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ABSTRACT.

When examining a man's theology, the obvious starting point is the scrutiny of the forces which shaped that man and that theology. We thus first of all investigate the ecclesiastical events in sixteenth and seventeenth century England, noting the effects these events had on John Owen, gradually convincing him that the 'Congregational Way' was God's chosen way of church government.

The doctrine of the church is, however, only one part of Owen's total theology. His views on other important doctrines are therefore considered to see how they are shaped by, and shape, his doctrine of the church. The doctrines examined are the Person and Work of Christ, the Holy Spirit, Holy Scripture and Grace.

The doctrine of the church is then discussed in detail. The salient points of Congregational belief are pointed out - the stress on the local, particular church as opposed to the universal church, the concept of the church as completely independent and comprising visible saints, voluntarily gathered together, the total reliance on the Scriptures as the sole rule of worship, the rejection of liturgies.

The Congregationalists were frequently accused of schism because of their practice of drawing people out of parish churches to form gathered churches. A chapter is therefore devoted to these charges and Owen's refutation of them, chiefly by redefining the term schism more scripturally.

This doctrine of the church is, however, not peculiar to Owen. A comparison between his doctrine and that of the Congregationalist Thomas Goodwin, discloses a substantial agreement between the two men. Owen was, therefore, expounding the Congregational way, and not a way of his own devising.

The thesis is concluded by a critical assessment of Owen and his theology.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH
IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN OWEN
by JEAN JAMES.

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Master of Arts.
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THE DOCTRINE OF THE CHURCH IN THE THEOLOGY OF JOHN OWEN

1. The Historical Background against which John Owen Formulated his Theology

A. The Rise of Nonconformity

Protestant Nonconformity is as old as the Elizabethan Settlement of religion. Elizabeth had tried to tread a via media between Rome and Geneva, and this had pleased few. The chief malcontents were those who had been in exile on the continent whilst the Marian fires were burning at Smithfield. These exiles had seen at first hand the workings of Reformed Protestantism as they visited such strongholds of the Reformed faith as Calvin's Geneva, Bucer's Strasbourg and Zwingli's Zurich. They regarded Elizabeth's Settlement as a step in the right direction, but one which did not go nearly far enough. She had reformed the corrupt Papist doctrine but not the corrupt practices of worship. At first they were content to wait, thinking that the Queen would gradually and cautiously move towards a more Reformed position with regard to worship and church government; but it slowly became obvious to them that Elizabeth had no such intentions, but was going to enforce her "compromise" settlement upon everyone in England in the interests of unity and uniformity.

There were two different reactions to this realisation, which sprang from the fact that there had been, right from the beginning of the Reformation, two different opinions as to the proper reaction to the old

system. "Some believed that only by complete repudiation of the traditional forms could Protestantism permanently maintain itself, while others dreaded the unsettling effects of too radical a change. The former maintained that nothing should be allowed in doctrine, worship or polity which was not approved by Scripture or fairly deducible therefrom. The latter, while recognising the binding authority of the Bible in matters of doctrine, held that in worship and polity the church had a right to determine its own conduct provided that it did not contradict Scriptural teaching."¹.

The latter was Luther's opinion, which was ably expounded by Hooker in his "Ecclesiastical Polity". The former was the opinion of Calvin and Zwingli.

It was at this stage that the word 'Puritan' was first heard in the land, to describe those adhering to Calvin's principle, as opposed to the Anglicans who accepted Luther's. It was, as the Puritan Fifth Earl of Huntingdon told his son some years later, "a reproachful name, given either by Papists that do hate all ministers except those of their own sect, or atheists, or men extremely vicious".²

The name was indeed one of contempt and derision, used at first to denote those who relied only on the 'pure' Word of God as their guide in all religious

1. McGiffert: Protestant Thought Before Kant. p.-125

2. Hill: Society and Puritanism. p.16

matters, but gradually it degenerated into a general term of abuse hurled at anyone whose views differed in any way from those normally accepted.

The Puritans, (using the word in its narrowly religious sense) were split into two camps, the non-separatist and the separatist Puritans; those who were prepared to wait for reformation from within the national church, and those who wanted "reformation without tarrying for anie". The separatists were as opposed by their fellow, less radical Puritans as they were by the bishops themselves, for belief in uniformity within the church was very strong.

The man who was one of the first leaders of the English separatist Puritans and the one who ushered in the era of the pre-history of Owen's beloved Independency, was Robert Browne. It would be helpful to take a brief look at some of Browne's theories as they contain much which later becomes essential to Independency even though the later Independents firmly disown the disfavoured name of 'Brownists'.

