

Ryan M. McGraw

A Heavenly Directory

Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship and a
Reassessment of John Owen's Theology

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Reformed Historical Theology

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Contents

Acknowledgements	9
1. Historical Introduction and State of the Question	11
1.1 Introduction	11
1.2 Puritanism and Public Worship	13
1.3 John Owen’s Life in Relation to Worship	20
1.4 Owen Scholarship and the Significance of This Study	27
1.4.1 Thesis, Scope, and Importance	27
1.4.2 Method, Sources, and Plan	27
1.4.3 Conclusion	30
2. Trinitarian Worship: The Climax of Communion with God	33
2.1 Introduction	33
2.2 The Trinitarian Basis for the Knowledge of God	33
2.2.1 Context: “Protestant Scholasticism” and Reformed Orthodoxy	33
2.2.2 The Knowledge of God in Owen’s Prolegomena	39
2.2.3 Definitions of True Theology	40
2.2.4 Owen’s Contemporaries on True Theology	46
2.3 Communion with the Triune God	48
2.3.1 Socinianism	48
2.3.2 Owen’s Trinitarianism	52
2.3.3 Communion with God in Three Persons	58
2.3.3.1 Communion with the Father	60
2.3.3.2 Communion with the Son	61
2.3.3.3 Communion with the Holy Spirit	66
2.4 Communion with the Trinity in Public Worship	69
2.4.1 Communion with the Trinity	69
2.4.2 Communion with the Father	71
2.4.3 Communion with the Son	74

2.4.4 Communion with the Holy Spirit	76
2.5 Concluding Observations on Ephesians 2:18	79
3. Chastity in Worship: The Spiritual and Scriptural Principles of Worship	81
3.1 Introduction	81
3.2 The Place of Scripture in the Knowledge of God	81
3.2.1 The <i>Principium Cognoscendi</i> of Reformed Theology	82
3.2.2 The Authority and Sufficiency of Scripture	84
3.3 The Principle of Worship Elaborated	89
3.3.1 Interpreting the Law of God	90
3.3.2 The Second Commandment	92
3.3.3 The Importance of the Biblical Principle of Worship	93
3.4 Owen's Emphases Compared to Those of His Contemporaries	97
3.5 The Ordinances, Circumstances, and Forms of Worship	101
3.5.1 Ordinances	101
3.5.2 Circumstances	102
3.5.3 Forms	104
3.5.4 Vestments and Postures	105
3.6 Apostasy from Chastity in Worship	107
3.6.1 Neglecting Public Worship	108
3.6.2 Adding Man-Made Ordinances to Worship	110
3.6.3 Trusting in the Ordinances of Worship	111
3.7 Conclusion	115
4. Heavenly Worship: Worship as a Transaction with the Triune God in Heaven	116
4.1 Introduction	116
4.2 Setting our Minds in Heaven During Public Worship	116
4.3 Wrong Affections in Public Worship	121
4.3.1 The First Danger: Externalism	122
4.3.2 The Second Danger: Intellectual Satisfaction	124
4.3.3 The Third Danger: Resting in Ordinances for Righteousness	125
4.3.4 The Fourth Danger: A Reputation for Devotion	126
4.3.5 The Fifth Danger: Superstition	127
4.3.6 Analysis	129
4.4 True Spiritual Affections in Worship	129
4.4.1 Exercising Faith, Love, and Delight in God	130
4.4.2 Means of Communicating Divine Love and Grace	133
4.4.3 Experience Leads to Greater Affection	136

4.4.4 God's Instituted Means	137
4.5 Conclusion	138
5. New Covenant Worship: The Character of Communion with God in Public Worship	140
5.1 Introduction	140
5.2 The General Structure of Confessional Covenant Theology in the Seventeenth Century	141
5.2.1 The Covenant in Reformed Orthodoxy	142
5.2.2 Owen's General Conception of the Covenant	151
5.3 The Intra-Trinitarian Covenant	155
5.3.1 The Covenant of Redemption in General	156
5.3.2 The Holy Spirit in the Covenant of Redemption	161
5.4 Worship under the Mosaic Covenant	166
5.4.1 Owen on the "Old Covenant"	167
5.4.2 Worship and the Old Covenant	175
5.5 New Covenant Worship	178
5.5.1 Spiritual Communion with God in New Covenant Worship	178
5.5.2 Simplicity of New Covenant Worship	182
5.6 Conclusion	185
6. The Ministry and Worship: The Christian Ministry as the Means of Communion with God in Public Worship	187
6.1 Introduction	187
6.2 The Benedictory Nature of the Christian Ministry	187
6.2.1 Benedictions in General	188
6.2.2 Categories of Benedictions	189
6.2.3 The Christian Ministry as Benedictory	191
6.3 Ministers as Christ's Gift to the Church	195
6.3.1 The Ministry and Christ's Humiliation and Exaltation	195
6.3.2 Extraordinary and Ordinary Officers	198
6.4 The Ministry, The Spirit's Gifts, and Christ's Presence	199
6.4.1 The Work of the Pastor and the Gifts of the Spirit	200
6.4.2 The Spirit's Work in Preaching	201
6.4.3 The Administration of the Sacraments	204
6.4.4 Public Prayer and Imposed Liturgies	206
6.4.5 The Work of the Pastor and the Presence of Christ	208
6.5 Conclusion	210

7. Conclusion	211
7.1 Introduction	211
7.2 Contributions of the Preceding Chapters	212
7.3 Areas Requiring Further Research	216
7.4 Conclusion	219
8. Appendix: Faith Versus Sight: The Rejection of Images in Devotion to Christ	220
8.1 Introduction	220
8.2 The Question of Images in Reformed Theology	221
8.2.1 Basic Arguments	221
8.2.2 Theological Connections and Implications	222
8.3 The Glory of Christ	225
8.4 The Chamber of Imagery	228
8.5 Conclusion	230
Works Cited	232
Works by John Owen	232
Other Primary Sources	234
Secondary Sources	245
Index of Persons	251
Index of Subjects	255

