The

COMPLETE WORKS *of* JOHN OWEN

The Christian Life • Volume 18

Sermons and Tracts from the Civil Wars (1646–1649)

INTRODUCED & EDITED BY

Martyn C. Cowan

The Complete Works of John Owen

The Complete Works of John Owen

The Trinity

Vol. 1 *Communion with God*
Vol. 2 *The Trinity Defended: Part 1*
Vol. 3 *The Trinity Defended: Part 2*
Vol. 4 *The Person of Christ*
Vol. 5 *The Holy Spirit—His Person and Work: Part 1*
Vol. 6 *The Holy Spirit—His Person and Work: Part 2*
Vol. 7 *The Holy Spirit—The Helper*
Vol. 8 *The Holy Spirit—The Comforter*

The Gospel

Vol. 9 *The Death of Christ*
Vol. 10 *Sovereign Grace and Justice*
Vol. 11 *Justification by Faith Alone*
Vol. 12 *The Saints' Perseverance: Part 1*
Vol. 13 *The Saints' Perseverance: Part 2*
Vol. 14 *Apostasy from the Gospel*

The Christian Life

Vol. 15 *Sin and Temptation*
Vol. 16 *An Exposition of Psalm 130*
Vol. 17 *Heavenly-Mindedness*
Vol. 18 *Sermons and Tracts from the Civil Wars (1646–1649)*
Vol. 19 *Sermons from the Commonwealth and Protectorate (1650–1659)*
Vol. 20 *Sermons from the Early Restoration Years (1669–1675)*
Vol. 21 *Sermons from the Later Restoration Years (1676–1682)*
Vol. 22 *Miscellaneous Sermons and Lectures*

The Church

Vol. 23 *The Nature of the Church: Part 1*
Vol. 24 *The Nature of the Church: Part 2*
Vol. 25 *The Church Defended: Part 1*
Vol. 26 *The Church Defended: Part 2*
Vol. 27 *The Church's Worship*
Vol. 28 *The Church, the Scriptures, and the Sacraments*

Hebrews

Vol. 29 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 1, Introduction to Hebrews*
Vol. 30 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 2, Christ's Priesthood and the Sabbath*
Vol. 31 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 3, Jesus the Messiah*
Vol. 32 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 4, Hebrews 1–2*
Vol. 33 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 5, Hebrews 3–4*
Vol. 34 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 6, Hebrews 5–6*
Vol. 35 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 7, Hebrews 7–8*
Vol. 36 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 8, Hebrews 9–10*
Vol. 37 *An Exposition of Hebrews: Part 9, Hebrews 11–13*

Latin Works

Vol. 38 *The Study of True Theology*

Shorter Works

Vol. 39 *The Shorter Works of John Owen*

Indexes

Vol. 40 *Indexes*

The Complete Works of John Owen

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

VOLUME 18

Sermons and Tracts from the Civil Wars (1646–1649)

John Owen

INTRODUCED AND EDITED BY
Martyn C. Cowan

GENERAL EDITORS
Lee Gatiss and Shawn D. Wright

CROSSWAY®
WHEATON, ILLINOIS

Sermons and Tracts from the Civil Wars (1646–1649)

Published by Crossway
1300 Crescent Street
Wheaton, Illinois 60187

Cover design: Jordan Singer

Cover image: Marble Paper Artist: Vanessa Reynoso, Marbled Paper Studio

First printing 2025

Printed in China

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-4335-6047-7
ePub ISBN: 978-1-4335-8609-5
PDF ISBN: 978-1-4335-8607-1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Owen, John, 1616–1683 author. | Cowan, Martyn C., editor.
Title: Sermons and tracts from the Civil Wars (1646–1649) / John Owen ; introduced and edited by Martyn C. Cowan ; general editors, Lee Gatiss and Shawn D. Wright.
Description: Wheaton, Illinois : Crossway, [2024] | Series: The complete works of John Owen ; volume 18 | Includes bibliographical references and index.
Identifiers: LCCN 2024007310 (print) | LCCN 2024007311 (ebook) | ISBN 9781433560477 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781433586071 (pdf) | ISBN 9781433586095 (epub)
Subjects: LCSH: Sermons, English—17th century.
Classification: LCC BX5201 .O795 2024 (print) | LCC BX5201 (ebook) | DDC 252/.059—dc23/eng/20240812
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024007310
LC ebook record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2024007311

Crossway is a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

RRD 34 33 32 31 30 29 28 27 26 25
15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Volume 18
Contents

Works Preface *vii*
Editor's Introduction *1*
Outlines *91*

A Vision of Unchangeable Free Mercy, in Sending the Means of Grace to Undeserved Sinners *103*
Appended Tracts:
A Short Defensative about Church Government, Toleration and Petitions about These Things *169*
A Country Essay for the Practice of Church Government There *185*

Ebenezer: A Memorial for the Deliverance of Essex, County, and Committee *217*

A Sermon Preached to the Honorable House of Commons, in Parliament Assembled: On January 31 *293*
Appended Tract:
Of Toleration: And the Duty of the Magistrate, about Religion *339*

Οὐρανῶν Οὐρανία: The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth *411*

Human Power Defeated *463*

General Index *489*
Scripture Index *502*

Works Preface

JOHN OWEN (1616–1683) is one of the most significant, influential, and prolific theologians that England has ever produced. His work is of such a high caliber that it is no surprise to find it still in demand more than four centuries after his birth. As a son of the Church of England, a Puritan preacher, a statesman, a Reformed theologian and Bible commentator, and later a prominent Nonconformist and advocate of toleration, he is widely read and appreciated by Christians of different types all over the globe, not only for the profundity of his thinking but also for the depth of his spiritual insight.

Owen was born in the year that William Shakespeare died, and in terms of his public influence, he was a rising star in the 1640s and at the height of his power in the 1650s. As chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, dean of Christ Church, and vice-chancellor of Oxford University, he wielded a substantial degree of power and influence within the short-lived English republic. Yet he eventually found himself on the losing side of the epic struggles of the seventeenth century and was ousted from his position of national preeminence. The Act of Uniformity in 1662 effectively barred him from any role in the established church, yet it was in the wilderness of those turbulent post-Restoration years that he wrote many of his most momentous contributions to the world of theological literature, despite being burdened by opposition, persecution, family tragedies, and illness.

There was an abortive endeavor to publish a uniform edition of Owen's works in the early eighteenth century, but this progressed no further than a single folio volume in 1721. A century later (1826), Thomas Russell met with much more success when he produced a collection in twenty-one volumes. The appetite for Owen only grew; more than three hundred people had subscribed to the 1721 and 1826 editions of his works, but almost three thousand subscribed to the twenty-four-volume set produced by William H. Goold

from 1850 onward. That collection, with Goold's learned introductions and notes, became the standard edition. It was given a new lease on life when the Banner of Truth Trust reprinted it several times beginning in 1965, though without some of Owen's Latin works, which had appeared in Goold's edition, or his massive Hebrews commentary, which Banner did eventually reprint in 1991. Goold corrected various errors in the original seventeenth- and eighteenth-century publications, some of which Owen himself had complained of, as well as certain grammatical errors. He thoroughly revised the punctuation, numeration of points, and Scripture references in Owen and presented him in a way acceptable to nineteenth-century readers without taking liberties with the text.

Since the mid-nineteenth century, and especially since the reprinting of Goold's edition in the mid-twentieth century, there has been a great flowering of interest in seventeenth-century Puritanism and Reformed theology. The recent profusion of scholarship in this area has resulted in a huge increase of attention given to Owen and his contribution to these movements. The time has therefore come to attempt another presentation of Owen's body of work for a new century. This new edition is more than a reprint of earlier collections of Owen's writings. As useful as those have been to us and many others, they fail to meet the needs of modern readers who are often familiar with neither the theological context nor the syntax and rhetorical style of seventeenth-century English divinity.

For that reason, we have returned again to the original editions of Owen's texts to ensure the accuracy of their presentation here but have conformed the spelling to modern American standards, modernized older verb endings, reduced the use of italics where they do not clarify meaning, updated some hyphenation forms, modernized capitalization both for select terms in the text and for titles of Owen's works, refreshed the typesetting, set lengthy quotations in block format, and both checked and added Scripture references in a consistent format where necessary. Owen's quotations of others, however, including the various editions of the Bible he used or translated, are kept as they appear in his original. His marginal notes and footnotes have been clearly marked in footnotes as his (with "—Owen" appearing at the end of his content) to distinguish them from editorial comments. Foreign languages such as Greek, Hebrew, and Latin (which Owen knew and used extensively) have been translated into modern English, with the original languages retained in footnotes for scholarly reference (also followed by "—Owen"). If Goold omitted parts of the original text in his edition, we have restored them to their rightful place. Additionally, we have attempted to regularize the numbering

system Owen employed, which was often imprecise and inconsistent; our order is 1, (1), [1], {1}, and 1st. We have also included various features to aid readers' comprehension of Owen's writings, including extensive introductions and outlines by established scholars in the field today, new paragraph breaks marked by a pilcrow (¶), chapter titles and appropriate headings (either entirely new or adapted from Goold), and explanatory footnotes that define archaic or obscure words and point out scriptural and other allusions in the text. When a contents page was not included in the original publication, we have provided one. On the rare occasions when we have added words to the text for readability, we have clearly marked them using square brackets. Having a team of experts involved, along with the benefit of modern online database technology, has also enabled us to make the prodigious effort to identify sources and citations in Owen that Russell and Goold deliberately avoided or were unable to locate for their editions.

Owen did not use only one English translation of the Bible. At various times, he employed the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, or the Authorized Version (KJV), as well as his own paraphrases or translations from the original languages. We have not sought to harmonize his biblical quotations to any single version. Similarly, we have left his Hebrew and Greek quotations exactly as he recorded them, including the unpointed Hebrew text. When it appears that he has misspelled the Hebrew or Greek, we have acknowledged that in a footnote with reference to either *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* or *Novum Testamentum Graece*.

This new edition presents fresh translations of Owen's works that were originally published in Latin, such as his *Θεολογούμενα Παντοδαπά* (1661) and *A Dissertation on Divine Justice* (which Goold published in an amended eighteenth-century translation). It also includes certain shorter works that have never before been collected in one place, such as Owen's prefaces to other people's works and many of his letters, with an extensive index to the whole set.

Our hope and prayer in presenting this new edition of John Owen's complete works is that it will equip and enable new generations of readers to appreciate the spiritual insights he accumulated over the course of his remarkable life. Those with a merely historical interest will find here a testimony to the exceptional labors of one extraordinary figure from a tumultuous age, in a modern and usable critical edition. Those who seek to learn from Owen about the God he worshiped and served will, we trust, find even greater riches in his doctrine of salvation, his passion for evangelism and missions, his Christ-centered vision of all reality, his realistic pursuit of holiness, his belief that theology matters, his concern for right worship and religious freedom,

and his careful exegetical engagement with the text of God's word. We echo the words of the apostle Paul that Owen inscribed on the title page of his book *Χριστολογία* (1679), "I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung that I may win Christ" (Phil. 3:8).

Lee Gatiss
CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND

Shawn D. Wright
LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, UNITED STATES

Editor's Introduction

Martyn C. Cowan

OWEN THE PREACHER

John Owen had the high view of preaching that was typical of the later English Puritans, and his sermon style involved the threefold method of doctrine, reason, and use.[1] We generally find him "opening" the text by carefully exegeting its context, grammar, and vocabulary. He then "divides" the text, a process whereby he identifies key words and phrases and from which he derives or "raises" the doctrine(s) to be expounded. Owen then concisely states a doctrinal proposition in what he often terms an "observation" before establishing it by recourse to multiple scriptural proof texts and supporting argumentative heads he terms "reasons." In this part of his exposition, Owen frequently resolves possible objections to the doctrine by way of confirmation. The third and final element of this expository method involves him applying the doctrine under consideration according to certain observations of its use(s). This can produce highly complex sermons with multiple points and subpoints.

Even in his day, Owen's methodology was ridiculed by some detractors. For example, Samuel Parker scathingly criticized the second sermon in this volume, originally published in 1648 as *Ebenezer.* The theme of the sermon was on a particular type of song from the book of Psalms, and Owen managed to raise over twenty doctrinal observations from the text and applied them in some twenty-five different uses. Parker mocked Owen's ability "to raise Edification out of a pair of Bagpipes."[2] The eighteenth-century Dissenter

1 Mary Morrissey, "Scripture, Style and Persuasion in Seventeenth-Century English Theories of Preaching," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53, no. 4 (2000): 687, 693.

2 Samuel Parker, *A Defence and Continuation of the Ecclesiastical Politie* [. . .] (London, 1671), 604.

Robert Robinson also condemned the method employed in that sermon as "abstruse" since Owen resorted to "almost one hundred and fifty observations, uses, reasons, &c."[3] Despite such criticisms, the formal structure of Owen's sermons provided both him and his hearers a shared set of expectations. Even those who differed from him on many matters recognized the power of his pulpit ministry. For example, Anthony Wood recalled the impact of Owen's preaching on many of his hearers:

> He had a very graceful behaviour in the Pulpit, an eloquent Elocution, a winning and insinuating deportment, and could by the persuasion of his oratory, in conjunction with some other outward advantages, move and wind the affections of his admiring Auditory almost as he pleased.[4]

Owen provided a sophisticated rationale of his underlying theology of preaching in *Πνευματολογια: Or, A Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* (1674) and called on all preachers to familiarize themselves with how the Holy Spirit made the preaching of the word of God "instrumental for the effecting of this new birth and life."[5] This was, of course, something that he himself had experienced when sermon gadding in London in 1642. On one such occasion, he received assurance of salvation through the "plain familiar discourse" of an otherwise unknown country preacher.[6] He articulated his high view of preaching in a sermon preached at an ordination service in September 1682: "And I will give you pastors according to my heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer. 3:15). He contended that the "first duty" of a pastor was to feed the flock by means of diligent preaching. Pastors were to preach with a powerful "unction" that came from prayerful dependence on the Spirit of God.[7] It was essential that the preacher placed himself under the authority of God's word: "I think, truly, that no man preaches that sermon well to others that doth not first preach it to his own heart"; and "it is an easier thing to bring our heads to preach than our hearts to preach."[8] True

3 Robert Robinson, *An Essay on the Composition of a Sermon: Translated from the Original French of the Revd. John Claude*, vol. 2 (London: Scollick, 1788), 458.

4 Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* [. . .], vol. 2 (London, 1692), 741.

5 John Owen, *Πνευματολογια: Or, a Discourse concerning the Holy Spirit* (London, 1674), 177, 188, 189.

6 John Asty, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," in *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen* [. . .], ed. John Asty (London: John Clark, 1721), 5.

7 John Owen, *Thirteen Sermons Preached on Various Occasions. By the Reverend and Learned John Owen, D.D. Of the Last Age. Never Before Printed* (London, 1756), 106.

8 Owen, *Thirteen Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*, 104.

preaching of the gospel would, he believed, be "accompanied by a powerful persuasive efficacy."[9]

All this is, in many ways, unsurprising to those who have some familiarity with Owen. However, any careful reader of Owen's sermons will quickly come to see that much of his preaching is best described as "prophetic" because, adopting the posture of a prophet, he explains how the unique and undeserved blessings that his hearers have experienced place on them the obligation to respond in faith and obedience, individually, corporately, and nationally.[10] Often there is lamentation because such a response is not forthcoming, and this led him to issue serious warnings of judgment to come. Many of the sermons in these volumes sought to bring a prophetic word to bear on contemporary religiopolitical events and consequently employ oblique discourse in which commentary on contemporary political events is couched in the language of the stories, tropes, and metaphors of the Bible.[11] This allowed for the "oblique discourse" in which criticism of contemporary political events was voiced by couching it in scriptural metaphor. As Kevin Killeen explains, in the early modern sermon, "the biblical idiom was its own and sufficient political comment: a measured, subtle, and precise medium of criticism and a vocabulary of political exordium."[12]

The corpus of Owen's sermonic material is diverse. It includes a number of stand-alone public sermons that Owen prepared for publication, usually in response to an invitation to publish. Most of the sermon-genre works that Owen prepared for the press were delivered between 1646 and 1659, with one notable exception being *An Humble Testimony* (1681). However, there is also extensive sermonic material that emerged in other forms. Many of the works contained in the other volumes in this project emerged from Owen's pulpit ministry. From the early days of his ministry in Essex, he was adapting his preaching for publication in the form of tracts: for example, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* (1644) was "resolved from the ordinary pulpit

9 Henk Van den Belt, "*Vocatio* as Regeneration: John Owen's Concept of Effectual Calling," in *John Owen: Between Orthodoxy and Modernity*, ed. Willem van Vlastuin and Kelly M. Kapic (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 153.

10 Martyn C. Cowan, *John Owen and the Civil War Apocalypse: Preaching, Prophecy, and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2017).

11 Kevin Killeen, "Chastising with Scorpions: Reading the Old Testament in Early Modern England," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2010): 493.

12 Kevin Killeen, "Veiled Speech: Preaching, Politics and Scriptural Typology," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, ed. Peter McCullough, Hugh Adlington, and Emma Rhatigan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 387–88.

method into its own principles."[13] This was a habit that he would continue throughout his life. For example, well-known works such as *Communion with God* (1657) and *Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656) found their origin in Owen's pulpit ministry in Oxford. The former took a number of years, and some persuasion from others, to find its way into print. The latter came about because Owen's preaching on mortification had enjoyed "some comfortable success," and he published the material "with such additions and alterations as I should judge necessary."[14] In it, Gribben has detected "the strategies of the pulpit" in Owen's "pithy soundbites."[15] His *Practical Exposition of the 130th Psalm* (1669) has obvious links to his preaching from the later part of the decade, but so too does his monumental commentary on Hebrews since during its composition Owen was engaged in some extended sermon series on the book. Even at the end of his life, we see numerous connections between his sermons on death from the autumn of 1680 and his preface to *Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ* (1684).[16] Consequently, it is important to recognize that the genesis of much of Owen's work lies in a pastoral context in which he was engaged in the time-consuming labor of preaching.

Many of Owen's sermons have come down to us from notes taken by auditors.[17] From the mid-1660s, Sir John Hartopp (ca. 1637–1722) took shorthand notes that he later wrote out in notebooks, producing a record that Gribben describes as often being "detailed and compelling."[18] The extant corpus of sermons contains well over one hundred sermon texts.[19] Many of the posthumously published sermons appeared in the 1721 collection edited by the Independent minister John Asty (1675–1730).[20] These were augmented by

13 John Owen, *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* [. . .] (London, 1644), sig. A2r; Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850–1855), 13:3.

14 John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sinne in Believers* (London, 1656), sig. A3r; Owen, *Works*, 6:3.

15 Crawford Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism: Experiences of Defeat* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 165.

16 Kelly MacPhail, " 'This Peculiar Constitution of Our Nature': John Owen's Perception of Death, Ontology, and the *Isangeloi*," *The Seventeenth Century* 36, no. 2 (2021): 271–86.

17 John Owen, *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen, D.D.* (London, 1721), preface.

18 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 239.

19 The fullest record has been cataloged by Mark Burden as "John Owen, Learned Puritan" on the University of Oxford Centre for Early Modern Studies website, accessed October 18, 2023, https://earlymodern.web.ox.ac.uk/john-owen-learned-puritan.

20 The *Complete Collection of the Sermons* was printed for the London bookseller John Clark, one of "the most important sermon publishers in the early eighteenth century." See Jennifer Farooq, *Preaching in Eighteenth-Century London* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2013), 82. John Asty was the son of Robert, an associate of Owen. Clark was one of "the principal London booksellers of

Thirteen Sermons Preached on Various Occasions (1756).[21] The Scottish Presbyterian minister William Goold (1815–1897) added further unpublished sermons to his nineteenth-century edition of Owen's works (1850–1855).

This volume covers Owen's preaching to the Long Parliament and its Rump—including his most (in)famous sermon delivered the day after the regicide—as well as a thanksgiving sermon held in London on the occasion of the defeat of the Levellers. Two of these sermons were first published with appended tracts dealing with matters pertaining to the debates about the nature of the postwar church settlement, and these are also included. By the end of the time frame covered in this volume, Owen's role as a spokesman for the new revolutionary regime is evident, something confirmed by his appointment as preacher to the new executive arm of government, the Council of State. He also delivered a further parliamentary sermon in June 1649, but this is not extant.[22] What is included in this volume is, of course, only a very limited selection of Owen's preaching between 1646 and 1649, and one that is restricted to sermons delivered on the national stage. During this time, Owen was also engaged in parish ministry in rural Essex. In the parish of Coggeshall, Owen was preaching to, perhaps, some two thousand people at public worship.[23]

Some of these sermons have an obvious timeless quality and edifying character to them. Others are very much of a historical moment that has now passed. The utility of the former is clear, and the reader may derive immediate benefit from many of the sermons, especially those from his ministry to dissenting congregations seeking to be faithful in hard and challenging days. The latter might have less obvious relevance, but actually, as we strain to hear Owen preach, in a way so unfamiliar to the modern ear, these sermons have much to teach the contemporary church.

---

works by Presbyterians and Congregationalists" at that time. See Isabel Rivers, *Vanity Fair and the Celestial City: Dissenting, Methodist, and Evangelical Literary Culture in England, 1720–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 10.

21 *Thirteen Sermons Preached on Various Occasions* was printed for James Buckland (1710–1790) at "The Buck," 57 Paternoster Row, in partnership with the particularly talkative bookseller Edward Dilly (1732–1779), who had premises at the Rose and Crown in the Poultry. See *Literary Anecdotes of the Eighteenth Century: Comprizing Biographical Memoirs of William Boywer, Printer, FSA, and Many of His Learned Friends*, vol. 3, ed. John Nichols (London, 1812), 191. In the second half of the eighteenth century, the Dilly brothers sold "a very large number of religious works by seventeenth-century puritans" such as Baxter, Bunyan, Flavel, Owen, and Sibbes. See Rivers, *Vanity Fair and the Celestial City*, 24.

22 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 115.

23 Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 40.

Three lessons stand out. First, the corporate application of Owen's preaching markedly contrasts the individualism of much modern preaching. These sermons remind us of how a preacher may address his auditors, not simply as members of the congregation but also as citizens of the nation. Second, there is an ever-present providentialism in the sermons. Undoubtedly, for many seventeenth-century preachers, there was, it appears, an overconfidence in the ability to interpret and apply the lessons of providence. That said, if contemporary preaching makes no careful, humble, and judicious attempt to interpret providence, then the people of God will be impoverished. There are still national and congregational, familial and individual blessings that ought to be, in Owen's language, improved, and there are similar types of warnings whose call should be heeded. Finally, in Owen's sermons we see what a pervasive influence one's eschatology can exercise over every aspect of thought and practice. It is a mistake to think that eschatology may be treated as a discrete isolated area of doctrine of, perhaps, only secondary importance. In Owen, we see how a preacher may be enthused and emboldened by his end-times convictions and consequently persevere even in the face of opposition and government-sponsored hostility. In light of this, we should endeavor to have a proper eschatological perspective permeate the preaching ministry of the church. If our preaching was less individualistic, recovered the application of providence, and declared more of the end-times realities of the gospel, then it would surely speak with greater prophetic clarity in our own days.

A VISION OF UNCHANGEABLE FREE MERCY

The Context of Owen's First Parliamentary Fast Sermon

As the newly appointed "minister of the gospel" at Coggeshall, Essex, Owen was invited to preach before the Long Parliament at its monthly fast on Wednesday, April 29, 1646. The other preacher chosen for that day was to be the London Presbyterian minister James Nalton (1600–1662). Owen had been nominated by the member of Parliament for Tamworth, Sir Peter Wentworth (1593–1675), and the member of Parliament for Hythe, the soldier Thomas Westrowe (1616–1653).[24] Wentworth was "keenly interested in religious matters" and was regarded as an Erastian because of his commitment to the state's role in controlling and regulating the church.[25] He was active in

24 John F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament: Puritanism During the English Civil Wars, 1640–1648* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 62.

25 *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1640–1660*, ed. Stephen K. Roberts, 9 vols. (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2023), s.v. "Wentworth, Sir Peter (1593–1675)."

nominating preachers and, as such, may not necessarily have known Owen personally.[26] The other nominator, Westrowe, had, like Owen, been a student at Queen's College, Oxford, and Gribben suggests that in bringing the nomination "he may have been doing his old college friend a special favor."[27] Westrowe was a "middle group" politician and a religious Independent who favored a "broadly irenic" tolerationist church settlement and had been part of a parliamentary committee tasked with considering the remonstrance of the "Dissenting Brethren."[28]

The venue for the sermon was St Margaret's Church, Westminster, where the Commons usually held its fast. It played host to more than two hundred fifty parliamentary sermons in the period of 1640–1653 and consequently witnessed some of the most important religiopolitical events of the day. This setting aside of the last Wednesday of every month for "public humiliation" began as England was edging closer to war in February 1642 and lasted until February 1649. Members of Parliament were obliged to attend and could face a ten-shilling fine if they were absent.[29] As a preaching venue, St Margaret's was preferred over Westminster Abbey because the remodeling that had taken place in the late fifteenth century provided a large, unified nave and

---

Erastianism is the idea, often associated with the thought of Thomas Erastus (1524–1583), that ecclesiastical power is subordinate to the state and that the state may exercise jurisdiction over the church.

26 Sarah Barber, "Wentworth, Sir Peter (1592–1675), Politician," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), accessed October 18, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/29052. Como describes him as one of the "more extreme" members of Parliament. See David R. Como, *Radical Parliamentarians and the English Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 133. The following year, 1647, Wentworth would be numbered among the minority of members who were prepared to countenance a political settlement that did not include the king. In the autumn of 1648, he supported that Army Remonstrance, but he retired to the country in the days leading up to the Regicide.

27 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 73. See also David Underdown, *Pride's Purge: Politics in the Puritan Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1971), 126, 219, 291; Blair Worden, *The Rump Parliament, 1648–1653* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 277.

28 *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Westrowe, Thomas (1616–53)."

29 For the background to these fasts, see H. R. Trevor-Roper, "The Fast Sermons of the Long Parliament," in *The Crisis of the Seventeenth Century: Religion, the Reformation, and Social Change*, ed. H. R. Trevor-Roper (London: Macmillan, 1967), 294–344; Christopher Durston, "'For the Better Humiliation of the People': Public Days of Fasting and Thanksgiving during the English Revolution," *Seventeenth Century* 7, no. 2 (1992): 129–49; Tom Webster, "Preaching and Parliament, 1640–1659," in McCullough, Adlington, Rhatigan, *Oxford Handbook of the Early Modern Sermon*, 404–20; Ann Hughes, "Preachers and Hearers in Revolutionary London: Contextualising Parliamentary Fast Sermons," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 24 (2014): 57–77; Ann Hughes, "Preaching the 'Long Reformation' in the English Revolution," *Reformation* 24, no. 2 (2019): 151–64.

chancel deemed more appropriate for godly preaching.[30] In terms of Owen's auditors, the makeup of the membership of the Long Parliament that heard these fast sermons was changing because of the presence of newly elected "recruiter" members of Parliament who were filling seats left vacant by deaths or by absent royalists.[31]

As members of the Commons gathered for the fast, the war that had broken out between King Charles I and his opponents was all but over after the parliamentary coalition enjoyed a string of successes in March and April. Parliament had duly appointed thanksgiving days, one earlier in the month and another for April 28 (further days of thanksgiving were also set aside for May).[32] Now, however, an increasingly intense battle would rage at Westminster about the nature of the impending post–Civil War settlement as the parliamentary cause divided into two dominant and competing factions that sought to shape the peace: "political Presbyterians" and "political Independents." These somewhat fluid groupings represented political and religious differences as well as differing attitudes regarding how the war should be concluded. Despite their names, they were often united more in what they opposed than on their positive visions for one particular form of church government. There are a number of important factors to consider in order to contextualize Owen's sermon and the tracts that accompanied the published version of it: the failure to find an accommodation over different views on church government; the resulting debates about any toleration that might be granted; the English Parliament's piecemeal establishment of a modified Presbyterian settlement; the ongoing petitioning campaigns, particularly by those in favor of a strict Presbyterian settlement; and the "tacit cooperation" that existed between Congregationalists and the parliamentary Erastians.

These various factors had led to polarizing opinions among the godly over matters of church government and liberty, so much so that this related network of issues could be described by one contemporary as "the great controversie of these times."[33] On the one hand, the Congregationalists at the Westminster Assembly (the so-called Dissenting Brethren) and the gathered churches advocated that all the godly (a term that could be defined in a broad

30 J. F. Merritt, *Westminster, 1640–60: A Royal City in a Time of Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 112.

31 David Underdown, "Party Management in the Recruiter Elections, 1645–1648," *English Historical Review* 83 (1968): 235–64.

32 Natalie Mears et al., eds., *National Prayers: Special Worship Since the Reformation*, vol. 1, *Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings in the British Isles, 1533–1688* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2013), 460–63.

33 J[asper] M[ayne], *The Difference about Church Government Ended* (London, [May 30,] 1646), 1.

or narrow way) ought to be either included in the national church or allowed the freedom to practice and worship alongside it. These Independents had managed to build quite significant support from the "political Independents" in the Commons, and they were backed by an increasingly powerful and confident army. Often associated with this grouping was a concern about authoritarian clergy wielding too much control, thereby leaving the church free from appropriate state influence. On the other hand, there were those who remained insistent on a thoroughgoing Presbyterian reformation, on the basis of the Solemn League and Covenant (the alliance between the English Parliament and the Scottish Covenanters sealed in 1643). Often associated with this was anxiety about religious heterodoxy and a conviction that deviant views and practices could be countered only by an effective and compulsory national Presbyterian church. This position was that of many of the London Presbyterian ministers, influential activists within the City of London government, the majority within the Westminster Assembly, the "political Presbyterians" in Parliament, and the Scottish Covenanter regime. Therefore, in this controversy, zeal for orthodoxy "jostled for position" with zeal for liberty of conscience for the godly: "Whilst many feared heresy, others feared a new persecution of the godly."[34]

In this context in which the godly were divided, an Accommodation Order had been pushed through the Commons by the Independents in September 1644, directing a parliamentary committee

> to take into Consideration the Differences in Opinion of the Members of the Assembly [of Divines] in point of Church-Government, and to endeavour an Union, if it be possible; and, in case that cannot be done, to endeavour the finding out some way, How far tender Consciences, who cannot in all Things submit to the common Rule which shall be established, may be borne with according to the Word, and as may stand with the publick Peace.[35]

The goal of this committee had been to find a means whereby the godly and orthodox could be comprehended within Parliament's national Presbyterian church. The committee met for two sessions: the autumn of 1644 and the

34 John Coffey, "A Ticklish Business: Defining Heresy and Orthodoxy in the Puritan Revolution," in *Heresy, Literature and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, ed. David Loewenstein and John Marshall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 122.

35 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 13 vols. (London: HMSO, 1802–1803), 4:314. See Youngkwon Chung, "Parliament and the Committee for Accommodation, 1644–46," *Parliamentary History* 30, no. 3 (2011): 289–308.

winter of 1645–1646.[36] The idea that such a compromise would be written into the postwar church settlement horrified many of the high Presbyterians.[37] The attempts to broker such an accommodation ended at an impasse in the month before Owen delivered this sermon. Owen is very likely referring to this when he speaks about the failure of accommodation between "dissenting parties about church government."

A range of voices was now calling for some kind of toleration, and Owen himself was well aware that "much discourse about toleration has been of late days among men." By now, gathered and separatist churches were meeting much more openly, and the sects were also growing in number and visibility. All of these groups sought some form of toleration, and the loose Independent coalition within Parliament was sympathetic to granting toleration. However, it should be recognized that there was a wide range of opinion over the nature of this toleration, and Owen pointed out that clarity in this matter was important because many "ambiguous words" had recently been spoken and written about the subject.[38]

The Congregationalists wanted to clear the ambiguity by insisting that they advocated only a limited toleration of orthodox Protestants and were committed to upholding the magistrate's role in religion. For example, in 1645 Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) made it clear that he was not calling for a universal toleration: "If any man think I am pleading for liberty of all opinions," he wrote, "I humbly desire them to remember that I only plead for the saints."[39] Preaching before the Lords in November 1645, Jeremiah Burroughes (1599–1646) said that he joined the "great outcry against the toleration of all religions."[40] In the summer of 1646, he would answer the accusations made about the content of that sermon, asserting that he

> did not preach for a universall, an unlimited toleration of all Religions, of all things, as both my selfe and others are very sinfully reported to doe . . .

