already dealt with the notion of universal redemption in his treatise *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, John Owen discusses the orthodox understanding of perseverance in *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*. Goodwin replied to these works, focusing mainly upon Kendall’s two treatises, in his massive *Triumviri*; however, besides defending his previous statements, *Triumviri* adds little of substance to the debate.<sup>20</sup>

In *Redemption Redeemed* Goodwin addresses the scriptural passages which appear to indicate the potentiality of the apostasy of Christians. The middle third of the work is a lengthy digression concerning a critique of perseverance and promoting instead “the possibility of the saints’ declining even to destruction.”<sup>21</sup> Following an introduction to the Reformed belief and the counter position, Goodwin spends most of his efforts

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<sup>19</sup> Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen*, 91.

<sup>20</sup> Resbury, *Some Stop to the Gangrene*; Richard Resbury, *The Lightless-Starre, or, Mr. John Goodwin Discovered a Pelagio-Socinian* (London, 1652); George Kendall, *Theokratia, or, A Vindication of the Doctrine Commonly Received in the Reformed Churches Concerning Gods Intentions of Special Grace and Favour to His Elect in the Death of Christ* (London, 1653); George Kendall, *Sancti Sanciti, or, The Common Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints* (London, 1654); Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*; John Goodwin, *Triumviri, or, The Genius, Spirit, and Deportment of the Three Men, Mr. Richard Resbury, Mr. John Pawson, and Mr. George Kendall* (London, 1658).

demonstrating from Scripture the fallibility of the Reformed formulation, and the biblical grounds for his own. In the midst of this discussion, Goodwin focuses a substantial part of his efforts on interpreting Hebrews 6:4-6.<sup>22</sup> He claims that, without Scriptural support, many commentators simply assume that the text is not dealing with true believers. He rejects this assumption because he believes it distorts the true thrust of the passage. Simply claiming, as did the orthodox commentator David Paraeus (1548-1622) (whom Goodwin frequently uses as a foil), that “hypocritas fuisse, apostasia et eventus declarat,”<sup>23</sup> imposes theological notions upon the text and “is to cause a man’s opinion to rise up early to praise itself.”<sup>24</sup>

Goodwin sets out to demonstrate from the Hebrews passage that the apostle was warning true believers about the reality of final apostasy. Thus, his is a limited exegesis, attempting to answer the question of who is being referred to by the author. His intention and conclusions are evident from his discussion of the scope of the passage : “The Holy Ghost, after a most serious manner, and with a very pathetic and moving strain of speech and discourse, scarce the like to be found in all the Scriptures, admonisheth those, who are at present true believers, to take heed of relapsing into the ways of their former ignorance and impiety.”<sup>25</sup>

However, before looking at the epitaphs characterizing these people, Goodwin first dismisses what he believes is a common Reformed response to his exegesis: that the apostle is speaking “conditionally and upon supposition” – that the case of apostasy he describes is merely hypothetical and cannot actually occur. He argues that there is no

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<sup>21</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 226.

<sup>22</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 379-389.

<sup>23</sup> “The apostasy and event prove them to have been hypocrites,” David Paraeus, *Commentarius in Diuisi Pauli Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, in *Opera Theologica*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1628), 2:884.

<sup>24</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 388.

conditional particle or hypothetical construction to be found in the passage, and that “refuge in an hypothetical form in the words is but a sanctuary built in the air.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, he blames the English translations of “if” on “the translators’ inclination to the cause” of perseverance.<sup>27</sup> However, aside from John Owen and George Kendall, who deal with the hypothetical nature of the passage only in response to *Redemption Redeemed*,<sup>28</sup> none of Goodwin’s English contemporaries appear in writing to have advanced this particular view of the passage. Certainly in sermons and treatises of the time, Puritan preachers were severely warning their congregations about the real possibility of apostasy. As such, a hypothetical view of Hebrews 6:4-6 was far from the minds of such preachers as Sebastian Benefield or Thomas Bedford.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Puritan exegetes before and after Goodwin’s time did not argue that the passage was simply hypothetical and did not reflect a real situation. Reformed commentators like Matthew Poole, David Dickson, John Trapp, William Gouge, and the authors of *The Westminster Annotations* all acknowledge that the Hebrews pericope spoke of the real possibility of apostasy.<sup>30</sup>

Goodwin then proceeds to his main purpose: to argue that the characteristics listed by the author in Hebrews 6:4-6 pertain to genuine Christians. His overall method is to

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<sup>25</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 379.

<sup>26</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 388.

<sup>27</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 380.

<sup>28</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:638-640; Kendall, *Sancti Sanciti*, 85.

<sup>29</sup> Benefield, *The Sinne Against the Holy Ghost Discovered*; Thomas Bedford, *The Sinne Vnto Death*. Cf. Tipson, “A Dark Side,” 320-330; Keddie, “Unfallible Certenty,” 235-244.

<sup>30</sup> Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 3:831-2; David Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrewes* (Cambridge, 1649), F8a-b; William Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews* (London, 1655; repr. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1980), 395; John Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition Upon All the Epistles, and the Revelation of John the Divine* (London, 1647), 674; *Annotations upon all the Books of the Old and New Testament, wherein the Text is Explained, Doubts Resolved, Scriptures Paralleled, and Various Readings observed. By the joynt-Labour of certain Learned Divines*, ed. Thomas Gataker, et. al. (London, 1645), commentary on Hebrews 6:4-6. See also, John Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament* (London, 1747), 705-707.

demonstrate that these characteristics are employed throughout the Scripture to describe true believers, and there is no indication that false professors are in view. He interprets the phrase τοὺς ἅπαξ φωτισθέντας [“those who have once been enlightened”] to refer to the communication of “the knowledge of God and of Jesus Christ in the gospel.”<sup>31</sup> He notes how frequently this phrase is used of true believers in the Scriptures, and lists numerous texts to support his contention that the only appropriate referent of φωτισθέντας is a genuine Christian. A similar view is held by the Socinian Johann Crell (1590-1633). Concerning *illuminati*, he remarks, “Incipit describere homines qui ad Christum conversi fuerunt . . . unde mirum non est, si tantis Dei muneribus spretis atque contemptis, a Deo postmodum reprobentur.”<sup>32</sup> Not mere professors, but true Christian believers are intended by the apostle:

Men converted unto Christ, are made partakers of that divine power and efficacy, whereby their minds are yet more cleerly and certainly enlightened; whereby those heavenly gifts are enlarged and increased unto them for the greater beauty, ornament, and comfort of their soules; whereby they are sealed unto the day of redemption, whereby they receive an earnest, a pledge, and an assurance of their heavenly inheritance.<sup>33</sup>

The “heavenly gift” that is said to be tasted is either Christ, the Spirit, righteousness and justification, or salvation and eternal life. Goodwin makes no attempt to pinpoint the actual meaning of the term since it is not germane to his argument. Rather, he is intent on pointing out that

all these gifts are given only unto true believers. Whatsoever is meant by this heavenly gift, certain it is that, by tasting, is not meant any light or superficial

<sup>31</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 380.

<sup>32</sup> Johann Crell, *Opera omnia exegetica, didactica, et polemica. Sive ejus in plerosque Novi Testamenti libros commentarii. Maximan partem hactenus inediti*, in *Bibliotheca Fratrum Polonorum*, vols. 8-9 (Eleutheropoli [Amsterdam]: Sumptibus Irenici Philalethii, 1656), vol. 9, fol. 123; English translation in Johann Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner in a Commentary Vpon the Epistle to the Hebrewes* (London, 1646), 98.

<sup>33</sup> Crell, *The Expiation of a Sinner*, 98.

impression made upon the hearts or souls of men, through the sense or apprehension of it, but an emphatical, inward, and affectuous pleasantness of it.<sup>34</sup>

Goodwin lists two reasons for understanding “taste” in this manner: first, the apostle mentions this characteristic in order to emphasize the heinousness and unreasonableness of their sin of apostasy. Diminishing the meaning of “taste” in any way would act to remove responsibility from them, rather than to exacerbate their sin. “To understand the phrase of ‘tasting the heavenly gift’ in any diminutive or extenuating sense, is to break the heart, as it were, to dissipate the strength and power of the apostle’s arguing in this place.”<sup>35</sup> His second reason is that “taste” is ordinarily used in the Scriptures to “import a real communion with, or participation and enjoyment” in a thing or experience. He lists numerous biblical texts to support his assertion, noting, for instance, that in Psalm 34:8 [“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him”], the author’s encouragement to “taste and see” is not for a superficial taste, but a thorough experience. Goodwin acknowledges that occasionally γεύομαι signifies only a slender perception, but denies that this meaning can be applied in this case. Feeling that he has definitively described the phrase “tasting of the heavenly gift,” Goodwin asserts, “we can safely conclude, that the persons whose estates and conditions are exhibited unto us by the Holy Ghost, in the scriptures in hand, are true saints, true believers.”<sup>36</sup>

Goodwin handles the final three characteristics – “partakers of the Holy Spirit,” “tasted the good word,” and “the powers to come” – in much the same manner. To be a partaker of the Holy Spirit “signifies no less than to be made partaker of his regenerating virtue or power.”<sup>37</sup> Again, the author cites supporting Scriptures, and notes that partaking

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<sup>34</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 382.

<sup>35</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 383.

<sup>36</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 383.

<sup>37</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 384.



of a thing implies more than simple communion, but rather a special communion, appropriate only for a true believer. Citing Micah 2:7 ["Do not my words do good to him whose ways are upright?"], and other texts as evidence, Goodwin claims that to taste the good word of God is "to have had a lively and satisfactory impression upon their hearts and consciences, of the goodness, i.e., of the great beneficialness of the word of God, or the gospel, unto them." It is obvious then that "hypocrites and unbelievers are incapable, whilst such, of tasting the good word of God, i.e., the word of God in the goodness, sweetness, and bountifulness of it; the taste which they have of it, is in the terror and severity of it against wicked men."<sup>38</sup> Finally, denying that "the powers to come" refers to miracles, and ironically citing *The Westminster Annotations* for support,<sup>39</sup> Goodwin claims that the phrase indicates the joys of heaven or the might and glory of immortality. Any taste of these glories clearly proves that the taster is a true member of the community of faith.<sup>40</sup>

Goodwin then pushes past this point and asserts that the author of Hebrews intends, not just ordinary believers, but especially those who have been blessed with extraordinary gifts: "I verily judge that he purposely sought out several of the most emphatical and signal characters of believers.... to be found in those that are most eminent amongst them."<sup>41</sup> In this way, Goodwin believes that the apostle demonstrates that even the mighty in faith may fall from everlasting grace. Goodwin concludes his exegetical analysis of Hebrews 6:4-6 by claiming: "we clearly see by the impartial discussion [of the Hebrew passage] lately insisted upon, that there is a possibility that true believers, yea,

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<sup>38</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 385.