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1. Historical Introduction and State of the Question

1.1 Introduction

Recent authors have called John Owen one of the greatest theologians England has ever produced.¹ His voluminous writings span a wide range of topics including the Trinity, Arminianism, the nature of the atonement, perseverance, justification, sanctification, principles of toleration, Christology, Ecclesiology, Pneumatology, textual criticism, and expositions of Scripture.² The character of his work is equally diverse. This includes catechisms, sermons, popular devotional works, polemical treatises, and scholarly theological tomes. Owen was an intellectual force of massive impact, who wrote extensively and who covered an astonishing range of topics. Examining and dissecting any aspect of his theology can be daunting. There are a growing number of books, theses, and articles on his life and thought, and he is gradually receiving scholarly attention in proportion to his importance.³ In a recent multi-author work treating theological

1 See Kelly Kopic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), ch. 1.

2 Two major collections of Owen's *Works* appeared in the nineteenth-century. The first was John Owen, *The Works of John Owen, D.D.*, ed., Thomas Russell, 21 vols. (London: for Richard Baynes, 1826). The second was Owen, John. *The Works of John Owen*, ed., William Goold, 24 vols. (London: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850–53). I will primarily make use of the Goold edition of Owen's *Works*. This is the most complete compilation of his writings, excluding his letters and Oxford orations only. I cite first editions of individual works where available. To avoid confusing competing editions, I will take all citations from Owen's work on Hebrews from volumes eighteen through twenty-four of the Goold *Works*. As far as I can tell, this set is identical to Owen's original publications, with the exception that Goold made the original divisions in the text clearer. Peter Toon has edited and published surviving letters in *The Correspondence of John Owen (1616–1683): With an Account of his Life and Work*, Peter Toon, ed., forward by Geoffrey F. Nuttall (n.p: James Clark & Co. Ltd., 1970). For an English translation of the Oxford orations, see John Owen, *The Oxford Orations of Dr. John Owen*, Peter Toon, ed. (Linkinghorne: Gospel Communication, 1971). For a chronological list of Owen's writings, see Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973), 179–181.

3 A *select* bibliography of secondary literature on John Calvin spans eleven closely printed

debates in seventeenth-century British Puritanism, nine out of twelve chapters include John Owen as a central figure.⁴

One challenge in writing historical theology is to distinguish the historian's interests from the interests of his or her subject. This project seeks to identify some of the central principles that run through Owen's theology. The broad range of his writings reveals a consistent emphasis on a Trinitarian piety that culminated in public worship as its highest expression. The Savoy Declaration of Faith, which he helped produce, states that the "doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of all our communion with God, and comfortable dependence upon him."⁵ However, few have recognized that his continual emphasis on public worship stood almost on par with his emphasis on the Trinity.⁶ Fewer still have recognized that he self-consciously intertwined a practical Trinitarianism with public worship. This is true even though some authors have treated his contribution to building a distinctively Trinitarian piety.⁷ These tendencies result in a partial view of John Owen in his theological context.

This research is a preliminary attempt to demonstrate that in Owen's writings, his Trinitarian theology frequently culminated in public worship as its highest expression. Communion with the Trinity as expressed in public worship both permeates and ties together the entire corpus of his theology. His doctrine of communion with the Triune God was foundational to his theology of public

pages. See Richard C. Gamble and Zachary John Kail, "Essential Calvin Bibliography," in David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback, *A Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes: Essays and Analysis* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 468–479. The literature on early figures such as Calvin and later figures such as Jonathan Edwards is overwhelming. By contrast, a nearly exhaustive bibliography of primary and secondary source material related to Owen spans about forty pages. See John W. Tweeddale, "A John Owen Bibliography," in Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 287–328.

4 Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones, *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism* (Göttingen; Oakville, Conn.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011). The exceptions are chapters 5, 7, and 12..

5 Savoy Confession, 2.3. Cited from A. G. Matthews, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order, 1658* (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1959), 79. The volume includes the full text of the Savoy Declaration of Faith, Institution of Churches, and the Preface, which was likely co-authored by Owen and Thomas Goodwin. It includes a historical introduction by Matthews.

6 Daniel R. Hyde, "'The Fire the Kindleth all our Sacrifices to God: 'Owen and the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer,'" *Ashgate Research Companion*, 250: "This lack of scholarship on Owen's liturgical theology is surprising given the prominence of it in his *Works*." However, Hyde does not connect Owen's liturgical theology adequately to his Trinitarianism.

7 Most notably in Brian Kay's treatise and in chapter 5 of Kapic's work. Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007); Kapic, *Communion with God*, ch. 5. However, Kay's thesis looks for a model of private communion with God as Triune. As such, he is more concerned with using Owen as an example of his overall thesis than he is with Owen's position. The limitation of his work is that he uses Owen as a model for private worship, whereas this thesis will demonstrate that Owen saw public worship as the climax of communion with God in three persons.

worship. This is particularly evident in light of his teaching on communion with God, the authority of Scripture, spiritual-mindedness, the contrast between old and new covenant worship, and the ministry.

This chapter seeks to establish Owen's historical context narrowly in relation to public worship. He was an English Puritan whose circumstances in life were intertwined with seventeenth-century English controversies over worship. This material surveys his life in relation to these controversies and will conclude by stating the thesis and justifying the plan of the following chapters. It includes a bird's-eye survey of Owen's works as they treat public worship, and it concludes by highlighting the importance of this study for historical theology and its potential contribution to contemporary discussions.

1.2 Puritanism and Public Worship

Owen's name is forever attached to the notoriously slippery term "Puritan."⁸ Carl Trueman argues that due to the difficulty of defining the term, the lack of theological consensus among "Puritans," and the parochial range of its meaning, it is more helpful to classify Owen as Reformed orthodox.⁹ This is a valid description of the international context of his theology and theological method. In particular, treating Owen as a Reformed orthodox theologian sheds light upon his Trinitarian theology. Chapter 2 below expands this observation. However, Owen classed himself among the "Puritans."¹⁰ This bears directly on the importance he assigned to public worship. This research examines how he merged his Reformed orthodox Trinitarianism with his Puritan views on public worship.