36 Murray Tolmie, *Triumph of the Saints: The Separate Churches of London, 1616–1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 128; Robert Baillie, *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie 1637–1662*, ed. David Laing, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, 1841–1842), 2:326, 343.

37 Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:344.

38 John Coffey, "The Toleration Controversy during the English Revolution," in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, ed. Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 44–45; Avihu Zakai, "Religious Toleration and its Enemies: The Independent Divines and the Issue of Toleration during the English Civil War," *Albion* 21, no. 1 (1989): 1–33.

39 Thomas Goodwin, *The Great Interest of States and Kingdomes* [. . .] (London, 1645), 53.

40 Jeremiah Burroughes, *A Sermon Preached before the* [. . .] *House of Peers* (London, 1645), 45.

> For my part, as I never was, so I am now not for a toleration of all things, nay I should be loth to live in *England* if ever it should be here.[41]

Nevertheless, Congregationalists like Goodwin and Burroughes were willing to tolerate a wider diversity among the godly than what was deemed acceptable by many Presbyterians.

At the other end of the toleration spectrum were radical voices who questioned the magistrate's coercive power in matters of religion and who were calling for a much more far-reaching toleration that would extend to include the toleration of heresy and even false religions. Roger Williams (1603–1683), the tolerationist who had founded Rhode Island, published his manifesto for liberty of conscience in London in 1644. In *The Bloudy Tenent of Persecution*, he called for a broad liberty that would be extended to not only all the godly but also Roman Catholics, Muslims, and even pagans.[42] That same year, the future Leveller leader William Walwyn (d. 1681) argued that "the tyrannie over conscience that was exercised by the Bishops, is like to bee continued by the Presbyter: . . . [T]he oppressors are only changed."[43] The following year, Richard Overton (d. 1664) produced his *Arraignment of Mr. Persecution* (1645), which presented arguments for liberty of conscience and called for a similarly broad toleration. In his *Sacred Decretal* (1645), he warned that the clergy were becoming new Babylonian taskmasters threatening to enslave both Parliament and the people. In late January 1646, religious Nonconformity was defended in Walwyn's *Tolleration Justified, and Persecution Condemn'd* and Overton's *Divine Observations upon the London-Ministers Letter against Toleration*. Such appeals for a more radical form of liberty of conscience increased in the month before Owen preached this sermon: John Saltmarsh (d. 1647) produced his *Groanes for Liberty* (1646), and Overton was involved in the production of the anti-Presbyterian pamphlet *The Last Warning to all the Inhabitants of London* (1646), which declared that "no opinion is so dangerous, or heretical, as that of compulsion in things of Religion."[44]

41 Jeremiah Burroughes, *A Vindication of Mr Burroughes, against Mr Edwards His Foule Aspersions, in his Spreading Gangraena, and His Angry Antiapologia. Concluding with a Briefe Declaration What the Independents Would Have* (London, 1646), 23–24 (italics original).

42 [Roger Williams,] *The Bloudy Tenent, of Persecution, for Cause of Conscience Discussed in a Conference betweene Truth and Peace* [. . .] (London, 1644), 18; John Coffey, "Puritanism and Liberty Revisited: The Case for Toleration in the English Revolution," *Historical Journal* 41, no. 4 (1998): 965–68.

43 William Walwyn, *The Compassionate Samaritane: Unbinding the Conscience* [. . .] (London, 1644), 17.

44 [Richard Overton], *Last Warning to all the Inhabitants of London* (London, [March] 1646), 8.

On April 20, the Commons dealt with a "scandalous paper" that graphically identified Presbyterian uniformity with both Roman Catholicism and Laudian episcopacy by an illustration that showed pope, prelate, and presbyter standing together. Owen would have had some sympathies for the point being made: it seemed as if the persecuted were preparing to become persecutors.

Thus, in 1646 support for some kind of toleration was gaining pace as many feared a return to religious persecution. Those making such appeals often envisaged fundamentally different postwar ecclesiastical settlements. Congregationalists rejected unbridled religious liberty and supported a ministry maintained through tithes with Parliament exercising authority in matters of religion. Others hoped for something much more radical. For example, Overton's Mar-Priest tract *The Ordinance for Tythes Dismounted* (1645) was a fierce polemic against an educated ministry supported by the collection of tithes.[45] Nonetheless, despite these differences among the tolerationists, there appeared to be a providential mandate for such an approach: in the now victorious New Model Army, Congregationalists had served alongside Baptists, Arminians, and other sectaries, and the army's cause had prospered under such de facto toleration. Oliver Cromwell had been pressing this very point. After victory at the battle of Naseby in June 1645, he wrote to the Speaker of the House of Commons about the God-given liberty of conscience enjoyed by his troops. Again, after the surrender of Bristol to the New Model Army, in September 1645, Cromwell once again appealed to the tolerance exercised in his own ranks as an example for the nation:

> Presbyterians Independentes all had here the same spiritt of faith & prayer; the same pretence & answer, they agree here, know no names of difference; pitty it is, it should be otherwise, anywhere . . . as for being united in formes, Commonly called uniformity, every Christian will for peace take studdy and doe as far as Conscience will permitt, and from brethren in things of the minde, we looke for no Compulsion, but that of Light and reaason.[46]

Many within Parliament were concerned about such religious sentiments, so they omitted them from the published version of the report of the successful storming of Bristol.[47] However, Cromwell's postscript on liberty of conscience was circulated in an unauthorized version. Across London,

45 Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*, 360.

46 Oliver Cromwell, *The Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, ed. John Morrill, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), 1:314–15.

47 Ronald Hutton, *The Making of Oliver Cromwell* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 290.

people were "highly sensitised" to the implications of the triumph of the New Model Army.[48] The Presbyterian book collector, George Thomason (d. 1666), scribbled on his version that it had been "printed by the Independent partie and scattrd up and downe the streets Last night but expresly omitted by order of the howse."[49] For many religious or political Presbyterians, the idea of allowing for Nonconformity threatened to overturn an essential part of English Protestantism. Earlier in the decade, these Presbyterians had shown some willingness to allow a degree of toleration, but now many of them were coming to believe that there could be no true settlement if Congregationalism was allowed. This was particularly the case because of the delaying tactics and outright resistance of the Independents to a Presbyterian settlement. Such concerns were one of the factors that led to an antitoleration campaign in 1646.

This was ostensibly a crusade against tolerating the alarmingly heterodox ideas that had become widespread by the mid-1640s. What was viewed as alarming heresy had arisen for a variety of reasons: the removal of the structures of ecclesiastical discipline; the breakdown of press censorship that allowed controversial religious ideas to be promoted; the New Model Army had allowed radical ideas to ferment, and these had widespread reach through the preaching of soldiers and officers while on campaign; finally, an apocalyptic view of the mid-century crisis led some to believe that new spiritual truths would emerge after the destruction of the antichrist. In December 1645, the London Presbyterian ministers from Sion College wrote to the Assembly decrying "that great *Diana* of Independents, and all the Sectaries . . . viz. *A Toleration*." For these Presbyterians, their concern was that the lack of proper discipline and uniformity was causing the disease of heresy and schism. They believed that various sects and promoters of heresy sought "safeguard and shelter . . . under the wings of *Independency*."[50] The years in which Owen delivered his sermon and published the appended treaties witnessed a number of high-profile sermons preached against toleration: these included James Cranford's *Haereseo-machia: or, The Mischiefe Which Heresies Doe* (1646), delivered before the Lord Mayor on February 1, and Matthew Newcomen's *The Duty of Such as Would Walke Worthy of the Gospel To Endeavour Union Not Division nor Toleration* (1646), preached at St Paul's on February 8. In January, Presbyterian mobilization in London

48 Ian Gentles, *The New Model Army: Agent of Revolution* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 43.

49 Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*, 342–43.

50 *A Letter of the Ministers of the City of London, Presented the First of Jan. to the Reverend Assembly of Divines* [. . .] (London, 1645), 4, 6.

led to the city submitting an antitoleration petition to both houses of Parliament, calling for a strict church settlement "according to our most Solemne Covenant" and demanding that "no Toleration be granted."[51] There were also provincial petitions. That February, in the county where Owen's own rural parish lay, "Divers Ministers about Colchester in the County of Essex" had written to the Westminster Assembly desiring that "a blessed Reformation may be endeavoured against an intolerable Toleration."[52]

Perhaps the voice that best represents this antitoleration crusade was Thomas Edwards (d. 1647). He played an infamous role in stoking fears about the dangers of Independency, Dissent, and the sects. At the beginning of the year he published the first installment of his "heresiographical blockbuster," *Gangraena* (1646).[53] He portrayed heresy as something that needed to be cut off and cauterized like a gangrenous limb before it proved fatal. The work presented a specter of religious anarchy by cataloging 176 errors, heresies, and blasphemies; 28 pernicious practices; and 16 types of sectaries. In *Gangraena*, error was "out of control . . . found all over the place, never subject to final definition or full description."[54] For Edwards, heresies had erupted because of the delay in establishing a church settlement, and he saw only two options: sectarian anarchy or Presbyterian polity. In doing so, Edwards was seeking to discredit mainstream Congregationalists by lumping them together with the radical sects and equating toleration with religious and political anarchy. For Edwards, their campaign for liberty of conscience for themselves would, inevitably, offer protection for heretical voices. Coffey describes how this polemical approach worked by creating the following dichotomy: "orthodoxy-Presbyterianism-coercion versus heresy-Independency-toleration."[55] Edwards's aim was to build support for a thoroughgoing Presbyterian settlement by portraying gathered churches as a source of heresy and therefore as something that should not be tolerated. This approach had some plausibility because although the Congregationalists were not separatists, they had found a degree of common cause with some of the more radical groups in a broad Independent alliance since late 1644. This alliance of convenience was designed to counter the attempts to establish Presbyterian uniformity. Nevertheless, the Congregationalists in-

51 *The Humble Petition of the Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Commons of the City of London in Common Councell Assembled, concerning Church-Government* [. . .] (London, 1646), 1–3.

52 *A True Copy of a Letter from Divers Ministers about Colchester in the County of Essex, to the Assembly of Divines, against a Toleration* (London, 1646).

53 Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*, 411.

54 Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 106.

55 Coffey, "Ticklish Business," 112.

tended to extend toleration only to include the orthodox godly. By the time of this April fast, Edwards's work had already proved to be phenomenally popular. The initial part had already been reprinted twice, and the second part would be published in May before a final installment in December.[56]

This offensive against toleration coincided with one infamous case of heresy being brought before Parliament, that of the anti-Trinitarian Paul Best (1590–1657). Best had been influenced by radical religious ideas while serving as a solider on the continent during the Thirty Years War. In June 1645, he found himself imprisoned in the Gatehouse for promoting Socinian ideas.[57] The members of the Westminster Assembly had appeared en masse before the House of Commons to denounce Best's "blasphemies" and to demand "condign Punishment upon an Offender of so High a Nature."[58] As the Westminster divines continued pressing for action to be taken against Best, intense debate in Parliament ensued over how his case ought to be handled, and in the spring of 1646 members of Parliament became divided over whether to impose the death penalty on Best.[59] One of the challenges was that Parliament lacked the appropriate mechanisms to deal with such a case because the laws and judicial bodies that had been used in the past to deal with heretics were now obsolete. The case was deeply divisive because what was at stake was the wider issue of how orthodoxy was best defended. For some, Best's activities demonstrated the urgent need for a church settlement in which the civil magistrate had coercive power to administer corporal punishments to heretics and blasphemers. For others, the fear was that Best's case would be used to establish a legal precedent for the suppression of those who dissented from the Presbyterian settlement.

Despite the high-profile case of Best and the Presbyterian propaganda campaign, a significant number were unpersuaded that the problem of heresy was quite as widespread as many conjectured and that the antitoleration campaign was alarmist at best, if not outright untruthful at worst. For example, Joseph Caryl (1602–1673), preacher at Lincoln's Inn and pastor of Magnus Church, preached before members of both houses of Parliament, the London city authorities, and members of the Westminster Assembly on April 20, 1646. The occasion was a thanksgiving to mark the ending of royalist

56 Hughes, *Gangraena*, 2–4, 22–49.

57 Nigel Smith, "Paul Best, John Biddle, and Anti-Trinitarian Heresy in Seventeenth-Century England," in Loewenstein and Marshall, *Heresy, Literature and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*, 160–84; Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 158–60.

58 Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:280.

59 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:444, 447, 460, 469, 514–15, 518, 524, 540, 556, 563, 586; 5:4.

resistance in the West. Caryl acknowledged that undoubtedly "no fore-head can deny" that "dangerous destructive and damnable" errors are among us, "perverting souls, and wasting the vitals of religion."[60] Nevertheless, Caryl claimed that there are fewer errors than people think, and, furthermore, "All is not errour which every one thinks to be errour." He cautioned against taking the heresiographers like Edwards at their word, suggesting that "there may be an errour in taxing some with errours."[61] What errors and heresies there were ought, Caryl argued, to be countered with gospel weapons rather than carnal weapons. He contended that God

> hath given a *compleat Armour* to his Church, wherewith to fight against all the errours and unsound doctrines of seducers. Therefore search the *Magazines of the Gospel*, bring out all the artillery, ammunition and weapons stored up there, look out all the chains and fetters, the whips and rods, which either the letter of the Gospel, or the everlasting equity of the Law hath provided to binde errour with, or for the back of heresie: let them all be imployed, and spare not. *I hope we shall never use* (I am perswaded we ought not) *Antichrists broom to Sweep Christs house with, or his weapons to fight against errours with*.[62]

On the same occasion, Hugh Peter (1598–1660), who had played a prominent role as a preacher to the parliamentary army, said that he did not need to tell his hearers that "every where the greater party is the Orthodoxall, and the lesser the Hereticks."[63] In this sermon and its tracts, Owen shared the perspective of both Caryl and Peter, particularly in regarding the heresiographers as somewhat alarmist and in emphasizing the need to counter heresy with spiritual weapons.

Against the backdrop of these calls for action against heresy and the ongoing debates about the limits and dangers of toleration, faltering steps were nonetheless being taken toward a moderate Presbyterian settlement for the English church. Parliament was attempting to achieve Presbyterian-Independent unity by a toleration of Congregationalists within the national

60 Joseph Caryl, *Englands Plus Ultra, Both of Hoped Mercies, and of Required Duties: Shewed in a Sermon Preached to the Honourable Houses of Parliament, the Lord Major, Court of Aldermen, and Common-Councell of London; Together with the Assembly of Divines, at Christ-Church, April 20, 1646* [. . .] (London, 1646), 23.

61 Caryl, *Englands Plus Ultra*, 24.

62 Caryl, *Englands Plus Ultra, 24–25* (italics original).

63 Hugh Peter, *Gods Doings and Mans Duty* [. . .] (London, 1646), 43.

church. An anticlerical majority in the Commons was intent on revising the Westminster Assembly's proposals for a Presbyterian settlement based on the model of the Church of Scotland. Many in Parliament rejected the divine right theory of the clericalist Presbyterians, fearing that it would lead to the church exercising arbitrary power. For example, on June 13, 1645, Parliament rejected the Assembly's claim that the church possessed the final authority in matters of church discipline. A majority in the Commons did not believe that this was the prerogative of the church. Consequently, as Parliament's Presbyterian settlement developed in a rather haphazard and piecemeal fashion, it fell far short of the aspiration of most Presbyterians.[64]

The first ordinance, of August 19, 1645, provided for the election of parish elders and for the organization of churches "under the Government of Congregational, Classical, Provincial, and National Assemblies."[65] In this four-tier structure, congregations were grouped into classes comprising ten to twenty parishes. Classes were grouped into provinces, one for each English county and the City of London. The ordinance outlined the classical makeup in London but left the organization of the classes in the rest of the country in the hands of Parliament. Furthermore, the national assembly of the church was also under the ultimate authority of Parliament and would meet only when Parliament chose. Many of the zealous Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly and the city of London viewed the August ordinance as inadequate. Those who sought a Presbyterian settlement based on the Scottish model considered this "Presbyterian" system to be a merely nominal one because elders had the authority to exercise sacramental discipline over only a small number of specified "scandalous" offenses. A parliamentary judicial committee would be the final court of appeal that would adjudicate in all other cases that might be brought by any of the classes. Thus, the disciplinary power of a parish eldership was severely restricted.

Consequently, from the second half of 1645, the English Presbyterians in the Westminster Assembly and the City of London along with their Scottish allies were involved in a petitioning campaign for a strict enforcement of Presbyterian uniformity.[66] This is something that Owen explicitly refers

64 Elliot Vernon, "A Ministry of the Gospel: The Presbyterians during the English Revolution," in Durston and Maltby, *Religion in Revolutionary England*, 116–17.

65 "August 1645: Ordinance regulating the Election of Elders," in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum, 1642–1660*, ed. C. H. Firth and R. S. Rait, 3 vols. (London: HMSO, 1911), 1:749–54.

66 The petitions from the London Presbyterian ministers were part of a broader campaign. See Michael Mahony, "Presbyterianism in the City of London, 1645–1647," *The Historical Journal* 22, no. 1 (1979): 93–103; Keith Lindley, *Popular Politics and Religion in Civil War London* (Aldershot, UK: Scholar Press, 1997), 356–70. For a more general introduction to the role of

to in his sermon. In a period of eight months, the assembly petitioned and wrote to Parliament sixteen times regarding the question of suspension from the Lord's Table.[67] Alongside this, the London Presbyterian ministers stepped up their campaign in favor of the recommendation of the Westminster Assembly by orchestrating a campaign of intense petitioning about matters pertaining to the independent authority of the church in any proposed settlement.[68] This was designed to increase pressure for Parliament to establish a more rigorously Presbyterian church. For example, in August they petitioned Parliament, calling for the power to exclude from the Supper to be given to the church.[69] In September, Parliament voted a petition on church government that was circulating in London scandalous and ordered that it be suppressed.[70] Undeterred, the London Presbyterian ministers then petitioned the City's Common Council, protesting about how Parliament's proposed ordinance for the election of elders failed to recognize the "Intrinsicall" power that church courts received directly from Christ. In November, the Council in turn petitioned Parliament about these matters and was rebuffed by the Commons, which was still seeking accommodation with the Independents.[71] Then, in the new year, the fears of "a Toleration of such Doctrines as are against our Covenant, under the Notion of Liberty of Conscience" prompted the City of London government to petition both houses of Parliament on January 15–16, 1646, for the settling of the Presbyterian government.[72]

On March 14, revised legislation was passed, which, according to Parliament, laid "the foundation of a Presbyterial Government in every Congregation with Subordination to Classical, Provincial, and National Assembly, and

---

petitioning at this time, see David Dean, "Public Space, Private Affairs: Committees, Petitions and Lobbies in the Early Modern English Parliament," in *Parliament at Work: Parliamentary Committees, Political Power and Public Access in Early Modern England*, ed. Chris R. Kyle and Jason Peacey (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2002), 169–78; and David Zaret, "Petitions and the 'Invention' of Public Opinion in the English Revolution," *American Journal of Sociology* 101, no. 6 (May 1996): 1497–555.

67 *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, ed. Chad Van Dixhoorn, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1:32.

68 Elliot Vernon, *The London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions, 1638–64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), 118, 130.

69 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:253; *Journals of the House of Lords*, 42 vols. (London: HMSO, 1767–1830), 7:557–59.

70 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:280.

71 Vernon, "Presbyterians during the English Revolution," 118; Mark A. Kishlansky, *Rise of the New Model Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 79–80.

72 *Journals of the House of Lords*, 5:8.

of them all to the Parliament."[73] However, for high Presbyterians, what was now proposed remained insufficient to establish a properly reformed ecclesiastical settlement because, according to this ordinance, although ministers and elders were given a significant role in church discipline, it was Parliament that determined the grounds of excommunication and appointed commissioners to supervise matters of excommunication. The English Parliament was not prepared to give up its control of the reformation of the church by agreeing to the type of synodical autonomy the Presbyterians demanded.

The petitioning that Owen identified continued in the lead up to this fast sermon with both the London Presbyterians and the Westminster Assembly petitioning Parliament against this proposed church settlement. In March, after intense debate, the City government petitioned Parliament against a revised program of lay commissioners in each of the ecclesiastical provinces, arguing that such power to regulate church discipline belonged to presbyteries.[74] This was presented to the House of Lords but was voted a breach of parliamentary privilege, and this forced the London government to give up its demands for a fully fledged Presbyterian settlement.[75] (The thanksgiving on April 2 at which Caryl and Peter preached was aimed at reconciling Parliament and the City after the controversial March petition.) Alongside the City's petition, the Westminster Assembly protested that what was being proposed was "so contrary to that Way of Government which Christ hath appointed in His Church, in that it giveth a Power to judge of the Fitness of Persons to come to the Sacrament unto such as our Lord Christ hath not given that power."[76] The assembly's petition was also rebuffed as a breach of privilege, and Parliament established a committee to appoint the commissioners. Robert Baillie (1602–1662), a Scottish Representative to the Assembly, castigated what was on offer as nothing more than "a lame Erastian Presbyterie" that lacked the power to effect true reformation.[77] This form of Presbyterian settlement was dubbed "Erastian" because the judicial and disciplinary powers of the

73 "March 1646: An Ordinance for Keeping of Scandalous Persons from the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the Enabling of Congregations for the Choice of Elders and Supplying of Defects in Former Ordinances and Directions of Parliament concerning Church Government," in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 1:833–38.

74 Thomas Juxon, *The Journal of Thomas Juxon, 1644–1647*, ed. Keith Lindley and David Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 107–11.

75 Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:366.

76 For the text, see "104. Protest to Both Houses of Parliament against Its Ordinance for Suspension from the Lord's Supper 20 March 1646," in *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, 5:301–2. See also *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:485; and *Journals of the House of Lords*, 8:227.

77 Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:361–62.

church were effectively subordinate to the authority of the English Parliament. As John Coffey explains, "a coalition of Erastians and Independents" in Parliament was now "calling the shots."[78] Owen was an ideal preacher for those in the Commons who shared these concerns because he was prepared to enter into such a working alliance in order to limit the influence of assertive Scottish-style Presbyterianism on the proposals for the settlement of the national church.[79] By 1644, Baillie was persuaded that the Congregationalists and Erastians were working together, and he and the other Scottish Presbyterians in London played a key role in labeling them and anyone else who advocated the supremacy of the civil magistrate in spiritual matters as "Erastian."[80] This was not without reason: by the mid-1640s, the magisterial Congregationalists were arguing that the Congregational Way was the form of church government that best recognized the magistrate's religious prerogatives over against centralized, hierarchical, clerical power.[81] The term is potentially misleading because English "Erastianism" predated the writings of Thomas Erastus (1524–1582). It had been the formal position on the relationship of church and state since the Henrician Reformation, which saw the spiritual and temporal realms united under one head. It was captured in Parliament declaring Queen Elizabeth to be the Supreme Governor of the Church and developed at length in the writings of Richard Hooker (1554–1600).[82] During the Laudian era, the church sought to assert divine-right episcopacy in such a way as to undermine this concept. This was believed to have resulted in what many regarded as an ecclesiastical tyranny that threatened the very nature of England's Reformation church settlement.[83] An "Erastian" impulse for religious reform was fundamental to the Long Parliament's political program and had been one of the factors that brought the country to civil war. Parliamentary Erastians were concerned that same *jure divio* claims made

78 John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution: Religion and Intellectual Change in Seventeenth-Century England* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2006), 136.

79 Jeffrey R. Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101, 109.

80 William M. Lamont, *Godly Rule: Politics and Religion, 1603–60* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1969), 114–16; Johann Sommerville, *Royalists and Patriots: Politics and Ideology in England, 1603–1640*, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 1999), 120–21; Baillie, *Letters and Journals*, 2:129, 197–99.

81 Collins, *The Allegiance of Thomas Hobbes*, 109; Jacqueline Rose, *Godly Kingship in Restoration England: The Politics of the Royal Supremacy, 1660–1688* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 79.

82 Charles D. Gunnoe Jr., *Thomas Erastus and the Palatinate: A Renaissance Physician in the Second Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 398.

83 Ofir Haivry, *John Selden and the Western Political Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 378.

by the Laudian bishops were now being made by the high Presbyterians. It was thought that this was a threat to the supremacy of Parliament because it created an independent sphere of ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Owen's dedication to the members of the House of Commons in the printed version of his sermon reveals his deferential attitude to the civil magistrate, and in the sermon itself he urged members of Parliament to continue to exercise their authority in the reform of the English church. When he describes himself as pleading for "presbyterial government," it is Parliament's "lame Erastian Presbyterie" that he has in view. Owen is perhaps signaling his commitment to some of the priorities of the parliamentary Erastians by referencing the work of William Prynne (1600–1669).

On April 17, just over a week before the fast day on which Owen delivered this first parliamentary sermon, the Commons issued a wide-ranging declaration that promised a settlement in line with the Solemn League and Covenant but with two important qualifications: first, the church would not be allowed to exercise "arbitrary and unlimited Power and Jurisdiction"; second, there was an insistence on "due regard" for "tender consciences which differ not in fundamentals of religion."[84] (Tellingly, it did not specify how such a complex resolution might be achieved, and it is highly plausible to see the published version of this sermon as a proposed solution.) Several days later, the Commons told the Westminster Assembly, in no uncertain terms, that it was an advisory committee and that it should cease to submit petitions that asserted divine-right Presbyterianism and claimed full jurisdiction over matters of parish discipline and censure. Parliament would determine heresies and oversee the ordination of ministers and matters of excommunication.[85] Those Presbyterians intent on securing an uncompromising Presbyterian settlement were deeply frustrated by this and refused to comply. Consequently, the day after Owen preached this fast sermon, a belligerent House of Commons censured the assembly for its clericalist ambitions, charging it with a breach of privilege and threatening it with *praemunire*.[86] A delegation from the Commons presented Nine Queries to the Assembly, demanding evidence that the assembly's proposed government was that set down in Scripture as having divine warrant "by the will and appointment of Jesus Christ."[87]

84 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:512–13.

85 John Harrington, *The Diary of John Harrington, M.P., 1646–53*, ed., Margaret F. Stieg (Taunton, UK: Somerset Record Society, 1977), 15–21.

86 *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, 4:82–97; *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:514–21.

87 *Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly*, 4:97; cf. 1:33.

At the same time, the counterrevolutionary City Remonstrance was being promoted in London.[88] This is essential context for Owen's sermon, and on the day that he preached it, Juxon recorded in his journal that "the City remonstrance . . . finds great cause of debate."[89] Presented to both houses of Parliament at the end of May, it argued for a rapid settlement with the king, on Presbyterian lines, in accord with the terms of the Solemn League and Covenant. It expressed outrage at "the daily invectives against us from the Pulpit, . . . the scurrilous and seditious Pamphlets daily broached against, and in the City: And the great contempt of . . . the Ministers of the Gospel, who adhere to the Presbyteriall Government." It also demanded the suppression of London's "separate congregations" and called for the exclusion of Separatists from public office.[90] It regretted that because of Parliament's declaration on April 17, many now expected some form of toleration. Owen's published sermon should be understood as part of a broader campaign in opposition to the Presbyterian Remonstrance. Like those who were petitioning against the Remonstrance, Owen was prepared to work around Parliament's Presbyterian settlement as laid out in the April declaration.[91]

It was into this complex and febrile context, one in which the parliamentary coalition was fracturing, that Owen delivered his sermon at St Margaret's, Westminster. Owen's participation marked a new phase of "more radical preachers" being invited to address the Parliament.[92] Nevertheless, as Tim Cooper notes, Owen addressed Parliament "as an insider" with references to the success of "our armies" and "our councils."[93] And while Trevor-Roper noted that these new preachers had to be "discreet," Owen's concerns were very clear, and they come into striking focus when set alongside the vision presented in the first sermon delivered on the day of the April humiliation. Nalton had called for the further reformation of the English church according to "that solemn sacred league"—that is, the Solemn League and Covenant that had been taken by members of Parliament in St Margaret's Church on September 25, 1643. In particular, Nalton emphasized how a covenanted nation must deal with the "canker or gangrene" of error and

88 Ian Gentles, "The Struggle for London in the Second Civil War," *Historical Journal* 26, no. 2 (1983): 280.

89 Juxon, *Journal of Thomas Juxon*, 119.

90 Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London's Overseas Traders, 1550–1653* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 469–77, 499–505; Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution*, 137–38.

91 For details of petitioning against the City Remonstrance, see Hughes, *Gangraena*, 357.

92 Trevor-Roper, "Fast Sermons," 299.

93 Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter*, 40.

idolatry.[94] The Presbyterian minister cautioned members of Parliament: "Beware, lest out of cowardice or carnal fears, out of sinful compliance or conformity to the wills of men, you tolerate what God would not have tolerated."[95] For Nalton, it was imperative that Parliament act against heretical teaching: "Take some speedy course to stop this flood-gate lest we be drowned."[96] Those magistrates who failed to suppress error and heresies would be "charged with them."[97] Nalton would have been pleased that later that day the Commons voted to form a committee to draft a bill for "the Prevention of the Growth and spreading of Heresies and Blasphemies and for the Punishment of Divulgers and Assertors of them."[98] It was also ordered that a list be prepared of all members of Parliament who had not taken the Solemn League and Covenant, "and that those Members be injoined to take the Covenant the next Fast-Day."[99]

After these sermons were preached, both preachers were thanked by Sir Peter Wentworth and the member of Parliament for Cricklade, the religious conservative Robert Jenner (ca. 1584–1651), and, as was customary, they were invited to publish their sermons.[100] The majority of fast day sermons were printed, and this helped to disseminate the ideas to a wider audience where they were read and discussed. Owen's sermon was published for Philemon Stephens, a London bookseller with a forty-year career who had already sold all three of Owen's earlier works: *A Display of Arminianism* (1643), *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* (1644), and *Two Short Catechisms* (1645). With his premises at Paul's Cross Churchyard, he was "a mainstay in Dissenting publishing," and his list of publications is illustrative of "business acumen informing godly fervor."[101] At this time, "virtually every frontage in the Cross Yard either was, or had been, a bookshop."[102] The different bookshops were known by their devices, in this case a gilded lion. Stephens remained at

94 James Nalton, *Delay of Reformation Provoking Gods Further Indignation* [. . .] (London, 1646), 33.

95 Nalton, *Delay of Reformation Provoking Gods Further Indignation*, 38.

96 Nalton, *Delay of Reformation Provoking Gods Further Indignation*, 41.

97 Nalton, *Delay of Reformation Provoking Gods Further Indignation*, 3.

98 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:513, 526. A draft of this bill came to the house on September 2, 1646, and the ordinance was eventually passed on May 2, 1648.

99 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:526.

100 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:526.

101 Sharon Achinstein, *Literature and Dissent in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 201; Kathleen Lynch, "Devotion Bound: A Social History of *The Temple*," in *Books and Readers in Early Modern England: Material Studies*, ed. Jennifer Anderson and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 191.

102 Peter W. M. Blayney, *The Bookshops of Paul's Cross Churchyard* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1990), 5.

these premises "until at least 1665."[103] The printer "G.M." was responsible for a number of high-profile sermons that were published in 1646, producing those by the likes of John Dury, Richard Vines, Joseph Caryl, Samuel Bolton, Francis Woodcock, and William Jenkyn. This is almost certainly a reference to George Miller's printshop in Blackfriars.[104]

Owen's preaching had not been universally well received, particularly his defense of a limited toleration and his call for parliamentary support for all "godly, orthodox, peace-loving pastors." In response, when publishing his sermon, Owen took the opportunity to add two additional pieces: The first was *A Short Defensative*, in which he particularly explained his own reluctance to subscribe to recent petitions calling for the implementation of a strict Presbyterian settlement. This was followed by a *Country Essay*, at the request of a "worthy friend," in which he laid out his vision for a form of church government that might find acceptance by all the godly. It was a proposal for how Parliament's Presbyterian settlement might have due regard for "tender consciences."

Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

In this sermon, Owen presents his own Macedonian call to the English Parliament to extend the work of gospel proclamation. Articulating a vision of England as a land recently visited by the Lord, he calls on Parliament to provide the necessary assistance to ensure that gospel preachers are sent out. In the dedicatory epistle, Owen makes very clear his understanding of the supremacy of the English Parliament and the central importance of religious reform to its work. He likens the task of the ongoing reformation of the English church at the end of the First Civil War to that of the workers in the days of Nehemiah, building the walls of Jerusalem with one hand while holding weapons of war in the other. As the political conflict at Westminster increased, he likened the experience of the mid-century turmoil to trying to find a way through a "maze or labyrinth," something only complicated by kings with "their flattering counselors" and the conspiracy of "malignant nations about them." Readers could draw the relevant analogies for themselves. Changing the illustration, the Parliament was seeking to direct the ship of the nation to port through a storm that had "quite puzzled the pilots and mariners" to an unexpected place, somewhere "on which their thoughts were

103 Blayney, *Bookshops of Paul's Cross Churchyard*, 40.

104 Peter McCullough, "Print, Publication, and Religious Politics in Caroline England," *The Historical Journal* 51, no. 2 (2008): 285–313, esp. 296. See also Sara J. van den Berg and W. Scott Howard, "G. M. Revealed: Printer of the First Attacks on 'The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce,'" *Milton Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (2004): 242–52.

not all fixed." Nonetheless, Owen was confident that the divine artist was at work and the finished masterpiece would be glorious.

As the title suggests, this strongly anti-Arminian sermon insists that God, in his "free mercy," uses various outward means to propagate the gospel among "undeserved sinners." This had been the case since the first announcement of the gospel promise to Adam, down through redemptive history, and on into the subsequent history of the church. The text of the published sermon is replete with references to anti-Pelagian authors such as Augustine of Hippo (354–430) and Prosper of Aquitaine (ca. 390–post 455) as it seeks to exalt "God's uncontrollable eternal purpose." This pertained to the propagation of the gospel at both an individual and a national level. As was borne out by recent and more distant British history, the coming of the gospel to a nation, and its continuance there, was all due to divine mercy. However, England was to "beware" because a nation's rejection of the gospel could lead to God withdrawing the gospel, leaving the people with only a nominal form of religion. At that moment in time, Owen explained that the nation had, by divine mercy, been saved from that fate by deliverance from the Laudian regime. The Laudians had been attempting to reverse the English Reformation with a corruption of doctrine, superstitious worship, and ecclesiastical tyranny, and Owen believed that the English church would have been led back to Rome if the Laudians had had their way. Wishing to press home the need for thankful acknowledgment of these mercies, he claimed that England was, at present, largely unthankful, despite its peculiar state of being the recipient of "as full a dispensation of mercy and grace, as ever nation in the world enjoyed."[105]

Those jeopardizing the cause of the English Reformation were not restricted to Laudians. Owen singled out two aspects of the Presbyterian campaign of 1646 for sharp criticism. First, he identified heresiographers, with their "catalogs of errors still among us," as being representative of those who failed to recognize God's mercy to the nation. Although they were not seeking to return to Roman Catholicism, Owen did believe that they were seriously misguided in their assessment of God's providential dealings with the English church. He was skeptical of their accounts, presenting them as having a distorted vision of the mercy that God had shown to the nation. They were "disturbed in their optics," as if they had "gotten false

105 In the Restoration, Samuel Parker mocked Owen for this "Vision (seen by himself) of Gods unchangeable Free Mercy, and uncontroulable Eternal Purpose in sending and continuing the Gospel unto this Nation, maugre all the Opposition of King and Bishops." See Parker, *Defence and Continuation*, 114.

glasses"; so instead of seeing God's unchangeable free mercy, all they saw was "nothing but errors, errors of all sizes, sorts, sects, and sexes." Second, in a point that was surely implicitly directed against the high Presbyterians, he argued that the cause of gospel reformation was threatened by those "pretending to power and jurisdiction over others." Despite the alarmist claims of those involved in the antitoleration campaign, he believed this abuse of power to be a much more significant threat than the "heedless and headless" errors and heresies of what he termed over five hundred "scattered individuals." The parliamentary Erastians in the congregation would have concurred with his warning against any form of church polity that fell victim to the Roman Catholic error of mixing and confusing civil and ecclesiastical power.

The form of toleration that Owen advocated was not the great enemy of the church and certainly did not threaten Reformed orthodoxy. Throughout the sermon, he displayed his Reformed credentials and argued that the need of the hour was not for imposed uniformity but, rather, was for gospel preachers to be sent out to those in darkness. The preaching of the gospel would bring salvation from a lost eternity, communion with God in this life through the administration of gospel ordinances, and the hope of heaven. This was the one great thing that mattered above all else, and in this regard the English nation was blessed in a peculiar manner at that moment. However, there was no place for presumption because the English "cities" and those "other places" that had enjoyed gospel ordinances in new and significant ways in the past few years were not responding appropriately. If they rejected the gospel, judgment would come on them and the mercies that they had experienced would be only "fuel for hell." Those in the nation who took confidence in their prosperity and "the catalog of their titles" would be called to account, and their palaces would be destroyed and left desolate.

Throughout the published sermon, the Exodus trope is significant.[106] As John Coffey explains, "no story captured the imagination of the godly" quite like that Exodus narrative because it explained that the parliamentary cause was akin to leading the children of Israel out of the bondage to arbitrary government and prelatical slavery toward the freedom of a promised land. Owen presented "Egypt" as the place of darkness and idolatry, and he quoted Juvenal's *Satires*, ridiculing the Egyptians for their superstition on two

106 For the wider context of how the Exodus account was deployed politically at the time, see John Coffey, "'The Only Parallel': The Puritan Revolution as England's Exodus," in his *Exodus and Liberation: Deliverance Politics from John Calvin to Martin Luther King Jr.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 25–55.

occasions in the published work. The nation had been led out on its exodus during the Henrician Reformation only to backslide and heed Laudian calls for "a captain to return to Egypt." Despite the national deliverance experienced in the 1640s, "the bulk of the people are as yet in the wilderness," and there were still those who would "rather be again in Egypt" than take the hazardous "pilgrimage" toward their place of "rest." They were "inhabitants of Goshen," a place of light, but were preoccupied with questions about "the bounds of their pasture." This trope enabled Owen to handle the contentious issue of the bounds of parishes, classes, and provinces within the national church in a somewhat oblique manner ("I shall not touch this wound, lest it bleed"). The "fierce contentions" that were ongoing about such "unprofitable questions" resulted in a neglect of "the weightier things of the gospel"—in particular, the fact that so many were still living in darkness. In a Macedonian-like call, he pressed home his point: "Does not Wales cry, and the north cry, yea and the west cry, 'Come and help us?'"[107] Owen relativized what he regarded as differences in circumstantial matters about church government, confident that the preaching of the "doctrine of the gospel" was what would "make way for the discipline of the gospel." He therefore implored the members of the "honorable assembly" of the House of Commons to explore all options available to them for bringing the gospel to the "poor Macedonians" of the land. His emphasis on the "wonderful variety" of external means that God employs would seem to suggest an implied criticism of attempts to enforce uniformity before gospel preaching has been able to produce its fruit. Owen was calling members of Parliament to "inhabit" these biblical narratives by not shrinking back from their calling.[108]

107 Parliament had described Wales as one of the darkest of the many "dark corners of the land," and a number of itinerant preachers were sent to Wales in 1646. In June, Vavasor Powell (1617–1670) was called to preach the gospel in Wales by commissioners from Parliament's Committee for Plundered Ministers. Then in July, Walter Cradock (ca. 1606–1659) stood in the pulpit of St Margaret's and echoed Owen's call to the members of Parliament: "Oh let not poore Wales continue sighing, famishing, mourning and bleeding . . . in thirteene Counties there should not be above thirteene conscientious Ministers who in these times expressed themselves firmly and constantly faithfull to the Parliament, and formerly preached profitably in the Welch Language." Walter Cradock, *The Saints' Fullnesse of Joy* [. . .] (London, 1646), 34. Parliament sent Cradock to Wales in October 1646. See *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:242. See also Christopher Hill, "Puritans and the 'Dark Corners of the Land,'" *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (1963): 77. Another work from the time that highlighted the plight of the Welsh and called on Parliament to propagate the gospel in Wales was John Lewis's *Contemplations upon the Times, or The Parliament Explained to Wales* [. . .] (London, 1646). Sir Peter Wentworth, who had nominated Owen to preach this sermon, would be part of the Commission for the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales established in 1650.

108 Coffey, *Exodus and Liberation*, 26.

Summary and Analysis of the Appended Tracts

The Short Defensative[109]

This short piece deals with three highly contentious matters: church government, toleration, and petitioning. Owen, somewhat reluctantly, felt compelled to address these because he believed that his message had been misrepresented by those preoccupied with bringing about conformity to the implementation and enforcement of a high Presbyterian settlement. This "defensative" sought to defend the contours of Parliament's proposed settlement by offering some proposals for how it could be implemented in a satisfactory manner. It was also a personal defense. After he delivered the sermon, some high-ranking individuals had accused him of undermining church government and opening the gate for the "Trojan horse" of toleration. Owen was well aware that in addressing these issues he might stir up a nest of hornets in "these quarrelsome days." Nonetheless, after the sermon itself had been "printed to the last sheet," he spent "a few hours" clarifying his position on both church polity, liberty of conscience, and ongoing campaigns about such things.

Owen believed he had been wrongly accused by those who were too quick to impose the label of "heretic" on those who expressed legitimate differences of opinions. Such people ought to be more charitable in their judgments or, failing that, at least be more imaginative in adopting a less counterproductive approach. Too many went into the pulpit and turned what he regarded as the "little" or "small" differences that existed among "godly and peaceable" men into something "horrid"—namely, calling all whom they disagreed with "sectaries." Such people were, he believed, preoccupied with asserting Presbyterian polity as "the only way" and claimed that all problems in the church could be explained by a failure to implement such a church settlement and almost immediately solved by the implementation of high Presbyterianism: "Conformity is grown the touchstone. . . . Dissent is the only crime." Owen objected to the warlike language used by those who exaggerated the differences between the "two great parties" at "variance about government" (Independents and Presbyterians) and turned fellow believers into "mortal adversaries," effectively implying that the kingdom of Jesus Christ consisted "in forms, outward order, positive rules, and external government." Owen believed that such an approach would do little to propagate the gospel and was unlikely to make any real progress in resolving "disputable questions."

In terms of petitioning about church government, Owen thought that many of those who put their names to petitions did so without understanding what

109 A defensative is an argument or plea made in defense of something.

exactly was at stake and that some of those who refused to did so for valid reasons. At the time when the *Short Defensative* was being prepared for the press, a petition was circulating among the ministers of Essex, calling for the establishment of a Presbyterian system. This petition from three hundred ministers in Essex and neighboring Suffolk was presented to the House of Lords at the end of May, calling for "Church Government to be established"; the delays in doing so had resulted in "the Name of the Most High God [being] blasphemed, His precious Truths corrupted, His word despised, His Ministers discouraged, His Ordinances vilified." The petitioners demanded action against "Scismaticks, hereticks, seducing teachers, and soul-subverting Books."[110] Owen joined his fellow ministers in signing this particular petition but explained that he could not subscribe to a petition, even if he agreed with many of the "general words," if it stated that "the cause of all the evils" was the lack of one particular form of church government. To him it was obvious that many of the exact same errors of his day had also existed at times when church discipline had been "most severely executed." He believed that the heresies that often were "enumerated" in pro-Presbyterian petitions were best countered by "spiritual weapons." He also challenged one of the assumptions underlying such petitions—namely, that the House of Commons had not already established the essentials of a Presbyterian form of government. He reminded his readers that, rightly in his mind, such petitioning had "not long since" been voted a breach of privilege because it undermined "the honor of our noble Parliament." Furthermore, Owen believed that there were adequate grounds to believe that some of the petitions were masterminded by those "distant and unseen," perhaps implying the hand of the Scots. Owen was unpersuaded that the Solemn League and Covenant required the implementation of one particular form of polity.

Owen then presented his own proposal in the hope that they would "give some light into a way for the profitable and comfortable practice of church government" and prevent further unnecessary division and separation among the godly. This was an exercise in formulating a workable ecclesiology, which avoided some of the most contentious theological questions, that he had "long since" drawn up at the request of a "worthy friend" and had been circulating in manuscript form. He made much of the fact that he did not have time to revise the document because its inclusion was done in "extreme haste," with the printer looking over his shoulder.

110 *Journals of the House of Lords*, 8:338; *The Humble Petition of the Ministers of the Counties of Suffolke and Essex, Concerning Church-Government* [. . .] (London, 1646). This was presented to the Lords on May 29 and printed on June 1.

The Country Essay

In this piece, Owen advocated a mediating position that incorporated elements of Presbyterianism and the Congregational Way. As Ethan Shagan points out, one noteworthy feature of the English revolution was "the desire of virtually all participants to claim the mantle of moderation."[111] It was a proposal for a way forward in which the Parliament's recently established national church would be flexible enough in its structure to accommodate congregational government and discipline. Hardline advocates of Presbyterian Uniformity would have been troubled by Owen's comments about the "paucity of positive rules in the Scripture for church government" and his proposals for gathered churches to have greater autonomy alongside parochial structures. The essay began by praising the work of Parliament, through its Committee for Plundered Minsters, for playing an active role in placing deserving ministers, approved by the Westminster Assembly, in vacant parishes so that there were now "in many parishes godly, orthodox, peace-loving pastors." However, when it came to the people of these parishes, Owen acknowledged that "very many" were "extremely ignorant, worldly, profane [and] scandalously vicious." While in most parishes there were at least some visible saints, their number included "very few, gifted, fitted, or qualified" to serve in the government of the church. The need to find a pragmatic solution was pressing because many of the godly were now "inclined" to become separatists. Owen's proposals were designed to find a way to achieve "comfortable communion" alongside the parish system.

First, with due deference to parliamentary authority, Owen asked that the mapping out of parishes into classes be left to the discretion of the churches themselves rather than parliamentary committees simply grouping them into the existing parish grouping traditionally used for keeping peace and gathering taxation. In matters that he termed "purely ecclesiastical," he thought the civil magistrate ought not to claim any privilege. Owen was anxious about an overly rigid parochial system that would inhibit the work of the gospel.

Second, he offered a reassurance that godly "clergy" would continue to minister in their parishes across the land. There they would be assisted in matters of rule and discipline by those chosen according to the August 1645 ordinance for the election of elders.

Crucially, alongside this, gathered churches of visible saints would be established on the basis of something like a church covenant with the congregation

111 Ethan Shagan, "Rethinking Moderation in the English Revolution: The Case of *An Apologeticall Narration*," in *The Nature of the English Revolution Revisited: Essays in Honor of John Morrill*, ed. Stephen Taylor and Grant Tapsell (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell, 2013), 27.

having the power to determine the membership and to elect any suitably godly parish ministers to the office of teaching elder. These ministers would exercise the ecclesiastical authority that belonged to a regional church court with the help of any elders that the gathered church chose to elect: it would be "one church, with one presbytery." Since Parliament claimed to possess the final authority in matters of excommunication, Owen's proposal was that special care should be taken in preparing potential candidates for membership to ensure that congregations were comprised of visible saints. He recognized that assistance may be required from the civil magistrates if the "stubbornly obstinate, or openly wicked" desired admission to the congregation.

These proposals were ones that Owen thought could gain broad acceptance, satisfying the concerns of both Presbyterians and Independents. He then turned to address an issue from his fast sermon that had generated some controversy—namely, the perplexing question of the possibility of some form of toleration. He was aware that there was strong opposition to any form of toleration from some clergy who claimed that it would disturb the peace of the civil state. He expressed strong Erastian-style sentiments as he reasoned that such divines lacked the skill and competence in the "secular affairs" of a commonwealth in order to make such a judgment. He then raised the question of whether the hypocrisy that would be produced by enforced uniformity was better or worse than the existence of heresy.[112]

In terms of his own thoughts on the nature of toleration, he clarified that he was not seeking an "unbounded," "universal toleration." That was something that he believed would not be conducive to the peace of the church but would, he feared, lead to sectarian violence. This was a rejection of the radical form of toleration being argued for by people like Roger Williams. As Coffey points out, here Owen's remarks are "very brief" because "the main thrust of the essay lay elsewhere"—namely, against advocates of thoroughgoing Presbyterianism that would preclude any form of toleration.[113] Owen made it very clear that the uniformity brought about by coercion was not the same thing as true Christian unity. In fact, claims about the importance of unity could be used as "a cloak for tyranny," as was the case with the Papacy. It was all too easy for the persecuted to become persecutors once they had the backing of those in authority. Owen reasoned that if, as it was being argued, the magistrate ought to suppress all error, then ultimately those in error could be put

112 Westrowe, one of those required to ask Owen to preach, was known for believing that religious coercion made more hypocrites than true converts and that hypocrisy was worse than error. See *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Westrowe, Thomas (1616–53)."

113 Coffey, "John Owen and the Puritan Toleration Controversy," 232.

to death; although those who advocated religious coercion made what Owen judged to be "fair pretenses" to the contrary, nevertheless he reasoned this was the logical consequence of their position. If universal toleration and religious coercion were the only two options, then it would be possible "to oppose both toleration and nontoleration, without any contradiction." The crucial question was where the bounds of toleration lay, and this involved distinguishing some potentially "ambiguous words." Owen highlighted one significant distinction that existed in the various discussions about the extent and boundaries of toleration. Some advocated toleration "in communion" with the established church, despite "great differences in opinion," such as was the case with the Remonstrants in the Dutch Reformed Church in the years prior to the Synod of Dordt (1618–1619).[114] Others proposed toleration of gathered churches that were "out of communion" with the national church, provided such Dissenters were peaceable and typically agreed "in all substantials of doctrine."

Owen went on to state his position on toleration by way of nine assertions:

1. Heresy and error ought not to be tolerated, especially in "fundamentals of the common faith," and should be dealt with by all means that "the gospel holds forth."
2. The civil magistrate may act against false doctrine that disturbs the peace of the commonwealth or undermines "lawful government." (Here the examples that Owen gives are Roman Catholicism and Anabaptism.)
3. Those whose teaching is associated with either "notorious" immorality or "abominable idolatry" should be punished "more severely."
4. Dissenters should not seek to undermine the established church and its ministers, for example by preaching against ministerial maintenance by way of tithes.
5. There ought to be a "charitable" posture to those in error because of the difficulty in distinguishing between error and heresy, especially if "stubbornness" is to be judged as a defining mark. Although some things are so clearly laid down in Scripture that the denial of them leaves a person self-condemned, there are many other errors that pertain to things that are less clear and harder to understand.
6. One great consideration to bear in mind is the "sovereign dictate of nature" expressed in a negative rendering of the Golden Rule: "Do not

114 Jonathan Israel, "The Intellectual Debate about Toleration," in *The Emergence of Tolerance in the Dutch Republic*, ed. C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, J. Israel, and G. H. M. Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 11–14.

do unto others what you do not want done to yourself." This would ensure appropriate "Christian forbearance" in "disputable things" and great care being exercised in the restraint and punishment of those who advocate "grosser errors," especially when they are outwardly "disorderly."

7. The "burning, hanging, or killing" of heretics "for simple heresy" was indefensible. Heresy ought to be distinguished from blasphemy, and in charging people with respect to the latter of these one "cannot be too cautious." The spreading of destructive error did not in itself constitute an act of blasphemy punishable by death.
8. A historical consideration of punishment of those deemed heretics by means of "death, imprisonment, banishment, and the like" revealed that, more often than not, those who suffered were actually martyrs for the truth. The idea of punishing heretics was virtually unheard of in the early church and only began to emerge as the papacy usurped civil power in order "to suppress error and heresies." Then, "for a thousand years," the "martyrs of Jesus" were slain as heretics. Owen mentioned those whom he regarded as forerunners of the Reformation who had been persecuted by the Roman Church: sects such as the Waldenses of the Piedmontese Alps, the Albigenses of southern France, and the Hussites of Bohemia.
9. Finally, it is a logical fallacy to mistake correlation for causation in the simultaneous occurrence of heterodoxy and "tumults and troubles" in the commonwealth, thereby accusing those with whom you disagree with "sedition." For Owen, down through the centuries, and especially in the sixteenth-century Reformations, the godly were falsely accused of seeking to destroy lawful authority.

In any consideration of toleration, Owen thought that the attitude and action of erring individuals should be taken into consideration. He had firsthand experience of some whom he thought were humble, sincere, and peaceable, while others could be proud and wicked. It seems reasonable to assume that Owen would have supported the decision one month beforehand to send representatives from the Westminster Assembly to confer with Paul Best in the hope of talking Best into a recantation.[115] He closed his essay with two final words of caution. First, church discipline should be preserved "as pure and unmixed from secular power as possible." Second, he warned against

115 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 4:500.

even setting out on a trajectory that could in time lead to "new persecution upon new pretenses."

For Owen, the Presbyterian propaganda campaign against toleration that sought to present "the least allowance of Dissent" as "the mother of abominations" was simply absurd. A degree of "hesitancy" was required because of the complex and interrelated questions involved in making judgments about "errors and erroneous persons." The following were among the most important considerations that still needed to be addressed: the magistrate's power in matters of religion, the different "restraints" that were under consideration, what distinguished "dangerous fundamental" error from things in which some latitude was permissible, and separating out the various "interests" and agendas in debates about toleration. These were all things that would concern Owen in the coming years and that he dealt with, to one degree or another, in subsequent parliamentary sermons.

He closed with three pertinent questions to those engaged in the antitoleration campaign. The first asked how religious coercion would be exercised. The second was about what particular errors they had in mind. The final question concerned the degree to which there had been actual serious engagement with some of those calling for a degree of toleration. Once those questions had been answered, Owen was willing to respond.

EBENEZER: A MEMORIAL OF THE DELIVERANCE OF ESSEX, COUNTY, AND COMMITTEE

The Context of Owen's Preaching after the Relief of the Siege of Colchester

At the beginning of 1648, the parliamentary cause was under threat. In terms of a church settlement, efforts to include all the godly seemed unworkable, and with the proliferation of the sects, many were coming to believe that an uncompromising approach to uniformity was the only way forward. The London Presbyterians campaigned for this and succeeded in gaining widespread support. Their pamphlet titled *A Testimony to the Truth of Jesus Christ* called for the proper implementation of a covenanted Presbyterian settlement and for action to be taken against heresies.[116] Over 900 ministers from 13 English counties signed similar printed "testimonies" or "attestations" supporting a Presbyterian settlement according to the Solemn League and Covenant and

116 *A Testimony to the Truth of Jesus Christ and Our Solemn League and Covenant* [. . .] (London, 1647).

often denouncing toleration.[117] In Owen's county, the Essex testimony was very well supported with 132 signatures, but it is of note that it expressed a more moderate sentiment, hoping for the accommodation of "tender consciences" and reserving its strongest criticism for popery, Arminianism, and Socinianism.[118] There were other important reasons why the parliamentary cause was under pressure. The New Model Army, now a significant political force, was increasingly distrusted and disliked, especially by many in Parliament and the City of London. There were growing complaints about Parliament's County Committees, bodies that had replaced the traditional local government and were charged with carrying out the orders of Parliament, particularly in the collection of the high taxes needed to support the army.[119] On top of this, the king had signed an engagement with the Hamiltonian faction of the Scottish Covenanters to invade England in support of his cause. Against this backdrop, the Presbyterian cause was somewhat emboldened, and there were early indications that Parliament might give its backing to a covenanted Presbyterian settlement. At the beginning of May, a Blasphemy Ordinance was passed by Parliament, marking the culmination of a long campaign to deal with heterodoxy.[120] This legislation provided for the death penalty for anti-Trinitarianism and imprisonment for the promotion of certain heterodox ideas.[121]

Alongside this, things were coming to a head militarily. By the spring, with the threat of Scottish invasion looming, there was a series of armed insurrections in south Wales and the north of England. Essex, the county where Owen ministered, had been a stronghold for the parliamentary cause during the First Civil War, but now there were signs of the beginning of a turn away from the cause. The Chelmsford grand jury petitioned for a peace treaty with the king that would see the New Model Army disbanded. This country petition attracted some twenty thousand signatures, and at the beginning

117 Hughes, *Gangraena*, 373–78.

118 *A Testimony of the Ministers in the Province of Essex, to the Trueth of Jesus Christ, and to the Solemn League and Covenant; As Also Against the Errors, Heresies, and Blasphemies of These Times, and the Toleration of Them. Sent up to the Ministers within the Province of London, Subscribers of the First Testimony* (London, 1648). Ann Hughes, "Thomas Edwards's Essex: Evaluating *Gangraena*," *Transaction of the Essex Society for Archaeology and History* 34 (2004): 186.

119 John Morrill, *The Revolt of the Provinces: Conservatives and Radicals in the English Civil War, 1630–1650* (London: Longman, 1980), 122–23, 204–5.

120 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 5:549; *Journals of the House of Lords*, 10:240–41.

121 See *An Ordinance of the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament, for the Punishing of Blasphemies and Heresies* (London, 1648). Although introduced in 1646, the ordinance was only passed on May 2, 1648. It is reprinted in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 1:1133–36. Coffey, "The Toleration Controversy during the English Revolution," 48.

of May, some two thousand men brought this petition to Westminster.[122] When this was rebuffed, the grand jury declared for the king.[123] Meanwhile in Kent, rebellion broke out toward the end of May after the County Committee attempted to suppress a petition calling for a treaty with the king and the disbandment of the New Model Army. George Goring, Earl of Norwich, attempted to lead this armed insurrection of perhaps around eleven thousand men in order to take London. The army sent forces to suppress these various rebellions: Lieutenant General Oliver Cromwell laid siege to the medieval fortress of Pembroke Castle in Wales; John Lambert went north to defend against any Scottish invasion; and Lord Thomas Fairfax, commander-in-chief of Parliament's land forces, advanced to the most immediate threat, taking Maidstone on June 1 and pacified Kent within a fortnight.[124]

In Essex, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Farr, an officer in the earl of Warwick's local regiment of militia, led one thousand of his men to declare for the king in a "spectacular" mass defection.[125] On June 4, Farr arrested members of Parliament's County Committee who were meeting in emergency session at Chelmsford in order to respond to the local crisis. Farr's militia combined with a larger royalist force assembled under a number of experienced leaders such as Lord Capel, the commander of royalist forces in Essex; Sir Charles Lucas, a talented solider who, as a native of Colchester, had invaluable local expertise; and a soldier of fortune named Sir George Lisle. They were joined with the Earl of Norwich, who had crossed the Thames with what was left of the defeated royalist force from Kent. On June 10, the insurgents moved to Braintree and en route plundered the house of Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, at Leighs. Owen may have alluded to this as he envisages the enemy kitted out with "rich booty from their enemies." Sir Thomas Honywood, one of the men to whom Owen dedicated the published version of the sermon, was one of the country commissioners who had not been taken hostage, and he managed to assemble what remained of the Essex-trained bands in order to

122 Robert Ashton, *Counter-Revolution: The Second Civil War and Its Origins, 1646–8* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 142–43.

123 Brian Lyndon, "Essex and the King's Cause in 1648," *The Historical Journal* 29, no. 1 (1986): 21–24.

124 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 114–15. General Sir Thomas Fairfax, Commander in Chief of the New Model Army, had succeeded as Lord Fairfax of Cameron upon the death of his father in March 1648. See Ian Gentles, "Fairfax, Thomas, third Lord Fairfax of Cameron (1612–1671)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed October 18, 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/9092.

125 Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, 465–66; Andrew Hopper, *Turncoats and Renegadoes: Changing Sides during the English Civil Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 96.

secure the county's arsenal. The insurgents arrived at Colchester on June 12 in the hope of recruiting more men before advancing toward Norfolk and Suffolk, where they expected to secure further support and supplies from the continent. Fairfax was determined to thwart this design and, moving at astonishing speed, rendezvoused with Honywood's forces and Colonel Edward Whalley's cavalry brigade. Fairfax had hoped to confront the enemy in a swift attack, like what he had executed so successfully at Maidstone, but the royalists retreated inside Colchester, and a protracted eleven-week siege ensued. The parliamentarians built "the most sophisticated set of siege lines of either civil war," which functioned as a "noose around the Essex town."[126] It was an unusually cold and wet English summer, and the conditions both in and around the town were appalling: the royalist cavalry's horses were slaughtered for food; there was large-scale intentional burning of property; allegations were made that the royalists were using poisoned bullets; and there was a refusal to relieve the suffering of noncombatants.[127] As Gribben writes, "Even by the standards of early modern warfare, the city's residents witnessed and were subject to spectacular suffering."[128] It seemed almost apocalyptic: one observer wrote that a "terrible red duskie bloody Cloud seemed to hang over the Towne all night."[129] The town was left devastated:

> The town hath suffered as well as the men, being ruined in its buildings, provisions, people, and trade; what fair streets are here of stately houses now laid in ashes? . . . [T]hey who had houses to live in now live desolate for want of habitation.[130]

Elsewhere the parliamentary army's cause prospered. Pembroke Castle fell in mid-July after a six-week-long siege, and this allowed Cromwell to join Lambert to confront the Scottish Engagers and English royalists at the Battle of Preston on August 17–19. The New Model Army routed the Scottish-royalist army, taking some ten thousand prisoners in a victory that signaled the end of the Second Civil War. News of the humiliating defeat of their allies reached Colchester at the end of August, whereupon all hope

126 Barbara Donagan, *War in England, 1642–1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 323; Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain, 1603–1714* (London: Penguin, 1997), 180.

127 Brian Lyndon, "The Parliament's Army in Essex, 1648," *Journal of the Society for Army Historical Research* 59, no. 239 (1981): 233.

128 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 92.

129 *Colchesters Teares: Affecting and Afflicting City and Country* [. . .] (London, 1648), 13–14.

130 *A True and Exact Relation of the Taking of Colchester* (London, 1648), 4.

of relief for those holed up in the town vanished. Threatened by mutiny, the royalists in the town surrendered on August 28. Lord Capel and the Earl of Norwich were sent to be judged by the House of Lords.[131] Fairfax convened a council of war at the King's Head tavern, and afterward Henry Ireton led two of the royalist commanders, Lucas and Lisle, out to where they were summarily executed by firing squad to "avenge for the innocent blood they have caused to be spilt, and the trouble, damage, and mischief they have brought upon the town."[132] All this was in accord with the laws of war at the time.[133]

Colchester was only a few miles from Coggeshall, and over the summer of 1648, Owen became acquainted with Fairfax and other senior members of the New Model Army. After the siege, he preached two thanksgiving sermons. The first was preached before Fairfax at a thanksgiving on August 31, and the second before members of the recently liberated County Committee on September 28.[134] The two sermons appeared under the title *Ebenezer: A Memorial for the Deliverance of Essex, County, and Committee*. The work is part of a wider body of printed works designed to represent and interpret the events in Colchester, such as the illustrated broadsheet *The Siege of Colchester By the Lord Fairfax As It Was With the Line and Outworks* (1648).[135] Gribben suggests that Owen's decision to self-publish the work is evidence that Philemon Stephens "was no longer prepared to take financial risk on a relatively unknown writer in the increasingly crowded world of print."[136] Evidence from ornaments and decorative initials reveal the printer that he used to be William Wilson (d. 1665) of Little St Bartholomew's Hospital.[137] The annotation on the copy acquired by the book collector George Thomason indicated that the work was available in December 1648.

131 Proceedings against them opened on February 10, 1649, in the newly convened High Court of Justice. They were sentenced to death on March 6. Norwich's life was spared, but Capel was executed on March 9 outside Westminster Hall.

132 Donagan, *War in England*, 364.

133 Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, 438; Gentles, *New Model Army*, 120–21.

134 Parliament ordered that the victory should be celebrated on September 7. See Mears et al., *Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings*, 490–91.