<sup>39</sup> *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*, commentary on Hebrews 6:5.

<sup>40</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 386.

<sup>41</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 386.

the greatest in their rank or order of men, may fall away, and that to an impossibility of a return to their former standing, by repentance.”<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Puritan and Reformed Exegesis

In his examination of Hebrews 6:4-6, Goodwin was reacting against much of the exegetical work done by earlier commentators on this passage. It is not that he objected to their linguistic or grammatical analysis; indeed, on many particulars, such as the identity of the “heavenly gift,” “coming age,” and “enlightened,” Goodwin’s conclusions are similar if not identical with contemporary Puritan exegetes. Rather, he rejected what he saw as the preconceived theological assumptions with which many biblical interpreters approached the passage – he believed that this conviction distorted the true intention of the text.<sup>43</sup>

When Reformed expositors insisted that the persons spoken of in Hebrews 6:4-6 were not true Christians, they believed that they were operating within the framework of the analogy of faith. They maintained that the overall thrust of Scripture taught that true children of God could not lose their salvation; therefore, whatever Hebrews 6 meant, it did not imply the possibility of the final apostasy of the saints. Arguing from the nature of God, the prominent Baptist pastor John Gill (1697-1771) expresses this opinion: while there are some who are “savingly enlightened by the Spirit of God,” these are not intended by this passage because, “if God had a mind to destroy them, he would never have shown them these things.”<sup>44</sup> The same sentiment is expressed by David Paraeus: “eos nunquam vera fide & poenitentia donatos, & vere conuersos, sed hypocritas fuisse,

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<sup>42</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 388.

<sup>43</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 388.

<sup>44</sup> Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 706.

scriptura & euentus testatur.”<sup>45</sup> Many other Reformed commentators state at the beginning of their exposition the assumption that the passage must not be talking about the elect, but either about hypocrites or deceived professors of the faith.<sup>46</sup> The popular Puritan preacher, Thomas Manton (1620-1677), uses Hebrews 6:4-6 as one of a series of examples of things which look like sanctification, but are not. In his exposition, the text deals with “common graces:” “common” because they are given to those who may fall away and depart from God – thus by definition they are not salvific blessings. Like many commentators, Manton does not attempt to demonstrate this distinction from the text, but asserts it as being consistent with the general flow of biblical revelation.<sup>47</sup>

Prior to the publication of Goodwin’s work, the exposition by the Scots exegete David Dickson (1583?-1663), appears as one of the few Reformed attempts to demonstrate exegetically that verses 4-6 do not refer to true believers. Dickson spends the first part of his exposition detailing what the falling away is, and what it is not. He is concerned to distinguish between a fall into sin and the final apostasy from the faith. Consequently, Dickson maintains that the author “doth not speake heere of every sinne against knowledge, albeit indeed those be fearefull, and dangerous; but of Apostasie from Religion, and the Doctrine of Christ.”<sup>48</sup> It is not an apostasy resulting from fear, weakness, fit of passion, or hasty passage of one’s life, but a voluntary, deliberate falling away from a clear conviction of the truth. The bulk of his work, however, attempts to

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<sup>45</sup> “They never had true faith or the gift of repentance, or were truly converted, but were hypocrites; the Scripture and event prove this,” Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:883.

<sup>46</sup> Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 395; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrewes*, F9a; Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:831.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Manton, *A Practical Commentary, or an Exposition with notes on the Epistle of Jude*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 5 (London: Nisbet, 1870), 38; Thomas Manton, *One Hundred and Ninety Sermons on the Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm*, in *The Works of Thomas Manton*, vol. 6 (London: Nisbet, 1870), 316. The extensive similarity between Manton’s sermons and Dickson’s commentary leads me to believe that Manton was preaching straight from Dickson’s exposition.

<sup>48</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrewes*, F8b.

prove how the persons described in verses 4-6 are different from the recipients of the epistle, i.e., those described in verses 9-10. The former he terms “professours in generall, conditionally,” the latter are “true believers amongst these Hebrewes, particularly.”<sup>49</sup>

Dickson’s exegetical argument is based upon a comparison of these two separate groups of people:

Heere in these verses [i.e., vv. 4-6], are glorious gifts, illuminations, and tasting of spirituall things: There in those verses [i.e., vv. 9-10], is faith, working by love, to the glory of Iesus, and weale of his saints. Here are men enrolled amongst Christians, so bolden, and esteemed, both of themselves, and others: There are sensible soules, in the feeling of sinne, and feare of wrath, and hope of mercy, fleeing to Iesvs, as to a refuge: and casting the ancre of their tossed soules within the veile, where Iesvs is in heaven. Here men, receaving from the Holy Ghost, good things: There men, receaving from him, beside these good things, better things also. Heere things glorious indeed, yet not alwayes accompanying salvation; but in some going before saving grace; in others, possibly alone, without saving grace: But there are saving graces alwayes joined with salvation. Here in these verses, the Apostle is not confident, but such as have received these things heere mentioned, may fall away, except they goe forwards, and study to make progresse. But there in those verses, the Apostle is perswaded, that they shall not fall away, but be saved; and thereupon encourageth them, to goe forwards.<sup>50</sup>

From this comparison, Dickson is able to draw the conclusion that apostasy is possible in professors and “titular saints,” but not in renewed souls. He ends his discussion with an extended treatment demonstrating that natural man may be convinced of some of the goodness in the gospel, yet not be redeemed. Dickson’s thoughts in this passage are taken up by Kendall and Owen in their responses to Goodwin.

In the epistle dedication of *Sancti Sanciti*, George Kendall’s (1610-1663) exegetical response to *Redemption Redeemed*, the author announces his intent to counter the concern of Goodwin and other Arminians that perseverance leads to slack Christian morality and a lack of motivation toward holiness: “I have made it my work to shew that our doctrine of perseverance is not guilty of lulling the saints in a secure neglect of their

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<sup>49</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrewes*, F10a.

<sup>50</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrewes*, F10a-b.

duty; but is a most happy encouragement to an holy performance of it.”<sup>51</sup> In chapter IV of his work, Kendall analyzes the Scriptures which Goodwin asserts proves the total and final apostasy of true saints. Included in this chapter is Kendall’s rebuttal of the Arminian’s exegetical argument concerning Hebrews 6:4-6. Kendall begins by responding to Goodwin’s objections concerning the hypothetical nature of the text. He points out that Goodwin’s “when” is equally conditional and equally absent from the original text.<sup>52</sup> The basis of his disagreement with Goodwin’s view of the passage, however, is his belief that Goodwin applied a faulty logic and hermeneutical process to the text. Kendall mocks the false logic which Goodwin applies throughout his discussion of the Hebrews 6 characteristics, using as an example the illogical syllogism “every one of Mr. Goodwin’s books is full of much new light; *ergo* every book that is full of much new light is Mr. Goodwin’s.” He concludes, “an illumination doth not infer a conversion, though it be true, there be no conversion without illumination.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, Kendall does not deny that the characteristics *could* apply to true believers, he simply argues that there is nothing in the text which demands that these characteristics must apply *only* to genuine Christians. Owen’s exposition of the Hebrews passage follows a similar path.

##### **5. John Owen’s *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance***

Owen’s massive work, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, is a systematic rebuttal of Goodwin’s rejection of the doctrine. Owen refutes both the individual arguments contained within *Redemption Redeemed* and the overall assumptions of the author. What most inflamed Owen was not his opponent’s opposition of the saints’ perseverance, but his distortion of the Reformed doctrine. Goodwin portrayed the notion

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<sup>51</sup> Kendall, *Sancti Sanciti*, Epistle Dedication.

<sup>52</sup> Kendall, *Sancti Sanciti*, 85.

of believer's security as undermining the Christian's motivation to strive for holiness and godliness. He distorted the orthodox understanding by saying it teaches preservation without perseverance. This frustrated Owen who pointing out the complementary truths of the Reformed doctrine: perseverance of the saints coupled with continuing belief, love for God, and the living of godly lives.<sup>54</sup> For Owen, the promise of eternal security went hand in hand with the call to persevere in faithfulness.

For this reason, Owen begins his assessment of Hebrews 6 by demonstrating that it holds both the exhortation and the promise together – the promise comes in verses 9-10, while the exhortation of verses 4-6

is peremptory, that men may without any disparagement to their wisdom or reason, earnestly deal with others and exhort them to avoid falling away from God, though they are fully persuaded that those whom they so exhort, by the help of those exhortations, and upon other considerations, shall abide with God to the end.<sup>55</sup>

In the view of Owen's modern interpreter, Sinclair Ferguson, verse 9 with its assurance that the author was convinced of the perseverance of his audience "controls the whole of his exegesis, and led him to argue that whatever significance the description in vv. 4-6 may have, it is not a *saving* significance."<sup>56</sup> To grasp fully this text's influence upon the doctrine of perseverance, the entire context must be taken into account. When this is done, the doctrine of perseverance is seen to stand alongside the Scripture's exhortation to pursue righteousness.

### 5.1 A Hypothetical Passage?

Owen's task in *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, as far as Hebrews 6 is concerned, is to show that Goodwin's assertion that true believers are being described in

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<sup>53</sup> Kendall, *Sancti Sanciti*, 86. See also, Danson, *The Saints Perseverance*, 3-4.

<sup>54</sup> See, Peterson, "Christian Assurance," 10.

<sup>55</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:465.

the text is exegetically unsound. Therefore, as with Goodwin's use of the passage, Owen's approach to Hebrews 6:4-6 is a limited one. Like Kendall, whom he appears to echo in much of his argumentation, Owen first challenges Goodwin for questioning the conditional nature of the passage, and for taking "occasion to fall foul upon the translators as having corrupted the passages."<sup>57</sup> In response to Goodwin's rejection of the translation "if," Owen points out the following:

1. Can a proposition not be conditional or hypothetical unless the word "if" is expressed?

Owen gives some clear examples – like "take that road and you will meet with thieves" – showing that language is simply too flexible to pin down in the way Goodwin asserts.