8 John Coffey noted: "Historians have agonized over its definition." As cited in Ian Hugh Clary, "Hot Protestants: A Taxonomy of English Puritanism," *Puritan Reformed Journal*, vol. 2, Num. 1, Jan. 2010, 41.

9 Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 5–6; *The Claims of Truth* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998), 9–13. Richard Muller treats the period in which Owen lived as both "Reformed Orthodoxy" and "Protestant Scholasticism." Orthodoxy describes an author's relationship to confessional statements of the Reformed faith, and Scholasticism refers to theological method. Following the Renaissance, this method included both continuity with Medieval methodology and heavy emphasis on studying biblical and ancient sources in the original languages. See Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001), 1:33–37, 60–78. Hereafter, I will refer to Muller's work as PRRD. Trueman relies heavily on Muller's classifications. For the continuity between Medieval theology and Reformed theology, see Heiko Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2000). For Protestant Scholasticism, see Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark, eds., *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (UK: Paternoster, 2005). The article by David Steinmetz outlines the Scholastic method. See "The Scholastic Calvin," *Protestant Scholasticism*, 16–30.

10 See citations in the treatment below.

Treating him as a Reformed orthodox theologian places him in an international context. Treating him as a Puritan theologian highlights his distinctively English emphases.¹¹ This twofold context provides the appropriate backdrop for his conjunction of a practical Trinitarian theology with public worship.

It is important to develop a working description of the term “Puritan.” “Description” is more accurate than “definition” in this case, due to the murky origins and elastic use of the term. Scholars have defined “Puritanism” from a variety of perspectives including politics, ecclesiastical relationships, theology and practice, and others. “Puritanism” is defined properly in light of both “Antipuritan” sentiments and of “Puritan” self-image. Owen’s views of this epithet, along with those of his contemporaries deserve particular attention. From Owen’s perspective, maintaining the purity of public worship was at least fifty percent of what it meant to be a faithful “Puritan.”

The term “Puritan” often describes a theologically diverse group of people.¹² Patrick Collinson notes that “Puritanism” originated as an insult from those whom he calls “Antipuritans.” While “Antipuritan” is a somewhat anachronistic term, Collinson uses it to illustrate that the “Puritan” was an elastic derogatory label that some English theologians attached to perceived opponents. In a marginal note to his theology, Edward Leigh (1602 – 1671) observed, “Puritan in the mouth of a drunkard doth mean a sober man, in the mouth of an Arminian it means an orthodox man, in the mouth of a Papist it means a Protestant, and so it is spoken to shame a man out of all religion.”¹³ Though the “Puritan” movement itself began sometime in the 1560s, Collinson points out that the term “Puritan” became a popular phrase of contempt in the 1590s.¹⁴ The term is an English

11 Patrick Collinson has warned recently against detaching British Reformed theology from the European Reformation. Polly Ha and Patrick Collinson, eds., *The Reception of Continental Reformation in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), xxvii–xxxii. However, it is equally problematic to ignore the local context of British theology. Collinson’s balanced approach seeks to mitigate British exceptionalism without dismissing it entirely (xxxvii).

12 Trueman points to the potentially Arian views of John Milton as an example. *John Owen*, 5. Nicholas Tyacke has observed, “To some extent, Puritanism has always existed in the eye of the beholder.” Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 186.

13 Edward Leigh, *A System or Body of Divinity: Consisting of Ten Books; Wherein the Fundamentals or Main Grounds of Religion are Opened, the Contrary Errors Refuted, Most of the Controversies Between us, the Papists, Arminians, and Socinians Discussed and Handled, Several Scriptures Explained and Vindicated from Corrupt Glosses* (London, 1654), 532. He attributed the citation to Dudley Fenner (1558–1587).

14 Patrick Collinson, “Antipuritanism,” in John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 19–33. In his book *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 568–569, Peter Lake criticized Collinson for postulating a late date for the origins of Puritanism. In *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 22, Collinson answers Lake by noting that though the Puritan movement did not begin in the 1590s, the popularization of the term at that time had

rendition of the Latin word “Cathari,” which referred to an extreme ascetic group in the Middle Ages.¹⁵ It depicted people who abstained from all pleasure and enjoyment in this world.¹⁶ The immediate cause of popularizing the label was the response, via stage plays, to a series of tracts written under the name of Martin Marprelate against the English clergy. The vitriolic response to these tracts matched Marprelate’s acidic criticism against the English clergy and liturgy.¹⁷ As Peter Lake noted, “Puritanism” is largely defined by the “complex dialectical relationships” between “Puritans” and “Antipuritans.”¹⁸ The fact that the label “Puritan” originated with critics further complicates its definition, since terms of reproach are often fluid in their use.

Positively, “Puritanism” often describes a common set of characteristics. Due to the fact that “Antipuritans” in the Church of England used the term to refer to anyone critical of their practices, it is hard to collect these characteristics. “Puritanism” included Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and anyone else under the censure of the English clergy. The “Puritans” have been called famously a “Hotter sort of Protestants.”¹⁹ John Coffey and Paul Lim suggest at least five traits of the movement. First, “Puritans” were Protestants. Second, they were Calvinistic Protestants. Third, “Puritanism” originated in the English Church and it is defined largely by its relationship to the Church of England. Fourth, the movement led to sects that stood apart from the English Church. Lastly, “Puritan” influences spread beyond English shores.²⁰ The third of these traits is the most relevant to this thesis. Hughes Oliphant Old elaborates the influence that this English context had upon “Puritan” views of worship:

While the actual controversies that were raised often seemed to center on such ceremonial details as vestments, the serving of Communion from a table rather than an altar, or refusal of the sign of the cross at baptism, the real concern of the Puritans was

a tremendous influence on popular thinking and heightened the tension between the two groups.