135 For a discussion of this piece of print propaganda, see Anke Fischer-Kattner, "Colchester's Plight in European Perspective: Printed Representations of Seventeenth-Century Siege Warfare," in *The World of the Siege: Representations of Early Modern Positional Warfare*, ed. Anke Fischer-Kattner and Jamel Ostwald (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 44–84.

136 Crawford Gribben, "Becoming John Owen: The Making of an Evangelical Reputation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 79, no. 2 (2017): 313.

137 C. William Miller, "A London Ornament Stock, 1598–1683," *Studies in Bibliography* 7 (1955): 125–51.

The title of the published work evokes the name of the stone that the prophet Samuel set up to memorialize a great victory (1 Sam. 7:10–14). The parallels to the events of the summer of 1648 would not have been lost on the biblically literate: captured cities were recovered, resulting in peace from both external invaders (either the Philistines or the Scots) and internal enemies (either the Amorites or the royalists).[138] The first preface was addressed to Lord Fairfax and portrayed the general in a light very different from the royalist propagandists who, in the immediate aftermath of Colchester, had vilified him as dishonorable and barbaric.[139] The second preface was addressed to four men: Sir William Masham,[140] Sir William Rowe (who had been imprisoned in the town), Sir Henry Mildmay of Wanstead,[141] and Sir Thomas Honywood (who had been with Fairfax's troops).[142] Through the experience, Owen was getting to know some important figures on the national stage, and Masham and Mildmay would provide Owen with opportunities to once again preach to Parliament in the coming years.[143]

138 In *Steadfastness of the Promises* [. . .] (London, 1650), Owen spoke of raising an Ebenezer for the victories in the Cromwellian conquest of Ireland.

139 Andrew Hopper, *"Black Tom": Sir Thomas Fairfax and the English Revolution* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), 87.

140 Sir William Masham (1591–1656) of Otes, High Laver, was a well-established member of the Essex gentry, member of Parliament, and the most prominent prisoner during the siege of Colchester. He was described as "a very factious Puritan" and sought a strong and reformed state church. Masham was "clearly suspicious of the moves towards greater religious freedom." Recently appointed to the Derby House Committee, he was also active in arranging fast preachers for Parliament. Masham was released in a prisoner exchange early in August 1648. See Donagan, *War in England*, 349; Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 188, 313; *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Masham, Sir William, 1st bt. (1591–1656)."

141 Sir Henry Mildmay (ca. 1594–1664) was the member of Parliament for Maldon and had a grand estate in Wanstead, Essex. Lyndon describes him as "one of the Parliamentary zealots of the county." He was a political ally of the Earl of Warwick and his wife was a member of the gathered church in Stepney. A war party member of Parliament, Mildmay had been instrumental in raising troops to support Fairfax at the siege of Colchester and had been one of those tasked with offering Parliament's thanks to Fairfax after the rebels surrendered. See Lyndon, "Essex and the King's Cause in 1648," 22–23; Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution*, 533; Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 93, 100, 127, 138.

142 Sir Thomas Honywood of Marks Hall, Essex, was a parliamentary colonel who led a body of militia that played a prominent role in the siege of Colchester. With most of the other members of the parliamentary standing committee held captive, and despite some from his own regiment having defected, Honywood succeeded in securing the county magazine before it could be seized by the royalist forces. He led the delegation that accepted the surrender of Colchester on August 27 and went on to act as the governor of the town. Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 312; *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Honywood, Sir Thomas (1587–1666)."

143 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:107, 152, 217, 374, 544; 7:13.

Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen opens the first sermon with a reflection on the "mixed" nature of providence in contemporary events: "an evil time" of "fearful judgments," not only in war but also in poor weather and failed harvests, while simultaneously a time of mercy in "unexpected deliverance." As Gribben notes, the Second Civil War was "a crisis of existential propositions, in which providence itself seemed fickle."[144] Owen appealed to a text to which he would often return in the years ahead to describe "a dispensation that seems almost as much against us, as for us": "the light shall not be clear nor dark: but it shall be one day which shall be known to the Lord: not day nor night" (Zech. 14:6–7). In such a season, the "well-tuned" response of the godly (God's "secret ones") to the "speaking providence of God" will be "to rejoice with thankful obedience for mercy received, and to be humbled with soul-searching, amending repentance, for judgments inflicted." "Special mercies," such as the deliverance of Colchester, "must have special observation" by "remembrance with thanksgiving." Owen made particular reference to the need to remember the events of Marston Moor and Naseby and to add to this list the parliamentary victories of 1648. The preacher rhapsodized on the words of Habakkuk 3:3, drawing the strongest of parallels between the acts of salvation that Habakkuk remembered in his prayer and the contemporary parliamentary victories:

> God came from Naseby, and the holy one from the West [Pembroke]: Selah: his glory covered the Heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. He went forth in the North [Lancashire], and in the East [Colchester] he did not withhold his hand.

The "manifestation" of such great works of God would be an encouragement to press on and "serve providence" in "great works." The published work was dedicated to Fairfax and other leading members of the parliamentary cause and it called them to persevere in "great undertakings" and in "great and high" matters, not turning back in "the heat of the day." From Owen's point of view, he had seen too many "drop off" in apostasy, not least the "backslidings of our days" by those "acted upon by engagements." This is likely a reference to the Scots who supported the Treaty of Engagement with King Charles. The Scottish Covenanters had played a vital role in the victory of Marston Moor, but Owen believed that those among them who had supported the Engagement had actually apostatized from God's work. To avoid

144 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 94.

such a danger and in order to "serve the will of God in this generation" it was necessary to conduct "a diligent inquiry" into "the designs of God." The implication was that those in leadership needed "new light" to face the challenges ahead. This would require "applications of providences, with wise consideration of times and seasons."

Owen insisted that the judgments that had been experienced in the "visitations of the last years" ought to be taken as a warning to "the enemies of this nation," those "that hate us," that their "total destruction" lay ahead. Contrary to the expectations of many, the day of those "factious Independents" did not come because God was on their side. God's people would have their "portion and inheritance," and all of those, including "kings and others," who might attempt to take away "their liberties, ordinances, privileges, [and] lives" would be guilty of touching "forbidden things." Aware that the language of sacrilege had gained currency in recent debates, he referred to the fable of the eagle that stole sacrificial flesh from an altar, not realizing that a coal was still attached that consequently set her nest on fire. Owen distinguished his understanding of sacrilege from those who had "abused" the notion to argue against the sale of episcopal and church lands—for example, in recent days, the authors of *The Humble Petitions* [. . .] *of the Eastern Association* (April 1648). Owen cautioned those in power to remember how in war God had broken those who would encroach upon the privileges of the saints. Now that peace had come, he cautioned against any attempt to take away the "liberties, privileges, ordinances or ways of worship" from the godly. Owen was familiar with the arguments that claimed that religious uniformity was essential for "peace and truth" but regarded them as "arguments for persecution . . . dyed in the blood" of the martyrs from "1,200 years" of persecution under the antichrist. In the preface addressed to members of the parliamentary County Committee, some of whom were members of Parliament, Owen urged that serious consideration needed to be given to the danger of "encroaching" upon the "portion, lot, privileges or inheritance" of the saints, particularly by any form of persecution of the godly. Owen stated that all who did so would fall under divine judgment, which he illustrated by referring to the divine punishment that fell on King Uzziah when he attempted to offer incense in the temple. In his pride, Uzziah had ignored warnings from the priests, attempted to take to himself their ministerial privilege, and was consequently smitten with leprosy (2 Chron. 26:18).[145] This proof text was also used in the New England *Cambridge Platform* (1648)(the preface of which expressed the

145 Lyndon, "Essex and the King's Cause," 19.

desire that "the example of such poor outcasts as ourselves, might prevail if not with all . . . yet with some other of our brethren in England"):

> As it is unlawful for church officers to meddle with the sword of the magistrate, so it is unlawful for the magistrate to meddle with the work proper to church officers. The acts of Moses and David, who were not only princes, but prophets, were extraordinary, therefore not imitable. Against such usurpation, the Lord witnesses, by smiting Uzziah with leprosy, for presuming to offer incense.[146]

Owen's point contrasted sharply with that offered by the other preacher at the public thanksgiving in Romford, Essex, the rector of Kedington in Suffolk, Samuel Fairclough (1594–1677). His sermon, later published as *The Prisoners Praises*,[147] was from Psalm 149:

> Let the high Praises of God be in their mouthes, and a two edged sword in their hands; to execute vengeance upon the heathen; and punishment upon the people. To bind their Kings with Chains, and their Nobles with Fetters of Iron (Ps. 149:6–8).

Fairclough told his hearers, "Raise the actual expression of your praise with the two-edged Sword of God in your hand, by improving your liberty by way of Vindication in executing vengeance upon the Heathen, punishments upon the People; by binding their Kings in chains, and Princes in fetters of iron." The chains with which Fairclough wished the king to be bound were none other than "our solemn League and Covenant" and the principal cause of the Second Civil War was Parliament's failure to implement a covenanted settlement.[148] In complete contrast, Owen went so far as to claim relief of the siege to be a providential warning to those who were endeavoring to impose such a Presbyterian settlement. Owen believed that the saints were being liberated from their Babylonian captivity, and that any who continued to hinder or oppose them would face this "vengeance of the temple."

146 *The Cambridge Platform* (1648), XVII.v: "Of the Civil Magistrate's Powr in Matters Ecclesiastical." For text, see *A Platform of Church Discipline Gathered Out of the Word of God: And Agreed Upon by the Elders: And Messengers of the Churches Assembled in the Synod at Cambridge in New England* (Cambridge, MA, 1649), 28.

147 Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in This Later Age* [. . .] (London, 1683), 172–73.

148 Samuel Fairclough, *The Prisoners Praises for Their Deliverance from the Long Imprisonment in Colchester* [. . .] (London, 1650), 37–40.

Owen's sermon sounded a note of strong support for the soldiers of the New Model Army, whom he regarded as "worthy instruments" carrying out the divine purpose as they went about "the work of the Lord." The point was clear: Fairfax and Cromwell had been led by God, who had "marched before them, and traced out their way from Kent to Essex, [and] from Wales to the North." "Round about" were "oppressing nations" who were either "gross idolaters" or "envious apostates" (probably an implied reference to the Irish and the Scots). Now that the "season of the church's deliverance" had come, the remaining opposers would be "subdued." For Owen this could be seen written with the finger of God in recent events in "the workings of God's providences" during the Second Civil War: "crafty counsels" being brought to nothing, armies destroyed, and strongholds demolished. In Essex, Owen portrayed the enemy as outnumbering those loyal to Parliament with "very many old experienced soldiers" among their number. There is some dispute about the size of the military forces involved at Colchester, but Donagan supposes that Fairfax's troops were indeed outnumbered.[149] Owen's suggestion that those loyal to Parliament were outnumbered ten to one ("near as many thousands, as we had hundreds") may not necessarily be hyperbolic, especially if taken as a description of the situation prior to the arrival of Fairfax. Ireton's account would concur with Owen's likening Colchester and its defenders to "a great beehive, and our army to a small swarm of bees sticking on one side of it."[150] Despite such opposition, the army had prevailed.

In the second sermon, Owen considered the recent surrender of Colchester as "a mercy of first magnitude" and a significant demonstration of "God's power and the efficacy of his providence." Essex had largely been spared from conflict during the first civil war, and, in Owen's mind, the saints had abused the peace. However, the conflict of the summer of 1648 had seen the people of God united and "set in a hopeful way." Owen identified the hand of providence at work in what he believed to be the "innumerable" foolish choices made by the enemy. He took this to be evidence of God thwarting and confusing the plans of those who had plotted and schemed for rebellion in at least three ways. First, in Owen's estimation, had the royalists not taken up arms in rebellion, such were the "divisions" in the parliamentary cause that within six months "I think we should suddenly have chosen them, and theirs, to be umpires of our

149 Donagan, *War in England*, 318. See also Austin Woolrych, *Britain in Revolution, 1625–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 413.

150 Edmund Ludlow, *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow, Lietenant-General of the Horse in the Army of the Commonwealth of England, 1625–1672*, ed. C. H. Firth, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1894), 1:197.

quarrels." Second, Owen placed great emphasis on the uncoordinated nature of the various risings. Had the rebellions been coordinated to coincide with the invasion of the Engager army, the whole nation would have been "swallowed up in that deluge." The Lord had thwarted their plans, and so the "homebred eruptions" were suppressed in turn, and the "discontented soldiery and divided nation" were roused and united, "ready to resist the Scottish invasion." The Essex rebellion was allowed to grow in strength only after Fairfax had "broken" the royalists in Kent and after the surrender of Pembroke castle, the last rebel stronghold in south Wales, on June 11. This providential ordering of events meant that Cromwell was able to march north to bolster the parliamentary forces set to confront the Duke of Hamilton's Scottish Engagers. This Scottish invasion was doomed from the start because of lack of resources and being several weeks too late to coincide with the risings in England and Wales. After the battle of Preston and the subsequent rout of the Duke of Hamilton's forces at Winwick Pass, several thousand of the Engager army had been slaughtered and almost ten thousand captured.[151] The third way in which the folly of the enemy was seen occurred just prior to the siege of Colchester, on the night of June 11, when the trained bands from Owen's own "little Village" of Coggeshall succeeded in blocking the road ahead of the advancing royalists. Compared to their enemy, these Coggeshall men were inexperienced (Owen said there were "not three men, that had ever seen any fighting"), and yet they forced the royalists to make a detour in order to reach their destination.[152] Fourth, the Colchester royalists refused Fairfax's offer of peace on the basis of a number of false hopes. For example, unaware that the parliamentary navy had blockaded the mouth of the River Colne, they had been expecting seaborne relief. Similarly, they had misplaced optimism that there might be a treaty between the king and Parliament.[153]

Owen recounted that many had doubted that Fairfax's army would prevail—"Greater armies than this, have been buried under lesser walls"—especially since they were originally outnumbered by seasoned veterans "famous and renowned" for their "skill in war." Nonetheless, in an extraordinary providence, they had prevailed in a deliverance that was "beyond the ken of sense and reason" or any explanation by means of "secondary causes."[154]

151 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 121–27.

152 See Ian Gentles, *The English Revolution and the Wars of the Three Kingdoms, 1638–1652* (Harlow, UK: Pearson, 2007), 338–40.

153 Donagan, *War in England*, 324–25.

154 In marked contrast to Owen's providentialist account of the siege of Colchester in *Ebenezer*, the royalist poet Henry King attributed the deaths of Sir Charles Lucas and Sir George Lisle

Owen recognized the gravity of the situation, alluding to the main theaters of the conflict: "The north invaded, the south full of insurrections, Wales unsubdued, the great city at least suffering men to lift up their hands against us." He is referring to how the City of London had been "a powder keg" that was in danger of revolting as it had done the previous year.[155]

In a particularly apt turn of phrase, given the martial context, Owen spoke of how the deliverance being celebrated that day at the thanksgiving in Romford came not from outward fortifications but from the "main fort" of God's "all-sufficiency." Such obvious manifestations of "the finger of God" had the power to convince even kings of old like Nebuchadnezzar and Darius (and, by implication, the contemporary crown) that God fights for his people.

Ominously, in a provocative adaption of his earlier treatment of miraculous water being brought "out of the flint," he called his audience to recollect "the stream from the flint"—that is, the stream of smoke rising from the firing squad of flintlock muskets at the execution of Lisle and Lucas. Some of those with local knowledge may have remembered that this sentence took place outside the King's Head tavern.

As for the five thousand "hard-bitten men" in Colchester, they were dangerous and unpredictable.[156] Owen portrayed them as "an enraged, headless, lawless, godless multitude, gathered out of inns, taverns, alehouses, stables, highways, and the like nurseries of piety and pity." It was no small thing to be rescued from their clutches because they had been reticent to even enter into negotiations for a prisoner exchange and, as the Parliamentarians alleged, their captors had deliberately housed the hostages in a dangerous position where they might succumb to friendly fire.[157] Having been delivered from them, the appropriate response was both thankfulness and a commitment to avoid all "animosities, strife, contention, and violence" among the godly.

Owen warned those who were magistrates against "sinful compliances with wicked men" and urged them to conquer their fears, reject hypocrisy, and trust the promises of God as they committed themselves to serving the kingdom of Christ in "justice" and "equity." Owen's call was prescient, at least to some degree. For example, Sir Henry Mildmay, one of those to whom the published work was dedicated, became one of the "pivotal figures" in the move toward

---

to chance and contingency: "Through Warr's stern chance in heat of Battle Dy'd." See James Loxley, *Royalism and Poetry in the English Civil Wars: The Drawn Sword* (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1997), 194.

155 Gentles, "The Struggle for London in the Second Civil War," 298–99.

156 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 117.

157 Donagan, *War in England*, 348.

revolution.[158] In the coming months, he would oppose all attempts to negotiate with the king and became an instrumental figure in the revolutionary turn. Mildmay was nominated as a commissioner to try the king in January 1649, and in his role as Master of the Jewel House he provided a sword of state to be placed in Westminster Hall.[159] His attendance at the trial was sporadic, but he was listed as a regicide, even though he refused to sign the king's death warrant. Two of the others named in the dedication (Sir William Masham and Sir Thomas Honywood) were also named as commissioners for the trial of the king, but neither of them took part.

As Owen prepared the sermons for publication at the beginning of October, the army and Parliament were on a collision course. Even before the first of these sermons was preached, on August 24 the parliamentary majority saw the balance of power shifting toward the army and acted to repeal the Vote of No Addresses in order to reopen negotiations with the king at Newport.[160] On August 29, the Commons passed the Ordinance for Presbyterian Church Government, which brought together the earlier ordinances but made no provision for toleration.[161] The army was more confident than ever in the justice of its cause, especially since providence had now witnessed on its behalf in the victories of two civil wars. The ongoing negotiations for a Presbyterian-royalist settlement that had begun in Newport on the Isle of Wight in the middle of September seemed like a betrayal. The army's providential mandate (so forcefully laid out by Owen in his preaching) was being rejected, and the moderate majority in the Commons was intent on negotiations with the one who was ultimately to blame for the suffering of the past months. Furthermore, there was little sign of the negotiations leading to any form of toleration.

Although Fairfax was said to have been "radicalised" by his experiences in the summer of 1648, by the end of September there were some who were frustrated by his refusal to intervene in order to terminate the negotiations

158 Brenner, *Merchants and Revolutions*, 533.

159 Sean Kelsey, "Staging the Trial of Charles I," in *The Regicides and the Execution of Charles I*, ed. Jason Peacey (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave, 2001), 82.

160 In June 1649, Owen claimed that he could offer an example, "as yet not much above half a year old," of those who "having followed God for a season in their enjoyment of success and protection, they turn aside to pursue their own ends." This is likely an allusion to the moderate majority in Parliament reopening negotiations with the kind. See Owen's sermon *Human Power Defeated*.

161 "August 1648: An Ordinance for The Form of Church Government to Be Used in the Church of England and Ireland, Agreed Upon by the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament, after Advice, Had with the Assembly of Divines," in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 1:1188–215.

with the king.[162] Edmund Ludlow feared that Fairfax was going to betray the cause and took the matter to Ireton, who himself attempted to resign over Fairfax's failure to move against the negotiation.[163] As Owen drafted the dedication on October 5, Fairfax was about to be inundated with petitions from the army condemning the ongoing talks with the king. Owen had gotten to know Fairfax during the siege and perhaps knew that he needed some encouragement to capitalize on the victory. By dedicating the work to the general, Owen might well have been hoping to remind him of what he had witnessed and to make good on this providential deliverance, especially in the issue that he highlighted—namely, refusing to countenance illegitimate persecution of the saints.

One of the "uses" of Owen's sermon was that in "every distress," the godly were to "learn to wait with patience for this appointed time." That is what the army grandees did on November 26 during an eight-hour prayer meeting, whose purpose was "only to wait upon God for his direction." Days later, Fairfax wrote to Speaker Lenthall, explaining how he believed he was "attending and acting the providence of God for the gaining of such ends as we have proposed in our . . . *Remonstrance*."[164] This *Remonstrance*, which articulated a program for revolutionary political intervention, had been drafted by Ireton, who had come to believe that any accommodation with the king would repudiate all that the army had fought for.[165] In Parliament, Mildmay—who argued against ongoing negotiations with the king at Newport, saying that he was "no more to be trusted than a lion that had been caged, and let loose again"[166]—became an important figure in the moves toward the revolution.[167] Owen's sermon contained an ominous note about what might lie ahead in the coming months, describing how God would "break nations, kings and kingdoms" because of his love for the saints. He reiterated this point by arguing that not even the opposition of "kings and princes" would stand. The "great tumultuating" of the day should not trouble the godly because all the oppressors would fall, and therefore those who had been used as instruments in the fulfillment of God's purposes should persevere. As Owen exhorted his audience, "Up and be doing, you that are about the work of the Lord."

162 Hopper, *Black Tom*, 94.

163 *The Memoirs of Edmund Ludlow*, 1:203–4; Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 191.

164 Cited in Gentles, *New Model Army*, 132–33.

165 Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 116–27.

166 *Old Parliamentary History, or The Parliamentary or Constitutional History of England* [. . .], 24 vols. (London, 1751–1762), 18:301–2.

167 Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 93, 100, 127, 138.

A SERMON PREACHED [. . .] *JANUARY 31*

The Context of Owen's Postregicide Fast Sermon

This sermon was preached in the immediate wake of the revolutionary turn of events that began in early December 1648. In the negotiations with the king after the Second Civil War, Charles played for time in the hope that the Duke of Ormond would enlist military support from the Irish Catholic Confederacy.[168] At the beginning of December, a majority in the Commons voted to accept the concessions that the king had made, and this forced the army to act, seizing control of the English Parliament and purging it of those members of Parliament who sought a negotiated settlement with the king and leaving behind what was came to be derisively referred to as the "Rump" Parliament. According to Underdown, 45 members of Parliament were arrested, 186 members were prevented from taking their seats, and 86 more moderate members stayed away from the house, often as an act of protest. Those members whom Owen would address "shared few common objectives."[169]

In order to contextualize Owen's sermon and its appended tract, it is necessary to rehearse the situation with respect to the debates that were ongoing about the nature of the postrevolutionary religious settlement. Parliament's Presbyterian settlement from the end of August was now more or less dead in the water, and the Blasphemy Ordinance of May 1648 was not put into effect.[170] The shift in the balance of power meant that a new political and religious settlement was required, and discussions about this were held at Whitehall in December 1648 to January 1649. Among those present to debate relevant matters of religion were Henry Ireton and other officers; clergy, such as John Goodwin, Philip Nye, and Hugh Peter; and representative of the Levellers: the Presbyterian clergy refused to participate.[171] There was a significant divergence of views among the participants: some contended for freedom of conscience for all, while others argued for limits to religious freedom.[172] In regard to the question about the civil magistrate's role in matters of religion, the radicals argued that the magistrate had no coercive power in this area,

168 Ashton, *Counter-Revolution*, 295–97.

169 Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 173, 212.

170 This notorious ordinance deemed blasphemies such as anti-Trinitarianism worthy of death and outlined a second tier of errors worthy of imprisonment. See "August 1648: An Ordinance for The Form of Church Government to be used in the Church of England and Ireland, Agreed upon by the Lords and Commons Assembled in Parliament," *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 1:1133–36.

171 Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions*, 211.

172 William Clarke, *The Clarke Papers* [. . .], ed. C. H. Firth, 4 vols. (London: Camden Society, 1891–1901), 2:81.

with John Goodwin stating the matter very bluntly: "God hath nott invested any power in a Civill magistrate in matters of religion."[173] Others held that the magistrate had a negative power to restrain and to act against heresy and blasphemy. Still others advocated that the magistrate also had a positive role in encouraging the true religion. For example, Ireton argued that the magistrate's authority comprehended "spiritual" as well as "civil" matters, and that while the magistrate could not exercise "compulsive" power in matters of religion, he could exercise "restrictive" power.[174] The Leveller leader John Lilburne quickly withdrew from the debate and published his own views in *Foundations of Freedom*, in which he sought to argue that the magistrate had no power either to "compell" or to "restraine" in matters of religion.[175] The result of the Whitehall debate was the compromise *Officers' Agreement of the People*: according to the ninth head, Christianity was to be "held forth and recommended, as the public profession in this nation"; ministers would be maintained by the public purse rather than by tithes; religious compulsion was renounced and instead people were to be won by sound teaching and good example; there would be limited liberty of conscience for those "differing in judgment," but this excluded "popery and prelacy" and any who would disturb "the public peace"; finally, all existing legislation to the contrary would be repealed and nullified.[176]

At the end of December, Owen was given notice that he would be the preacher at the next monthly parliamentary fast by one of the Essex County Committee, Sir Henry Mildmay (ca. 1594–1668).[177] Mildmay had been instrumental in raising troops to support Fairfax at the siege of Colchester and had been one of those tasked with offering Parliament's thanks to Fairfax after the rebels surrendered. In the wake of the Second Civil War, he opposed all attempts to negotiate with the king.[178] Owen's neighboring clergyman, Ralph Josselin, believed that this would be the final monthly fast since "people doe so exceedingly neglect the same."[179]

173 Clarke, *Clarke Papers*, 2:115–18.

174 Carolyn Polizzotto, "Liberty of Conscience and the Whitehall Debates of 1648–9," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 26, no. 1 (1975): 69–82.

175 John Lilburne, *Foundations of Freedom* [. . .] (London, 1648), 11. The book collector George Thomason dated his copy December 15.

176 *A Petition from His Excellency Thomas Lord Fairfax and the General Council of Officers* [. . .] (London, 1649), 26–27.

177 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:107.

178 *The History of Parliament*, s.v. Mildmay, Sir Henry (ca. 1594–1668).

179 Ralph Josselin, *The Diary of Ralph Josselin, 1616–1683*, ed. Alan Macfarlane, Records of Social and Economic History (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 155.

The new republican regime was facing a crisis of legitimacy on two significant fronts. There were counterrevolutionaries who wished to reverse what had taken place in the past number of weeks. The Presbyterian pulpits of London denounced the army's revolutionary activities as covenant breaking.[180] There were also social revolutionaries, like the Levellers, who believed that the revolution had already been betrayed. As Underdown explains, the regime at the time was seeking to advance "two incompatible aims": the first, "revolution"; the second, "conciliation."[181]

Both of these aims are discernible in Owen's sermon. First, he sets out to justify the basis on which the government rested. Second, the sermon is an exercise in broadening the support base of the regime. He is seeking to engage with those who refused to actively support the army coup but who now might be persuaded to adopt a pragmatic approach and return to Parliament, given that the revolution was now a *fait accompli*. Owen had already been engaged in this task with the lawyer and moderate member of Parliament Bulstrode Whitelocke (1605–1675) as part of a wider endeavor to restore relationships with some of the secluded members, thus broadening the base of the new regime.[182] Owen was sent (Blair Worden believes by Oliver Cromwell) to Whitelocke at his country seat of Henley-on-Thames in order to persuade him to return to Westminster. There, in a bitterly cold winter in which the Thames had frozen over, Owen preached what the lawyer-politician described as "two excellent sermons" on December 31. Whitelocke noted that "upon discourse concerning the present affairs of the army he seemed much to favour them, and spoke in dislike of those members who voluntarily absented themselves from the House, having no particular force upon their persons."[183] It appears that those involved in this conciliation had some success. The day after Owen preached, a newspaper reported that "Divers members [have] since the death of the King, intimated a desire to come in."[184] That February, around eighty members were readmitted to the Commons—for example, Sir Henry Vane the Younger (1613–1662) and Sir William Masham (one of those to whom Owen dedicated *Ebenezer* [1648]).[185]

180 Eliot Vernon, "The Quarrel of the Covenant: The London Presbyterians and the Regicide," in Peacey, *The Regicides and the Execution of Charles I*, 203–4.

181 Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 200.

182 Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 68, 173.

183 Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affairs from the beginning of the reign of Charles the First to the Happy Restoration of King Charles the Second*, 4 vols. (Oxford: University Press, 1853), 2:486.

184 *Moderate Intelligencer*, 203 (February 1–8, 1649), cited in Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 215.

185 Worden, *The Rump Parliament*, 69; *History of Parliament*, s.v. "Sir William Masham (1591–1656)."

As Owen would have been preparing to preach, the High Court of Justice was conducting the trial of the king between January 18 and 27. (It would also try the Duke of Hamilton and Lord Capel who had been responsible for the siege in Colchester.) The king would be sentenced to death on Saturday, January 27, condemned as a "tyrant, traitor and murderer," and executed on January 30.

The following day, Owen came to preach before the Parliament. The nature of this sermon, and particularly what may be gleaned from it about Owen's view of the regicide, has been contentious. For example, an early biography suggested that Owen turned down the opportunity for easy promotion by ignoring the subject altogether.[186] Appleby says that Owen deployed texts from the Old Testament to justify the regicide without referring to it directly."[187] Gribben describes Owen's sermon as "ambiguous," one that "pulled its punches," especially in comparison to the sermon preached by John Cardell.[188] Cardell "tiptoed warily around" the subject of the regicide while making it explicitly clear that victory in the Second Civil War was the work of God rather than of men:[189]

> Remember but the *wonders* (I had almost said, the *miracles*) of this last *Summer* . . . when the *Malignant* party in both *Kingdoms* were *desperately* inraged against you; And I know not how many *thousands* of them, a second time up in *arms* against you, and nothing to *stand, between* you and all this *danger, but a poor despised, unpaid Army;* and yet, what a *wonderful*, what a *sudden*, what an *unexpected*, what an *unparalleld deliverance*, did the *Lord work* out for you.[190]

Cardell condemned those who were "vexing, and fretting, and *fuming* at present *Providential* Administrations, and consequently *flying* in the *very face*

186 Asty, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," vii; William Orme, *Memoirs of the Life, Writings and Religious Connections of John Owen* (London, 1820), 89–90.

187 David J. Appleby, "Sermons and Preaching," in *The Oxford History of Protestant Dissenting Traditions*, vol. 1, *The Post-Reformation Era, c.1559–1689*, ed. John Coffey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 446.

188 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 98.

189 Appleby, "Sermons and Preaching," 446.

190 John Cardell, *Gods Wisdom Justified, and Mans Folly Condemned, Touching All Maner of Outward Providential Administrations, in a Sermon* (London, 1649), 37 (italics original). Cardell, minister of All Hallows, Lombard Street, became known as an independent in 1648, and at this time he was moving toward a strict Congregationalist position. See Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions*, 183; Tai Liu, *Puritan London: A Study of Religion and Society in the City Parishes* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1986), 112.

of *God* himself, for not *ordering* things just as they *would* have him."[191] In the immediate aftermath of the king's trial and execution, Cardell was clear that a commitment to justice required "*courage* to *execute*, and to *carry* on the work *vigorously*."[192] Tom Webster describes the sermons delivered by both preachers as "fairly celebratory sermons, but moderate nonetheless," and comments that the preacher to the soon-to-be-abolished House of Lords, Stephen Marshall, was addressing "probably the smallest congregation of his career" (this sermon was not printed).[193] Nevertheless, Gribben points out that the fact that Owen preached at all indicates his "willingness, however hesitant, to be identified with a revolutionary, regicidal regime" and how he was fast becoming "the favorite preacher of the army elite . . . a principal spokesperson for the new regime, its prophet of a new world order."[194]

Owen's sermon was published by Matthew Simmons (1608–1654), one of the most important progovernment printers of 1649.[195] Simmons was a liveryman of the Stationers' Company since 1647 and as a "diehard independent" was a supporter of antiepiscopal and proparliamentary works. His premises were located near the Gilded Lion. He had been "notorious for unlicensed printing" in the 1640s and printed a number of prose works by John Milton, including *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* (1643) and, in February 1649, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. Simmons also printed works by John Goodwin, including, in January 1649, his defense of Pride's Purge, *Right and Might Well Met*.[196]

As Gribben notes, Owen enjoyed "his first literary success" with the sermon, and this encouraged Philemon Stephens to reissue some of Owen's earlier works in a single volume.[197] Simmons printed a second edition later that year for the bookseller Henry Cripps (1620–ca. 1658).[198]

There is no doubt that Owen condoned the regicide, despite the attempts of some to dissociate him from it. Samuel Parker mocked Owen for seeking to defend the "Equity of Gods Judgments" in the trial and execution of the king on the basis of the people's "retained Soveraignty" and the need to "restrain" the king from continuing in "his provoking ways."[199] Something

191 Cardell, *Gods Wisdom*, 19 (italics original).

192 Cardell, *Gods Wisdom*, 35 (italics original).

193 Webster, "Preaching and Parliament, 1640–1659," 409.

194 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 98–99, 104.