2. What clear sense can be made of the statement without some conditional implication?

Rendered verbum de verbo, the text makes no sense, while the syntax and coherence directs one toward "if they fall away."

3. Goodwin's "when they fall away" is equally conditional (and equally absent from the text itself) unless the implication is that all those with the characteristics listed in verses 4 and 5 "shall and must fall away certainly, and so requires the event of the thing whereof it is spoken."<sup>58</sup>

Owen concludes concerning the hypothetical nature of the text, "Notwithstanding then, any thing here offered to the contrary, those who affirm that nothing can certainly be concluded from these places for the apostasy of any, because they are conditional assertions... need not be ashamed of nor recoil from their affirmations in the least."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 233.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:639.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:640.

<sup>59</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:640.

## 5.2 True Believers or False Professors?

Owen, however, does not think that the question of conditionality was pertinent to the exegesis of the text. The doctrine of the saints' perseverance does not depend upon interpreting the passage as a hypothetical or conditional warning, because the text itself does not even deal with true saints.<sup>60</sup> Before countering Goodwin's "proof" that the text speaks of real believers, Owen offers the following description of what is frequently experienced within the Christian community:

1. It is generally recognized that there is "an inferior, common work of the Holy Spirit" in persons "causing in them a great alteration and change as to light, knowledge, abilities, gifts, affections, life, and conversation, when the persons so wrought upon are not quickened, regenerated, nor made new creatures, nor united to Jesus Christ."<sup>61</sup>
2. These people upon whom the Spirit has laid his "common work" may assent to the realities of the gospel as true in its kind and not merely a counterfeit profession of their beliefs.
3. In light of the above, these people cannot be termed hypocrites since they are not counterfeit believers, pretending only to be genuine believers. Their faith is not merely for show and absent of all substance, "yet, notwithstanding all this, they are in bondage, and at best seek for a righteousness as it were by the works of the law, and in the issue Christ proves to them of none effect."<sup>62</sup>
4. Many often have excellent gifts, abilities, qualities, even rendering useful service to the mission of the church – nevertheless, they remain unregenerate persons.

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<sup>60</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:640.

<sup>61</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:640-1.

<sup>62</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:641.



5. Having experienced the conviction of the Holy Spirit, as well as the manifold gifts and blessings he brings to true believers, these persons who have yet to be fully united to Christ are capable of sinning against the Holy Spirit, “the unpardonable apostasy from God.”<sup>63</sup>

Having introduced this alternative identification for the persons spoken of in the passage, Owen then critiques Goodwin’s conclusions. Goodwin had noted that the characteristics listed by the author of Hebrews are *only* applied in the Scriptures to saints and true believers. Owen, however, claims that “this is most remote from the truth,” and lists six reasons why the description does not identify real believers:<sup>64</sup>

1. There is no explicit or implied mention of faith or believing, the cardinal marks of a true Christian.
2. There is no mention of anything which belongs peculiarly to true believers, such as “regenerated, justified, born again, called according to the purpose of God, etc.”
3. The contextual comparison with verses 7-8 show the incompatibility of identifying true believers with “thorns and briers.”
4. In verse 9, the author of Hebrews lists “salvation” as one of the “better things” his audience possesses, which the apostates of verses 4-6 lack.
5. The persons addressed in verses 4-6 were in need of being taught the first principles of the faith all over again. (Heb 5:12-14).
6. The point of the passage, in context with what follows, is to contrast apostasy with true belief – to assume that the apostates are real believers undercuts the thrust of the whole argument.

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<sup>63</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:642.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:642-3. Cf. Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 380.

“Upon all which considerations, it is abundantly evident that they are not believers, the children of God, justified, sanctified, adopted, saints, of whom the apostle treats in the passages insisted on.”<sup>65</sup>

Owen grants Goodwin’s claim that the passage does not speak of “hypocrites and outside professors,” in the sense that the persons addressed are not pretending to be what they are not, and what they know themselves not to be.<sup>66</sup> However, in denying that the passage speaks of hypocrites, Goodwin meant more than those who deceitfully portray themselves as believers, and Owen knows it. Goodwin denied, with reasons “pregnant of proof,”<sup>67</sup> that the passage speaks even of those who, while experiencing the blessings of the Holy Spirit, nevertheless come short of full union with Christ. Owen vehemently rejects this assertion. To Goodwin’s claim that there is nothing in the text which is descriptive or characteristic of hypocrisy, but much that believers should strive after, Owen points out that the design of the apostle was not to identify hypocrites, but “to declare the excellencies that are or may be found in them, from the enjoyment of all which they may decline.”<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, many true believers do experience the characteristics listed in verses 4-6, and all Christians should strive for them – nevertheless, this does not imply that everyone so endowed is one of the truly faithful.

### 5.3 The Descriptions in Verses 4-6

Owen then looks at the particular characteristics as expounded upon by Goodwin to show that true believers are in view. In each case, he refutes Goodwin’s exegesis and

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<sup>65</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:643.

<sup>66</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 387; Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:643.

<sup>67</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 387.

<sup>68</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:644. See also, Kendall, *Sancti Sanciti*, 85-86; Danson, *The Saints Perseverance*, 3-4.

interprets the passage in such a way as to prove that the author has mere professors in mind.

Goodwin had stated that only believers are said to be “enlightened.” Owen, however, notes that the historical exegetical understanding of this word, “and that not improbably,” affirms only their participation in the ordinance of baptism.<sup>69</sup> Additionally, Owen calls upon the experience of the visible church as evidence that many persons have been enlightened and yet never come to Christ savingly by faith. Blaming Goodwin’s poor exegesis on the influence of the Remonstrants, Owen charges that it “hath been again and again excepted against as illogical and unconcluding, and inconsistent with the principles of them that use it,” and rebukes Goodwin for “crudely again to have imposed it upon his reader without some attempt at least to free it from the charge of impertinency, weakness, and folly, wherein it is burdened.”<sup>70</sup> Goodwin has operated under an illogical syllogism and Owen wants his readers to be aware of its fallacy:

Illumination is ascribed to believers;  
Illumination is ascribed to these men;  
therefore, these persons are believers.<sup>71</sup>

This same faulty reasoning is present in Goodwin’s analysis of every characteristic – if it can be ascribed to true believers, then everyone who is so described must be a true believer. Time and again, Owen points out the illogic of this underlying assumption.

When he examines Goodwin’s view of the phrase γευσσάμενους τε τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου [“the ones who have tasted of the heavenly gift”], Owen’s scholastic training begins to surface. He approaches the text with a series of distinctions intended to clarify the issue at hand and remove false assumptions. For instance, he notes that “both the

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<sup>69</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:646.

<sup>70</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:647.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:647.

*object* and the *act* are here in question,” i.e., what is meant by τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου and what is meant by γευσσάμενους.<sup>72</sup> In his response to Goodwin, Owen does not follow all his distinctions to their conclusions, but only those which have direct bearing upon his disagreement with the Arminian position. Thus, he does not explicitly explore what the heavenly gift is, but considers only that the “taste” of it falls far short of the “feeding on it, digesting it, growing thereby.”<sup>73</sup>

Owen’s conclusion regarding the subject of this phase is completely opposite that of Goodwin.<sup>74</sup> Both men marshal Scripture to support their respective interpretations – Owen, however, noting that Goodwin’s examples “consist of instances collected by the Remonstrants to manifest the use of the word “tasting” to be other than what we here confine it to.”<sup>75</sup> Owen insists that the Remonstrants have committed a basic exegetical error in the interpretation of the γεύομαι [“to taste”] texts. The word is used metaphorically, and as such the analogy or metaphorical meaning found in one passage must not be extended beyond its specific context. Although there are indeed places where γεύομαι in the Scriptures is used figuratively for full consumption, there are equal instances where it does not – and the literal meaning is of a faint, weak perception of a thing. Thus, Owen challenges Goodwin to produce some clear exegetical reason why the metaphor should be extended beyond its natural meaning. Lacking any such evidence, Owen can claim: “we may safely conclude that Mr. Goodwin hath not been able to advance one step in his intendment to prove that the persons here described are true believers.”<sup>76</sup> While not all Reformed exegetes have followed Owen in his specific

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<sup>72</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:649.

<sup>73</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:649.

<sup>74</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 382-3.

<sup>75</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:651-2.

<sup>76</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:652.

understanding of the significance of “taste,” it is central to his interpretation. Ferguson comments:

Clearly Owen’s exegesis of the idea of “tasting” in these verses in Hebrews also influences his whole interpretation. It has been described as ingenious but dubious even by those in sympathy with his theological position.<sup>77</sup>

Owen again makes explicit use of scholastic methodology in expounding the description μετόχους γενηθέντας πνεύματος ἁγίου [“those who have shared in the Holy Spirit”]. A distinction is drawn between participating in the gifts of the Spirit, and in the graces of the Spirit. Owen further divides the graces into either the more *common* and “*inchoative*,” or the *special* and *completing* work of conversion. While Goodwin is unable to prove that the special grace of regeneration is intended, or even that the graces of the Holy Spirit are meant, Owen brings numerous arguments against such an assumption, not least of which is that Goodwin’s position is opposed by the overall thrust of the entire Scripture.<sup>78</sup>

In light of the extensive treatment Owen gave both to Goodwin’s arguments and to the text itself, it is difficult to justify Goodwin’s critique in his *Triumviri* where he claims that Owen

seldom ingageth against any argument, whether levied from some text of Scripture, or from the clearest principles of reason, but first he vilifieth and disgraceth it : and when he hath made it soft and tender by steeping it thorowly in this liquor, an answer made of straw will serve to thrust it thorow, and lay it for dead.<sup>79</sup>

Given his exposition in *The Saints Perseverance*, Owen confidently concludes that the author of Hebrews consciously directed his warning of verses 4-6 against professors of the Christian faith who were not yet truly unified with Christ. He believes that this passage merely asserts how far one can go in the Christian religion without truly

<sup>77</sup> Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith*, 235.

<sup>78</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:653.