15 For the Cathars, see Malcolm Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), and, Andrew P. Roach, *The Devil’s World: Heresy and Society 1100–1300* (Harlow: Longman, 2005).

16 In *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as they Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), Leland Ryken argued that this is not an accurate depiction of those who received the label “Puritan.”

17 See Collinson, “Antipuritanism,” 24–25. See also Joseph Black, “The Rhetoric of Reaction: The Marprelate Tracts (1588–9): anti-Martinism and the uses of print in early modern England,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 28 (1997), 707–725; Kristen Poole, “Saints Alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Staging of Puritanism,” *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46 (1995), 47–75. The tracts have been reprinted under the title, *The Marprelate Tracts, 1588, 1589*, ed. William Pierce (London: Constable, 1911).

18 As cited by Collinson, “Antipuritanism,” 30.

19 Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 27.

20 John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, “Introduction,” *Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 2–6.

the deepening of the experience of worship. For them the reformation of the rite was only a means of reforming the inner life of the Christian. It was the reforming of the heart that really interested them, and yet they recognized that outward reforming of the institution of the Church and the forms of public worship was an important means to that end.²¹

In this respect, “Puritan” describes those who sought to reform the personal piety and the public worship of the English Church. In a sense, “Puritanism” became harder to identify under the Stewart monarchs than under Elizabeth I.²² Prior to this, however, the actions of Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645) in the 1630s made reforming public worship an even more prominent feature of “Puritanism.”²³ After the Restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660, the diverse sects formerly called “Puritans” became “Dissenters” or “Non-conformists.”

It is a mistake to define “Puritanism” simply in contrast to “Anglicanism,” as one popular twentieth century author has done.²⁴ Some “Puritans,” such as Edward Reynolds (1599–1676) and James Ussher (1581–1656), held bishoprics in the Church of England. However, connecting the Church of England and “Puritanism” is a vital point. “Puritans” were people who believed that the Reformation of the Church of England was incomplete. Most early “Puritans” remained within that Church – separatism was rare. Only after many were convinced that lasting reform in the Church of England was unlikely did they begin to separate from the established Church and to emigrate abroad.²⁵ “Pu-

21 Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 4, The Age of the Reformation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 252. Old does not specialize in Puritanism and his primary concern in this volume is with preaching as an act of worship, yet his treatment is well researched and his insight into the role of worship in Puritan piety is profound. His treatment of the influence of Protestant Scholasticism upon Puritan preaching and theology is very helpful. See especially pp. 326–327. For a scholarly treatment of the manner in which “Puritans” related public worship, family devotion, and the inner life of the individual, see Philip Benedict, *Christ’s Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 490–532.

22 Tom Webster, “Early Stuart Puritanism,” in *Cambridge Companion*, 61.

23 Laud is addressed below.

24 D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 54–72. For a treatment of popular perspectives of “Puritanism,” see John Coffey, “Puritan Legacies,” in *Cambridge Companion*, 327–345. Coffey refers to his article as “no more than a preliminary sketch” needing further research (333). He cites D. M. Lloyd-Jones and J. I. Packer as early leaders of a revival of interest in Puritan literature through the establishment of the “Puritan Conference” and The Banner of Truth Trust (339). Banner of Truth has reprinted the Gould edition of Owen’s works, with the omission of his Latin treatises in volumes 16 and 17.

25 For the connection between Puritan emigrants and Reformed churches in other lands such as Holland, see Anthony Milton, “Puritanism and the continental Reformed churches,” in

ritanism” cannot be understood ultimately without reference to efforts to purify the piety and the worship of the Church of England.²⁶

How did the term “Puritan” relate to like-minded Christians in other nations, such as Scotland, the Netherlands, and America, specifically in New England? Although “Puritan” began as a derogatory term, adherents of the movement eventually accepted it.²⁷ This was true beyond English borders. Some have referred to like-minded believers in Holland as the “Dutch Puritans,” due to their emphases on personal piety and their interest in English devotional literature.²⁸ Scottish Presbyterians often accepted the title as well. However, Scottish Presbyterians, though holding much in common with English “Puritans,” cannot be called “Puritans” in precisely the same sense.²⁹ The issue uniting the “Puritans” was not simply a common theology and practice, but a desire to purify the Church of England. For the most part, the Scots simply wanted the English to leave them alone. George Gillespie (1613–1648), who was a Scottish Commissioner to the Westminster Assembly,³⁰ noted that since the English Church had never enjoyed as thorough a Reformation as the Scots had, it was improper for England to impose “the rotten dregs of Popery” of its liturgy on the more

Cambridge Companion, 109–126; Patrick Collinson, “England and International Calvinism, 1558–1640,” in *From Cranmer to Sancroft* (New York: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), 75–100. For Puritanism in New England, see Francis J. Bremer, “The Puritan Experiment in New England, 1630–1660,” in *Cambridge Companion*, 126–142; David D. Hall, “New England, 1660–1730,” in *Cambridge Companion*, 143–158.