195 Amos Tubb, "Printing the Regicide of Charles I," *History* 89, no. 4 (2004): 502, 509, 521.

196 Como, *Radical Parliamentarians*, 38, 183, 320; Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution*, 179.

197 Gribben, "Becoming John Owen," 313.

198 See English Short Title Catalogue.

199 See Parker, *Defence and Continuation*, 114.

of how the sermon was received can be deduced from the fact that it was burned in Oxford in 1683. Zachary Grey, in his writings against the Nonconformists, was able to include passages from the sermon that, he alleged, supported the regicide.[200] Owen's support of the regicide was not because he espoused republicanism as a political theory—that is, he did not believe that "the common good of a community can never be satisfactorily assured under a monarchical form of government."[201] Pocock's argument that republicanism was "far more the effect than the cause of the execution of the King" holds true for Owen.[202]

Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

The dedicatory epistle of the published sermon revealed Owen's awareness that there was no lack of opposition to the Rump Parliament, whose members he styled as "visible instruments" of God's great work in that generation, those serving "in the high places of Armageddon" and engaged in "rolling up" the nation's "heavens." Indeed, writing from his parish in Coggeshall at the end of February, he anticipated that there would be further opposition on a number of fronts. Nonetheless, now that the die had been cast and the Rubicon had been crossed, Parliament was set to work in "the unraveling of the whole web of iniquity, interwoven of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny, in opposition to the kingdom of the Lord Jesus." As suggested in the title of the sermon in the 1721 edition, this was Owen's call for Parliament to continue to exercise righteous zeal. Owen took the following as his text: "Let them return to thee, but return not thou unto them. And I will make thee unto this people a fenced brazen wall, and they shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee: for I am with thee to save thee, and to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (Jer. 15:19–20). Two months later, Oliver Cromwell would employ the same trope that Owen developed from this text at the meeting of the Army General Council at Whitehall on March 23, 1649, to express his confidence in the Parliament enjoying divine protection for as long as it continued to do God's work: "wee shall finde hee will bee as a wall of brasse round about us till wee have finished that worke that hee has for us to doe."[203]

200 Zachary Grey, *An Impartial Examination of the Third Volume of Mr. Daniel Neal's History of the Puritans* [. . .] (London, 1737), 358.

201 Quentin Skinner, "The State," in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. Terrence Ball, James Farr, and Russell L. Hanson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 114.

202 J. G. A. Pocock and G. J. Schochet, "Interregnum and Restoration," in *The Varieties of British Political Thought, 1500–1800*, ed. J. G. A. Pocock et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 148.

203 Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 1:27.

Owen begins the sermon with a consideration of a sinful people and the various judgments that God brings against them, including God taking a king away in his wrath (Hos. 13:11). He highlights how in the "civil politic body" "the sins of the king" bring divine judgments on a nation. He employed the example of Manasseh, the wicked king of Judah, who had turned his back on Hezekiah's reformation by introducing false worship and persecuting those who refused to participate (2 Kings 20-21; 2 Chron. 33). As Kevin Killeen has shown, biblical figures could be used to prefigure a number of contemporary figures.[204] However, Owen's concerns extend beyond the late king, and he is "careful in balancing responsibility for the sins of the realm."[205] The people were complicit in this in a number of ways. First, they had "set him up" by way of "plenary consent" and so "may justly be called to answer for his miscarriage." Second, for various reasons the majority of people allowed themselves to be seduced into apostasy. Third, the bulk of the people had failed to "restrain" the king. Here he quoted Bishop Thomas Bilson's *True Difference between Christian Subjection and Unchristian Rebellion* (1585), which argued that subjects should not consent to the wickedness of a tyrannical king but instead had a responsibility to call kings to account. According to Anthony Wood's recollections, Bilson "did contribute much to the ruin" of Charles, and the historian William Lamont claims that *True Difference* "was probably more quoted on the parliamentary side in the English Civil War than any other source."[206] Manasseh's two great sins were idolatry and tyranny, and Owen claimed that providence had made clear that there was "a parallel" between Manasseh's day and current events in England. In so doing, Owen was provocatively likening King Charles to the very worst of the Judean kings. First, like Manasseh, Charles had been guilty of shedding "innocent blood." This followed the line of the army's *Remonstrance* from December, which held the king to be "guilty of all the innocent blood" spilt in the Second Civil War.[207] Second, like Manasseh, Charles had led the people into various forms of idolatry. For Owen, this included the recent observance of advent and Christmas, what Owen termed "the late solemn superstition." In the appended tract,

204 Killeen, "Chastising with Scorpions: Reading the Old Testament in Early Modern England," 491–506; Killeen, "Hanging up Kings: The Political Bible in Early Modern England," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 4 (2011): 549–70.

205 Margaret Aston, *Broken Idols of the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 73.

206 Richard Baxter, *A Holy Commonwealth*, ed. William M. Lamont (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xxvi; Anthony à Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* [. . .], vol. 1 (London, 1691), 334.

207 *Old Parliamentary History*, 18:183–84.

Owen described the magistrate's responsibility to deal with the nation's idolatry: for example, the potent symbol of Roman Catholic worship in the center of London at Somerset House. Owen believed these two sins of oppression and idolatry were "inseparable concomitants" (a "close-woven web of destruction"), and when the state committed these evils, with the people's consent, then the nation was doomed to "remediless ruin," except there be an "unprecedented" deliverance.

Owen believed that his exposition of the major themes of Jeremiah 15 enabled him to address "the very state and condition of this nation at this time." His analysis was stark: the very future of "poor England" was in jeopardy because, "under several administrations of civil government," it had now fallen on three occasions into "nation-destroying sins." He highlighted how in his days "God's choicest servants," who could be instrumental in delivering the people from this judgment, often had to endure the burden of being cursed by the people.[208] This was, of course, nothing new because it was the experience of Moses as he led the people out of Egypt in a "wonderful and unparalleled deliverance." Owen suggested that one of the reasons behind this opposition was that the nature of the deliverance did not conform to the expectations or satisfy the desires of many of the people. As for "the saints of God," the path of providence was indeed dark and perplexing, and he therefore urged his audience to be "tender toward fainters in difficult seasons." Owen sounded a conciliatory note toward those who had been slow to support the revolution and regicide, recalling how even Martin Luther had initially been "bewildered" at the idea that the "inferior magistrate may in some case resist the superior."[209]

As Owen offered "God's direction" for the future, he was realistic in his assessment that "the bulk of the people" did not support the new regime. Nevertheless, as the members of the Rump Parliament sought "to swim against the stream of an unreformable multitude," they should be undeterred. If some of those who had backslidden from the cause were to return, they ought to be embraced; indeed, hard work was to be done in order "to recover others." As for the rest, Owen insisted that there should be no dealings with those who had acted treacherously in "the late workings of things among us." In the first instance, this meant any who refused to bring justice and retribution against the enemies of the nation. Given that Owen emphasized that

208 Samuel Parker's hostile account of Owen's words claimed that the enmity came about because "the People of *England* [were] enraged against them for murthering their Soveraign." See his *Defence and Continuation*, 503.

209 Owen cited bk. 8 of John Dawes, *A Famouse Cronicle of Oure Time* [. . .] (London, 1560).

this was justice against "the mighty," this was an oblique reference to those secluded members of Parliament who refused to bring the king to justice. The second area in which there could be no compromise was with those who were willing to countenance the persecution of the saints: some of these would-be persecutors had themselves been persecuted but now were willing to countenance persecution because of their commitment to coerced uniformity. Owen's explanation of such "deviation" into the "crooked walking" of injustice and persecution was twofold: either "carnal fear" or a "covetousness and ambition" for "perishing things." With respect to the first, "most men in authority" were too taken up with pragmatic considerations about their own safety. This was similar to that of Captain George Joyce when, on January 13, he accused Fairfax—who withdrew from sitting as a commissioner for the king's trial—of having "a spirit of feare" on him, "studying to please men" rather than engaging in "the greatest work of righteousness that ever was amongst men."[210] The second cause, that of desiring perishing things, was what led Saul to spare king Agag and his cattle (1 Sam. 15). John Cardell also appealed to this text because it illustrated how the unwillingness to execute a tyrannical king incurred God's displeasure and necessitated another—in this case, Samuel—to intervene, enacting justice by means of the sword. Since the end of the First Civil War in 1646, Owen thought that many had succumbed to "backsliding" brought about by either fear or ambition and had now reached the point that they derided those with whom they once had common cause as a "parliament of saints" and an "army of saints."

In order to restore backsliders to the "paths of righteousness," Owen's primary exhortation was to avoid the ways that "the Lord has blasted under your eyes": oppression, self-seeking, and persecution. With regard to the first, there were many poor and oppressed people after three poor harvests and two civil wars. Earlier that month, one of Owen's neighboring clergy, Ralph Josselin, recorded in his diary "the great dearness of everything," noting that "men expect it will be dearer and dearer."[211] Owen warned, "Oh let it be considered by you, that it be not considered upon you!" This would resonate with an ominous warning from the Leveller weekly newspaper, *The Moderate*, that March: "Either take some care to ease, or relieve" the poor, it warned, "else their necessities will enforce them to be rich and level what they never intended." The *Kingdomes Faithful and Impartiall Scout* concurred, "If the Lord puts it not into the hearts of the Parliament to take some speedy course

210 Cited in Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 182.

211 Josselin, *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, 154–6, 162–63, 167; Steve Hindle, "Dearth and the English Revolution: The Harvest Crisis of 1647–50," *Economic History Review*, new series 61 (2008): 64–98.

for the care of the people," "we shall then fear nothing but confusion, and many will turn Levellers upon necessity."[212] Owen's practical recommendation was that "a committee of your honourable house might sit once a week" to deal with the issue. Three months after Owen preached, the Rump passed its *Act for the Relief and Employment of the Poor, and Punishment of Vagrants and Other Disorderly Persons within the City of London*.[213] This was perceived to be a new beginning in "reformation of and provision for the necessitous poor."[214] Second, he warned of the fate awaiting those "self-seeking" persons who endeavored to "build their honors, greatness, and preferments" on the "tottering foundation" of the "heaps and ruins" of what God had pulled down. The final way "blasted" by God were those "pretenses" and "contrivances" that would have resulted in persecution, something Owen would return to at length in the tract on toleration published with the sermon.

Even if some might be restored and reconciled to the cause, Owen did accept that he was calling members of Parliament to "the greatest undertakings" in a time of the most significant "difficulty and opposition." He therefore promised them that as "instruments of [God's] glory," they would, like Moses, be strengthened for the task of leading the people out from under the bondage of a tyrannical and angry king because he had been deprived of his sovereignty. Furthermore, in England's exodus the very people being liberated were, again, so accustomed to slavery that they initially opposed their liberation. In fact, as had happened under Moses, many appealed to God against their God-given liberators: the heavy rain and a further poor harvest of 1648 was "laid on the shoulders of the present government."[215] The opposition was certainly great, but Moses provided an example of how God gave his chosen liberators "unconquerable" support. The new regime—"parliament, people, [and] army"—ought to be confident because all opposition would ultimately turn out to be either futile or self-destructive. Of those who at present opposed them, some would simply be destroyed while others would be transformed. Here Owen offered the example of what had happened to some of the ministers in Scotland after the defeat of the Engager

212 *The Moderate* (March 20–27, 1649), 375; *The Kingdomes Faithful and Impartiall Scout* (August 17–24, 1649).

213 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:202; *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:104–10; Valerie Pearl, "Puritans and Poor Relief: The London Workhouse, 1649–1660," in *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill*, ed. D. Pennington and K. Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), 206–32.

214 [Rice Bush], *The Poor Mans Friend, or A Narrative of What Progresse Many Worthy Citi[zens] of London Have Made in That Godly Work of Providing for the Poor* [. . .] (London, 1649).

215 Hindle, "Dearth and the English Revolution," 64–98.

army at Preston some months beforehand. He also expressed optimism that something similar would happen to the ministers in Ireland. This promise was conditional, however. Too many of those who had gone before (presumably including those now secluded from Parliament) had been preoccupied with public opinion, particularly a desire to preserve the support of "the city."

This was significant, given what had taken place in London in 1648 when the city leadership, dominated by political Presbyterians, sought a parliamentary settlement with the king that would bring about a return to pre–civil war normality.[216] Owen contended that the preoccupation of those in power ought instead to ensure that God would not be provoked by their actions. At its heart, this required Parliament to "assert, maintain, [and] uphold the order of the gospel, and administration of the ordinances of Christ." Owen was aware of "novel fancies" such as contempt for divine ordinances, and he indicated that he would address this in the appended tract, *Toleration*. By "ordinances," Owen is referring to the outward means of grace within the church—that is, such things as preaching, the administration of the sacraments, and the exercise of church discipline. Radical antiformalism had been growing through the 1640s, particularly among those, often described as "Seekers," who claimed that all outward church "forms" and "ordinances" had ceased.[217] In the spring, the Leveller William Walwyn anonymously published *The Vanity of the Present Churches*, arguing that the Independent clergy were really no different from the Laudians and Presbyterians in their "hankering after persecution," and he called his readers to "disentangle" themselves "from all religious forms."[218] Similarly, the two leaders of the Digger movement who came to prominence in April, Gerrard Winstanley and William Everard, both rejected outward ordinances and forms.[219] This antiformalist "contempt" for ordinances would continue to grow. Abiezer Coppe, one of those who came to be known as Ranters, rejected water baptism, claiming that he was "above ordinances."[220]

This prognosis led Owen into an extended theological discussion about the nature of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. Through this he

216 Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British Revolutions*, 208.

217 Alec Ryrie, "Seeking the Seekers," *Studies in Church History* 57 (2021): 185–209; J. C. Davis, "Against Formality: One Aspect of the English Revolution," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 3 (1993): 265–88.

218 [William Walwyn], *The Vanity of the Present Churches* [. . .] (London, 1649).

219 Ariel Hessayon, "Early Modern Communism: The Diggers and the Community of Goods," *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3 (2009): 18–22.

220 Ariel Hessayon, "The Making of Abiezer Coppe," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 62, no. 1 (2011): 55–56.

sought to explain how even though the furious opposition of a "hardened multitude" was ultimately futile, it nonetheless served the divine purpose: this was something he believed to be evident down through the history of the people of God. Such opposition served to seal up the destruction of a "provoking people" and to reveal God's glory in keeping his remnant. Owen was seeking to reassure a regime without a significant support base that God had worked through a godly remnant in the past and that he could do so again. He believed that this would prepare members of Parliament for whatever storm might come and should also cause those opposed to the Parliament to engage in self-examination in order to consider whether they were undergoing judicial hardening. Owen's final note in the sermon was one of optimism. In all the ongoing "sinful advisings and undertakings," all the "reasonings, debates, [and] consultations," God in his sovereignty was able "to bring light out of darkness."

Summary and Analysis of the Appended Tract

As Owen had done with his first parliamentary sermon, when the work came to print, he appended an additional tract—in this case *Of Toleration: And the Duty of the Magistrate, about Religion*.[221] This important work should be understood as a plea for a workable middle way rather than a call for a toleration from which he would eventually distance himself. He explained how the ongoing toleration debate had taken on "sinful and dangerous extremes" and hoped that he might reach some agreement from both sides, thus "pouring a little cold water upon the common flames." He intended to remove the arguments that were advanced for "nontoleration," or what he insisted was actually more accurately described as the civil "punishment of erring persons." In doing so, he was directly challenging the approach adopted that month by the Commissioners of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, who had issued *A Solemn Testimony against Toleration, and the Present Proceedings of Sectaries and Their Abettors in England, in Reference to Religion and Government* (Edinburgh, 1649). This tract was circulating in London in the middle of January and was intended to be a public rebuke of the Rump Parliament by the Scots. It declared that "we have searched

221 A number of scholars have examined Owen's views on religious toleration: e.g., John Coffey, "John Owen and the Puritan Toleration Controversy, 1646–1659," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 227–48; and Paul Lim, "The Trinity, Adiaphora, Ecclesiology, and Reformation: John Owen's Theory of Religious Toleration in Context," *Westminster Theological Journal* 67, no. 2 (2005): 281–300.

after the minde of Christ . . . and no where can we finde in the Scriptures of truth, either precept or precedent allowed of God for Toleration of any Errour, much lesse did it ever come into his minde, or did he speak to any of his servants concerning a Toleration of all Errour."[222] For the Scots, what the English Army and Parliament had done threatened the very idea of a covenanted reformation. Before he set out to address the arguments like these that were being advanced in favor of enforced uniformity, Owen clarified his own position on a number of points. First, he distinguished the approach that might be taken to those who simply maintained "errors" from that required toward those engaged in "peace-disturbing enormities." Owen also denied the claim (one made by the Commissioners of the Kirk) that those like him who "plead for toleration" hold that the magistrate cannot punish sins against both tables of the Law.[223] He was clear that the magistrate could punish sins against the first table of the Law that "tend to the disturbance of the public peace." Here he differed from more radical tolerationists like John Goodwin, who believed that the magistrate's power was restricted to the second table of the Decalogue.[224] Thus, at the outset, Owen offered a reassurance that the Congregationalists' strong line on the role of the magistrate in religion was coupled with strong opposition to the persecution of the godly. Second, it allowed him to distinguish his position from that of the more radical tolerationists, something that would be very important for one of the great needs of the hour—namely, building alliances.[225]

In the first major section of the tract, Owen devoted considerable attention to rejecting the arguments that were used in an attempt to justify the capital punishment of heretics. First, that the penal sanctions of the Old Testament (the "Judaical polity") against idolatry and blasphemy warranted the punishment of those who hold "any error whatsoever": For Owen, there was no straightforward equivalence between simply maintaining an error and engaging in acts of idolatry and blasphemy. This was significant because, according to Coffey, at this time "the Israel model remained central to the case for persecution."[226] Owen then dealt with three specific key texts that

222 *A Solemn Testimony against Toleration, and the Present Proceedings of Sectaries and Their Abettors in England, in Reference to Religion and Government* [. . .] (Edinburgh, 1649), 3, 8.

223 *Solemn Testimony against Toleration*, 3.

224 Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution*, 143.

225 Clarke, *Clarke Papers*, 2:74; Coffey, "Puritanism and Liberty Revisited," 961–85; G. E. Aylmer, *The Levellers in the English Revolution* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1975), 41; Polizzotto, "Liberty of Conscience and the Whitehall Debates," 69–82.

226 John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (London: Longman, 2000), 31.

were commonly used to establish the doctrine of coercion. First, he rejected the argument from Zechariah 13:6, advanced by the likes of Samuel Rutherford and William Prynne, that the punishment by death of a false prophet warranted the punishment of those in doctrinal error. In terms of the New Testament, Owen also dismissed the claim that according to Romans 13 it was the duty of the magistrate to suppress error by external force. Finally, he gave more sustained attention to the argument for coercion based on the punishment of the seducer in Deuteronomy 13 because it had "more show of reason" than any of the other arguments that were advanced. This text was utilized by the commissioners of the Kirk—George Gillespie and Samuel Rutherford—and by William Prynne in their various works in support of the state's role in punishing those who publicly promoted or practiced certain forms of heterodoxy.[227] Once again, Owen argued that there was no straightforward parallel between what was in view with the case of the seducer and that of the obstinate heretic.

Owen then turned to premise some "general observations." The first was that error was to be opposed "by gospel mediums, and spiritual weapons," in particular by "the sword of the Spirit," that "hammer of the word," and also by "the sword of discipline" in the form of church "censures." He claimed that if those "despised instruments" of proclamation of the word and administration of discipline were employed as they had been by the primitive churches from the first to the third centuries, then they would "quickly make the proudest heretic to tremble." His second observation was to state what he believed to be the crux of the acrimonious debate that was taking place—namely, whether the lawful magistrate had authority "to coerce, restrain, punish, confine, imprison, banish, hang, or burn" those who did not "embrace, profess, believe, and practice, that truth and way of worship" that was held out by the state. His answer was that there was no scriptural warrant for the magistrate to punish those who would not "forsake their own convictions" in matters of belief and worship. He laid down a number of arguments in support of this.

He began by tracing the lineage of the idea of "force and violence" in matters of religion, arguing that the cruelty of the pagan Babylonians and Romans against Dissenters had simply been "inserted into the church's orthodoxies" by anti-Christian Rome under the name of "*Haereticidium*." This was done by legislating against any worship that was not established by law that was typically justified on two grounds: the first being that toleration would disturb

227 See, e.g., Samuel Rutherford, *A Free Disputation against Pretended Liberty of Conscience* [. . .] (London, 1649), 70–71.

the peace and prosperity of the commonwealth; the second that Dissent should be regarded as a dangerous plague that would cause untold troubles. This resulted in "the most orthodox" being charged with all sorts of "foolish, absurd, detestable, pernicious, sinful, wicked" things. For Owen, this applied not only to the primitive Christians but also to the Waldensians, Lollards, Reformers, Brownists, and Puritans. Owen warned that "the old Roman way" was to seek to destroy the truth under the name of destroying error.

Owen then considered the utility of coercion, arguing that the punishment of so-called heretics had rarely been "serviceable" to "the maintenance of the truth" but had instead resulted in the blood of countless martyrs. He offered a number of examples of significant violence against those who were orthodox: the tyrannical rule of Fernando Álvarez de Toledo (1507–1582), the third Duke of Alva, in the Netherlands (1567–1573); the persecution of the adherents of Nicene orthodoxy in the fifth century by the Arian Vandals in North Africa; the persecution of the followers of Athanasius in Alexandria by Emperor Valens; and the iconoclasm controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries, particularly the violence of the image-worshiping *Iconodules*. Owen claimed that in the seven-hundred-year period at the height of the reign of Satan and the antichrist (850–1550) there had been "millions of martyrs." Those put to death as "heretics" included the Albigensians in southern France in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and, at the end of the period, the Waldensians in the village of Mérindol (1545). Owen appears to cite the words of Joseph Caryl by way of caution, telling his readers to beware using "the broom of Antichrist" to "sweep the church of Christ."[228] Persecution, he reasoned, simply did not work. It frequently turned those who really were heretics into martyrs, resulting in their ideas being "confirmed and propagated" rather than suppressed. It also proved counterproductive to those who employed it in an attempt to suppress the spread of the reformations in Bohemia, Germany, the Netherlands, Scotland, and France. In all those places, religious persecution led to wearying cycles of violence and war. Peace and prosperity came about when magistrates offered toleration, whether under the brief reign of emperor Jovian (363–364) or with the Edict of Nantes (1598) that brought to an end the French Wars of Religion. Owen pressed this point home by calling for a serious consideration of the Dutch model of tolerance.[229] The founding charter of the confederation of

228 Caryl, *Englands Plus Ultra*, 24.

229 For the often-neglected continental context of Owen's vision for reformation, see Adam Quibell, "The Grounds, Method, Scope, and Impact of Independentism's Efforts for Union, 1654–1659" (PhD diss., Queen's University Belfast, 2024).

Dutch provinces that became the independent Dutch Republic in 1581 was the Union of Utrecht (1579). Article 13 had stipulated that "nobody shall be persecuted or examined for religious reasons." This had evolved into the magistrate keeping the peace between the official Reformed Church (*publicke kerk*) and other religious communities. This tacit toleration had clear limits since some confessional groups were condemned to clandestine worship (e.g., Roman Catholics were not allowed to publicly practice their religion), and no toleration was extended to anti-Trinitarians and atheists.[230] A number of the exiled future leaders of English Congregationalism had found a safe haven in the Netherlands during the drive against Nonconformity during the Laudian era.[231] There in exile they had firsthand experience of the limited toleration that was practiced in the Low Countries. For example, William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughes, and Sidrach Simpson had been in the English church in Rotterdam, and Thomas Goodwin and Philip Nye had gathered a church at Arnhem.[232] The proposals of the Dissenting Brethren in the *Apologeticall Narration* (1644) recalled the authors' experience of exile in the Netherlands, where they had enjoyed "a latitude" with respect to "some lesser differences" and their ongoing "brotherly correspondency" with members of the Dutch Reformed Church.[233] Owen's call for this Dutch model to be "seriously considered" was an appeal to find a middle way through the acrimonious debates that were taking place. His approach would probably have done little for those at loggerheads with one another. Many Presbyterians believed that the Dutch went too far. For example, the heresiographer Thomas Edwards thought if England embraced toleration, it would become "a chaos, a Babel, another Amsterdam."[234] On the other hand, some of the more radical tolerationists thought that the Dutch did not go far enough. Thus, Owen is appealing for something of a middle way, one with the viability of being akin to the policy and practice

230 M. E. H. N. Mout, "A Comparative View of Dutch Toleration in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries," in *The Emergence of Toleration in the Dutch Republic*, ed. C. Berkvens-Stevelinck, J. Israel, and G. H. M Posthumus Meyjes (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 41; and Benjamin J. Kaplan, "Fictions of Privacy: House Chapels and the Spatial Accommodation of Religious Dissent in Early Modern Europe," *American Historical Review* 107, no. 4 (2002): 1034, 1048.

231 John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138–93, 335–70.

232 Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of the English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 162–72, 227–32.

233 Thomas Goodwin et al., *An Apologeticall Narration* [. . .] (London, 1644), 8, 24, 31.

234 Thomas Edward, *Gangraena: or a Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errours, Heresies, Blasphemies and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of This Time, Vented and Acted in England in These Last Four Years* (London, 1646), pt. 1, p. 120.

of another nearby Protestant state.[235] It is important to note Owen's appeal because the Cromwellian church settlement that he would help forge in the 1650s "bore more than a passing resemblance to the religious settlement of the early Dutch Republic."[236]

Owen recognized that it was on occasion necessary to act "against erroneous persons" in order to defend the gospel and preserve the peace of the church, although he did not believe that such action was "so urgent as is pretended." He pointed out that for the first three centuries, the church had no assistance from the Christian magistrate, and during that period "there was not one long-lived, or far-spreading heresy." Ante-Nicene fathers such as Polycarp, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Cyprian contended for the faith by spiritual means such as "church censures" and "communion among the churches" but said nothing at all about the corporal punishment of heretics, a doctrine Owen believed to have a "poor footing in antiquity." It was only when those in civil power "began to interpose in the things of religion" that heresies such as Arianism became widespread. Furthermore, although initially the magistrate acted to defend catholic orthodoxy, this was a Satanic ruse through which "the Roman pontiffs . . . advanced their own supremacy." In all this, Owen pinned the blame on those "who called themselves bishops," "aspiring prelates" and their "associates," and "turbulent priests." They persuaded Constantine to reverse his initial policy of toleration by means of "lies, flatteries, [and] equivocations." The way in which Owen presented these fourth-century developments resonated with contemporary debates about the role of the magistrate in matters of religion because this retrograde step toward religious persecution came about when those in power had been "wearied by the importunity of the orthodox," not least with their "petitions." There was also an implicit warning from history in Owen's explanation of how these developments led to all sorts of troubles with religion becoming more and more a matter of "external pomp and dominion" and a servant of the antichrist.

Owen concluded his critique of the arguments advanced in favor of the civil magistrate "proceeding against erring persons" with a survey of the providential judgments that came on persecutors. Employing ancient histories—such as

235 For a discussion of how different groups appealed to the example of the Dutch during the seventeenth-century controversy, see John Coffey, "European Multiconfessionalism and the English Toleration Controversy, 1640–1660," in *A Companion to Multiconfessionalism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Thomas Max Safley (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 340–64.

236 Hugh Dunthorne, *Britain and the Dutch Revolt, 1560–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 170.

those by Eusebius and Theodoret, and *De mortibus persecutorum* by Lactantius—he described in somewhat gruesome detail the downfall and deaths of the persecuting Roman emperors. Owen believed that similar judgments had occurred in more recent English and European history, and he argued that this should serve as a caution to any who might be tempted to fight against God by persecuting the faithful.

For the final part of the tract, Owen turned to consider "what positively the civil magistrate, may, nay, ought to do, in the whole business of religion." This had been a matter of considerable dispute in the Whitehall debates, and Owen handled it in a threefold manner. He began with what he thought was the most important consideration—namely, the magistrate's duty toward the truth and those who professed it, "the settling and establishing of the profession of the gospel." He laid out five position statements. First, the supreme magistrate was to ensure that the truth of the gospel be preached and declared to the nation. Second, it was incumbent upon the magistrate to act against any "unruly men" who employed "force or violence" against the progress of the gospel. Third, the magistrate was to ensure the provision of places of public worship. Fourth, worshipers were to be protected from any who would disturb their gatherings, which included acting against those who had been excommunicated who might try to disrupt a church gathering. Finally, when necessary, it was the duty of the magistrate to provide ministerial maintenance until churches were "settled" and able to provide for their ministers in the "ordinary way." Owen clarified that those who were in error should not expect any support from the magistrate beyond protection from violence, and in so doing the magistrate was not exercising a duty in matters of religion but was simply preserving the public peace. Additionally, the "minute differences" that existed between "Presbyterians and Independents" were not a matter for the civil magistrate, and therefore both those groups should expect the magistrate to support them.

As Owen laid out his vision for the role of the magistrate in matters of religion, he considered how the magistrate should respond to those who opposed the truth that was officially embraced by those in power, not least by way of "disturbances" and blasphemy. In the first instance, the government was to ensure that no public places were used for false worship. This required the removal of altars, crosses, religious images, and prayer books so that those buildings "commonly called churches" could be properly used. For Owen, it also would logically imply the demolition of mosques. This all was straightforward, but he conceded that the question of how to deal with those in error was altogether more difficult.

Nonetheless, he believed that there were "certain clear rules," the first of which was that those who disturbed the peace ought to be restrained. Here he offered the example of the rebellion of radical Anabaptists in the German city of Münster in 1534–1535. The second rule was to apply the negative version of the Golden Rule: "Do not that to another that you would not have done unto yourself." Owen had made this same point in the *Country Essay* of 1646. Third, he dealt with those who endeavored to propagate error with respect to "matters of great weight and importance." Here he referenced the notorious anti-Trinitarian phrase "*Tricipitem Cerberum*."[237] Such rhetoric had been used by Miguel Servet and, in recent days, had been employed by another anti-Trinitarian, Paul Best.[238] For Owen, the issue here was not "disbelieving" the truth but rather the resultant public blasphemy of "reviling opprobrious speeches." In such cases, Owen was inclined to support some degree of "corporal restraint." He was much more convinced about the need for judicial action to be taken against certain itinerant preachers whom he portrayed as lazy vagrants.[239] This was a call for the magistrate to act against such itinerants by utilizing the legal means for dealing with vagabonds. In May, shortly after this tract was written, the Rump Parliament's Poor Act would include additional legislation to deal with "rogues, vagabonds, and beggars."[240] Well aware of the antitolerationist propaganda that was designed to stoke fear, Owen expressed a measure of skepticism about many of the salacious stories that were circulating regarding the "vice and sin" of the sects (presumably about those who would generically come to be referred to as "Ranters" in the 1650s), likening it to the anti-Separatist and anti-Puritan propaganda he remembered from his childhood. Nonetheless, the magistrate was justified in exercising restraining power to "set hedges of thorns" around those who "[broke] forth into disturbance of common order" with "enormities against the light of nature."

Finally, Owen turned to what the magistrate ought to do with the various kinds of "Dissenters." Once again, he did this by setting forth a number

237 In Greek and Latin mythology, Cerberus was the three-headed hound guarding the gates to the underworld.

238 Bruce Gordon, *The Swiss Reformation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 219; Mortimer, *Reason and Religion*, 195.

239 David Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England, 1603–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 250; David Hitchcock, *Vagrancy in English Culture and Society, 1650–1750* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 21–26.