<sup>79</sup> Goodwin, *Triumviri*, d2.

experiencing salvific faith and grace. It is an awareness of how far men may proceed in the path of righteousness, yet fall far short of union with Christ, which motivated the writing of the passage in the first place.<sup>80</sup>

#### 6. Owen's Exegetical Strategy and Results in His *Exposition of Hebrews*

In addition to his *Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, Owen also dealt with the exegetical issues of Hebrews 6:4-6 in two other works, his major *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, and a treatise on apostasy entitled *The Nature of Apostasy from the Profession of the Gospel*. The latter work was published at a time when, in Ferguson's opinion, Owen was "conscious of a decline in contemporary religion."<sup>81</sup> In it he sought "an inquiry into the nature, causes, and occasions of the present defection that is in the world from the truth, holiness, and worship of the Gospel."<sup>82</sup> Except for a few introductory comments, the first chapter of this work is simply a word for word rendition of his exegesis of Hebrews 6:4-6 as laid out in *An Exposition of Hebrews*.<sup>83</sup> This work is a painstaking exposition of the Epistle in which Owen's skills as an exegete and an orthodox theologian coincide.

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<sup>80</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11: 653-654.

<sup>81</sup> Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith*, 232.

<sup>82</sup> John Owen, *The Nature of Apostasy from the Profession of the Gospel and the Punishment of Apostates Declared*, in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 7 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 11.

<sup>83</sup> In the reprinted Works edition, pages 11-40 of volume 7 correspond directly to pages 67-91 of volume 21. For convince, the pagination from the Hebrews commentary will be followed below. Although the treatise on apostasy was published before the third Hebrews volume (which contains the 6:4-6 pericope), from the style of writing, etc., it is most likely that Owen had first completed his exegetical work in the commentary before writing *The Nature of Apostasy*.

### 6.1 The Scope of Hebrews 6:4-6

Granting that this passage is a difficult one and that “both doctrinally and practically, sundry have here stumbled and miscarried,”<sup>84</sup> Owen attempts to clarify the text in light of three main difficulties which have historically affected its interpretation. First, in a controversy in the primitive church, the Novatians used this passage as support for their practice of denying all hope of pardon, or of a return to ecclesiastical communion, to those once baptized who openly fall into sin. As a result of this interpretation, some within the catholic Church “choose for a season to suspend their assent unto the authority of the whole epistle.”<sup>85</sup> Secondly, Owen is well aware that the text has been used to demonstrate that real and true believers may totally and finally fall from grace and eternally perish. Finally, Owen cites “sundry mistakes in the practical application of the intention of these words unto the consciences of men.”<sup>86</sup> By this, Owen refers to the fear which gripped numerous Englishmen that they indeed had committed the unpardonable sin and were now, much to their dismay, set aside for destruction. Owen concludes, however, that an accurate exposition of the text in question, “compared with other Scriptures, and freed from the prejudices that men have brought unto it, is both remote from administering any just occasion to the mistakes before-mentioned, and is a needful, wholesome commination, duly to be considered by all professors of the gospel.”<sup>87</sup>

In passing, two things should be noted about Owen’s introduction to his exegesis: First, the prominent role he places upon the analogy of Scripture in the interpretation of all difficult texts. In this, Owen was completely in harmony with the traditional orthodox

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<sup>84</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:68.

<sup>85</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:70.

<sup>86</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:70.

emphasis upon *analogia fidei*.<sup>88</sup> Second, while clearly aware of the importance of Hebrews 6:4-6 in the Arminian controversy, Owen's approach never failed to reflect his practical, ministerial emphasis. A theologian of great quality, Owen's pastoral interest dominated his thinking and writing.<sup>89</sup> This is most evident as he wraps up his exposition of these verses – attention is given to the pastoral issues involved, and not primarily the theological ones: there is in this text, an encouragement of sinners – an encouragement Owen clearly seeks to express.<sup>90</sup> Throughout his exposition of this passage, Owen vividly demonstrates his integrated understanding of orthodox thinking, effective ministry, and proper living. While a determination of the persons spoken of in the text is a central issue for Owen, both practically and dogmatically, his opening outline of his exegesis reveals an awareness of the totality of exegetical issues generated by this passage.

Owen is concerned to locate the text within the overall scope of the epistle and in particular to identify its connection with the preceding material. He does this by exegetically exploring the grammatical and logical role of the introductory particle γάρ. The particle functions as a causal conjunction, connecting the apostle's previous rebuke concerning his audience's slow progress in the faith (Heb 5:11-14) with a description of the danger there is in continuing in that condition.<sup>91</sup> Verses 4-6, then, function as a warning to the Hebrews: "that therefore they might be acquainted with the danger hereof, and be stirred up to avoid that danger, he gives them an account of those who, after a profession of the gospel, beginning at a non-proficiency under it, do end in apostasy from

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<sup>87</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:71.

<sup>88</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:69.

<sup>89</sup> Owen's attention to and interest in practical ministry and pastoral work is well documented by his biographers, Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith*, 1-16, 201-210; Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971), 150-172; Orme, *Life of the Reverend John Owen*, 215-226.

<sup>90</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:90.



it.”<sup>92</sup> Although Owen is not directly confronting Goodwin here, his analysis of the role of this pericope, conditioned by the conjunction γάρ, is important in his rejection of the Arminian interpretation: in Owen’s opinion, the particle explains the apostle’s purpose in a manner which accords with the literary flow of the entire epistle and the Reformed doctrine of perseverance.

## 6.2 Owen’s Exegetical Methodology

Owen’s treatment of the passage reveals the marks of a meticulous seventeenth-century exegete. As mentioned above, an awareness of the overall design of the author is essential to his hermeneutical strategy. His grammatical exactness, as well as his lexical and syntactical abilities, are evident throughout his exposition. Owen carefully examines other translations, especially those of Erasmus and Beza, and he consults ancient manuscripts and translations. The Syriac and Vulgate both play a prominent role in Owen’s exegetical treatment; he frequently discusses both and deals with any unique elements presented therein. Finally, in generating and expressing his exegetical conclusions, Owen often makes use of theological and classical distinctions characteristic of the scholastic educational method.

One example of his focus upon ancient documents is his treatment of the Syriac translation of τοὺς φωτισθέντας which reads “those who one time descended unto baptism.” Owen understands this translation as being the earliest witness to that particular interpretation of τοὺς φωτισθέντας and it therefore naturally carries significant weight.<sup>93</sup> Since he ultimately disagrees with this interpretation, its presence in the ancient authority demands that he spend some time explaining his objections. Owen acknowledges that in

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<sup>91</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:71-72.

<sup>92</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:72.

the early church, baptism was frequently called φωτισμός, “illumination,” and that the cognate φωτίζειν was used for the act of baptism. The use of the word ἄπαξ strengthens the Syraic interpretation. After offering further support for this interpretation, Owen notes that “this opinion hath so much of probability in it, having nothing therewithal unsuited to that analogy of faith or design of the place, that I should embrace it, if the word itself, as here used, did not require another interpretation.”<sup>94</sup> Owen’s basic objection to identifying τοὺς φωτισθέντας with the sacrament of baptism is that there is no evidence that the word was so used until “at least an age or two, if not more” after the New Testament writing.<sup>95</sup>

Two aspects of Owen’s hermeneutical strategy are apparent here – first, the value he places upon ancient textual witnesses, and second, the controlling role that the analogy of faith and the scope of the entire work plays in fixing the proper interpretation of the work. Owen gives the impression that, regardless of how plausible a certain interpretation might be on its own, it must be rejected if it conflicts with either the analogy of faith or the overall design of the biblical writer. One of Owen’s basic hermeneutical assumptions is the internal consistency of the entire scriptural record and the logical progression of the individual biblical author.

In his discussion of the description given concerning those in danger of falling into apostasy, Owen’s scholastic approach to exegesis frequently appears. In his interpretation of the phrase τοὺς ἄπαξ φωτισθέντας, Owen cites various texts, employing the traditional exegetical technique of *analogia Scripturae*, which define “enlightened” as “to be

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<sup>93</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:67, 73-74.

<sup>94</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:73-74.

<sup>95</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:74; see also, Kendall, *Sancti Sanciti*, 86.

instructed in the doctrine of the gospel, so as to have a spiritual apprehension thereof.”<sup>96</sup> He further notes the absence of any particular circumstance in the specific text which would indicate that the word should be understood as having a meaning different from that typically encountered in the Scripture. Owen makes certain distinctions in order to “more particularly discover the nature of this first part of the character of apostates.” He first distinguishes between the object and the subject of “enlightenment,” the object being the light of the gospel, the subject being the mind of the person. He then clarifies the nature of the enlightenment, distinguishing between a knowledge that is (1) purely natural and disciplinary, (2) a spiritual gift from the Holy Ghost but that is nevertheless short of salvation, and (3) a saving, sanctifying light, which is given to the elect only.<sup>97</sup>

The same methodological tendencies are evident when Owen expounds the other four characteristics listed in Hebrews 6:4-6. First, he shows great concern for the grammatical construction of the text itself: for example, he explains the curious doubling of the article in the phrase τῆς δωρεᾶς τῆς ἐπουρανίου [“the heavenly gift”], the use of the particle τε in verse 5, and the active voice of the infinitive ἀνακαλιζέειν [“to renew, restore”].<sup>98</sup> Second, he is extremely cautious to draw his lexical information primarily from (1) a word’s other usage in Scripture, and (2) the immediate syntactical and grammatical context. Owen’s controversial understanding of γευσάμενους [“taste”], is a perfect example of this – he analyzes both the word’s other occurrences in the Bible, as well as the impact on its meaning of the Hebrews’ context.<sup>99</sup> Third, the scope of the epistle and the overall purpose of the author in this pericope limit the options which are open to the exegete. Owen recognizes these limits, for instance, in his analysis of

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<sup>96</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:74.

<sup>97</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:74-76.

<sup>98</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:77, 83, 67.

discussion of what it means to “participate in the Holy Ghost.”<sup>100</sup> Finally, making clear distinctions and considering the detailed nature of the elements discussed in the text, are important aspects of Owen’s exposition.

### 6.3 The Characteristics of Apostates

Owen was, in Ferguson’s words, “deeply concerned to show that a true Christian does not commit apostasy, and he is therefore obliged to show that Hebrews 6:4-6 does not refer to the genuine believer. He may stumble and fall, but by grace he perseveres to the end.”<sup>101</sup> The identification of the persons spoken about in the verses, therefore, occupies the bulk of Owen’s exegesis. He begins by conceding to the Arminians that the characteristics ascribed to these persons are “evangelical privileges whereof they were made partakers; notwithstanding all which, it is supposed that they may wholly desert the gospel itself.”<sup>102</sup> He does not here deny that the men referred to have experienced something beyond natural blessings; rather, “all these privileges do consist in certain especial operations of the Holy Ghost, which were peculiar unto the dispensation of the gospel.”<sup>103</sup> Nevertheless, as he noted in his debate with Goodwin,<sup>104</sup> there is no explicit mention of faith, justification, sanctification, or covenant grace. He briefly contrasts this with the apostle’s description of the Hebrews themselves in verses 9-10. Of these true believers, Owen notes (1) “they had such things as did accompany salvation,” (2) they responded with “duties of obedience and fruits of faith,” and (3) they depended upon the

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<sup>99</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:79-80, 82.