- 26 Persecution over matters related to public worship often led to immigration. Puritans such as Thomas Goodwin left England for Holland in order to pursue liberty of conscience in matters of worship. See Mark Jones, *Why Heaven Kissed Earth: The Christology of the Puritan Reformed Orthodox Theologian, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680)* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010).
- 27 Owen’s own use of the term and his understanding of his relationship to the Church of England will be dealt with below.
- 28 This has been evidenced on a popular level by Cornelis Pronk, “The Dutch Puritans,” *Banner of Truth*, July–August 1976, nos. 154–155. See also Joel R. Beeke, “The Dutch Second Reformation (‘Nadere Reformatie’),” in Wilhelmus a Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*; trans. Bartel Elshout; ed. Joel R. Beeke (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1992), vol. I, lxxxv–cxi. The theologians of the “Nadere Reformatie” were directly influenced by “Puritans” such as William Perkins and William Ames as well. See Muller, *PRRD*, I, 66–67; Joel R. Beeke and Todd M. Rester, “The Learned Doctor William Ames and *A Sketch of the Christian’s Catechism*,” in William Ames, *A Sketch of the Christian’s Catechism*, trans. Todd M. Rester, Introduction by Joel R. Beeke and Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008), xii–xx; Keith L. Sprunger, *The Learned Doctor William Ames: Dutch Backgrounds of English and American Puritanism* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1972); *Dutch Puritanism* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 1982).
- 29 For the complexities of associating Scottish Presbyterians with Puritanism, see Margo Todd, “The Problem of Scotland’s Puritans,” in *Cambridge Companion*, 174–188.
- 30 For the role of the Scottish commissioners to the Westminster Assembly and the manner in which their influence has been exaggerated at times, see Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly* (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2009), 48.

thoroughly Reformed Scottish Church.³¹ William Ames (1576–1633) reflected this assumption when he asserted that the Church of England was the first example of “any orthodox church” that imposed human ceremonies upon the people of God in worship.³² He added that in the time of King Edward and in the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign, many ministers regarded some of the ceremonies that England had recently adopted as “the weeds of popery.”³³ As for New England, many “Puritans” migrated to the new world in order to flee persecution and to worship God according to Scripture only.³⁴ American “Puritanism” originated in relation to the Church of England, yet moving across the Atlantic Ocean eventually produced features that were peculiar to an American context.³⁵ Although common concerns linked English “Puritans” to other Reformed Christians, if Collinson is correct that we should understand “Puritanism” in light of “Antipuritanism,” then we should largely reserve the term for those seeking to reform the Church of England or who emigrated elsewhere when hopes for reform failed. This reiterates Coffey’s and Lim’s description of “Puritanism” above.³⁶

This discussion sets the stage for Owen’s place in the “Puritan” movement. His description of the primary task facing English Protestants is revealing in this respect. He preached four undated sermons entitled, “Providential Changes, An Argument for Universal Holiness” in which he summarized the work of continuing reformation in England under two headings. In the first sermon, he argued that the two primary pursuits of Christians should be holiness and godliness. Holiness refers to the principles and practice (doctrine and piety) of the Christian life. Godliness refers to “the worship of God according to the

31 George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English Popish Ceremonies Obtruded on the Church of Scotland* (Orig. Pub., 1637, reprint, Dallas, TX: Naphtali Press, 1992), xxix. For examples of Gillespie’s self-association with the “Puritans,” see pp. 64, 80, 88, 91, etc. Jane Dawson adds, “Within a few years of the Reformation, the Scots had become convinced that their practices were not merely on a par with other European Reformed churches; in some instances they were better.” James I cited the Scot’s rejection of holy-days as an improvement over Geneva. Jane E. A. Dawson, “John Knox, Christopher Goodman, and ‘the Example of Geneva,’” *Reception of Continental Reformation*, 133.

32 Ames, *A Fresh Suit Against Human Ceremonies in God’s Worship, or, A Triplication unto Dr. Burgess his Rejoinder for Dr. Morton* (London, 1633), Part I, 10.

33 Ames, *A Fresh Suit*, Part I, 15.

34 Francis Bremer notes that many of the early “Puritans” in America believed that they continued to be in communion with the Church of England. See Francis J. Bremer, “The Puritan Experiment in New England (1630–1660),” in *Cambridge Companion*, 132.

35 David D. Hall, “New England (1660–1730),” in *Cambridge Companion*, 143–156.

36 However, in his work on Samuel Rutherford, Coffey defends associating Scots such as Rutherford with “Puritanism.” He reasons that the Scots possessed “part of the tendency within English speaking Reformed Protestantism” to walk strictly with God in everything. John Coffey, *Politics, Religion, and the British Revolutions: The Mind of Samuel Rutherford* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 17–18.

appointment and institution of Christ.”³⁷ From their content, it is difficult to determine the time period in which he wrote these sermons. On the one hand, Owen referred to the great blessings of God on the nation and to the great progress of the work of reform. On the other hand, he warned of impending judgment against the sins of neglecting the advantages provided by the gospel.³⁸ When the “Puritans” held power in England, he believed that “holiness” and “godliness” were so widespread that this was a sign that the millennium was near.³⁹ However, the success of the “Puritan” movement and the subsequent sins of the nation ought to move adherents to greater zeal in pursuing holiness and godliness. The term “Puritan” does not occur in these sermons.⁴⁰ However, if “Puritanism” describes characteristic emphases of a group of English Protestants, then Owen’s reduction of the emphases of reform to these two heads fairly depicts his view of “Puritanism.” In his view, at least half of the task of “Puritanism” had respect to purifying public worship (“godliness”).⁴¹ Chapter 2 below will show that communion with the Triune God in public worship was the ultimate goal of the Reformed theological tradition to which Owen and his contemporaries viewed themselves as heirs.

Although “Puritanism” is defined variously, the primary features that are relevant to this study are a thoroughgoing personal piety (ordinarily in the context of Reformed orthodoxy)⁴² coupled with a zeal for external and internal

37 Owen, *Works*, 9:137. Owen based these distinctions on his understanding of the Greek terms in text.

38 He likely preached these sermons after the English Civil War and the “failure” of the Puritan movement.

39 Owen, *Works*, 9:151. For Puritan millennial views see Jeffrey K. Jue, *Heaven Upon Earth: Joseph Mede (1586–1638) and the Legacy of Millenarianism*, (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2006); Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000). For a treatment of the millenarian developments from the 1640s to the end of the “Puritan” movement, see Gribben, “Millenialism,” *Drawn into Controversie*, 83–98.

40 The term does not occur often in Owen’s writings. Where “Puritan” appears in his works, he was usually citing the accusations of some opponent to his theology. For some examples see *Works*, 10:9; 11:495, 497; 14:244–245.