The system which Browne laid down in the three treatises of 1582 - "The Booke which sheweth the life and manners of all true Christians", "A Treatise upon the 23 of Matthew" and "A Treatise of Reformation without tarrying for anie" - is imperfectly worked out in detail, but it nevertheless presents with great clearness the essential features of modern Congregationalism.

Williston Walker states that "the starting point in

Browne's thinking was not a desire to establish a novel polity, but to foster the spiritual development of the believer by his separation from communion with the non-faithful whom all the state churches allowed a place in the church. He broke with the church of England primarily because all its bishops and other authorities approved its general and, as Browne thought, anti-Christian, inclusion of all non-excommunicate baptised persons, an inclusiveness which made real elevation of the establishment in spiritual tone impossible"¹.

Therefore, it was useless to wait for the reform of the establishment. Christians must organise themselves into new societies.

Browne believed that he found the model for this organisation in the New Testament. According to Nuttall, two of the determinative principles of this early congregationalism were then revolutionary. Firstly, the voluntary principle - "the Lords people is of the willing sorte", "for it is the conscience and not the power of man that will drive us to seeke the Lordes kingdome." Secondly, Christians must separate, not only from the world, but also from the church, if the church has become so far worldly as to "have all aloft by civill power and authorities...that men may say, Loe the Parliament, or Loe the Bishoppes decrees."².

1. Williston Walker: Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism p.12
2. Treatise of Reformation ed. T. G. Crippen 1903 pp. 25,21 Quoted in Nuttall, Puritan Spirit p. 57

With regard to the relation between church and state, Browne believed that magistrates had no part in religion. In 'Reformation without tarrying for anie', he states, "My kingdom, saith Christ, is not of this world, and they would shift in both bishops and magistrates into his spiritual throne to make it of this world; yea to stay the church government on them, is not only to shift but to thrust them before Christ. Yet under him in his spiritual kingdom are first apostles, secondly prophets, thirdly teachers etc. Also helpers and spiritual guides; but they put the magistrates first, which in a commonwealth indeed are first and above the preachers, yet only as any other Christians, if so be they Christians".¹

In the Hastings Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics, Powicke, commenting on Browne's beliefs about the relation between the church and the state, points out that he had been more than anticipated on the continent by the Anabaptists. This is because in one respect at least, his plea as compared with theirs presents a limitation - that is, he seems to permit, if not to oblige the prince - after the examples of the 'good kings of Juda' - not indeed to force the people by laws or by power to receive the true church government, but yet once they had received it, to keep them to it and even to "put them to death" if they fell away.²

1. 'Reformation without tarrying for any'. Reprint in the 'Old South Leaflet' No. 100 p.4. Quoted in McGiffert p. 131

2. p. 10. Quoted in McGiffert p. 132

Browne also believed in the concept of the gathered church, called out of and set apart from the world. The church is a company of saints and its purpose is not the salvation of the world or the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God, but the communion of its members with God and with each other and their growth in grace. The church exists primarily for common worship and mutual edification.

Because the church is a company of visible saints, Browne believed in strict discipline to maintain the purity of the church. Lack of discipline is one of the main criticisms which the Puritans levelled at the Established Church.

The independence of the local church is another of Browne's tenets. According to him "Christians are a company or number of believers who, by a willing covenant, made with their God, are under the government of God and Christ and keep his laws in one holy communion."¹ If the church is constituted by a voluntary covenant taken by Christian men with God and each other, anything else than independency was impossible.

Another feature of Brownism was the democratic organisation of the church. Ecclesiastical officers are not self-appointed nor imposed on the church from without, but chosen by the congregation itself, are responsible to their brethren and may at any time be deposed by them. Ordination as well as appointment of

1. "Book which sheweth the Life and Manners of all true Christians" Quoted McGiffert p. 134

pastors, teachers and other officers, lay in the hands of the congregations. Ordination is not a sacrament, it does not convey grace nor does it create a special ministerial class. It is simply the recognition of a man's divine gift to teach or rule, and of his choice by the congregation to exercise that gift within its bounds. In this the Reformation principle of the priesthood of all believers and of their direct access to God through Christ without any human intermediary, found clear and consistent exhibition.

Browne also retained infant baptism. The ceremony, according to McGiffert, meant that believers took a pledge to bring up all those dependent on them in the admonition of the Lord. It thus lost its sacramental character. The retention of this practice necessitated the laying of a greater stress on the covenant whereby believers bound themselves together into a church. They did not become church members by baptism, but by a voluntary covenant taken many years later, by which they bound themselves to each other and to God. "This separation of baptism from covenant brought out clearly the difference between the traditional doctrine of the church, both Catholic and Protestant, and the theory of the separatists. To the former, the church was first and the believer was second, because only in the church is salvation found. To the latter, on the contrary, the believer was first, and the church was second, because the church is nothing else than a community or assembly

of those already saints."¹.

