

Title: All Subjects of the Kingdom of Christ: John Owen's Conceptions of Christian Unity and Schism

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## ABSTRACT

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

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

Accordingly, the dissertation surveys Owen's ecclesiastical life and works against the historical background of ecclesiology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, recognizing that ecclesiology was one of Owen's main theological concerns throughout his life, and that ecclesiology in general and schism and unity in particular were significantly developed by him in debate. The general tenets of Owen's ecclesiology are examined in his two definitive ecclesiological works: *An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order, and Communion of Evangelical Churches* and *The True Nature of a Gospel Church*. Examination of Owen's *Of Schism* and his controversy with Daniel Cawdrey, a prominent English Presbyterian, shows more precisely what the real issues were between Congregationalists and Presbyterians with regard to the unity of the church. Owen's criticism of *Fiat Lux*, a Roman Catholic work written by John Vincent Canes, reveals that the problem of authority is fundamental to the understanding of unity and schism: for Owen, Scripture is the final judge in all religious matters not only in itself but also in relation to us. In Owen's apologies against two eminent Conformists, Samuel Park and Edward Stillingfleet, the question of "unity how?" is as important as that of "unity in what?" Owen argues that Nonconformity is not schism but the true way to Christian unity whereas imposition of conformity is a false way.