<sup>100</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:78.

<sup>101</sup> Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Faith*, 237.

<sup>102</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:72.

<sup>103</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:72.

<sup>104</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance*, 11:642.

faithfulness of God.<sup>105</sup> This then, in a nutshell, is the essence of Owen's understanding of who the apostates of verses 4-6 are: those who have greatly benefited from the power of the Spirit, but who have yet to attain to the fullness of salvation.

As opposed to most Puritan exegetes, who simply assumed that the characteristics listed in verses 4-6 could not apply to true believers, and to Goodwin and similar Arminians who insisted that true believers were indeed intended in the pericope, Owen carefully analyzes each description. Thus, he determines that being "enlightened" entailed the special work of the Holy Spirit, yet did not necessarily mean that those enlightened were true Christians. "Tasting" of the heavenly gift truly pertained to gospel matters, but signified no more than a trial or experiment. One who "partakes of the Holy Ghost" shares in the spiritual gifts of the Spirit, yet does not automatically experience his gracious inhabitation. To "taste of the good word" stops short of really receiving, feeding and living on Jesus Christ. And finally, an experience of "the world to come," while indicating some unique encounter with the eschatological blessings of God, is not limited simply to those who will ultimately benefit from those blessings.<sup>106</sup>

While Owen freely acknowledges his dependence upon other exegetes for their insights,<sup>107</sup> he is not unwilling to come to conclusions which disagree with those reached by others. Ultimately, Owen's determination of the nature of the apostates in verses 4-6 does not differ from other Reformed interpreters; nevertheless, his conclusions regarding the specific nature of some of the apostle's phrases vary from his Puritan and continental contemporaries. All are generally agreed that "enlightened" does not signify baptism, but rather refers to some form of spiritual understanding arrived at by the special work of the

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<sup>105</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:72-73.

<sup>106</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:73-83.

<sup>107</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 17:5.

Spirit. The description by the English commentator Matthew Poole of these people is shared by most:

These are such who are instructed in the principles of the Christian religion, and brought out of the darkness and ignorance of Judaism and heathenism, so that they were other persons for the knowledge of the Gospel truths than before: they see with a new light spiritual things, and have the mind raised up to such objects as they knew not before; but they have no new eyes or understandings given them, and so are but as devils like angels of light, whereas the light of a real Christian is the light of life.<sup>108</sup>

The unique, though deficient character of this enlightenment is echoed by John Gill:

Such are meant, who are so enlightened as to see the evil effects of sin, but not the evil that is in sin, to see the good things which come by Christ, but not the goodness that is in Christ: so as to reform externally, but not to be sanctified internally: to have knowledge of the Gospel doctrinally, but not experimentally: yea, to have such light into it, as to be able to preach it to others, and yet be destitute of the grace of God.<sup>109</sup>

However, differences appear, particularly between Owen and others, in the remaining descriptions. Owen interprets “the heavenly gift” to be the Holy Spirit, “not that which he gives, but that which he is.”<sup>110</sup> This opinion differs from the identification of that gift as Christ (as John Trapp, *The Westminster Annotations*, and John Gill conclude), or as justifying grace or faith (as David Dickson and *The Dutch Annotations* determine).<sup>111</sup> William Gouge (1578-1653), a prominent London preacher and member of the Westminster Assembly, similarly maintains that faith is in view here, though that faith is not justifying or saving faith since “this kind of faith never falleth away.”<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3:831.

<sup>109</sup> Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 706.

<sup>110</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:77.

<sup>111</sup> Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition Upon All the Epistles*, 674; *Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*, commentary on Hebrews 6:4; Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 706; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrewes*, F12a; *The Dutch Annotations Upon the Whole Bible: or, All the Holy Canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testament, together with, and according to their own Translation of all the Text: As both the one and the other were ordered and appointed by the Synod of Dort, 1618. And published by Authority, 1637*, 2 vols., trans. Theodore Haak (London, 1657), commentary on Hebrews 6:4.

<sup>112</sup> Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 397.

Almost universally, the phrase “the world to come” is seen by commentators as referring to the coming eschatological fullness and the blessings promised and experienced by the saints in heaven, “whereinto a hypocrite may see far, and have a glimpse of heaven, or a flash of hell upon his conscience.”<sup>113</sup> Owen, however, expresses a more “inaugurated eschatological” viewpoint, by insisting that “our apostle in this epistle intends the days of the Messiah, that being the usual name of it in the church at that time, as the new world which God had promised to create.” While Owen’s contemporaries taught that apostates “tasted” of the future blessings, Owen saw in this phrase repeated emphasis that they had actually experienced the blessings presently given to this church age, i.e., “powers, gifts of tongues, and other miraculous operations.”<sup>114</sup>

Having made these observations, Owen summarizes “what sort of persons it is that is intended here by the apostle.”<sup>115</sup> He denies that they are true and sincere believers, recapping his arguments against such, and demonstrating from verses 9-10 the difference between apostates and true believers. Who then is intended? For whom does the author of Hebrews fear? Owen finds in the passage four characteristics of these men: 1. They “not long before were converted from Judaism unto Christianity.” 2. They were not of the common sort, but evidenced special privileges and extraordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit. 3. They were firmly convinced of their own faith and position in the church. 4. They experienced the work of light upon their minds, and changed “their affections and their

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<sup>113</sup> Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition Upon All the Epistles*, 674. See also, Paraeus, *Epistolam ad Hebraeos*, 2:882; Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrews*, G1b; Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 400; Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 706; *The Dutch Annotations and Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*, commentary on Hebrews 6:5.

<sup>114</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:83.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:83.

conversation” accordingly.<sup>116</sup> It is these persons whom the author of Hebrews supposed could “fall away” into final apostasy.

#### 6.4 Scholastic Methodology in Owen’s Exegesis

As pointed out above, at numerous times throughout his exegetical work, Owen’s debt to scholastic methodology is evident. Owen depends upon the analogy of faith and his scholastic training to clarify what are the dangers and consequences of the apostasy as specified in verse 6. He first demonstrates from the comparison of other scriptural texts (Eze 18:21 [“if a wicked man turns away from all the sins he has committed and keeps all my decrees and does what is just and right, he will surely live; he will not die”]; Isa 55:7 [“Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon”]; “yea, and the whole sense of the Scripture”<sup>117</sup>) and examples such as Peter’s denial of Christ, that “to fall away,” παραπεσόντας, cannot mean “to fall into any sin.” “There is no particular sin that any man may fall into occasionally, through the power of temptation, that can cast the sinner under this commination, so that it should be impossible to renew him to repentance.”<sup>118</sup> To understand then what the apostle intended, Owen distinguishes between sin of “various degrees” and “divers kinds.” From his clarification of these distinctions, Owen concludes that falling away is not the result of any particular “actual sin,” “the falling upon temptation or surprisal,” nor a falling away from some “material principles of Christian religion.” Rather, it is “a total renunciation of all constituent

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<sup>116</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:84-85.

<sup>117</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:85.

<sup>118</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:85.



principles and doctrines of Christianity” and that “it is required that this renunciation be avowed and professed.”<sup>119</sup>

Owen’s most evident dependence upon scholastic method, however, is in his discussion of the significance of the term, “impossible.” In analyzing this concept, Owen uses traditional scholastic arguments concerning the nature of God, the contingency of all future events, and the will of God. He first reminds his readers that all future events depend upon God, who alone necessarily exists. Everything else either exists or not “as they respect him or his will.” In this regard, a thing may be impossible with respect to the nature of God, his decrees, or his moral rule and law.

First, something may be impossible according to God’s nature either *absolutely* (i.e., something inconsistent with his being and essential properties), or on some *supposition* (i.e., God should not forgive sin without satisfaction). In this sense, Owen hesitates to say if it is impossible for apostates to repent. He appears unwilling to determine whether there is something about apostasy which is contrary by nature to the essential properties of God. In any case, he asserts that this is not the apostle’s meaning in Hebrews 6:4-6.<sup>120</sup>

Second, things which by nature may be possible, are rendered impossible by God’s decree and purposes so that they may absolutely never be. For instance, it was not impossible by nature for Saul’s posterity to remain on the throne of Israel, but impossible because God had so decreed. However, Owen does not see the impossibility of apostates’ repentance in this light either, for while we may know something of the possibility of things with respect to the nature of God, “what is so one way or other with respect unto

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<sup>119</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:86.

<sup>120</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:87-88.

his decrees or purposes, which are sovereign, free acts of his will, knoweth no man, no, not the angels in heaven."<sup>121</sup>

Finally, things may be possible or not according to the rule and order of all things that God has appointed. If God has not appointed it, or commanded us to pursue it, then, from our perspective, it is impossible. "And this is the impossibility here principally intended. It is a thing that God hath neither commanded us to endeavour, nor appointed means to attain it, nor promised to assist us in it." While it may be possible with God (depending upon whether there is something about his nature which we do not know), "it is not for us either to look, or hope, or pray for, or endeavour the renewal of such persons unto repentance."<sup>122</sup> Most of Owen's contemporaries also saw the impossibility as resting in the moral commands of God, and restricting not only the apostate persons, but also the minister who would attempt to renew them.<sup>123</sup> However, Owen's exegesis is much more detailed and exact, and reflects most clearly the scholastic distinctions which helped guide the exegetical process. He concludes,

the impossibility intended, of what sort soever it be, respects the severity of God, not in refusing or rejecting the greatest sinners which seek after and would be renewed unto repentance, – which is contrary unto innumerable of his promises, – but in the giving up such sinners as those are here mentioned unto that obduratenss and obstinacy in sinning, that blindness of mind and hardness of heart, as that they neither can nor shall ever sincerely seek after repentance; nor may any means, according to the mind of God, be used to bring them thereunto.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:88.

<sup>122</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:88.

<sup>123</sup> Dickson, *A Short Explanation of Hebrewes*, G4a; Gouge, *Commentary on Hebrews*, 402; *The Dutch Annotations and Annotations Upon All the Books of the Old and New Testament*, commentary on Hebrews 6:6 and 6:4 respectively; Gill, *An Exposition of the New Testament*, 707.