41 Tyacke observes that Stephen Marshall (1594–1655) preached before the Long Parliament in 1640 and that he set forth “a five point religious indictment of the Caroline regime.” While point 4 addressed the introduction of idolatry and superstitious worship into the English church, Tyacke argued that “only his fifth and final point,” in which Marshall denounced indiscriminate admission to the Lord’s Supper, “suggests a Puritan at heart.” This fails to recognize the central importance that the “Puritans” assigned to the purity of public worship. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, 224.

42 For instance, John Goodwin’s Arminian tendencies and Milton’s heterodoxy mentioned above are exceptions to the rule. With respect to the term, “Reformed orthodoxy,” Muller argues that it is preferable to the term “Calvinism” because it more accurately “functions as a historical denominator.” Reformed orthodoxy entails “confessional solidification” of doctrine that characterized “institutionally established Protestantism.” Muller, *PRRD*, I, 31, 33.

purity in English worship. These two emphases not only lie at the heart of “Puritanism,” but they reflect why public worship was integral to John Owen’s life and theology. If Owen is legitimately called a “Puritan,” then the purity of public worship largely defined who he was. Its dominant place in his theology should not be surprising.

1.3 John Owen’s Life in Relation to Worship

Convictions are often shaped by a combination of historical circumstances and the inherent significance of issues. Doctrine and practices that were important previously may gain a higher degree of prominence and clarity when they are threatened. The subject of the manner of God’s worship held a special place in the Reformed branch of the Protestant Reformation. In a tract with the translated title *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, the Genevan Reformer John Calvin asserted that the two most important areas of reform respected the manner in which God should be worshiped, and the means by which a sinner is justified before God – in that order.⁴³ Sinners must be justified before they can worship God, but worship is the goal and purpose of their salvation. Carlos Eire noted that zeal for limiting divine worship strictly to the confines of Holy

For a fuller treatment of the relationship between Reformed Orthodoxy in connection to the Protestant Scholasticism of the Academy, see Richard A. Muller, “The Problem of Protestant Scholasticism: A Review and Definition,” in Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds., *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 45–64.

43 “Si quaeritur, quibus potissimum rebus stet Christiana religio inter nos, suamque veritatem retineat, has duas non modo summum locum occupare certum est, sed reliquas etiam omnes partes, adeoque totam vim Christianismi sub se comprehendere: ut rite colatur Deus: ut inde salus sibi petenda sit, noverint homines. Iisdem sublatis, Christi nomine gloriemur licet, vana est ac inanis nostra professio. Sequuntur deinde Sacramenta, & Ecclesiae gubernatio, quae sicut ad huius doctrinae conservationem sunt instituta, sic non alio referri debent: nec aliunde aestimari potest, sanctene & ordine, an secus administrentur, nisi quum ad hunc finem exiguntur. Hoc si clarius & familiarius habere quis velit: regimen in Ecclesia, munus pastorale, & reliquus ordo, una cum Sacramentis, instar corporis sunt: doctrina autem illa, quae rite colendi Dei regulam praescribit, & ubi salutis fiduciam reponere debeant hominum conscientiae, ostendit, anima est, quae corpus ipsum inspirat, vividum & actuosum reddit: facit denique, ne sit mortuum & inutile cadaver. Quae hactenus dixi, controversiam inter pios, & recti sanique animi homines nullam habent.” Jean Calvin, *Supplex exhortatio, ad invictiss. Caesarem Carolum Quintum, et illustrissimos principes, aliosque ordines, spirae nunc imperii conventum agentes: ut restituendae ecclesiae curam serio velint suscipere. Eorum omnium nomine edita, qui Christum regnare cupiunt, in Ioannis Calvini Noviodunensis opera omnia; in novem tomos digesta* (Amsterdam: Apud viduam Ioannis Iacobi Schipperii, 1671), 38. For a translated text, see John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, orig. pub. 1544, trans. Henry Beveridge, 1844 (Dallas: Protestant Heritage Press, 1995), 15.

Scripture was one of the primary characteristics of Reformed churches.⁴⁴ This Reformed emphasis on the true worship of God formed the backdrop for the theological tradition in which Owen took part.

We cannot avoid the topic of public worship in studying the “Puritans.” Controversies over the proper worship of God and resulting persecution characterized the times in which Owen lived, and they have substantial ramifications for his life.⁴⁵ While most of the churches in the Reformed tradition from Zwingli onward had sought to limit the ordinances of public worship to what was prescribed in Scripture, the Church of England was largely unique in seeking a middle way between traditional forms of public worship and the simple biblical worship of its Reformed counterparts on the continent.⁴⁶

Owen was born in 1616. His father, Henry Owen, was a “Puritan” minister who lived in troubled times.⁴⁷ In the early part of the seventeenth century, many “Puritans” were apprehensive about King James’ friendly relationship with Roman Catholicism. Fearing that the English prayer book retained too many remnants of the worship and theology of Rome, many English Protestants feared that the liturgy paved the way for the resurgence of Catholicism and for the suppression of Protestantism.

As a young man, Owen attended Oxford University. While studying for his B.A., he was continually confronted with practices of worship that grated against his “Puritan” upbringing.⁴⁸ The ordinary routine of study and worship was often interrupted by the various holy days interspersed throughout the academic year.

44 Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Philip Benedict makes the same point, providing a statement from Zwingli that is nearly identical to the one cited by Calvin above. See Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 2–3.

45 For a study of the connection between persecution and liberty of conscience and practice in Protestant England, see John Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558–1689* (Essex, UK: Pearson Education Limited, 2000).

46 This was particularly true during and after the reign of Elizabeth I (r.1558–1603). For the controversies and fragmentation of the English Church during this time period, see Benedict, *Christ's Churches*, 384–422.