240 See "May 1649: An Act for the Relief and Imployment of the Poor, and the Punishment of Vagrants, and other disorderly Persons, within the City of London, and the Liberties thereof," in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:104–10.

of position statements. First, given the present "confusion" and "the great disorder of the churches," he thought the question was in some ways premature, and his proposals were more provisional than what he had laid out in the earlier part of the tract. Next, he suggested that the state might utilize the Apostles' Creed, "that ancient symbol commonly esteemed apostolical," as an initial summary of the "chief heads of religion" for the churches that would be "owned and protected" to consent to. He thought that this would be a necessary precursor to resolving the recent disputes about "the nature and use of confessions." Third, he recognized that Dissent from the doctrine and worship that would be established could be either in "less matters of small consequence" or in fundamentals. With respect to the former, Owen was clear that if the peace of the church and society was not disturbed, then the magistrate should not attempt to force conscientious Dissenters, "sound in so many fundamentals," to submit or deploy "the laws against idolatry and blasphemy." This can be taken as Owen's dismissal of Parliament's Blasphemy Ordinance of May 1648, which would have punished with imprisonment a multitude of Dissenters, including those who claimed Presbyterianism and paedobaptism to be unlawful.[241] When it came to those who dissented in more fundamental matters, Owen contended that spiritual means should be employed, and if these proved ineffectual, the magistrate ought to act against only Dissenters who disturbed the peace. He acknowledged that there would, undoubtedly, be controversy and disagreement, but this was better than any "compelled peace" because only the Holy Spirit had the power to quiet the conscience.

Owen concluded by suggesting that Parliament might find it necessary to facilitate further debate among those "who are differently minded as to this business of toleration." He sought to define the boundaries of that debate with two corollaries: it was wrong to claim that the magistrate had no powers in matters of religion; second, "corporal punishments for simple error" were anti-Christian. In other words, as Coffey explains, Owen adopted a "measured and judicious approach" that rejected coerced uniformity while leaving a significant role in matters of religion for the civil magistrate.[242]

Owen's tract *Toleration* supported the essence of the religious settlement laid out in *Officers' Agreement*. What was in view in both documents would find later expression in the religious clauses of the Instrument of Government that established the Protectorate in 1653 and that served as the basis for the

241 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 5:549; *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 1:1133–36.
242 Coffey, "John Owen and the Puritan Toleration Controversy," 235.

Cromwellian church settlement. The instrument stated that "the Christian religion, as contained in the Scriptures, be held forth and recommended as the public profession of these nations."[243] However, this state-sponsored national church, united by fundamentals, privileged in so many ways, would be noncompulsory; there would be toleration for anyone outside it who did not disturb the peace, provided they were not advocating popery or prelacy. Similarly, the ideas in this tract found expression in the religious settlement in the Protectorate's second constitution, the *Humble Petition and Advice* (1657).[244] The same view would be present in the Congregationalists' *Savoy Confession* of 1658. Magistrates were "bound to encourage, promote and protect the Professors and Profession of the Gospel" and "to take care that men of corrupt minds and conversations do not licentiously publish and divulge Blasphemy and Errors in their own nature subverting the faith, and inevitably destroying the souls of them that receive them." However, when it came to secondary differences among the godly, those "holding the foundation" and not disturbing the peace were to be protected even when they did not accept the "public profession" in "the Doctrines of the Gospel, or ways of the worship of God."[245] At that time, ten years after the writing of the tract, Owen still regarded the position on toleration set out in *Toleration* as in line with his "Present Judgment" on the matter and was directing readers to it.[246]

ΟΥΡΑΝΩΝ ΟΥΡΑΝΙΑ: THE SHAKING AND TRANSLATING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

The Context of the Sermon

Οὐρανῶν Οὐρανία: The Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth was the second sermon that Owen preached to the purged Parliament at St Margaret's Westminster. In the past three months, the revolution had continued with

243 David L. Smith, "The *Agreements of the People* and the Constitutions of the Interregnum Governments," in *The Agreements of the People, the Levellers and the Constitutional Crisis of the English Revolution*, ed. Philip Baker and Elliot Vernon (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 2012), 247–48.

244 *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:1048–56.

245 *A Declaration of the Faith and Order Owned and Practised by the Congregational Churches in England* [. . .] (London, 1659), 17–18.

246 John Owen, *An Answer to a Late Treatise of the Said Mr. Cawdrey about the Nature of Schism* (Oxford, 1658), 67. See also Owen's letter to Du Moulin in which he mentioned how he had written on the subject and that "the general opinion of most theologians in England is for a civil toleration of those who do not err in fundamental matters." See Adam Quibell, "John Owen's Lost Huguenot Letters: French Reformed Protestants and the Reception of Congregational English Puritan Ecclesiology and Politics," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* (2023), 12.

acts abolishing the office of the king and the House of Lords. The sermon was delivered on the occasion of a national fast, one that had been postponed several times (previous proposed dates were March 22 and April 5) before it finally took place on Thursday, April 19, 1649.[247] According to the parliamentary order, the purpose of the national day of fasting and humiliation was "to implore Gods forgiveness for the ingratitude of the people," particularly "unthankfulness and unfruitfulness under unparalled mercies and deliverances."[248] The idea being "to set the godly tone for the newly established Commonwealth."[249]

The Rump's membership had broadened since Owen's postregicide sermon, and as a preacher he had significant work to do in order to persuade some of the more moderate members of Parliament that the revolutionary events they had witnessed in some horror were indeed providential mercies to be celebrated. According to a hostile royalist newspaper, across the rest of London, the national fast "was not observed in any Church of note," something that it reported caused the government "great grief and vexation."[250] Days afterward, on April 23, the Rump abolished the regular monthly fasts, established in 1642, and replaced them by days of fasting called on a more occasional basis.[251] One of the reasons why they came to an end was the fear that they had become a matter of mere "formal observance."[252] Other reasons included the widespread unpopularity and neglect of the fasts and (perhaps the thing most concerning for the new regime) the fact that on such occasions some pulpits were being used to undermine the government.[253] For example, John Clopton recorded in his diary that the fast "was not kept" in and around his parish on the Essex-Suffolk border.[254] That month, there were serious concerns about the messages that some were communicating from their pulpits: on April 3, the Rump formed a committee to consider "an Act prohibiting Ministers and

247 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:152, 158, 166, 175.

248 *An Act of the Commons of England Assembled in Parliament, for the Keeping a Day of Humiliation upon Thursday the 19 Day of April, 1649* (1649); *The Kingdomes Faithfull and Impartiall Scout* (April 13–20, 1649), 96; *A Perfect Summary of Exact Passages of Parliament* (April 17–23, 1649), 130.

249 Mears et al., *National Prayers*, 1:497.

250 *Mercurius Pragmaticus* (for King Charles II) (April 17–24, 1649), sig. A3v.

251 "April 1649: An Act For setting apart A Day of Solemn Fasting and Humiliation, and Repealing the Former Monethly Fast," in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:79–81.

252 Hughes, "Preachers and Hearers in Revolutionary London," 59; Milton, *England's Second Reformation*, 304.

253 *Perfect Occurrences* 120 (April 13–19, 1649), 944; *Perfect Occurrences* 122 (April 27–May 4, 1649), 1006. See Durston, ' "For the Better Humiliation of the People,' " 142.

254 Mears et al., *Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings*, 497.

Preachers, in Praying or Preaching, to intermeddle with Matters of State";[255] it returned to the matter of disaffected preaching within a fortnight, establishing a committee to discuss the problem of hostile preaching designed "to stir up and disaffect the people."[256] The new regime was under siege and needed preachers like Owen to serve as apologists for the revolution.

Two of the parliamentarians to whom Owen had dedicated *Ebenezer* (1648) issued the invitations to the preachers who were to participate: Owen was invited by Sir William Masham, and Sir Henry Mildmay extended the invitation to John Warren (1621–1696), minister of Hatfield, Broad Oak, Essex.[257] Afterward, the House ordered that the sermons be printed, and Owen's was duly published by John Cleaver, who was also now selling copies of the published version of Owen's preaching on the occasion of the victory at Colchester.[258] Warren's sermon, *The Potent Potter* (1649), emphasized divine sovereignty in the "breaking down, and building up of Nations." He insisted that "God can deal with any people or Nation, as the potter dealeth with his clay." Well aware of the "blustring storms that rage amongst us at these present alterations," Warren argued that in matters of government, God had authority "when he hath removed one forme, to introduce another." His sermon was very much in line with Owen's; echoing the title of his fellow preacher's published sermon, Warren likened the change of government that had taken place to "an old house translated into a new form."[259]

Owen's sermon appears to have had an immediate impact on at least one of his auditors. According to the memoirs of Asty, Oliver Cromwell heard Owen preach this sermon and a few days later encountered him at the home of Thomas Fairfax. Cromwell informed Owen that he was "the person I must be acquainted with." Owen is said to have responded, "That will be much more to my advantage than yours," to which Cromwell replied, "We shall see."[260] Cromwell's experience was far from unique because this sermon continued to resonate with those living in times of political crisis. In 1655, the Fifth Monarchist John Spittlehouse quoted extensively from this sermon to accuse Owen of abandoning his earlier convictions.[261] Similarly, in the turmoil of 1659, a Fifth Monarchist pamphlet

255 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:178.

256 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:183, 186–87.

257 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:152.

258 Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, 96; Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 107.

259 John Warren, *The Potent Potter* (London, 1649), 6, 9–10,12–13.

260 Asty, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," 9.

261 John Spittlehouse, *The Royall Advocate. Or, An Introduction to the Magnificent and Honourable Laws of Jehovah the Lord Christ, Now Contaminated and Despised by the Present Army-Men of this Nation* (London, 1655), 50–59.

reminded readers of exactly what had been said by "Dr. Owen in his Sermon [on] Heb. 12.27."[262] Some years later, in the revolutionary fervor of the late eighteenth century, this sermon was reissued in London in 1793, Edinburgh in 1774, Belfast and Monaghan in 1795, and again in Belfast in 1797.[263]

The subject matter was apt, given that the new republic no doubt felt as if it were being shaken to its very foundations by a range of domestic and international threats. At home, the new regime was widely unpopular and faced a very difficult economic situation, particularly with the rising costs of food and fuel. Politically, it was encountering opposition from both conservatives wishing to restore the monarchy and disgruntled radicals alike.[264] Two days after Owen delivered the sermon, the London women's petition was presented to the Commons, expressing concerns about a nation "laid waste" and the day-to-day reality of "poverty, misery and famine."[265] Within the rank-and-file soldiers of the New Model Army, there was also mounting dissatisfaction due to arrears of pay and the prospect of the being shipped to Ireland. There was also the very real prospect of a Leveller rising among the soldiers. The Leveller leader, John Lilburne, had published *Englands New Chains Discovered*, attacking the Independents and the army for betraying the cause and adopting the character of the old tyrannical regime.[266] Some in the army believed that there should be no Irish expedition until the English liberties were protected in An Agreement of the People.[267] The Commons voted *The Second Part of Englands New-Chaines* "highly seditious," and Lilburne along with three others Leveller leaders were sent to the Tower to await trial, from where they did all that they could to stir up sedition in the army.[268] A week after Owen preached, there was a minor mutiny in one of the regiments in London, which saw trooper Robert Lockyer executed by way of exemplary punishment.[269] On the day Owen penned his preface (May 1), the four imprisoned leaders orchestrated the publication of the most radical Leveller constitution, *An Agreement of the Free People of England*.[270]

262 *The Fifth Monarchy, or Kingdom of Christ, in Opposition to the Beasts, Asserted, by the Solemn League and Covenant, Several Learned Divines, the Late General and Army, (viz.) in their Declaration at Muslebrough, August 1650* (London, 1659), 7–8.

263 Gribben, "Becoming John Owen," 319.

264 Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 281.

265 Gary S. De Krey, *Following the Levellers*, vol. 1, *Political and Religious Radicals in the English Civil War and Revolution, 1645–1649* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 239.

266 *Englands New Chains Discovered* (London, [February 26,] 1649).

267 See, for example, *The English Souldiers Standard* (London, [April 5,] 1649), 9.

268 John Lilburne, *The Second Part of Englands New-Chaines Discovered* (London, [March 24,] 1648).

269 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 164–65.

270 De Krey, *Following the Levellers*, 244–47.

In the wider context, the covenanted Scots were horrified at the death of the king and had immediately recognized his son as Charles II. On top of this, a significant part of the navy had revolted during the second Civil War and was now under the control of Prince Rupert.[271] In Ireland, the regicide had united the main rival factions in support of a Stuart restoration: in January, James Butler, Marquess of Ormond, had negotiated an alliance between royalist and Irish Roman Catholic forces termed the Second Ormond Peace.[272] For a time, the Scottish Presbyterians in Ulster allied with them. It is no wonder that as Owen surveyed the nations of the world, he lamented how so many were "wasted, destroyed, [and] spoiled," and concluded that "God has taken quietness and peace from the earth."

Despite these domestic and foreign threats, this sermon gives voice to what Worden describes as "an exultant mood in and about [Owen's] circle in the period around the regicide."[273] Coffey captures the essence of this sermon by describing it as "apocalyptic."[274] In his postregicide sermon from January, Owen had already spoken of how "the shaking of heaven and earth" would result in further political turmoil. This sermon anticipates the prospect of the reconstruction of the political and religious structures of England as Owen boldly proclaimed that the "season of the accomplishment of [God's] great intendments for the good of his church" was "nigh at hand, even at the doors." Owen was fully persuaded that God was at work to "refashion the governments of the world."[275] Despite some opposition, plans were advancing for the conquest of Ireland, and the day before Owen preached lots were cast to select the four New Model regiments that would be sent to give "timely relief to that distressed Country."[276] Such wide-scale millenarian optimism was, no doubt, bolstered by news that France was experiencing its own internal crisis, the Fronde (1648–1653), a series of civil wars and disturbances during the minority of Louis XIV. Like the conflict in England, this revolt came about through a desire to curb royal authority in support of the ancient liberties of the people. In London at the end of February, news reports circulated about how the French king had been forced "to yield" by calling a

271 Bernard Capp, "Naval Operations," in John P. Kenyon and Jane Ohlmeyer (eds.), *The Civil Wars: A Military History of England, Scotland and Ireland, 1638–1660* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 184–87.

272 Micheál Ó Siochrú, *Confederate Ireland 1642–1649: A Constitutional and Political Analysis* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1999), 185–204.

273 Worden, *God's Instruments*, 335.

274 Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution*, 193.

275 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 107.

276 *Perfect Weekly Account* (April 11–April 18, 1649), 445; *Perfect Weekly Account* (April 18–April 25, 1649), 453.

"generall Parliament of the Estates."[277] The Spanish branch of the Habsburg Empire was having to deal with the secessionist revolts in Naples (1647), Catalonia (1640–1653), and Portugal (1640–1668). It is therefore unsurprising that Owen felt that he "need not speak one word" about the "shaking of civil constitutions" that had taken place "under our eyes." He believed that this would usher in a whole new era: "the prosperous estate of the kingdom of Christ."

The sermon was printed by Matthew Simmons, who had published Owen's postregicide parliamentary sermon from January 1649. It was to be sold by John Cleaver. This is Cleaver's "only recorded publication."[278] His bookshop was located close St Paul's School, founded in 1509 by the Dean of the Cathedral, John Colet.[279] A deed in the London Metropolitan Archives reveals that by 1653 Cleaver's shop at St Paul's Churchyard was in the hands of another stationer by the name of George Greene.[280]

Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen's aim in this sermon was "the confirming and establishing [of] his countrymen in the faith of this glorious gospel" so that he would "persuade professors to constancy in the paths of the gospel." His text from Hebrews enabled him to address those who because of "opposition or persecution" had succumbed to "apostasy" and "backsliding." John Tweeddale describes how in Owen's careful exegesis of the text, he can be seen at the opening of the sermon in "noting linguistic nuances, expounding the wider biblical context of the letter, and interacting with differing commentators on the passage."[281] The central trope he chose to focus on was the shaking of the heavens and earth. He rejects what he regarded as three inappropriate interpretations of what it meant for heaven and earth to be shaken.[282] First, the view of Rollock and Piscator and "sundry other famous divines," that it is humanity and the angels

277 *Perfect Weekly Account* (February 21–February 28, 1649), 403.

278 Blayney, *The Bookshops of Paul's Cross Churchyard*, 51, 77. A stationer of the name John Cleaver is referenced in *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640*, ed. Edward Arber, 5 vols. (London, 1875–1894), 2:736.

279 For the print culture associated with this area, see Benjamin King-Cox and Daniel Starza Smith, "Buying and Selling Books Around St Paul's Cathedral: 'Be Dishonest, and Tell Lies,'" in *Old St Paul's and Culture*, ed. Shanyn Altman and Jonathan Buckner (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 269–92.

280 City of London Corporation, *Miscellaneous Deeds at the London Metropolitan Archives* (CLC/522), Add. Mss. 0924, 326.

281 John W. Tweeddale, *John Owen and Hebrews: The Foundation of Biblical Interpretation* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 33.

282 See John H. Duff, *"A Knot Worth Unloosing": The Interpretation of the New Heavens and Earth in Seventeenth-Century England* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2019), 49–64.

who are shaken through the incarnation of the Son. Owen dismisses this on a twofold basis: at the time when the epistle to the Hebrews was being written, the shaking was presented as a future event yet to take place; and Hebrews states that what is shaken is removed, which makes no sense if human beings and the angelic company are in view. Second, Owen rejected the interpretation of Junius and "most" English commentators that the shaking is that of the creation by way of the events that accompanied Christ's birth, death, and resurrection—for example, the star, the darkness, and the earthquake. Owen denied this interpretation on the same basis as the first. The third interpretation denied by Owen is that the shaking in view is that which takes place at the consummation of all things. Owen rejects this because he believed that although the kingdom of Christ had not yet been revealed in its full glory, it nonetheless had been established by Jesus Christ. Owen's interpretation is based on the meaning of "heaven and earth" in the passage from Haggai from which the quotation is drawn (Hag. 2:6–7). He argues that the author has employed more words than is strictly necessary ("pleonasm") in order to emphasize that the heavens and earth of all nations will be shaken. According to his interpretation, as is typical in prophetic literature, the idiom refers to the shaking of a nation's government (its "heaven") and the people of the nations (the "earth").

The trope of shaking from Hebrews 12:27 was also employed by others close to Owen to explain how the kingdom of Christ would be ushered in.[283] In the posthumously published *Supereminence of Christ above Moses*, Thomas Goodwin spoke of the "unparalleled changes, alterations, and abolitions of things which were already begun . . . and are to go on till they are to be consummated in the latter day." Like Owen, Goodwin contended that "States and kingdoms, and the governments, and powers, and ranks in them, are as ordinarily set forth by this metaphor of heaven and earth." For Goodwin, the scope of this shaking was comprehensive and included the establishment of the "ordinances, institutions, and administrations . . . of gospel worship"; "all other alterations of religions, false and suppositious"; and "all the alterations, shakings and removals civil that have been in states."[284]

283 William Strong, *The Vengeance of the Temple: Discovered in a Sermon Preached Before the Right Honourable the Lord Major* [. . .] *May 17 1648. Being the Day of Publique Thanksgiving for a Victory Obtayned by the Forces Under the Command of Colonell Horton, at St. Faggons, Neere Cardiffe in Wales* (London, 1648), 44; M. Barker, *A Christian Standing & Moving upon the True Foundation* (London, 1648), 47; John Cotton, *The Powring Out of the Seven Vials* (London, 1642), "The Seventh Vial," 7; Thomas Goodwin's treatise *Supereminence of Christ Above Moses* is an exposition of these two texts, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D. Sometime President of Magdalen Colledg in Oxford*, 5 vols. (London, 1681–1704), 5:439–62.

284 Goodwin, *Supereminence of Christ*, in *Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 5:439–40, 457–59.

This exposition enabled him to play his part in helping justify the new and unpopular regime by explaining that what was taking place was a "civil shaking" of "the political heights, the splendor and strength of the nations of the earth." Owen sought to persuade members of Parliament that in contemporary events, "heaven and earth" were being shaken to make way for the things that were unshakeable—namely, the prosperous estate of the kingdom of Christ. He believed that this prophetic idiom included the transformation of a nation's "political heights and glory" (its heavens) and "the nation's earth," which he understood to be "the multitudes of their people, their strength and power, whereby their heavens, or political heights, are supported."[285] This would bring down "the pillars" and "props" that upheld the spiritual city of Babylon—namely, the governing powers of the world in their present form.[286] In the process, God was planting new heavens and laying the foundations of a new earth (Isa. 51)—that is, establishing governments that would allow "the Nations, as Nations," to serve the kingdom of Christ (Rev. 11:15).

In the past, God had shaken to pieces the heavens and earth of the Roman Empire ("the pagan-Roman state"; Owen points to Rev. 6:12–15). This began in the plagues that came on the persecuting Roman emperors and ended "in the ruin of the empire itself." Subsequently, from the "crumbled" remains of the Roman Empire, Satan "molded" the heaven and earth of "papal anti-Christian Rome," which was spread "through all the nations of the West." Owen contended that this era of "anti-Christian tyranny" would soon be brought to an end by those Western nations and their "political heights," "governments," and constitutions being shaken. From the "confusion," these nations would emerge "translated [and] new-molded" and be instrumental in both the destruction of the antichrist as the bringing in of Christ's "peaceable kingdom." There were, he said, "innumerable promises" about the "visible glorious appearance" of the Christ's kingdom in the last days. It would be an era marked by the blessings of "the special presence of Christ," such as "multitudes of the elect being . . . born," the callings of the Jews, and the renewal of the worship of the church. Owen did not subscribe to what he thought to be fanciful ideas of "a terrene kingly state" associated with "the personal reign of the Lord Jesus on earth," viewing the "curiosities" of some as undermining authority in both church and state. Owen was also concerned that the Fifth Monarchists were undermining the legitimate

285 Samuel Parker drew attention to Owen's use of this language. See Parker, *Defence and Continuation*, 114.

286 In 1655, Cromwell utilized the same trope to describe Spain as "the great underproper" of "Romain Babilon." See Cromwell, *Letters, Writings, and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell*, 2:231.

civil power. According to him, they too mistakenly thought that the political heights would be removed rather than translated. He clearly distanced himself from those who "for sinister ends pretend . . . to fancy to themselves a terrene kingly state, unto each private particular saint," thinking that this would lead to "the disturbance of all order and authority, civil and spiritual," and that Christ would "exceedingly abhor" such "confusion and disorder." For Owen, the visible appearance of Christ on earth was something that would take place only at his future glorious appearance as Judge (Rev. 19:13). Rather, he expected that by "the special presence of Christ" the church would enjoy in the near future a golden era characterized by freedom from persecution and purity of worship.

Owen turned to confirm what he had said by way of appeal to the timeline of events outlined in Daniel 2 and Revelation 17. This prophetic chronology, one that would help bolster the new regime, was employed by a number of republican polemicists at this time.[287]

According to this scheme, in the fifth century, when the Germanic peoples settled the territory of the former Western Roman Empire, ten nations emerged as "distinct dominions." This was also the time when the Papacy emerged. This "Roman harlot" gained the support and allegiance of these nations that promised to undertake the defense of the "holy church." Having "submitted to the usurpation of the man of sin," these nations effectively came into papal servitude. Owen claimed that in the period from approximately 750 to 1066, "the pope had a hand" in every alteration of government that took place across Europe, and this brought "all these nations into subjection to his Babylonish usurpations." This resulted in the "false worship" and the "witnesses of the Lamb" being persecuted "with fire and sword" as "heretics." Owen referenced the work of the martyrologist John Foxe as he outlined how the persecution of the true church began in earnest in the tenth century and continued with the persecution of groups such as the Lollards, Waldensians, Cathars, and the Hussites. Owen's assessment of the government of most of the European kingdoms was that they were "purely framed for the interest of Antichrist" and thus stood "in direct opposition to the bringing in of the kingdom of Christ." Adopting a decidedly antimonarchical tone, Owen claimed that all the Western kings were united in this "implacable enmity" toward the godly and that "the papal interest" lay at the bottom of all or the most ruling lines in Christendom. The "Western nations" had

287 Nicole Greenspan, *Selling Cromwell's Wars: Media, Empire and Godly Warfare, 1650–1658* (London: Routledge, 2016), 20.

been tricked and deceived by the papacy, the whore of Babylon, and brought into "spiritual and civil slavery" while their rulers were "drunk with the cup of her abominations." Owen's point that many kings were in the service of popery would have gained plausibility from Charles II being allied with Irish Roman Catholics and seeking assistance from other Roman Catholic kings to secure his restoration. The articles of Second Ormond Peace of January 1649, well-publicized in London, offered a number of concessions to Irish Roman Catholics, including freedom of worship, a discharge of all indictments since 1641, and the possibility of holding public office.[288] Uncovering these links between the institutions of monarchy and popery was part of how Owen sought to build support for the new godly regime and to explain the nature of the opposition that it faced.

Owen believed that the European nations that evolved out of the old Roman Empire were in the process of being thoroughly shaken so that they would no longer support the Papacy. After this shaking of the nations, the Papacy would be dethroned, and the church would enjoy peace and prosperity. No amount of "digging or mining" would be able to change the present constitutions that were "directly framed to the interest of Antichrist" ("dig you never so deep, build you never so high"). Rather, what was required was for Christ to "so far open their whole frame to the roots, as to pluck out all the cursed seeds of the mystery of Iniquity, which by the craft of Satan and exigencies of State, or methods of advancing the pride and power of some sons of blood, have been sown among them." Contextually, it is plausible to see oblique references here to two groups of which members of Parliament were well aware of: first, the Diggers (or True Levellers) sowing seed and, second, the Derbyshire miners of the Peak District.

Three weeks before Owen preached this sermon, Gerrard Winstanley and around thirty others established a settlement on St George's Hill, Walton-on-Thames, Surrey. They began to cultivate the commons, "casting in Seed, that we may eat our Bread together in righteousness."[289] These "Diggers" declared the earth a common treasury and called for an end to private property as the source of all bondage and violence. This was a highly provocative assault on the existing social structures because Winstanley and his small group of followers had no legal right to the land. On April 16, the Council of State

288 *Perfect Diurnall* [. . .] (March 26–April 2, 1649), 2388–89.

289 Gerrard Winstanley, *The True Levellers Standard Advanced* (April 1649), in *The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, ed. T. N. Corns et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 252; John Gurney, "Gerrard Winstanley and the Digger Movement in Walton and Cobham," *Historical Journal* 37, no. 4 (1994): 775–802.

ordered Fairfax to disperse them, and on the day of Owen's sermon, Captain Gladman was in Surrey investigating. The following day, April 20, Winstanley and William Everard were brought to Whitehall to explain themselves (both refused to remove their hats).[290]

Regarding the second group with levelling tendencies, for several years the Earl of Rutland had been involved in a dispute with lead miners who claimed the right to mine on his Derbyshire estate. On March 28, Rutland had petitioned the Commons to declare against the miners who had recently won the support of the Levellers.[291] Countering such levelling ideas, Owen explained that the change of government that was to be expected would be a "translation," not "a destruction and total amotion, of the great things of the Nations" (the legal term *amotion* means either "removal of a person from office" or "removal of property from its owner"). He believed that the magistracy would be "new molded for the interest of the Lord Jesus," rather than be levelled. Anthony Ascham expressed similar sentiments that year when he wrote against those who "by a new Art of levelling, thinke nothing can be rightly mended or reformed, unlesse the whole piece ravell out to the very end, and that all intermediate greatnesse betwixt Kings and them, should be crumbled even to dust, where all lying levell together as in the first Chaos."[292]

In a context in which there was intense debate about the nature and legitimacy of government, Owen argued that turning to other "carnal" forms of government was, likewise, no solution. He described those for whom "no sooner is one carnal form shaken out, but they are ready to cleave to another: yea to warm themselves in the feathered nests of unclean birds." In the Bible, the unclean birds are listed in Leviticus 11:13–19 and Deuteronomy 14:11–18, and in Revelation, fallen Babylon (i.e., Rome) becomes "a cage of every unclean and hateful bird" (Rev. 18:2). It would appear that by these "feathered nests," Owen may have been alluding to the ideas of the political thought of classical antiquity. At that time, some were attempting to legitimize the new regime by appealing to the ideas of classical republicanism and the Renaissance humanism of the city-states of the Italian peninsula.[293] The journalist Marchamont Nedham would be responsible

290 William Clarke, *The Clarke Papers*, vols. 1–4, ed. C. H. Firth (London: Camden Society, 1891–1901), 2:210–12.

291 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:175; Andy Wood, *The Politics of Social Conflict: The Peak Country, 1520–1770* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 279–85.

292 Anthony Ascham, *Of the Confusions and Revolutions of Governments* (London, 1649), 18.

293 Blair Worden, "Classical Republicanism and the Puritan Revolution," in *History and Imagination: Essays in Honour of H. R. Trevor-Roper*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Valerie Pearl, and Blair Worden (London: Duckworth, 1981), 184–93; J. G. A. Pocock, "Political Thought in the Cromwellian

for widely disseminating these neoclassical ideas, first in *The Case of the Commonwealth of England, Stated* (1650) and then in the government newspaper *Mercurius Politicus* (1651–1652).[294] Just over a month before Owen made these comments, the godly in England's second city, Norwich, voiced similar concerns about those who looked to the ideas of "heathen Rome and Athens."[295] His assessment was that "the whole present constitution of the government of the nations, is so cemented with anti-Christian mortar, from the very top to the bottom," that the only solution was the "thorough shaking" that Owen was expounding. Similarly, the "invented idolatrous worship" of the nations was likewise "riveted and cemented" into the European nations. Owen believed that the idolatry of the Roman Catholic Church was the most significant obstacle to Jewish conversion. An apocalyptic shaking and metamorphosis of the nations would be required if it was to be removed. This would shake out all idolatrous practices such as "iconolatry, artolatry, hagiolatry, staurolatry, and mass abominations." These tropes of "riveting" and "cementing" were used across the spectrum to refer to strong coupling of episcopacy into the old constitution. On the one hand, for example, the radical army chaplain John Saltmarsh described how prelacy "remained rivetted into our Laws and usages" and on the other, Bishop John Bramhall, spoke of episcopacy as "woven and riveted into the body of our law" and "cemented into our laws."[296] Thus, according to Owen, constitutional reformation would require the separation of powers that had been strongly intertwined. This would involve them being "translated in mind, interest, and perhaps government" so that they would become "instrumental in the hand of Christ for the ruin of that anti-Christian state which before they served."

Owen applied this by way of six "uses." He devoted significant material to the first point of application as he called his hearers to understand the "times

---

Interregnum," in *W. P. Morrell: A Tribute*, ed. G. A. Wood and P. S. O'Connor (Dunedin: University of Otago, 1973), 21–36.

294 Blair Worden, "Marchamont Nedham and the Beginnings of English Republicanism, 1649–1656," in *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society, 1649–1776*, ed. David Wootton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 45–81.

295 *Certain Quaeres Humbly Presented in Way of Petition* (London, [February 1649]), 3; Sarah Barber, *Regicides and Republicanism: Politics and Ethics in the English Revolution, 1646–1659* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 192.

296 John Saltmarsh, *A Solemn Discourse upon the Grand Covenant* (London, 1643), 50; John Bramhall, *The Serpent Salve* (1643), in *Works*, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1842–1845), 3:468–69; David L. Smith, *Constitutional Royalism and the Search for a Settlement, c.1640–1649* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 220–23.

and seasons" and to familiarize themselves with "the mind and will of God" in their "generation"—in particular, "the season of the accomplishment of his great intendments for the good of his church." The results of such a diligent inquiry would deliver them being preoccupied with attempts to establish a uniform liturgy or polity within the church. It was folly to work "night and day to set up what God will pull down." It would also dispel "sinful cares" about "the force and power of this or that growing monarchy," perhaps a reference to fears that William II was seeking to become the absolute monarch of the United Provinces and might seek to intervene in English affairs on behalf of his brother-in-law, Charles II. Such understanding of the prophetic chronology would remove anxiety about "wars, and rumors of wars, appearances of famine, invasions, conspiracies, revolts, treacheries, sword, blood." In order to "follow hard after God," it was necessary to have insight into the work that God was accomplishing at that time. Owen explained that the "peculiar light of this generation" lay in "the great discovery" "of the mystery of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny"—that is, the "anti-Christian interest" that saw "civil and spiritual" things being "interwoven, and coupled together." Months later, Milton would employ similar language to "discover more of Mysterie and combination between Tyranny and fals Religion," those "twisted Scorpions" of "temporal and spiritual Tyranny" whose "very dark roots" "twine and interweave."[297] For Owen, civil and ecclesiastical powers had to be unraveled, and this would require an "earthquake," an entirely new constitutional settlement.