<sup>124</sup> Owen, *An Exposition of Hebrews*, 21:90-91.

## 7. Conclusion

The development of the Reformed doctrine of the saints' eternal perseverance was an important issue in seventeenth-century England. The proponents of this position were forced to withstand numerous attacks on the doctrine, many of which were based upon biblical passages such as Hebrews 6:4-6. Arminians like John Goodwin insisted that the only consistent way to understand the description in those verses was to see them as referring to genuine believers. This, of course, contradicted the Puritan stance on eternal security, and forced more orthodox commentators to view the passage in a different light. While most Puritan exegetes were content to assume that the text spoke of the real possibility of apostasy in mere Christian professors and not genuine believers, the exegetical validity of this assertion was powerfully demonstrated by John Owen's meticulous interpretive analysis of the passage.

Owen's treatment of Hebrews 6:4-6 reveals his gifts as an exegete and a theologian. His hermeneutical methodology demanded that he take due consideration of the various exegetical techniques available in the seventeenth-century. In his polemic response to Goodwin, Owen based his critique of *Redemption Redeemed* on Goodwin's failure to appreciate the author's intent, his neglect of the context (particularly the controlling role of verses 9-10), and his faulty deductive reasoning. In Owen's own biblical work, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, he demonstrates the importance of recognizing the function of the scope of the original work and the careful application of the analogies of faith and Scripture. Owen's attention to the syntactical and grammatical construction of the text, the lexical data of the rest of Scripture, and the value of ancient manuscripts and translations is manifest throughout his comprehensive exposition. Owen's scholastic training is frequently reflected in his commentary – in explaining the significance of a particular phrase or idea, Owen often employs a series of distinctions intended to clarify

the issue at hand and remove false assumptions. Through the use of these distinctions and other exegetical techniques, Owen is able to do justice to the linguistic features of Hebrews 6:4-6, and particularly to the author's intent, while asserting its basic compatibility with the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

Consequently, Owen demonstrates through the careful application of seventeenth-century exegetical techniques that the warnings in Hebrews 6:4-6 are directed against those who are mere professors of the faith and who therefore are not yet fully united with Christ. He rejects the identification of those described in these verses with genuine believers who, through apostasy, lose their salvation. Instead, the text is intended by the author to demonstrate the extent one may go in the Christian religion while yet not possessing salvific faith.

## Chapter VIII

# The Exegetical Methodology of John Owen

The goal of the preceding chapters has been to examine the theoretical principles John Owen espouses and the actual biblical interpretations which result in order to discern the practical exegetical method he employed – and then to see if that method substantiates or reviles the criticism frequently leveled against the biblical exegesis of this period.

### 1. Owen's Exegetical Methodology

While Owen never wrote a formal treatise on the exegetical method, various brief summaries of the interpretive task as he understood it were printed in some introductory sections of his works. These summaries encourage the interpreter to employ a variety of exegetical tools and methods, but they do not provide explanations or illustrations of the assorted techniques. Owen's polemical work, *Pro Sacris Scripturis adversus hujus temporis fanaticos*, was directed against the "illumination" theories of the Quakers and offers little in terms of an organized approach to the Bible. The only systematic presentation of Owen's interpretive process is *Causes, Ways, and Means*, and it lacks an in-depth discussion on the technical aspects of biblical interpretation, focusing instead on the role of the Holy Spirit in properly understanding the mind of God as expressed in the Scripture. Consequently, a coherent picture of his exegetical methodology must be deduced primarily from analyzing the results of his actual biblical interpretation.

#### 1.1 The Role of the Holy Spirit in Owen's Method

Owen's *Causes, Ways, and Means* does reveal one important aspect of his methodology. He divides the exegetical task into two parts, the subjective and the

objective. The objective element he further divides in two; the *disciplinary*, which relates to the specific techniques as discussed below, and the *ecclesiastical*, which concerns the relation of one's own interpretations to the church tradition and history. The subjective element, however, addresses the importance of the spiritual condition of the exegete in arriving at an accurate assessment of the scriptural message. Foundational to Owen's exegetical methodology is his firm belief that the Holy Spirit guides the reader into an understanding of the mind of God as revealed through Scripture. This spiritual condition requires that the exegete be a faithful follower of Christ, to eagerly pursue holiness in all areas of life, and to prayerfully approach the text with humility and in dependence upon the illumination of the Spirit, both to remove the distortions of sin and to reveal the depth of the mysteries of God. Owen is convinced that this is the crucial step in the exegetical process – without the proper spiritual state, the diligent application of the disciplinary and ecclesiastical elements will only produce a spirit-less head knowledge, far removed from understanding the mind of God.

### 1.2 Scope and the Analogies of Faith and Scripture in Owen's Method

Owen, along with other English orthodox, accepted the Protestant *sola Scriptura* principle as axiomatic and held firmly to the belief that Scripture is its own key to interpretation. The literal sense of the text was to dominate interpretation, and grammatical tools were indispensable in this regard. However, the true meaning of any word was understood, not as being rooted in linguistics or etymology, but in the entire biblical context itself. This general principle led to the guiding hermeneutic of the *analogia fidei* where the whole scriptural context helps control the interpretation of a text. Accordingly, Owen insisted that the conclusions of one's biblical exegesis had to conform to that which was faithfully summarized in the Church's creeds and confessions. While the Reformed orthodox did not specify what exactly made up the *analogia fidei*,

the Apostles' Creed was generally viewed as the classic example of what the Christian faith entailed. Similarly, faithfulness to the *analogia Scripturae* required an expositor to ensure that his interpretations were congruent with other parts of the Bible, and this was done largely through employing the *Scriptura sui ipsius interpres* rule – collating similar and dissimilar texts as the definitive interpretive guide. These “analogies” functioned as the rule of faith and the judge of all controversies in the Protestant theological system, and were therefore discussed as part of the ongoing debate between the Protestants and Rome.

Owen's exegesis shows a great dependence upon these analogies in directing and guiding his scriptural interpretations; he self-consciously restricted the exegetical options he would consider to those which were consistent with the historic Christian faith, and he rigorously avoided interpretations which would contradict other biblical texts. The validity of the analogy of faith as an exegetical tool was not directly challenged until the non-orthodox theological developments of thinkers like the Rationalists and Socinians. Similarly, limiting the exegetical possibilities of an individual pericope by a strict adherence to the *analogia Scripturae* was not regarded as detrimental to a true understanding of the text until the rise of modern grammatico-historical criticism and its emphasis on a pre-canonical *Sitz-im-Leben*.

### 1.3 Humanistic Elements in Owen's Method

Throughout Owen's commentaries, the influence and impact of the developments of Renaissance humanism are obvious – so much so, that it is impossible to read his biblical comments without seeing its presence on every page. The original Greek and Hebrew texts of Scripture form the basis of Owen's exegesis, and his familiarity (see, for instance, the wealth of linguistic material in his library) and his precise use of the grammatical and lexical nuances of the languages testify to his abilities as a linguist –

abilities which extended beyond the biblical texts to include cognate and other ancient languages and cultures. It was Owen's concern for the exegetical priority of the original languages which led to his detailed examination of the text source for the Old Testament citations used by the apostle in the Epistle to the Hebrews. Owen assumed that the apostle's handling of the OT Scripture should serve as a model for our own exegesis, and therefore the apostle's commitment to the original language text is important as a guide to our own – secondary sources or translations are not adequate. "Back to the sources" is a cry certainly heard and embraced by Owen.

Owen's commitment to the ideals and developments of humanism also showed in the breadth of his scholarship. Not only was he deeply engrossed in theology and ecclesiastical history, his writings also reveal his acquaintance with a broad field of academic interests, including philosophy, geography, history, and classical literature. Further evidence of Owen's humanism is found in his progressive approach to the incorporation and application of Judaistic insights into biblical studies. It was the perceived lack of attention to the Hebraic background of the original setting of the epistle which led Owen to write his Hebrews commentary in the first place. His knowledge and use of ancient and medieval Jewish culture has few parallels in the seventeenth century, save for the work of a few scattered Hebraic scholars like John Lightfoot, the Buxtorfs, and John Weemse. Academically and methodologically, Owen embraced the linguistic and pedagogic advances of the Renaissance without setting this in opposition to his Christian faith.

#### **1.4 Text Criticism in Owen's Method**

While it is true, and has garnered significant scholarly attention, that Owen entered into an unsatisfactory debate with Brian Walton concerning the value of what we now call textual criticism, it is incorrect to conclude that Owen did not practiced the technique



or that he rejected its validity. Throughout his exposition of Hebrews, Owen's first exegetical step is to establish the text, by comparing his Greek text with other Greek variants and evidence from versions and translations. His textual work was thorough, exact, and meticulous, especially when compared with the relatively superficial work expressed in many of his contemporaries' commentaries. It was not the text criticism itself which Owen rejected, but the manner in which contemporary scholars were reconstituting the "original" text. He objected to this form of text criticism because it was ultimately based on the wisdom of human conjectures – a form of wisdom which for Owen is vastly overrated compared with the wisdom of God – and such conjectures were completely unsupported by any textual evidence; he was fighting scholars' abuses of text criticism with text criticism itself.

Owen's concerns and clear examples of his own practice are evident in his handling of the textual issues surrounding the Old Testament citations in the New Testament. The Reformation debates between Rome and the Protestants concerning the reliability of the Scripture and the use of the Vulgate as an authoritative text underlie his discussion about what textual version the apostle used in citing the Old Testament in Hebrews. Owen assumed that the apostle's handling of the OT Scripture in his citations should serve as a model for our own exegesis. If it could be shown that the apostle in writing the epistle referred to an existing translation and not the original Hebrew text, then this would undercut Owen's insistence upon the priority of the originals. If, as Protestants claimed, the original OT text was authoritative, and that written in Hebrew, did the NT authors use a common translation like the Septuagint? If so, does that grant validity to other similar versions? It was a small step in Owen's mind, from allowing that the author drew upon the Septuagint for his citations, and using the Septuagint to make alterations to the original text of the Old Testament.