47 Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), 1. Toon's work is the only major biography of John Owen. In the Epilogue to Toon's work, he has surveyed the two eighteenth century biographies of Owen as well as the nineteenth century biography by Andrew Thompson prefaced to the Goold edition of Owen's works. Toon notes that these earlier biographies focus almost exclusively upon Owen as a Congregationalist leader and theologian and downplay his role as professor at Oxford and his involvement in the politics of his times. Toon, 174–178. After Toon's work, the only biography written concerning Owen is the popular work by R. G. Lloyd, *John Owen, Commonwealth Puritan*, 1972. This book was never completed due to the death of the author. Crawford Gribben is currently working on a large-scale intellectual biography of John Owen.

48 This upbringing would have instilled an abhorrence of the use of images in worship, the observance of holy-days, kneeling at the Lord's Supper, and many other practices that were required at Oxford while Owen attended there. See Toon, *God's Statesman*, 9.

The vestments of the English Church were required attire. Moreover, the end of year ceremonies connected to graduation often ended in outright revelry.⁴⁹ During his later overlapping tenure as Dean of Christ Church (1651 – 1660) and Vice Chancellor of the University (1652 – 1657), Owen attempted to bring reform to the University by continually protesting the imposition of vestments, by simplifying the end-of-year ceremonies, and by enforcing strict discipline within the student body.⁵⁰

Owen continued as a student at Oxford for several years, but his education was cut short due to his developing conscience with regard to the proper worship of God. After completing his B.A. in 1632, he immediately began work on his M.A. under Thomas Barlow's tutorship. Under Barlow, he received extensive instruction in ancient languages, literature, and philosophy. Barlow was instrumental in Owen's early training and Owen later appointed him to serve the University under his oversight. After completing his M.A. in 1635, Owen was ordained as a deacon and began what would have been a seven-year divinity degree in order to prepare for the ministry.⁵¹ It was during the 1630s under the influence of William Laud that the English liturgy was imposed strictly. Laud's liturgy began to be imposed with rigor by 1637.⁵² In contrast to former times, the liturgy was now enforced by means of visitors who ensured that local clergy wore proper vestments, used the prayer book, and knelt at the Lord's Supper. These events made a deep impression upon Owen as a young scholar. As Laud's reforms were pressed at Oxford, Owen left the University after completing only two years of his seven-year divinity degree.⁵³ Some of the practices that he rejected included "paintings, crossings, crucifixes, bowings, altars, tapers, wafers, organs, anthems, litany, rails, images, copes and vestments."⁵⁴ His convictions over the proper worship of God were momentous enough to lead him to sacrifice a standard course of ministerial education and potentially the opportunity to serve in the pastorate.

In spite of not completing his ministerial studies, Owen soon came to prominence in both Church and state. Some "Puritan" ministers who could not in good conscience conform to the practices of the established Church became private chaplains. Accordingly, Owen became a house chaplain to Robert Dorner

49 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 4.

50 For Owen's persistent tactics to reform worship during his time at Oxford, see Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011).

51 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 6.

52 For Puritan reactions to Laud's policies, see Tom Webster, "Early Stuart Puritanism," 55 – 62 as well as the chapter treating the persecutions under Laud in Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*.

53 Trueman, *John Owen*, 2.

54 Owen, *Works*, 8:28. As cited in Toon, *God's Statesman*, 9.

of Ascot and later to John Lord Lovelace.⁵⁵ He later pastored churches in Fordam (1642 – 1646) and Coggeshall (1646 – 1649). He gained public recognition when he published his first book, *A Display of Arminianism* (1642).⁵⁶ His growing reputation as a theologian eventually led to opportunities to preach before the English Parliament. As Oliver Cromwell gradually gained prominence in the course of the English Civil War, he persuaded Owen (against his congregation's and his own desires) to leave Coggeshall in order to accompany him as chaplain to Ireland and to seek to reform the University of Dublin.⁵⁷ In 1651, Cromwell, who was then Chancellor of Oxford University, appointed Owen as Dean of Christ Church and Vice-Chancellor of the University in 1652. He held the latter post until he fell out of favor with Cromwell when he opposed the move to make him king in 1657.⁵⁸

In 1658, Owen took part in the Savoy Conference, which was designed to draw up a confession of faith and church order for Congregationalist churches. Although nearly two hundred men attended the conference, Thomas Goodwin (1600 – 1680), Philip Nye (1595 – 1672), William Bridge (1600 – 1670), William Greenhill (1591 – 1671), Joseph Caryl (1602 – 1673), and John Owen were selected to draft these documents.⁵⁹ Owen likely coauthored the preface to the Savoy Confession of Faith, which defended the need for confessions in general as well as provided the rationale for the need for a confession peculiar to the Congregationalists.⁶⁰ He was one of the principal architects of the Savoy Confession. The Confession and Declaration of Church Principles not only gave clear definition to Congregationalist principles and practices, but defended their practices of worship. As chapter 22 of the Declaration of Faith indicates, the Savoy divines followed chapter 21 of the Westminster Confession of Faith ("Of Reli-

55 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 10. For a brief account see Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 2.

56 The full original title was, *A Display of Arminianism: Being a Discovery of the Old Pelagian Idol Free-Will, with the New Goddess Contingency, Advancing Themselves into the Throne of the God of Heaven, to the Prejudice of His Grace, Goodness, and Supreme Dominion Over the Children of Men, Wherein the Main Errors by Which They are Fallen Off from the Received Doctrine from All the Reformed Churches, with their Opposition in Diverse Particulars to the Doctrine Established in the Church of England, are Discovered and Laid out from their own Writings and Confessions, and Confuted by the Word of God.*

57 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 30, 36; Ferguson, 7.

58 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 50 – 79; Ferguson, 12 – 13.

59 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 103 – 105.

60 See A. G. Matthews, *Savoy Declaration*, for a scholarly introduction as well as the full text of the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Church Order. Hunter Powell is currently completing a doctoral thesis at Cambridge University in which he demonstrates that Owen was not likely the single author of the preface, as was previously supposed.

gious Worship and the Sabbath Day”) almost to the letter.⁶¹ This placed English Congregationalists in close continuity with their Presbyterian counterparts.