Owen believed that Scripture was silent on exactly how, or for how long, the shaking would proceed: the new Babylon had taken over "a thousand years" to build and so it was unlikely to fall in under "a thousand days." This apocalyptic shaking would continue until "the interest of anti-Christianity be wholly separated from the power of those nations." Owen thought that it was significant that the shaking of the "heavens" of the nations had already reached the point where the political controversy was now about "the interest of the many" rather than being taken up with "the power and splendor of single persons." As well as events in England, Owen may have had in mind the secessionist revolts in Portugal, Catalonia, and Naples against the absolutism of the Spanish Habsburgs, the Fronde rebellion designed to curb royal authority, and opposition to the monarchical tendencies of William II, Orange stadtholder in the Netherlands.[298] The saints were expecting the liberty that would come as both civil and ecclesiastical tyranny came to an end.

297 John Milton, *Eikonoklestes in Answer to a Book Intitl'd Eikon Basilike* (London, 1650), 148, 200.

298 Donald H. Pennington, *Europe in the Seventeenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2014), 326–31, 388–97, 469–75.

Owen's second use was to call his hearers to "embrace the Lord Jesus in his kingly power" by enthroning Christ in their hearts. For those serving in government, this required serious consideration of how the Lord was shaking the heavens and earth of the nations, bringing the "potentates" of this world to justice for their sins and a realization that his aim was "to frame and form" them as "kingdoms of the Lord Jesus." Owen referred his readers to the tract *Toleration*, which he had appended to the published version of his fast sermon from January, explaining how it set out what the true interest of the nation involved.

The final four uses were covered is less detail. The realization that the heavens of the nation were being shaken would help explain how "some who pretended to be church stars" and who sought a place in the "political heavens" of the nation were shaken to the ground. For Owen, this served as a warning to those who were vacillating, unsure of which way to turn, that if they failed to serve the interests of Christ they too would be shaken from their places. This resulted in a call to self-examination because the nation was "entering the most purging trying furnace, that ever the Lord set up on the earth." Consequently, Owen called his hearers to be "loose from all shaken things" and to keep their eyes, hearts, and hands focused on the things that would not be shaken. Well aware that "some are angry, some troubled, some in the dark, [and] some full of revenge," Owen closed with the uncompromising assertion that "Babylon shall fall" and the kingdoms of the earth would become "the kingdoms of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rev. 11:5).

HUMAN POWER DEFEATED

The Context of Owen's Sermon Celebrating the Defeat of the Levellers at Burford

In the spring of 1649, the army was "seething with unrest": Parliament had not acted to settle arrears in pay, there was reluctance to embark on the impending expedition to Ireland, and the government was slow to implement hoped-for reform. This discontent was further stirred up by the Levellers.[299] This group was associated with John Lilburne, Richard Overton, and William Walwyn, and its political agenda was to extend the electoral franchise and safeguard the political and religious liberties of the English people under a new written constitution. The Leveller movement had emerged during the civil wars as the parliamentarian side became increasingly divided over

299 Gentles, *The English Revolution*, 386.

questions about the religious settlement, the role of the ancient institutions, and the nature and legitimacy of government. The first known political use of the term *Leveller* was in 1607, when it was used to name a group in Northamptonshire who protested the enclosure of commons by filling in the ditches and levelling the fences that marked the new boundaries. The first use of the term for the movement in question may quite possibly have been by Oliver Cromwell at the Putney Debates of 1647.[300] The leaders of the movement objected to the term because it suggested that they wished to obliterate distinctions in rank and to challenge traditional property rights. A draft constitution termed *An Agreement of the People* went through several editions between 1647 and 1649, and during this time Leveller ideas took hold in the army. There had been a rapprochement between the senior army officers and the Leveller leaders late in 1648, but this had broken down. In the negotiations that took place in November 1648 to January 1649, no consensus was reached, and there were fundamental differences between the Levellers' second *Agreement* and the *Officers' Agreement*. The Levellers felt betrayed and viewed the events of the revolution as simply the exchange of one tyranny for another. On March 28, four days after the appearance of *The Second Part of Englands New-Chaines Discovered*, a blistering attack on the new military regime, the government arrested Lilburne, Overton, Walwyn, and Thomas Prince. This tract was viewed as seditious and as a threat to the reconquest of Ireland by fomenting further war at home.[301] The prisoners were taken before the Council of State and, after refusing to answer any questions, committed to the Tower of London on suspicion of high treason. On May 14, Parliament passed a new Treason Act that made "Writing, Printing, or openly Declaring, that the . . . government is Tyrannical, Usurped or Unlawful" a capital offence.[302]

There was a small mutiny in Colonel Edward Whalley's cavalry regiment on April 24, which saw one of the ringleaders, Robert Lockyer, court-martialed and executed. Significant defiance against the regime was demonstrated at his funeral.[303] The following month, there was a much more serious mutiny.

300 Blair Worden, "Appendix—'The Levellers': The Emergence of the Term," in *The Putney Debates of 1647: The Army, the Levellers and the English State*, ed. Michael Mendel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 280–82.

301 Michael Braddick, *The Common Freedom of the People: John Lilburne and the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 168.

302 "July 1649: An Act Declaring What Offences shall be adjudged Treason," in *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 2:120–21.

303 Ian Gentles, "Political Funerals During the English Revolution," in *London and the Civil War*, ed. Stephen Porter (Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1996), 218–21.

On May 1 at Salisbury in Wiltshire, a significant number of the troops in Colonel Scroop's regiment of horse, en route for embarkation at Bristol, revolted, refusing to go to Ireland until their grievances were met. The mutineers outlined their grievances in *The Resolutions of the Private Souldiery of Col. Scroops Regiment of Horse* (1649). They called for "Freedom, Peace, and Happiness [to be] Setled in the Nation, and that the Souldiery should have Satisfaction" prior to the Irish expedition, and they also sought the restoration of the elected army council of 1647. They were joined by elements from Ireton's regiment at Old Sarum from where they issued a declaration on May 11.[304] They refused to participate in the "Relief of Ireland" until their "Native Liberties" were restored, and they called for the return of the General Council with representatives from each regiment.[305]

They were joined by other mutineers, including a troop from Harrison's regiment, making a total force of around nine hundred men.[306] William Thompson, a Leveller who had been a corporal in Whalley's regiment, led another group of several hundred mutineers who made for Banbury on May 6 and issued *England's Standard Advanced*. It articulated the demands of the soldiers and included the text of the latest Leveller manifesto, *The Agreement of the People*. Thompson's aim was to rally with the main group of mutineers from Wiltshire at Burford, but this came to nothing because of the intervention of Colonel Reynolds. There was also the suggestion of a mutiny in Buckinghamshire, but this failed to materialize.[307]

Fairfax and Cromwell mustered forces loyal to them in Hyde Park on May 9 and set out along the Thames Valley to the Cotswolds. The main body of mutineers converged on the Oxfordshire village of Burford. Fairfax decided that decisive action was required before the mutiny spread. Cromwell led a surprise assault in the early hours of May 15 with his cavalry and a detachment of Colonel Okey's dragoons. Major Francis White was negotiating with the mutineers when Cromwell attacked.[308] Despite some initial resistance, in the dazed confusion many of the Levellers immediately surrendered and the loss of life was minimal.[309] Cromwell held around three hundred forty

304 *The Levellers (Falsly So Called) Vindicated* (London, 1649), 3–5.

305 *The Unanimous Declaration of Colonel Scroope's and Commissary Gen. Ireton's Regiments* (London, 1649); *The Moderate* (May 1–8, 1649).

306 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 166–70.

307 Braddick, *Common Freedom of the People,* 171.

308 Francis White, *A True Relation of the Proceedings in the Businesse of Burford* (London, 1649), 7.

309 *Moderate Intelligencer* (May 10–17, 1649), 2048; William Eyre, *Serious Representation of Col. William Eyre* (London, 1649), 5; Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller, *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (Brighton: Harvester, 1984), s.v. "Eyre, William."

men captive in Burford parish church.[310] The Council of War had determined that all mutineers were liable to death, but, since the majority confessed to "the odious wickedness" of what they had done, the punishment was limited to those deemed to be the four main leaders. Four of the ringleaders were court-martialed and sentenced to death. On the morning of May 17, Cornet James Thompson (William's brother) and Corporals Church and Perkins were executed in the churchyard. A second cornet from Scrope's regiment, Henry Denne, was appropriately penitent and was pardoned.[311] Denne was a General Baptist preacher who preached a sermon of repentance to the other mutineers in the parish church. Denne wrote a tract designed to persuade others that the Levellers were a "dangerous and destructive Faction."[312] Denne thanked "the great providence of God" for stopping the Levellers "from turning all things upside down."[313] The mutineers who fled were hunted down, with William Thompson being killed in Wellingborough, Northamptonshire, on May 17 and William Eyre being imprisoned in Oxford.

Gentles describes the event as "the most serious internal challenge faced by the republican regime until 1659."[314] With the suppression of the mutineers, army discipline was restored, and with the Leveller leaders in the Tower, any thought of further Leveller mobilization disappeared. Cromwell reported to the Commons that the victory was like waking from a bad dream. If the rebellion had not been crushed, the mutineers would soon have been joined by "discontented persons, Servants, Reformadoes, beggars &c." He claimed that their plan was to "cast off all Government, and chose some among themselves to have made new Lawes." It would have led to the murder of all "Ministers and Lawyers,"[315] (including Episcopalians and Presbyterians), and an eradication of private property.

On May 26, a public thanksgiving was appointed for Thursday, June 7, and Thomas Goodwin and Owen were called to preach.[316] The order was passed on June 1, and on June 5 it was decided that the day should also be used to give thanks for recent naval successes. Christ Church, Newgate Street, was

310 *Full Narrative of All the Proceedings between His Excellency the Lord Fairfax and the Mutineers* (London, [May 18,] 1649), 3.

311 *A Declaration of the Proceedings of His Excellency the Lord General Fairfax in the Reducing of the Revolting Troops* (London, [May 23,] 1649), 10–11.

312 Henry Denne, *The Levellers Designe Discovered: Or the Anatomie of the Late Unhappie Mutinie* (London, 1649), 3. The book collector Thomason acquired his copy on May 24.

313 Denne, *Levellers Designe Discovered*, 5.

314 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 172.

315 *Perfect Occurrences* 126 (May 25–June 1, 1649), 1054.

316 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:218, 220–21; *Perfect Occurrences* 126, 1054.

appointed as the place where the thanksgiving service would take place.[317] Reviving an earlier practice, the London Common Council resolved on May 29 to invite members of Parliament, the Council of State, and senior army officers to dinner at the Grocers' Hall to demonstrate "the city's good affections towards them."[318] The regime hoped that the occasion would help reconcile the City of London to the new government, and the consensus of the news reports was that Goodwin and Owen both preached of "the great blessing of peace and unity."[319] Once again, Christ Church was "a focal point for the enactment of parliamentarianism as ideology and alliance."[320] For example, one report described how "Mr. Thomas Goodwin and Mr Owen of Coxhall in Essex preacht before them, and applyed themselves notably to the time and occasion incouraging all men to Love and Unity: Of which, here is a rare and reall example of the happy Union betwixt the Parliament, City and Army."[321] Not everyone in London was rejoicing, according to *The Moderate*: "the Ministers of the City were very much blamed, for their great neglect, in not observing thereof." Some of the Presbyterian clergy used the day to pray openly for the new king.[322] In Essex, John Clopton reported that the day of thanksgiving was "kept of very few."[323] After the thanksgiving service there was a lavish feast. According the Bulstrode Whitelocke, a member of the new Council of State, "The Music was only drums and trumpets."[324] The events were widely mocked: for example, *Hosanna: or, A Song of Thanksgiving* (1649) published spoof speeches supposedly delivered at the event.[325]

317 At the time, this was one of the largest church buildings in the City of London. The thirteenth-century Gothic style building had originally been established as a monastic church but became a parish church after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. Rather poignantly, Owen's old opponent, the heresiographer Thomas Edwards, had held a weekly lectureship from its pulpit in the 1640s. It would be destroyed in the Great Fire of London (1666) and subsequently rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren. See Hughes, *Gangraena*, 31–31, 135–36; Derek Pearsall, *Gothic Europe 1200–1450* (London: Pearson, 2001), 96.

318 Christ Church had hosted the thanksgiving services for victory at the battle of Naseby (June 1645) and for the suppression of royalist resistance in the west (April 1646). For the practice of feastings at the Grocers' Hall, see Juxon, *Journal of Thomas Juxon*, 113.

319 *A Modest Narrative of Intelligence* 10 (June 2–9, 1649), 80. See also *Perfect Occurrences* 127 (June 1–8, 1649), 1096; *A Perfect Summary of an Exact Dyarie of Some Passages of Parliament* 21 (June 4–11, 1649), 165.

320 Hughes, *Gangraena*, 134.

321 *The Kingdomes Faithfull and Impartiall Scout* 19 (June 1–8, 1649), 142.

322 *The Moderate* 48 (June 5–12, 1649), 551.

323 Mears et al., *Special Prayers, Fasts and Thanksgivings*, 503.

324 Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affair*, 3:47.

325 See also *The Man in the Moon* 8 (May 28–June 5, 1649), 73; *Mercurius Elenctius* 12 (July 9–16, 1649), 89.

The establishment regarded Owen's sermon as very satisfactory, with the *Commons Journal* recording,

> That the Thanks of this House be returned unto Mr. *Owen*, for his great Pains taken in his Sermon, preached before this House Yesterday, in *Christ Church, London*, being the Day appointed for Publick Thanksgiving: And that he be desired to print his Sermon: And that he have the like Privilege in printing the same, as others in like case have usually had.
>
> *Ordered*, That Mr. *Allen* do give Thanks to Mr. *Owen* accordingly.[326]

Whitelocke recorded that "hearty thanks" was to be given to Owen and Goodwin for their sermons.[327] As had been the case after his postregicide sermon, Owen was thanked by Francis Allein and invited to publish the sermon.[328] He chose not to do so, and the sermon was published posthumously under the title "Humane Power Defeated."[329]

Summary and Analysis of the Sermon

Owen conjectures that Psalm 76 describes the deliverance of Jerusalem from the vast army of Sennacherib, and from this he makes the observation that the "whole course of affairs in the world, is steered by providence in reference to the good of Salem"—that is, the church. The mistake of those who had mutinied was to assume "that their right hand had accomplished the work of the Lord, and that the end of it must be the satisfaction of their lusts." In their pride, these soldiers had not realized they were of "no account in the eyes of the Lord in all he is accomplishing." They failed to recognize that all the great providential shakings had been for the sake of the church, in particular so that the ordinances of worship of the church might be purified and vindicated. Instead, out of a desire for "preeminence," these murmuring "rebels" challenged the regime, those whom the Lord had "chosen" to deliver his people. For Owen,

326 *Journals of the House of Commons*, 6:226.

327 Whitelocke, *Memorials of the English Affair*, 3:47.

328 Alderman Francis Allein (1605–1658), a recruiter member of Parliament for Cockermouth in Cumberland, was a wealthy goldsmith and member of the London Common Council. Although he did not sign the king's death warrant, he did take a hard line in the High Court of Justice and broadly supported the revolution as an active member of the Rump Parliament. See Underdown, *Pride's Purge*, 214, 242. Allein also had the responsibility for thanking Owen for *A Sermon Preached to the Honourable House of Commons, in Parliament Assembled: On January 31* [. . .] (London,1649).

329 Owen, *Complete Collection of the Sermons*, 79–91.

this was little different from how the "thankless" Israelites had complained against Moses. Down through the centuries, there were numerous "monuments and trophies" of victories against the enemies of the church. Owen included in his list crowns and clerical vestments, spoils belonging to enemies and oppressors who occupied the civil and ecclesiastical spheres respectively.

The mutineers were a "formidable" enemy: strong, courageous, powerful, and puffed up with pride because of "former success" (a phrase Owen repeats six times in the sermon). Full of "fury and folly," they mistakenly thought that "the God of the Parliament could not help." The enemy was no "poor, effeminate Sardanapalus, a poor, sensual, hypocritical wretch, as some have been" (surely a jibe at the late king).[330] Rather, the mutineers were experienced soldiers, with historians believing that at least twenty-five hundred men were in active mutiny or on the brink of it.[331] However, in a work in which the *digitus Dei* was revealed as "their strength departed," they cast themselves "to the mercy of those against whom they rose and opposed themselves." These Leveller-inspired troops thought that they would achieve "their hearts' lusts, and cobweb fancies"—"throwing up all bounds and fences" and "laying all common to their lusts"—but all they were left with was "shame and disappointment." God had broken the mutiny just as he was breaking "the old monarchies" and "papal power." Its suppression was to be regarded as a providential sign of "the Lord's continuing presence." With all the millenarian optimism of his parliamentary sermon from April 1649, Owen insisted that the morning star of the promised latter-day glory had appeared.

Owen applied these observations in a twofold manner. First, he believed this ought to inspire courage in the face of "strong combinations" that might arise. This word of application was apt as thoughts turned toward the reconquest of Ireland. Second, he thought it stood as a warning to others that "great endowments are ofttimes great temptations."

Owen moved on to explain how providential deliverances were tailored according to "the qualifications of the opposers." In other words, the proud are brought low, the strong are made weak, and the wise become foolish. Here the mutineers had provoked God by engaging against the authority that God had owned and established—that is, the new Commonwealth regime. Owen thought that the legitimacy of the new regime could be defended by recourse to "the rule of reason, law, and common established principles

330 Sardanapalus was the legendary last emperor of the Assyrian monarchy in the seventh century BC. For a contemporary description, see Thomas Beard, *Theatre of Gods Judgments* [. . .] (London, 1642), 280.

331 Gentles, *New Model Army*, 166–74.

among men" but instead chose to offer six a posteriori evidences.[332] First, despite opposition, the Lord had "honored" it "with success and protection in great, hazardous, and difficult undertakings for himself." Second, those in power acted for God rather than pursuing selfish ambition. Here Owen said that he could offer an example "yet not much above half a year old," which presumably is a reference to those in Parliament who wished to continue to negotiate for a Presbyterian-royalist settlement at Newport. Third, the government that would be owned and protected by God would be comprised of those who "rule according to the interest of Christ and his gospel," which he summarized in terms reminiscent of his parliamentary sermon delivered eight weeks beforehand: "ordering, framing, carrying on of affairs, as is most conducible to the unraveling and destruction of the mystery of iniquity." Fourth, such rulers would seek the peace and prosperity of the godly and enjoy their prayerful support. Fifth, such powers would administer the rule of law, "especially in those great and unusual acts of justice" (presumably a reference to the trial of the king). Finally, such government would be untainted by idolatry and tyranny (two things with which Owen charged the late king in his postregicide sermon). Owen reminded his hearers of how he had "not long since" demonstrated that governments that gave their support to false worship and persecuted the godly would be shaken, broken, and destroyed.

Acknowledging that his claim would be contested by "thousands," Owen stated that "the Lord has borne witness" that these six marks were "for the main" to be found "in your assemblies" (both the Rump Parliament and the London Common Council). He therefore assured members of Parliament and members of the London government that the opposition they faced would be unsuccessful. He marshaled two reasons why this was the case from his text. First, the "stout hearts" of their opponents would be taken away. This could happen in a variety of ways. As their hearts "rage for revenge," they could be stirred up in a self-destructive "untamable fury." Alternatively, they could be given over to folly, unable to take counsel. Owen believed that "never did any providence speak plain in any latter age" about this than in "the late dispensation," when God added folly to the fury of the mutineers and consumed them with fear. Another way in which "stout hearts" could be taken away was by "changing them," giving them "contrition and humility." This offered an explanation of the surrender of the majority of the mutineers. The second reason why opposition to the new regime would be unsuccessful

332 Owen may be alluding to defenses of the new republican regime on the basis of natural law principles such as *salus populi suprema lex* ("the good of the people is the highest law") and that of self-preservation.

would be because God would take away the power and strength of the hands of those who opposed it.

Owen applied this by means of four uses. The first was to explain how the Leveller-inspired mutiny was ultimately an "undertaking against the Lord." This was, first of all, because of its "declared enmity to the ministry of the gospel," particularly in the administration of ordinances, and against "the spiritual ordinances of God." Owen placed Coverdale's translation of the "levelling" words of the Edomites in their mouths: "Down with it! Down with it even to the ground!" (Ps. 137:7). The mutineers had been unwilling to go to Ireland until their desires had been met. Owen reasoned that in opposing the cause of Christ they endured more losses in one week than they would have suffered in seven years of fighting the antichrist in Ireland. He believed that God would impress on the members of the Irish expeditionary force that Zion was able to withstand the strongest enemies (Ps. 48:12–14). The mutiny was also an undertaking against the Lord because it was against those magistrates "whom the Lord has owned in the darkest day that ever this nation saw."[333] The Levellers had insisted on implementing the *Agreement of the People* before the king would be brought to trial. Owen suggested that this would have dangerously "wrapped us in confusion for a few months." In opposing "Parliament, and their own commander," the mutiny opened the door to either anarchy or tyranny.

Second, Owen urged those in power to "be in the ways of God, and do the things of God." Having received another sign of divine protection and deliverance, he "trembled" as he asked, "Where shall we have hearts large enough to receive all these mercies?" Owen told his hearers that "peace and safety" were to be found in upholding those things that their enemies sought to destroy: in other words, the ordinances of the gospel and the administration of judgment.

Third, Owen warned his hearers to a watchful examination of themselves to ensure that they were not "engaged against the Lord." As he had done in his April 1649 sermon, he invoked Samson as an illustration, telling them that just as Samson's strength lay in the locks of his hair, so the secret to their strength lay in walking in the ways of the Lord.[334]

333 Owen's neighboring clergyman wrote of "the black providence of putting the King to death." See Josselin, *Diary of Ralph Josselin*, 155.

334 As Gribben notes, Samson became "increasingly popular among radical voices in and after the revolutionary decade, most famously in Milton's *Samson Agonistes* (London, 1671)." Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 107. Harvey comments on how "many revolutionaries cited Samson as the illustrious example of one who destroyed the idolaters in his time." See Elizabeth D. Harvey, "Samson Agonistes and Milton's Sensible Ethics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 647.

Owen's final use was a call to see what God can do and to trust and bless him for it. This deliverance ought to encourage them to value the gospel and its ordinances, which had been recovered from Babylonian corruption. Furthermore, they should rejoice that the civil wars had led to the establishment of the peace and liberty of the nation and that they had been preserved from anarchy and tyranny. He implied that the army, one of the "instruments of our deliverance," should not be "the scorned object of men's revengeful violence" and held out the hope that the Cromwellian expedition to Ireland would lead to the relief of the "distressed handful" in that country. Thus, this rather "fiery" sermon ends with Owen constructing an ideological justification of the forthcoming Cromwellian reconquest of Ireland.[335] All was now in place for this long-deferred expedition, and as the recently appointed Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Lieutenant General Oliver Cromwell would leave London early in July.

335 Gribben, *John Owen and English Puritanism*, 104.

Outlines

A VISION OF UNCHANGEABLE FREE MERCY

I. Introduction
   A. The ground and foundation of the growth of the kingdom
   B. The purpose of this fast-day sermon
   C. Initial exegesis of the vision
      1. The manner of the vision
      2. The time of the vision and its messenger
      3. The message of the vision

II. Three observations based on the sovereign will of God and the propagation of the gospel
   A. The sovereign will of God regulates the great variety that is seen in the propagation of the gospel
      1. The outward means of grace have been dispensed in a variety of ways
      2. God works effectually in various ways in different individuals
      3. The rules that govern this variety
      4. Uses arising from the first observation
         a. God's glorious purposes in the ongoing reformation of the English church
         b. God uses a wide variety of means to accomplish his purposes
   B. The sovereign good pleasure of God accounts for why the gospel is sent to any nation or person
      1. Three initial premises regarding God's distinguishing mercy
      2. Proof of this second observation

3. Three further points relating to the second observation
4. Four uses arising from the second observation
    a. Humbling an unworthy and undeserving nation
    b. Warning the nation about despising newfound gospel light and liberty
    c. Revealing the wonder of divine sovereignty in salvation
    d. Warning the nation about the danger of losing the gospel

C. There is no distress comparable to being without the gospel
1. Four lessons that arise from this observation
    a. Without the gospel there is darkness and distress
    b. Without the gospel there is no communion with God in this life or in eternity
    c. Without the gospel there is ignorance of the greatest need
    d. Without the gospel national mercies are worse than of no value
2. Three uses arising from the third observation
    a. The nation was enjoying unique privileges
    b. The nation was now obligated to respond
    c. The particular obligation upon ministers and magistrates

Appended Tracts: *Short Defensative* and *Country Essay*

I. The *Short Defensative about Church Government, Toleration and Petitions* about These Things
A. Four equitable demands made in the context of the anti-toleration campaign
1. Exercise charity rather than seeking to create guilt by association
2. Do not exaggerate differences unnecessarily
3. Understand legitimate concerns about the current petitioning campaigns
4. Recognize that labeling other godly Protestants as sectaries is unhelpful

B. Introduction to the proposals set down in the *Country Essay*

II. The *Country Essay for the Practice of Church Government There*
A. Introduction

B. Eighteen requests to those in government for a moderate church settlement
C. Answers to three possible objections
D. Response to the accusation that this tolerates error
E. Unresolved issues in current debates about toleration
F. Clarification of the nature of toleration
G. Nine assertions regarding toleration
    1. Heresy ought not to be tolerated, especially in fundamentals, but should be dealt with by appropriate means
    2. The magistrate may act against heresy that disturbs the peace or undermines lawful government
    3. False teaching associated with immorality or idolatry ought to be punished more severely
    4. Dissenters should not seek to undermine the established church and its ministry
    5. Charity toward those who err in nonfundamentals
    6. The Golden Rule should guide all undertakings
    7. Heresy does not necessarily amount to blasphemy
    8. Many who were punished as heretics were actually martyrs for the truth
    9. Take care not to equate heresy with sedition
H. Two concluding words of caution
I. Three questions to be answered by those who favor religious coercion

EBENEZER: A MEMORIAL OF THE DELIVERANCE OF ESSEX, COUNTY, AND COMMITTEE

I. Part 1: The title and preface to Habakkuk's prayer (3:1)
    A. Exposition of the title of the prayer (3:1a)
        1. Believers are called to fervent prayer in a season of divine judgment
    B. Exposition of what it is for a prayer to be "upon Shigionoth" (3:1b)
        1. God's people are often called to sing a song mixed of both joy and sorrow
            a. Two reasons why the saints are called to sing songs "upon Shigionoth"
            b. The saints should therefore learn to sing such songs

II. Part 2: Habakkuk's fear and the main request of his prayer (3:2)
    A. Exposition of Habakkuk's fearful condition (3:2a)
        1. The saints should fear God in the season of his appearance
    B. Exposition of Habakkuk's request (3:2b)
        1. God will revive his work by remembering mercy
        2. God will act in mercy in his appointed season
            a. Two reasons why God will act in his appointed season
            b. Since deliverance will come in God's time, the godly should wait in faith

III. Part 3: The arguments in Habakkuk's prayer that support faith (3:3–17)
    A. Exposition of Habakkuk remembering the former works of God (3:3)
        1. The saints anticipate future blessing by remembering former mercies
            a. Two reasons why the saints should anticipate future blessing by remembering former mercies
            b. Remember the great recent works of God in the First Civil War
    B. Exposition of the glory manifest in God's former works (3:4)
        1. God reveals his great purposes to the saints
            a. Two reasons why God makes such revelations
            b. Seriously consider the new light that had been revealed
    C. Exposition of the fearful harbingers of a great work of God (3:5)
        1. God has all means at his disposal to bring judgment on his enemies
            a. Two uses arising from this observation
                i. Fear such a mighty God
                ii. Be confident that no enemy can stand against him
    D. Exposition of God surveying the land before driving out the nations (3:6)
        1. God carefully surveys the promised inheritance of his people
            a. Be content knowing that God has carefully measured out his people's lot and inheritance

2. Do not attempt to rob the saints of their liberties and privileges
    a. Two uses arising from this observation
        i. Understand the relevant lessons of history
        ii. Understand God's purposes in recent events
3. God does the work of driving out the nations
    a. Continue to play your part in God's work

E. Exposition of the state of the surrounding oppressive nations (3:7)
1. Faith makes both past and future mercies present to the soul
    a. Two reasons for this observation
    b. Two uses from this observation
        i. Use the past to transform the present
        ii. Use the future to transform the present
2. Special consideration should be given to how God treats his enemies in the season of the church's deliverance
    a. Two reasons to engage in such serious consideration
    b. Seriously consider how God dealt with his enemies in the Second Civil War
3. The enemies of the saints are motivated by envy and fear
    a. Two reasons for this observation
    b. The church's deliverance provokes both oppressors and the superstitious
4. The enemies of the church rise only to be destroyed
    a. Three reasons for this observation
    b. Faith makes the promises of future deliverance present to the soul

F. Exposition of the mighty works of God for his people (3:8)
1. In his mighty works, God shakes the heaven and the earth
    a. Proud hearts should tremble
2. No people or nation can thwart the deliverance of the saints
    a. The reason for this observation
    b. The events of the Second Civil War show that nothing can hinder God's purposes
3. God has all means at his disposal to deliver his people

IV. Second part of the sermon expounding 3:9
  A. Exposition of God manifesting his almighty power according to his promise (3:9a)
    1. In his mighty power, God will keep all his promises
      a. Two reasons for this observation
      b. Four uses of this observation
        i. In the events of the siege, God manifested his power to keep his promises
        ii. Such deliverances are gracious and undeserved
        iii. Thankful obedience is the appropriate response
        iv. Learn the lessons taught by this providential judgment
  B. Exposition of God's mighty work (3:9b)
    1. Bringing great rivers from flinty rocks
    2. This is a type of God's unexpected deliverance of his church
    3. God continues to bring about unexpected deliverances
    4. The divine deliverance of Colchester
    5. God's promise to bring about such unexpected deliverances
      a. Two reasons why God delivers weak saints in such seemingly dire straits
      b. Four uses
        i. Consider Colchester to be such an unexpected deliverance
        ii. Learn to live by faith
        iii. Respond with gratitude to such a mighty deliverance
        iv. Learn spiritual lessons from this temporal deliverance

A SERMON PREACHED [. . .] *JANUARY 31*

I. Part 1: God threatens a range of judgments against a sinful people (Jer. 15:3–10)
II. Part 2: Divine judgment comes against idolatrous and tyrannical nations (15:4, 6)
  A. God justly punishes the nation for the sins of the king
  B. The people are "wrapped up" in the sins of their king

III. Part 3: Ruin is inevitable unless there is spiritual renewal (15:1)
IV. Part 4: God's instruments often endure such hard providences and opposition that they feel ready to give up (15:10, 15–18)
    A. God's instruments often face severe opposition from the people
    B. God's instruments often feel at a loss and ready to abandon the cause
    C. A call for patience and tenderness toward those who are faltering
V. Part 5: God's word to the nation in such a condition (15:11–14, 19–21)
    A. Direction to those engaged in God's work about the dangers of compromise and backsliding
        1. Compromise and backsliding are often caused by fear and a desire for perishing things
        2. Several specific applications to those in government
            a. Many have backslidden in recent years
            b. Backsliders restored by a commitment to righteous zeal
    B. The promise of divine guidance and protection to God's chosen instruments
        1. Three applications of this principle to those in government
            a. The folly of opposition to God's chosen instruments
            b. The wisdom of recognizing that Parliament's victories come from God
            c. God will be with Parliament so long as it does God's work in God's way
    C. Judicial hardening stands behind the self-defeating opposition to God's instruments
        1. Four reasons why God remains both just and good in giving up his enemies
            a. The nature of God's sovereignty
            b. The distinction between primary and secondary causation
            c. God's use of means
            d. The difference between divine and human purposes
        2. Three applications to those in government and those who oppose them

a. Those who follow God in difficult days should expect opposition
b. Those opposed to the cause should engage in self-examination
c. All should see the sovereign hand of God at work