To discover the source of the apostle's OT citations in Hebrews, Owen embarks on a detailed and rigorous textual comparison of the epistle's phrasing and that of known manuscripts, translated versions, and Hebrew texts. Owen then compares the Greek text of the quotation with the Septuagint version, noting similarities and differences. He frequently consults the Greek versions prepared by Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, as well as known variant readings of each version. He is careful to note the presence or absence of an article, minor variations of word order, and the use of synonyms between versions, regardless of whether the differences significantly effect the sense of the words. Owen concludes that the author of Hebrews, in citing and expounding upon the Old Testament, turned to the Hebrew originals as the authoritative source for his quotations -- although the Septuagint might have been used for interpretative purposes, the epistle's citations reflect the apostle's reliance upon the Scripture in the original languages and gives no support to the authority of the versions. In so exegeting the text, Owen is simply following his own theory concerning the value and limitations of the ancient versions: they assist the exegete (both the apostle when writing Hebrews, and now Owen in interpreting the epistle) in coming to a correct understanding of the text, yet the versions themselves were not used as the basis for the apostle to write Scripture.

### **1.5 Hebrews's OT Citations and Owen's Method**

From Owen's analysis of the Old Testament citations in the first chapter of Hebrews, further important insights can be drawn concerning his own exegetical approach, including:

- (1) *The importance of understanding a text within its original context.* The meaning of the quotation in its Old Testament context provides necessary insight into its usage in the New Testament. The quotation is not taken out of context, nor is it used in a way which ignores or alters its meaning in its original place in the Old Testament.

A citation in the NT is used because in its own OT context the text promotes the point the NT author is seeking to make.

(2) *The Old Testament text is to be understood in its literal sense* – any interpretation of a citation which separates the New Testament use from the text's literal meaning assumes that the apostle inappropriately handled the Old Testament and, consequently, must be rejected. However, this literal sense is not a simple, wooden historical sense, but a scriptural sense (allowing for typological interpretations) which takes into account the whole scope of biblical revelation.

(3) *Full awareness of the scope of the work is crucial for proper interpretation.*

Understanding the true scope of the first chapter of Hebrews explains the appropriateness of the use of the OT citations. Similarly, the true design of the OT author from which the quotations derive supports the NT authors' application of these texts in his own writings.

(4) *The humanistic emphasis* on grammatical analysis of the original text, the comparative use of the ancient versions and the application of insights from Hebraic scholarship in determining exegetical conclusions are an integral part of seventeenth-century exegesis.

(5) *Familiarity with the writings of other commentators and theologians.* Owen

consistently interacts with other exegetes and their conclusions; his knowledge of the work of modern as well as ancient Hebrew rabbis is extensive, and he frequently uses them as either a foil or as support for his own conclusions. His exegesis is informed and controversial, gathering insights from others and drawing contrasts when he deems it necessary.

## 1.6 Typology in Owen's Method

When the scope, the analogies of faith and Scripture, and the grammatical text demand it, Owen willingly, though cautiously, turns to typology in an effort to discern the intended meaning of a particular passage. Not only does he employ the technique, but he also describes its various characteristics, giving greater clarity and definition to this aspect of the seventeenth-century exegetical practice. Comparable with other commentators of his day, Owen's basic typological strategy is evident, and he was not hesitant to disagree with exegetes who based their conclusions on what he saw as a failure to faithfully abide by proper typological constraints. The following principles clearly dominate Owen's methodological approach:

- ◆ *The historicity of the type.* The historical nature of the type is central; it is what distinguishes proper typological technique from allegory. The orthodox exegetes could claim that their promise-fulfillment paradigm followed the literal sense of the Old Testament text by asserting the historicity of the type and anti-type.
- ◆ *The divine institution of the type.* Typology discovers scriptural mysteries hidden by God himself in the record of redemptive history. Allegorical interpretation is a human enterprise where one creates and expresses similar characteristics or verbal connections between scriptural things. The difference is between the divine and the human, between commenting on the literal sense as intended by the Spirit and expressing the allegorical insights of human reason and creativity. It is not the author's creative process that typology explores, but the very mind of God.
- ◆ *Multiple types foreshadowing a single antitype.* Many types are necessary to properly prefigure Christ and the new covenant realities. The fullness and greatness of the messianic age far surpass anything available in the Old Testament era, and thus, each individual Old Testament type is intended by God to foreshadow only a limited

portion of the New Testament reality. Recognizing this canon of typology enabled the exegete to avoid multiplying fanciful parallels between the old covenant and the new, focusing instead on the typical aspects of the Old Testament history which highlight a specific characteristic of the antitype.

- ◆ *Not everything in the type applies to the antitype.* As the antitype contains more than the type, thus requiring multiple types to satisfactorily foreshadow the antitype, so the reverse is also true: all that is of the type does not evolve onto the antitype. Seventeenth-century typologists strive to stress this point – especially when confronted by the sinfulness of a person who serves as a type of Christ. An Old Testament type's foreshadowing of an antitype functioned only so far as that intended by God – everything mentioned concerning a person who serves as a type does not have typological significance.
- ◆ *The antitype far surpasses the type.* The glories hinted at in the type are but shadows of the fullness in the antitype; the antitype far surpasses the pattern established by the type. Thus, there is an analogical relationship between the type and the antitype, and the fullness of the analogy becomes clear when Christ appears. The type is only valuable prior to the coming of the antitype; whereas the type has a limited role, the antitype continues on in its fullness. Solomon, David, and the other Old Testament types of Christ have immense value as precursors to the Messiah, but when Christ appears, the importance of the type is surpassed by the presence of its fulfillment.
- ◆ *Typology may have a literary as well as an historical aspect.* A distinctive feature of Owen's theory of typology is his assertion and defense of a literary character of the apostle's typological approach. He argues that, while the historical nature of the type is indispensable to typology, the type-antitype construction is also dependent upon the literary presentation of the historical persons/events in the scriptural accounts. The

Old Testament types are recognizable, not from their historical existence, but from the written account of their historical existence. For Owen, this is a necessary corollary of the fact that true typology arises from God's initiative and God's Word.

## **2. Owen's Methodology and Modern Assessments of Seventeenth-Century Exegesis**

While far from providing a systematic, step by step procedure of Owen's exegetical methodology, the preceding discussion faithfully summarizes the key elements which appear to dominate his interpretive method. An evaluation of how this method stands up to the scholarly representations of the biblical exegesis of this period is now in order.

The traditional critique of seventeenth-century biblical interpretation was described in Chapter I and falls largely along three lines: (1) that the exegesis of that time served only to provide proof texts for dogmatic and polemic works; (2) that the seventeenth-century commentators reverted to the scholasticism of the medieval times, ignoring the freshness and vitality of the humanism as promoted by the Reformers; and (3) that the biblical interpretations of this era were academically inferior due to the expositors' neglecting and/or rejecting scientific advances in biblical studies and their embracing of erroneous and debilitating presuppositions about the Scripture.

### **2.1 Owen's Exegesis and the Dogmatic Proof Texting Critique**

The initial response to the first criticism that the exegesis of the seventeenth century was dogmatic and served only to generate proof texts for systematic use is to note its complete inapplicability to Owen's Hebrews commentary. Owen's exegetical work in his *Exposition on the Epistle to the Hebrews* cannot in any sense be seen as an effort to "mine the Scriptures" for theological proof text material. Certainly there is a plethora of theologically relevant statements in the commentary, but the work does not go from one doctrinal point to another – rather, it follows the text of the letter, addressing the issues

which the author himself addressed. Unlike the common accusation that the orthodox only used biblical citations to proof text their dogmatic conclusions, Owen's commentary on Hebrews 1:1-3 reflects a reluctance to speak on theological issues which are not directly related to the text, while still showing how certain classical theological constructions concerning the Godhead naturally flow from a careful analysis of Scripture. And while the commentary is verbose and exhaustive to the point of being awkward for some tastes, the style of the *Exposition* is by no means representatively derogatory or polemical. When the text appropriately leads him to it, Owen can aggressively denounce theological and exegetical opinions he finds unsatisfactory, yet these occurrences hardly warrant including his work under the umbrella of "polemical exegesis." Owen also clearly states his purpose for examining the epistle; it is for the edification of the church by exploring the apostle's message, not for the purpose of justifying his theological positions.

Owen himself is concerned with the same question which has given rise to the criticism of proof texting – can one use biblical quotations to justify a theological position without concern for the biblical context of the citation? It is the seriousness of this question which led Owen to spend significant time in his *Exposition* defending the apostle's citations of the OT in the first chapter of Hebrews (as analyzed in Chapter V). Owen does this by demonstrating two things: first, that the citations are appropriately applied to the NT situation by the apostle, and second, that the Old Testament text in its OT context correctly advances the argument of the epistle, that is, it actually means what the Hebrews' author took the text to mean. Thus, Owen believed the apostle accurately expounded the meaning of the OT when he employed the OT text to prove his theological point in the NT – the apostle was not "proof texting," he was exegeting.

Owen certainly believed that one could (and should) draw theological conclusions from the Scripture, that exegesis and theology were intertwined. But he consciously sought to avoid imposing his theological stance upon the text, nor did he argue beyond the scope of the pericope. For instance, in his exegesis of Hebrews 1:1-3, there were numerous opportunities for Owen to find solid scriptural support for the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity. In his opinion, the only way to appropriately make sense of the author's words in this passage is to interpret them in light of classical Trinitarianism. The distinction between persons and the economy of subsistence and action in the Godhead enable him to explain how the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews could speak of God revealing his will through the Son who was himself divine and how the Son is the image and brightness of God. Similarly, the doctrines of the humanity of Christ and the hypostatic union of his person are biblically supported and intricately woven into a proper understanding of the opening verses of this epistle. Yet Owen is careful not to systematically elaborate on the Trinity – the doctrine may help illuminate the text, but the purpose of the text is not to develop fully the doctrine, and so neither should the exegete.

In his polemic response to John Goodwin over the meaning of Hebrews 6:4-6, Owen based his critique of Goodwin's *Redemption Redeemed* on the Arminian's bad exegesis – the failure to appreciate the author's intent, his neglect of the context (particularly the controlling role of verses 9-10), and his faulty deductive reasoning. Demonstrating the connection between the appropriate application of the exegetical method and dogmatic outcomes, Owen assesses the function of the scope of the original work, the careful application of the analogies of faith and Scripture, the syntactical and grammatical construction of the text, the lexical data of the rest of Scripture, and the value of ancient manuscripts and translations in deriving his conclusions. Through the use of these exegetical techniques, Owen is able to do justice to the linguistic features of



Hebrews 6:4-6, and particularly to the author's intent, while asserting its basic compatibility with the Reformed doctrine of the perseverance of the saints.