Following the death of Oliver Cromwell, England was plagued by political turmoil. Oliver’s son Richard was accused of being an ineffective leader and resigned.⁶² General Monck in Scotland prepared to invade England, and there was a (successful) movement to restore the Stuart monarchy. During this time period, Owen’s primary concern was to preserve the freedom to worship according to the Congregational Way.⁶³ Charles II desired to restore uniformity in worship according to the terms enforced prior to the 1640s. In the 1660s, a series of four acts were passed known as the Clarendon Code.⁶⁴ The first act renounced the Solemn League and Covenant and required observing communion according to the manner of the Church of England, which included kneeling before the elements. The second was the notorious Act of Uniformity (1662), which required all ministers to submit to Episcopal ordination. Under this act, over 1,900 ministers were ejected from their pulpits. Owen responded the same year by writing *A Discourse Concerning Liturgies and their Imposition*.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the Conventicle Act (1664) forbade people to meet in religious assemblies of five or more persons. Owen was prosecuted under this Act in 1665.⁶⁶ The last act of the Clarendon Code was the Five Mile Act (1665), which forbade pastors from engaging in ministerial activities within five miles of their former charges. Owen

61 The principle of worship is stated in the following manner: “The acceptable way of worshiping the true God is instituted by himself, and so limited by his own revealed will, that he may not be worshiped according to the imaginations of men, or the suggestions of Satan, under any visible representations, or any other way not prescribed in holy Scripture.” Cited from Matthews, *Savoy Declaration*, 104. That which was “prescribed in holy Scripture” was not limited to express chapter and verse statements, but it included practices that “by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture” (Savoy Declaration 1.6). Ibid, 77.

62 Some recent research has suggested that Richard was not as ineffective a leader as he has been accused of being. John Peacey in particular has traced Richard’s developing political career and influence prior to becoming Lord Protector in 1658 in order to illustrate the mistake of evaluating Richard’s career in light of selected statements from contemporary critics. John Peacey, “Fit for Public Services: The Upbringing of Richard Cromwell,” in Patrick Little, ed., *Oliver Cromwell: New Perspectives* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 241–264. For an additional reassessment of Richard Cromwell, see B. Coward, *The Cromwellian Protectorate* (Manchester, 2002), 94–95.

63 Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 117. These included: *An Account of the Grounds and Reasons on which Protestant Dissenters desire Liberty* (London, 1670) and later, *A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformists from the Charge of Schism* (London, 1680).

64 Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 125.

65 *Works*, 15:1–55. In the preface, Goold seems to assert mistakenly that Owen wrote this work in order to defend the Presbyterians, since Owen himself was in no danger. Given the fact that many of Owen’s Congregationalist colleagues suffered under the Clarendon Code as well as Presbyterians, it is difficult to see how Goold could substantiate this claim.

66 Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 129.

was nearly arrested under this Act in 1681, but was released by a civil magistrate who happened to be passing by when he was detained.⁶⁷ He was able to continue publishing during this time with the assistance of William Morice, who obtained the necessary licenses.⁶⁸ In 1667, Owen wrote *Indulgence and Toleration Considered: In a Letter unto a Person of Honor*, in which he defended the right to worship God upon principles derived from Scripture alone.⁶⁹ In 1669, he published *Truth and Innocence Vindicated*, in which he argued that since worship was man's highest duty, the manner in which God should be worshiped was not a matter of secondary importance.⁷⁰ These events led him to turn his attention to public worship more intensely than ever.

In 1672, Charles II formed a secret treaty with France in which, in exchange for military aid against the Dutch, he promised to profess Roman Catholicism at the earliest convenience. Knowing that this news would not be accepted well by his subjects, Charles sought to appease Nonconformists in his realm by passing the Declaration of Indulgence in the same year.⁷¹ In principle, this Act provided relief to Dissenting ministers by allowing them to apply for licenses to preach and to minister to "gathered congregations." This helped establish Congregational churches in the realm, but it did not ultimately secure freedom of worship to Nonconformists. It was repealed scarcely a year after it was passed. Assaults against Nonconformity continued in law and in print. Notably, Bishop Edward Stillingfleet (1635–1699) wrote two works against separation from the established Church.⁷² A deluge of books appeared in reply, including Owen's own.⁷³ Following a consistent pattern, his response emphasized the necessity of freedom to worship publicly according to Scriptural principles. Owen suffered far less during these trying times than many of his colleagues did, due primarily to the help of wealthy and influential friends that he made during his public life in the 1650s.⁷⁴

In 1673, Owen's small congregation of fewer than forty members merged with the larger London congregation of the recently deceased Joseph Caryl (1602–

67 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 148.

68 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 127.

69 John Owen, *Indulgence and Toleration Considered: In a Letter unto a Person of Honour* (London, 1667). Cf. *Works*, 13:518–540.

70 John Owen, *Truth and Innocence Vindicated; in a Survey of a Discourse Concerning Ecclesiastical Polity, and the Authority of the Civil Magistrate Over the Consciences of subjects in Matters of Religion* (London, 1669). Cf. *Works*, 13:344–506

71 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 139.

72 *The Mischief of Separation*, which was originally a sermon, and *The Unreasonableness of Separation* (London, 1680).

73 *An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book of the Unreasonableness of Separation* (London: Printed for Tomas Pankhurst, 1682), also in *Works*, 15:375–444. Baxter and Howe also wrote books in reply.

74 Toon, *God's Statesman*, 149.

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A growing body of historical literature reflects the importance of John Owen. Ryan M. McGraw seeks to reassess Owen's theology in light of the way in which he connected his trinitarian piety to his views of public worship. He argues that his teaching on communion with God as triune was the foundation of his views of public worship and that he regarded public worship as the highest expression of communion with the triune God. McGraw shows how Owen's thought is intertwined with the Trinity and public worship. In addition he provides a detailed exposition of the parts of Reformed worship.

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