Appended Tract: *Of Toleration*

I. Part 1: Consideration of the grounds for nontoleration
   A. Eight problems with the arguments used to support religious coercion
      1. Those opposed to toleration have yet to provide a compelling case for the civil punishment of those in error
      2. Those opposed to toleration should recognize that not all things fall under human cognizance
      3. It is wrong to say that those in favor of toleration do not allow for the punishment of those in error who disturb the peace
      4. It is problematic to apply the law against idolatry to those in error
      5. Similar challenges in applying the law against blasphemy
      6. Further problems in applying the punishment of false prophets
      7. Take more care in the interpretation of Romans 13
      8. The law concerning the death of the seducer is difficult to apply
II. Part 2: Assertion of the truth about toleration
   A. General presuppositions
      1. The church should oppose error with gospel means
      2. The main question in the toleration debate
         a. Defining the question
         b. The manner in which the debate has been carried out
   B. No warrant for the magistrate to punish those simply in error
   C. Relevant considerations
      1. Religious coercion has frequently been used to suppress the truth
      2. Religious coercion has either harmed the church or done little for truth
      3. Grounds and reasons offered in favor of lawful coercion resemble those employed by unjust persecutors

4. The pre-Constantinian church received no support from the magistrate, and yet there were no long-lasting heresies
5. Providential judgments have frequently fallen on persecutors

III. Part 3: The role of the magistrate in matters of religion
   A. First head: The duty of the magistrate in settling and establishing the profession of the gospel set out in five propositions
      1. Ensure that the gospel is declared to the nation
      2. Protect the propagation of the gospel from those who oppose it
         a. Introduction to further responsibilities
         b. Four proofs that the magistrate has such responsibilities
      3. Provide places for gospel worship
      4. Protect the church from violent disturbances
      5. Maintain and support as required
   B. Implications arising from these five position statements on the duty of the magistrate
      1. Three consequences
         a. These positive responsibilities do not extend to those in error
         b. All people, including those who err, are to be protected from violence
         c. Minor differences do not fall under the magistrate's purview
      2. Two corollaries concerning Dissent
   C. Second head: The duty of the magistrate to support, maintain, and defend the profession of the gospel from opposition, disturbance, and blasphemy
      1. Ensure that no public places are used for false worship
      2. Five rules regarding the more difficult issue of restraining people who publicly oppose the truth
         a. Those who disturb the peace should be restrained
         b. The Golden Rule should always be applied
         c. With blasphemy there is a case for a degree of corporal restraint

d. Problematic itinerant preachers can be dealt with by existing legislation
e. The magistrate should act against the worst excesses of the sects

3. The remaining issue of how to respond to peaceable error
a. Three things that cannot be assumed
b. Legal arguments against corporal restraint and punishment of those in peaceable error
c. Arguments from the nature of the gospel against corporal restraint and punishment in such cases
d. Examples of the other arguments that could be advanced against corporal restraint and punishment in such cases

D. Third head: how the magistrate might deal with various sorts of Dissent
1. The provisional nature of this response
2. The Apostles' Creed as a starting point for defining fundamentals, given the controversy over confessions
3. The importance of distinguishing Dissent in lesser matters from Dissent in fundamentals
4. Spiritual means should be employed, and the magistrate should act against only those Dissenters who disturb the peace
5. True uniformity requires a work of the Spirit
6. Two assumptions for any further debate about toleration

ΟΥΡΑΝΩΝ ΟΥΡΑΝΙΑ: THE SHAKING AND TRANSLATING OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

I. Introduction: The grace and duty of perseverance
II. Opening of the text
A. The assertion: "The things that are shaken shall be removed"
1. Defining the things that are shaken
2. The shaking of these things involves a shaking of governments
3. This shaking will take place prior to this new era
4. The removal involves a transformation

B. The proof of this assertion: "This word, once more, signifies no less"
C. The inference from the assertion: "The things that cannot be shaken must remain"
1. The dawn of a new golden era for the church
2. These things will remain and be firmly established

III. Doctrine arising from the opening of the text
A. Proof of the doctrine
1. Confirmation from Daniel 2:44
2. Confirmation from other Old Testament texts
B. Four reasons for the doctrine
1. To bring justice against the persecutors of the saints
2. To establish government that will advance the kingdom of Christ
3. To fulfill God's promise for an ingathering of the Jews
4. To stir up the saints to lay hold of the kingdom of Christ
C. Six uses of the doctrine
1. Be acquainted with the special work that God is doing in these days in order to be able to follow hard after God
a. Four sins that would hinder gaining such wise understanding
b. Four ways to gain this understanding of the work of God
2. Enthrone Christ as King
a. The priority of a personal commitment to Christ as King
b. Two particular responsibilities of the magistrate in these days
3. Expect this shaking to continue
4. Prepare for a time of purging and purification
5. Look to heavenly things
6. Be confident that all opposition will end

HUMAN POWER DEFEATED

I. The occasion and structure of Psalm 76
A. The exordium (76:1–2)
B. A narrative of the great work that God did for his people (76:3, 5–6)

1. Remembering the place where God did this great work
2. Remembering the great work that God did in this day of distress

II. Three main doctrinal observations
   A. Strong and courageous men often oppose the ways of God
      1. Two uses of the first observation
         a. Faith delivers the saints from fear
         b. The strong and mighty must be watchful
   B. In God's works of providence, the nature of divine deliverance is fittingly tailored
   C. God turns the courage and strength of those who engage against him into weakness and folly
      1. Six ways that those in power can know they are truly engaged in God's cause and therefore be confident of divine protection
      2. Two reasons why even the strongest opposition will not succeed
         a. God has a host of ways to take away the courage of his enemies
         b. God can simply take away the strength of his enemies
      3. Four uses of this doctrine
         a. At Burford God defeated the Levellers, turning their strength into weakness and thwarting their evil designs against church and state
         b. Providence reassures those in power of divine protection, so long as they are walking in God's ways
         c. Providence calls those who are strong and mighty to watchful self-examination
         d. Providence calls for trust in God, especially in the context of the forthcoming Irish expedition

A VISION OF UNCHANGEABLE FREE MERCY, IN SENDING THE MEANS OF GRACE TO UNDESERVED SINNERS

Wherein God's Uncontrollable Eternal Purpose, in Sending and Continuing the Gospel unto This Nation, in the Midst of Oppositions and Contingencies, Is Discovered; His Distinguishing Mercy in This Great Work Exalted, Asserted against Opposers, Repiners. Whereunto Is Annexed, a Short Defensative about Church Government, (With a Country Essay for The Practice of Church Government There) Toleration and Petitions about These Things.

By John Owen, minister of the gospel at Coggeshall in Essex

London,
printed by G. M. for Philemon Stephens at the sign of the gilded lion in Paul's Churchyard. 1646.

[Parliamentary Order]

Die Mercurii, 29 Aprilis, 1646.[1]

Ordered, by the Commons assembled in Parliament, that M[r]. Jenner[2] and Sir Peter Wentworth[3] do from this House give thanks to M[r]. Nalton[4] and M[r]. Owen for the great pains they took in the sermons they preached this day, at the entreaty of this House (it being a day of public humiliation), at Margaret's,[5] Westminster. And to desire them to print their sermons: and it is ordered that none shall presume to print their sermons without license under their handwriting.

H. Elsynge, Cler. Parl. D. Com.[6]

I do appoint Philemon Stephens, and none else, to Print my Sermon.

John Owen.

1 Lat. "Wednesday, 29 April, 1646."

2 Robert Jenner (ca. 1584–1651), a religious conservative and the member of Parliament for Cricklade, Wiltshire.

3 Sir Peter Wentworth (1593–1675), the member of Parliament for Tamworth, Staffordshire.

4 James Nalton (1600–1662), who was a leading London Presbyterian minister at St Leonard's, Foster Lane. This was Jenner's London parish. See *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1640–1660*, ed. Stephen K. Roberts, 9 vols. (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2023), s.v. "Jenner, Robert (c. 1584–1651)."

5 St Margaret's Church, Westminster.

6 This is a reference to Henry Elsynge (1598–1654), who would officiate as clerk of the House of Commons until 1648.

[Dedication]

TO THE MOST HONORABLE SENATE, the most renowned convention of the people of England, on account of the laws of the energetic and faithful defense of the ancient rights of the Anglo-Britons:[1] the recovery of our ancestral freedom (almost wholly sunk into oblivion by the villainous exertions of certain men);[2] the courageous, equitable, moderate, and impartial administration of justice; the abolition of an unholy, tyrannical authority in ecclesiastical matters, as well as of Popish rites, innovations, and antichrists;[3] the newly restored privileges of common Christians; and especially the protection of Almighty God graciously granted to all these and countless others in counsel, in war, at home, and abroad—to this most deserving body, highly and justly renowned in all the world, which ought to be enshrined in everlasting memory by this whole island, to the most noble, preeminent, and outstanding men assembled from the ranks of the Commons in the august House of Parliament, John Owen dedicated this

1 The Parliament of England defended an ancient legal tradition that rejected political absolutism. The Commons had responded to petitioning from the Westminster Assembly on April 18 with *A Declaration of the Commons of England Assembled in Parliament, of Their True Intentions concerning the Ancient and Fundamental Government of the Kingdom, the Government of the Church, the Present Peace; Securing the People against All Arbitrary Government, and Maintaining a Right Understanding Between the Two Kingdoms of England and Scotland, according to the Covenant and Treaties* (London, 1646).

2 The arbitrary power exercised by the monarchy in the pre–Civil War period, especially during Charles's personal rule.

3 The arbitrary power, exercised by bishops claiming to govern by divine right, in pursuit of liturgical uniformity according to the ceremonial style of the Laudian church. Parliament's religious reform program had now dismantled the Laudian church. As Owen made this dedication, many in Parliament feared Presbyterians were attempting to secure such divine right power.

oration in divinity (to be sure, a very modest one on that occasion), delivered originally in private at the desire and bidding of those very gentlemen, and now presented publicly.[4]

Dedicated by John Owen.[5]

4 In the text: *AMPLISSIMO SENATUI, Inclytissimo populi Anglicani conventui, (ob) Prisca Anglo-Britannorum* jura *strenue & fideliter asserta: Libertatem Patriam (nefariis quorundam molitionibus paene pessundatam) recuperatam: Justitiam fortiter,* ἴσως, ἐπιεικῶς ἀπροσωπολήπτως *administratam,* Ἀρχὴν *in Ecclesiasticis* Ἀνιερο τυραννικὴν *dissolutam, Ritus Pontificios, novitios, Antichristianos abolitos, Privilegia plebis Christianae postliminio restituta, Potissimum Protectionem Dei O.M. his omnibus, aliisque innumeris, consilio, Bello, Domi, foras gratiose potitam,) Toto orbe jure meritissimo Celeberrimo, Toti huic Insulae aeternâ memoriâ recolendo, Viris illustribus Clarissimis, selectissimis, ex Ordine Communium in suprema curia Parliam. congregatis, Concionem hanc sacram, humilem illam quidem, ipsorum tamen voto jussuque prius coram ipsis habitam, nunc luce donatam.*—Owen. The "O.M." is a abbreviation of *optimus maximus* (best and greatest), a title appended to God's name in some early modern Latin texts in imitation of the classical epithet "Jupiter Optimus Maximus." I wish to thank Tyler Flatt for his assistance with the Latin here and in other places in this volume.

5 In the text: DDC *Ioannes Owen.*—Owen. "DDC" is an abbreviated form of *Dedicaverunt*.

A Sermon Preached before the Honorable House of Commons, on the Day of Their Public Fast, April 29, 1646

And a vision appeared to Paul in the night, there stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

ACTS 16:11[1]

INTRODUCTION

The Ground and Foundation of the Growth of the Kingdom

The kingdom of Jesus Christ is frequently in the Scripture compared to growing things; small in the beginning and first appearance, but increasing by degrees unto glory and perfection.[2] The shapeless stone cut out without hands, having neither form nor desirable beauty given unto it,[3] becomes a great mountain, filling the whole earth (Dan. 2:35). The small vine brought out

1 The reference should be corrected to Acts 16:9.

2 In the margin: *Ecclesia sicut luna defectus habet, et ortus frequentes; sed defectibus suis crevit, etc. Haec est vera Luna, quae de fratris sui luce perpetua, lumen sibi immortalitatis et gratiae mutuatur* Amb. Hex *lib* 4. *Cap* 8.—Owen. This is a citation from Ambrose's *Hexameron* 4.8, which says, "Looking down, then, the Church has, like the moon, her frequent risings and settings. She has grown, however, by her settings and has by their means merited expansion. . . . This is the real moon which from the perpetual light of her own brother [Christ, the sun] has acquired the light of immortality and grace." For the Latin text, see Ambrose, *Hexameron*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 14 (Paris: Migne, 1845), 204. For the English translation, see Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, trans. John J. Savage, Fathers of the Church 42 (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1961), 156.

3 Isa. 53:2.

of Egypt quickly covers the hills with her shadow, her boughs reach unto the sea, and her branches unto the rivers (Ps. 80:8). The "tender plant"[4] becomes as the cedars of God;[5] and the grain of mustard seed to be a tree for the fowls of the air, to make their nests in the branches thereof.[6] Mountains are made plains before it,[7] every valley is filled, and the crooked paths made straight,[8] that it may have a passage to its appointed period;[9] and all this, not only, not supported by outward advantages, but in direct opposition to the combined power of this whole creation,[10] as fallen, and in subjection to the "god of this world," the head thereof.[11] As Christ was "a tender plant," seemingly easy to be broken; and "a root out of a dry ground,"[12] not easily flourishing, yet "lives for ever":[13] so his people and kingdom, though as a "lily among thorns,"[14] as "sheep among wolves,"[15] as a "turtledove" among a multitude of devourers, yet stands unshaken,[16] at least unshivered.[17]

The main ground and foundation of all this is laid out, [in] verses 6–9 of this chapter, containing a rich discovery how all things here below, especially such as concern the gospel and church of Christ, are carried along through innumerable varieties and a world of contingencies, according to the regular motions and goings forth of a free, eternal, unchangeable decree: as all inferior orbs, notwithstanding the eccentrics and irregularities of their own inhabitants, are orderly carried about by the first mover.

In verse 6, the planters of the gospel are "forbid to preach the word in Asia" (that part of it peculiarly so called), and verse 7, assaying[18] to go with the same message into Bithynia,[19] they are crossed by the Spirit, in their attempts; but in my text, are called to a place, on which their thoughts were not at all fixed: which calling, and which forbidding, were both subservient

4 Isa. 53:2.
5 Cf. Vulgate of Ps. 80:10.
6 Luke 13:19.
7 Zech. 4:7.
8 Luke 3:5.
9 In the margin: Psal. 108:13; Isa. 54:11; Zech. 4:7; Isa. 53:3–5.—Owen.
10 In the margin: 1 Joh. 3:13; Rev. 2:10.—Owen.
11 In the margin: 2 Cor. 4:4.—Owen.
12 In the margin: Isa. 53:2.—Owen.
13 In the margin: Heb. 7:25.—Owen.
14 In the margin: Cant. 2:2.—Owen. This is an abbreviation for Canticles—i.e., Song 2:2.
15 In the margin: Mat. 10:16.—Owen.
16 In the margin: Ps. 74:19.—Owen.
17 I.e., unbroken, intact.
18 I.e., attempting.
19 I.e., a region in northwest Asia Minor.

to his free determination "who worketh all things according to the counsel of his own will" (Eph. 1:11).[20]

And no doubt but in the dispensation of the gospel, throughout the world, unto this day, there is the like conformity to be found, to the pattern of God's eternal decrees: though to the messengers not made known aforehand by revelation, but discovered in the effects, by the mighty working of providence.

Among other nations, this is the day of England's visitation, "the day-spring from on high" having visited this people, and "the Sun of righteousness" arising upon us "with healing in his wings,"[21] a man of England has prevailed for assistance, and the free grace of God, has wrought us help by the gospel.

The Purpose of This Fast-Day Sermon

Now in this day three things are to be done, to keep up our spirits unto this duty, of bringing down our souls by humiliation.

First, to take us off the pride of our own performances, endeavors, or any adherent worth of our own: "Not for your sakes do I this, saith the Lord; be it known unto you, be you ashamed and confounded for your own ways, O house of Israel," (O house of England) (Ezek. 36:32).

Secondly, to root out that atheistical corruption, which depresses the thoughts of men, not permitting them in the highest products of providence, to look above contingencies, and secondary causes, though God "hath wrought all our works for us" (Isa. 26:12), and "known unto him are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18).

Thirdly, to show that the bulk of this people are as yet in the wilderness, far from their resting place, like sheep upon the mountains, as once Israel (Jer. 50:6), as yet wanting help by the gospel.

20 In the margin: *Eo ipso tempore, quo ad omnes gentes praedicatio Evangelii mittebatur, quaedam loca Apostolis adire prohibebatur ab eo, qui vult omnes homines salvos fieri*. Prosp. *Ep ad Rufin.* Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή Hom.—Owen. This Latin quotation is from Prosper of Aquitaine's defense of the Augustinian view of grace in his Letter to Rufinus (a person otherwise unidentified). This letter was a significant text in the so-called semi-Pelagian controversy. For the Latin text, see Prosper, *Epistola ad Rufinum*, in *Opera omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 51 (Paris: Migne, 1846), 85. "At the very moment that the preachers of the gospel were sent out to all the nations, the apostles were forbidden to go to certain regions by Him who will have all men to be saved" [1 Tim. 2:4]. For the English translation, see Prosper of Aquitaine, *Defense of St. Augustine*, trans. P. de Letter, Ancient Christian Writers 32 (New York: Newman, 1963), 32. The Greek quotation that follows in the marginal note is from the opening lines of Homer's *Iliad* 1.5, which may be translated "The will of Zeus was brought to fulfillment." For the text and translation, see Homer, *Iliad*, vol. 1, *Books 1–12*, trans. A. T. Murray, rev. William F. Wyatt, Loeb Classical Library 170 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1924), 12–13.

21 In the margin: Mal. 4:2.—Owen.

The two first of these will be cleared, by discovering, how that all revolutions here below, especially everything that concerns the dispensation of the gospel and kingdom of the Lord Jesus, are carried along, according to the eternally fixed purpose of God, free in itself, taking neither rise, growth, cause nor occasion, from anything among the sons of men.

The third, by laying open the helpless condition of gospel-wanting souls, with some particular application, to all which my text directly leads me.

The words in general are the relation of a message from heaven unto Paul, to direct him in the publishing of the gospel, as to the place, and persons wherein, and to whom he was to preach.[22] And in them you have these four things:

1. The manner of it, it was by vision, "A vision appeared."
2. The time of it, "In the night."
3. The bringer of it, "A man of Macedonia."
4. The matter of it, help for the Macedonians, interpreted, verse 10, to be by preaching of the gospel.[23]

Initial Exegesis of the Vision

A little clearing of the words will make way for observations.

The Manner of the Vision

1. For the manner of the delivery of this message, it was by vision: of all the ways that God used of old, to reveal himself unto any in an extraordinary manner, which were sundry and various (Heb. 1:1), there was no one so frequent, as this of vision: wherein this did properly consist, and whereby it was distinguished from other ways, of the discovery of the secrets of the Lord, I shall not now discuss: in general, visions are revelations of the mind of the Lord, concerning some hidden things present or future, and not otherwise to be known: and they were of two sorts;

(1) Revelations merely by word, or some other more internal species, without any outward sensible appearance, which, for the most part, was the Lord's way of proceeding with the prophets; which transient light or discovery of things before unknown, they called a vision.[24]

22 In the margin: *1. A quo*. 2. *Ad quem.*—Owen. Owen is distinguishing the *terminus a quo* ("the point from which") and the *terminus ad quem* ("the point to which") of this message. In other words, it has come from heaven, and it will be sent to the Macedonians.

23 In the margin: *Modus. Tempus. Instrumentum. Materia.*—Owen. Owen links these four points to the classical *elementa narrationis* (components of the story): means, time, instrument, and matter.

24 In the margin: Isa. 1:1; Amos 1:1; Nah. 1:1; Obad. 1.—Owen.

(2) Revelations, accompanied with some sensible apparitions, and that either:

[1] Of things, as usually among the prophets, rods and pots, wheels and trees, lamps, axes, vessels, rams, goats and the like, were presented unto them.[25]

[2] Of persons, and those according to the variety of them, of three sorts;

{1} of the second person of the Trinity; and this either;

1st, in respect of some glorious beams of his deity, as to Isaiah, chapter 6:1, with John 12:41, to Daniel 10:5–6, as afterward to John (Rev. 1:13–15), to which you may add the apparitions of the glory of God, not immediately designing the second person, as Ezekiel 1.

2nd, with reference to his humanity to be assumed, as to Abraham (Gen. 18:1–2) to Joshua (5:13–15), etc.

{2} of angels, as unto Peter (Acts 12:7), to the women (Matt. 28:2), to John (Rev. 22:8), etc.

{3} of men, as in my text.[26]

Now the several advancements of all these ways in dignity and preeminence, according as they clearly make out, intellectual verity, or according to the honor and exaltation of that whereof apparition is made, is too fruitless a speculation for this day's exercise.[27]

Our vision is of the latter sort, accompanied with a sensible appearance, and is called ὅραμα; there be two words in the New Testament signifying vision, ὅραμα and ὀπτασία, coming from different verbs, but both signifying "to see." Some distinguish them, and say, that ὀπτασία is a vision, χαθ' ὕπαρ, an appearance to a man awake; ὅραμα χαθ' ὄναρ, an appearance to a man asleep: called sometimes a dream (Job 33:15), like that which was made to Joseph (Matt. 2:19). But this distinction will not hold: our Savior calling that vision, which his disciples had at his transfiguration, when doubtless they were waking, ὅραμα (Matt. 17:9). So that I conceive Paul had his vision waking; and the night, is specified, as the time thereof, not to intimate his being asleep, but rather his watchfulness, seeking counsel of God in the night which way he should apply himself, in the preaching, of the gospel: and such I suppose was that of later days, whereby God revealed to Zuinglius a strong

25 In the margin: Jer. 1:11; Jer. 1:13; Ezek. 1:5–7; Zech. 1:8; 3:9–10 etc.; Dan. 7:8–9.—Owen.

26 In the margin: Zech. 2:1.—Owen.

27 In the margin: Vid. Aquin. 2.2 q. 174. Art. 3, 4. Scot in dist. Tert.—Owen. The first part of this reference is to Aquinas's *Summa theologiae* 2a2ae.174, dealing with a. 3, "Whether grades of prophecy can be distinguished in terms of imaginative vision?," and a. 4, "Was Moses greater than all the prophets?" For the text and translation, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, vol. 45, *Prophecy and Other Charisms (2a2ae. 171–178)*, trans. Roland Potter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 76–85.

confirmation of the doctrine of the Lord's Supper (from Ex. 12:11), against the factors for that monstrous figment of transubstantiation.[28]

The Time of the Vision and Its Messenger

2. For the second or time of this vision, I need say no more, than what before I intimated.

3. The bringer of the message, ἀνήρ τις ἦν Μακεδὼν ἑστὼς, he was a man of Macedonia in a vision: the Lord made an appearance unto him, as of a man of Macedonia; discovering even to his bodily eyes a man, and to his mind, that he was to be conceived as a man of Macedonia. This was, say some, an angel,[29] the tutelar[30] angel of the place, say the Popish expositors, or the genius of the place,[31] according to the phrase of the heathens, of whom they learned their demonology, perhaps him, or his antagonist, that not long before appeared to Brutus [at] Philippi.[32] But these are pleasing dreams: us it may suffice, that it was the appearance of "a man," the mind of Paul being enlightened to

28 Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531), the principal Reformer of Zürich, wrote about a dream that he had on the night before the first celebration of the Reformed rite of the Lord's Supper in the Grossmünster in April 1525. For the text, see "*Subsidium sive coronis de eucharistia*," in *Huldreich Zwinglis sämtliche werke*, vol. 4 (Leipzig: Heinsius, 1927), 458–504, esp. 483–84. For the English translation, see "Subsidiary Essay or Crown of the Work on the Eucharist," in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, vol. 2, *In Search of True Religion: Reformation, Pastoral and Eucharistic Writings*, ed. and trans. H. W. Pipkin (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1984), 194–231, esp. 199. For an account of this episode, see Bruce Gordon, "Huldrych Zwingli's Dream of the Lord's Supper," in *Crossing Traditions: Essays on the Reformation and Intellectual History in Honour of Irena Backus*, ed. Maria-Cristina Pitassi and Daniela Solfaroli Camillocci (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 296–310. For Zwingli's rejection of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, see "Explanation of the Sixty-Seven Articles," in *Huldrych Zwingli Writings*, vol. 1, *The Defense of the Reformed Faith*, ed. and trans. E. J. Furcha (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1984), 92–124.

29 For example, the Lutheran commentator Georg Major (1502–1574). See Georg Major, *Auslegung der epistel S. Pauli an die Philipper* (Wittenberg, 1555), sig. 18r–19r.

30 I.e., having guardianship of a person or a thing.

31 The *genius loci* was thought to be the protective or presiding spirit of a particular place.

32 In the margin: A Lapide, Sanctius in locum, etc. Mede. Apost. Of later times. Plutarch, in vit. Bruti.—Owen. The first two references represent the writings of those to whom Owen referred as "Popish expositors"—namely, the Flemish Jesuit Cornelius à Lapide (1542–1613) and his *Commentaria in Acta Apostolorum* (Antwerp, 1627), and then, by way of the Latinized form of his name, the Spanish Jesuit Gaspar Sánchez (1554–1628) and his *Commentarii in Actus Apostolorum* (Lyon, 1616). The third reference is to Joseph Mede's *Apostasy of the Latter Times* [. . .] (London, 1641), which is cited in support of his claim that Roman Catholic demonology was of pagan origin. The final reference is to an example of pagan demonology taken from Plutarch's account of an apparition that Brutus received in his tent prior to the Battle of Philippi (42 BC). For the text and translation, see Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 6, *Dion and Brutus. Timoleon and Aemilius Paulus*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, Loeb Classical Library 98 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1918), 206–7.

apprehend him as "a man of Macedonia": and that with infallible assurance, such as usually accompanies divine revelations in them to whom they are made, as Jeremiah 23:28, for upon it, Luke affirms, verse 10, they assuredly concluded, that the Lord called them into Macedonia.[33]

The Message of the Vision

4. The message itself is a discovery of the want of the Macedonians, and the assistance they required, which the Lord was willing should be imparted unto them: their want is not expressed, but included in the assistance desired, and the person unto whom for it they were directed. Had it been to help them in their estates, they should scarcely have been sent to Paul, who I believe, might for the most part say with Peter, "Silver and gold have I none."[34] Or had it been with a complaint, that they, who from a province of Greece, in a corner of Europe, had on a sudden been exalted into the empire of the Eastern world, were now enslaved to the Roman power and oppression, they might better have gone to the Parthians, then the only state in the world, formidable to the Romans.[35] Paul, though a military man, yet fought not with Nero's legions, the then-visible devil of the upper world, but with legions of hell, of whom the earth was now to be cleared.[36] It must be a soul want, if he be entrusted with the supplying of it.

33 In the margin: Calvin, in locum, *Dicebat se discernere (nescio quo sapore, quem verbis explicare non poterat) quid interesset inter Deum revelantem,* etc. Aug. confes.—Owen. The first reference is, presumably, to Calvin's Commentary on Acts 16, which makes the point that there are different modes of revelation and some "are better suited for confirmation." See John Calvin, *The Acts of the Apostles 14–28*, trans. John W. Fraser, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1966), 69. The second reference is to Augustine's *Confessions* 6.13.23, which recounts his mother Monica's claim to be able to discern "by a certain small indescribable in words, the difference between [God's] revelation and her own soul dreaming." For the Latin text, see Augustine, *Confessions*, vol. 1, *Introduction and Text*, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992), 70. For an English translation, see Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 108.

34 In the margin: Acts 3:6.—Owen.

35 Originally a province of the Persian and Seleucid empires, the Parthian kingdom was a dominant power in the ancient East.

36 In the margin: Plutarch, de *defectu oracu*. Ἑβραῖος κέλεταὶ με παῖς μακάρεσσιν ἀνάσσων, Τὸν δὲ δόμον προλιπεῖν καὶ ὁδὸν πάλιν αὖθις ἱκέσθαι. Respons. Apoll. Apud Euseb. Niceph.—Owen. The first reference is to Plutarch's *De defectu oraculorum*, 5. For the Greek text and English translation, see Plutarch, *Moralia*, vol. 5, *Isis and Osiris. The E at Delphi. The Oracles at Delphi No Longer Given in Verse. The Obsolescence of Oracles*, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library 306 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1936), 350–51. Owen's second reference is to the Byzantine ecclesiastical historian Nicephorus Callistus (ca. 1256–ca. 1335), who, relying on Eusebius, gave an account of an oracle, attributed to the Delphic Apollo, that foresaw the birth of Christ and the eventual decline of oracles: "A Hebrew boy, who rules [over] the blessed ones, commands me to leave this house and to return again [to Hades]" (editor's translation).

And such this was, help from death, hell, Satan, from the jaws of that devouring lion:[37] of this the Lord makes them here to speak, what everyone in that condition ought to speak, help for the Lord's sake, it was a call to preach the gospel.

THREE OBSERVATIONS BASED ON THE SOVEREIGN WILL OF GOD AND THE PROPAGATION OF THE GOSPEL

The words being opened, we must remember what was said before of their connection with the verses foregoing; wherein the preachers of the gospel, are expressly hindered from above, from going to other places, and called hither. Whereof no reason is assigned, but only the will of him that did employ them: and that no other can be rendered, I am farther convinced, by considering the empty conjectures of attempters.[38]

God foresaw that they would oppose the gospel, says our Beda:[39] so say I might he of all nations in the world, had not he determined to send his effectual grace for the removal of that opposition: besides, he grants the means of grace to despisers (Matt. 11:21).

They were not prepared for the gospel, says Oecumenius:[40] as well say I as the Corinthians, whose preparations you may see (1 Cor. 6:9–11), or any other nation, as we shall afterward declare; yet to this foolish conjecture adhere the Papists and Arminians.[41] God would have those places left for to

---

For the Greek text and Latin translation, see Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopolus, *Ecclesiasticae historiae libri i–vii*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca 145 (Paris: Migne-Garnier, 1857), 683–84.

37 See 1 Pet. 5:8.

38 In the margin: . . . a nullo duro corde resistitur, quia cor ipsum emollit. Aug. Ezek. 36 26. Deut. 30.6.—Owen. It is unclear what Owen is referring to with this quotation attributed to Augustine. There is a similarity to Augustine's *De praedestinatione sanctorum* 8.13. For the Latin text, see Augustine, *Liber de preadestinatione sanctorum*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Latina 44 (Paris: Migne, 1865), 971. For an English translation, see Augustine, *Selected Writings on Grace and Pelagianism*, ed. Boniface Ramsey, trans. Roland Teske (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2011), 434. The Old Testament texts that Owen cites appeal to the promise that the Lord will circumcise the hearts of his people (Deut. 30:6), taking away the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh (Ezek. 36:26).

39 The Venerable Bede (ca. 673/4–735) was an English monk, historian, and theologian. For the English text and translation, see Bede, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Lawrence T. Martin (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 136.

40 Pseudo-Oecumenius, *Commentaria*, in *Opera Omnia*, ed. J.-P. Migne, Patrologia Graeca 118 (Paris: Migne-Garnier, 1857), 226–28.

41 In the margin: *Lapide. Sanctius.* In loc. Rom Script. Synd ar. 1.—Owen. Owen again contrasts his exegesis to that of the Jesuit commentators Cornelius à Lapide and Gaspar Sánchez. The next reference is possibly to the Remonstrant records of the Synod of Dordt, *Acta et scripta synodalia Dordracena ministrorum Remonstrantium* (Harderwijk, 1620).