Given the stress the post-Reformation orthodox laid on the importance of the scope, historical occasion and circumstances, and the context of a particular passage in the exegetical enterprise, the prevalence of the critique of seventeenth-century exegesis as a dogmatic, proof texting practice is surprising. The Puritan use of Scripture in their polemic and dogmatic works may, at times, be inaccurate, but this is arguably the result of faulty use of the precritical method and/or techniques, rather than evidence of problems in the method itself. The traditional scholarship which derided the Protestant orthodox for their dogmatic and polemic use of Scripture continues to find expression in present studies, even when such critique reflects the theological presuppositions of the critic more than those of the critiqued.

## **2.2 Owen's Exegesis and the Scholasticism/Humanism Critique**

It is generally conceded that the theological product of the post-Reformation orthodox appears more scholastic than that produced by the Reformers. What is at issue is the continuity of that scholasticism with earlier eras, and whether the observed change represents a distortion or a development of the Reformers' work. This is, in many ways, a textual issue: is a more refined reading of the materials necessary – one that recognizes that all works by nominally “scholastic” writers may not be scholastic in method and that the use of the scholastic method in the seventeenth century in no way precluded humanistic approaches in exegesis? In exegetical terms, the question is whether the interpretive practices of the era ignored and/or neglected the humanistic insights of the Reformers and reverted instead to the exegetical techniques and assumptions of pre-Reformation centuries, and whether such a movement toward scholasticism rendered their exegetical product substandard. On one level, the answer in Owen's case is easy: the

presence of scholastic techniques and assumptions are liberally scattered throughout his biblical interpretations. The thoughtful application of theological distinctions and definitions in helping one through difficult scriptural passages, the use of demonstrative arguments and logical deductions, and the presentation of the material in a structured, pedagogical manner all point to Owen's scholastic training and tendencies.

However as has been consistently demonstrated throughout this work, Owen's commitment to, and use of, the discoveries of the Renaissance are by no means abandoned in the midst of his scholastic thought. Owen's humanism is just as prevalent in his exegesis as is his scholasticism – actually, humanistic exegetical techniques are much more readily identifiable than those which are more closely connected to scholasticism. In any case, playing off of scholasticism against humanism, as though they were competing ideologies, incompatible by definition, seems erroneous and inadequate in light of the recent scholarship on both movements. The pejorative contrast between an antiquated scholasticism and a modern, enlightened humanism inherent in this critique of orthodox exegesis seems based on an outdated and flawed description and definition of scholasticism. Moreover, while one may have legitimate concerns about particular exegetical conclusions yielded due to the influence of a scholastic methodological approach, it hardly seems academically appropriate to label presumptively anything as “poor quality,” “inadequate,” or “of an inferior caliber” simply because of its scholastic ties.

John Owen belongs to a long exegetical tradition which reaches back to medieval times, yet is strongly influenced by two factors, the theological orientation of the Reformers and the methodological changes brought about by the rise of humanism in the previous two centuries. His exegesis shows continuity with the methodology of medieval

scholastics; with the style, presuppositions, and theology of the Reformers; and with the academic and intellectual developments arising from Renaissance humanism.

### 2.3 Owen's Exegesis and the Academic Quality Critique

The basis of this critique appears to be twofold, (1) that the post-Reformation orthodox exegetes failed to use the techniques developed by humanists in previous centuries, and (2) that they embraced theological presuppositions about the nature and purpose of Scripture which, *de facto*, surrendered their exegetical freedom to the dictates of Church authority – in the case of the orthodox, a restrictive authority expressed by their creeds, confessions, and dogmatic theology. The first part of this criticism has been shown over and over again not to apply to Owen's interpretive methodology; he was a master of the techniques advocated by the humanists, and except when he opposed the underlying assumptions of aspects of the developing text critical theory when he felt they were impinging upon the divine authority of the Bible, Owen openly promoted the thorough application of these skills. On the technical side, Owen's exegesis certainly qualifies as a "scientific" one, especially when evaluated by his own contemporary standards.

The second part of this critique assumes that, given the presuppositions by which the post-Reformation orthodox operated, it was impossible to produce a truly "scientific" or academically valuable exegetical work, as had the Reformers a century earlier. As noted in Chapter I, the notion that the Reformers themselves operated with a "scientific" or "modern" hermeneutic has itself been challenged. And it is clear from this study that Owen functioned within a presuppositional climate which appears very "unscientific" to modern exegetes and scholars.

While the spiritual condition of the interpreter is occasionally addressed in modern hermeneutical manuals, Owen, like most other seventeenth-century exegetes, taught that

a godly spiritual state in the interpreter is a necessary requirement for an accurate grasp of the biblical message, and the discussion of the exegetical task generally begins with a call for Christ-like godliness and holiness – a rather “unscientific” prerequisite to modern ears. The assumption that the divine mind operated in and through the human authors of Scripture to produce a coherent, unified message justified the post-Reformation insistence upon the analogies of faith and Scripture – again, an assumption which appears to undercut the modern belief that meaning lies with the *Sitz-im-Leben* of the pericope, not ultimately in the pericope’s connection to the broader lines of the entire Bible. The same conflict is found in the orthodox expectation that the text’s intended message is directed to the church in all ages, in contrast to the modern belief that the contemporary church hears only a secondary message derived from the true meaning planned by the human author and received by his original audience. Finally, the insistence on following the literal sense of the text is radically different for the orthodox than for the modern interpreter. The “literal sense” to the orthodox meant the sense intended by the divine author, and could therefore encompass much more than the simple grammatical sense, which is the sense explored by modern exegetes. In all these ways, the interpretive assumptions of John Owen correspond to those of his orthodox contemporaries and thus are “unscientific,” or “precritical,” when judged by modern standards.

It remains to be seen, however, if evaluating the usefulness and quality of the seventeenth-century biblical interpretations is best served by using modern standards as the measuring stick. One can certainly debate the value of the assumptions with which Owen and his contemporaries approached the text – assumptions which preceded the development of the modern higher critical method, hence the term “precritical” – but to denounce as “unscientific” and/or “academically inferior” every biblical interpretation which shares those precritical presuppositions seems grossly unwarranted.

### 3. Conclusion

The exegetical work of the seventeenth-century Puritan John Owen so completely defies the traditional assessment of the quality of biblical studies of this era as to call into question the validity of the conventional scholarship on this issue. Certainly, the sweeping criticisms directed against orthodox exegetes do not apply, as they have been made, to Owen. And, while he was certainly willing to draw interpretive conclusions which differed from his orthodox brethren, methodologically Owen's exegetical strategy does not seem to have been anything other than typical of his era. The exegetical method he promoted and employed demonstrates his commitment to what we now call precritical hermeneutical presuppositions, as well as his acceptance and use of techniques influenced by both scholasticism and humanism. In his theoretical writings and throughout his exposition of the scriptural text, the picture emerges of a theologian and biblical commentator who was shaped by, and deeply tied to, (1) precritical exegetical assumptions about the biblical text, (2) scholastic techniques which stretch back to medieval centuries, and (3) the humanistic advances of the Reformation and post-Reformation eras. Consequently, this study suggests that a reassessment of the character of the biblical interpretation of the post-Reformation period is warranted, especially given the continuity between Owen's work and the interpretive models identified as belonging to precritical exegesis. This reading of Owen, in turn, points toward the need for a broader reassessment of the exegetical efforts of Reformed and Puritan biblical interpreters in the seventeenth century.

## Appendix

### Defense Propositions

1. The Reformers' emphasis on Scripture's literal sense was important, not because it ushered in the age of modern critical theory, but because it grounded theological authority in the literal sense of the divinely authored Bible.
2. The literal sense of Scripture had been sought in medieval times, but it was not invested with the same authority that the Reformers' placed upon it. Thus, the major change in "exegesis" during the Reformation was not an exegetical change at all, but a theological and authoritative one.
3. The transition to modern critical methodology involved, not the development of new exegetical techniques, but the use of those techniques to different ends; exegetical tools which hitherto had played a minor or subservient part in exegesis now took on a more prominent role (e.g., text criticism, occasion, style), while those most helpful to the precritical exegete were now rejected or ignored (e.g., scope, analogies of faith and Scripture).
4. The traditional criticism leveled against seventeenth-century biblical interpretation bears little resemblance to the actual texts, particularly in the implication that the exegesis is academically inferior to that which preceded and followed it.
5. In his debate with Brian Walton, Owen primarily opposed was the emerging hermeneutical principle which allowed the emendation of the Hebrew text based solely upon the witness of ancient versions, even in the complete absence of any supporting Hebrew manuscript.
6. Failure to grasp the intricacies of the theological environment during the English Civil War and the continental Thirty Year's War will inevitably lead to a gross distortion of the motives and concerns of the participants, as well as the causes and resolutions of the conflicts themselves.
7. While his theory of hermeneutics continues to have a powerful influence today, Friedrich Schleiermacher's actual method of interpreting texts is largely unknown to modern exegetes.
8. The dominant and persistent use of the analogies of faith and Scripture, and other prominent characteristics of precritical exegesis, highlights the depth of continuity which existed in exegetical methodology throughout the late medieval, Reformation and post-Reformation eras.
9. Owen derides the Socinian John Biddle's "desire for novelty," insisting that his pursuit of the new and original simply duplicates the errors and heresies of the past. Owen's apprehension concerning the desire to be innovative is particularly apropos in today's theological climate.
10. As an exegetical technique, the analogy of faith did not dictate any interpretation nor force a particular meaning on any one text; rather, it provided boundaries and limits on the range of interpretations an exegete could legitimately consider.
11. The Protestant orthodox maintained that a person could comprehend the words of Scripture, yet, due to an ungodly spiritual state, fail to understand "the mind of God" contained therein.

12. In the ecclesiastical debates in the seventeenth century, a distinction was made between the scriptural use of "schism" – identified as a destructive rupture *within* an individual congregation – and "separation" – a disunion *between* congregations.
13. Though agreeing on the major aspects of the doctrine of perseverance, Augustine's concern for holiness and the evils of pride led him to doubt a sustained assurance of salvation, while Owen specifically tied perseverance to a subjective, believer-oriented assurance of salvation.
14. Melito's *Peri Pascha* details the structure of salvation as prefigured in the redemption of Israel from Egypt, and proves that a highly mature theory of typology existed in the early patristic age.
15. Orthodox theologians explicitly stated the relation between Scripture and reason, uniformly asserting Scripture as the *principium cognoscendi theologiae* and reason as operating in a supportive, subservient role. Faith is not founded upon the rational deductions extracted from the scriptural text, but upon the text itself.

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