However, the logicality of the retention of infant by both Browne and the later Congregationalists, can be questioned. According to the New Testament, baptism is always the entrance into the church, and in rejecting this they go against New Testament teaching. This position is reached because they do not question the basic assumption of infant baptism. Their position would have been much more logical had they accepted adult baptism. Many indeed later did secede from Congregationalism to become Baptists.

Apart from Browne's embryonic Congregationalism, there were several other forms of nonconformity. There was, for example, Barrowism, whose leaders, Barrowe, Greenwood and Penry all died for their beliefs. Their system, which is set out in 'A True Description out of the Word of God of the Visible Church', published from prison by Barrowe and Greenwood in 1589, is very similar to that of Browne. The chief difference, however, is in Barrowe's conception of the elders as a ruling oligarchy in the church, in distinction from the thorough-going democracy of Browne.

There were also the Anabaptists, who differed from other separatists in their mode of administering, and their choice of recipients of baptism. Thomas Helwys who in 1612 presided over the first known English Baptist

1. McGiffert p.136

Church, insisted upon believer's baptism, either by immersion or sprinkling. Immersion was exclusively insisted on by the London Baptists in 1633 because it resembled burying and rising again.

From Calvin's Geneva came the finely disciplined system of church government subsequently known as Presbyterianism. This was, for a long time, the strongest nonconformist force in England.

Originally, the Presbyterian experiments, led by Thomas Cartwright and John Field, took place within the framework of the established church, but eventually, continued attempts at suppression forced some of them to become separatists. John Owen was at first attracted to Presbyterianism before becoming convinced of the more Scriptural basis of Congregationalism. However, even towards the end of his life his views on elders and synods would not have been unacceptable to moderate Presbyterians.

B. The King and the Archbishop.

James I's maxim was 'No bishop, no King' ! He believed that unless he could retain power over the church, he would soon lose power over his kingdom. This was because he had always been trying to strengthen the weak royal authority in Scotland amid the claims of presbyteries and the sermons of pastors. He, and later his son Charles I, therefore steadily discouraged Puritanism, and encouraged the anti-Puritan party within the Church of England which was, in Charles I's time, led by Archbishop Laud, that

staunch supporter of the Divine Right of Kings: "The most high and sacred order of kings is of divine right, being the ordinance of God himself, founded in the laws of nature, and clearly established by express texts both of Old and New Testaments".¹

This partnership of king and archbishop set about minimising the Puritan influence and maximising high-church influence. The 'Romanising' of the church which followed, had the effect of driving many to nonconformity. Amongst these was John Owen, who severely criticised the innovations of Laud; the 'paintings; crossings, crucifixes, bowings, altars, tapers, wafers, organs, anthems, litany, rails, images, copes and vestments' were 'but Roman varnish, an Italian dress'² for devotions introduced to lead men into the clutches of the Anti-Christ.

The fears of Owen and others seemed to be justified by what they regarded as Laud's conciliatory attitude to Rome: "Protestants have not left the Church of Rome in her essence but in her errors; not in the things that constitute a church, but only in such abuses and corruptions as work towards the dissolution of a church",³ and fortified by the fact that the King had a Roman Catholic wife and was pursuing a policy of friendship with 'Papist' Spain.

1. Quoted in Hutton: History of the English Church from Charles I to Anne. p.26
2. Quoted in Toon: God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen. p.9
3. Quoted in Hutton p.14

These fears, together with the King's total disregard of liberties, fomented Puritan reaction and led eventually to the civil war. The archbishop and the king were executed, Charles to the last refusing to renounce episcopacy, partly because of fear that this would lead to the erosion of royal power - "...We should have the doctrine against Kings fiercelier set up than among the Jesuits"¹, but also because he was genuinely convinced that episcopacy was the true way of church government.

C. Commonwealth and Protectorate

During the spring and summer of 1643, the parliamentary forces fighting Charles I had found themselves in serious difficulties. To continue the struggle they needed the help of the Scottish army and in return for their assistance the Scots wished them to make an agreement with them - The Solemn League and Covenant. This guaranteed the maintenance of the Reformed Church of Scotland (which was Presbyterian) and promised to reform the churches of England and Ireland on Presbyterian lines.

Parliament had already declared its intention of establishing a church government that would be "more agreeable to God's Word and bring the Church of England into a nearer conformity with the Church of Scotland and other Reformed Churches abroad."² To implement this design, Parliament convened "an Assembly of learned, godly

1. Hutton p. 138

2. New International Dictionary of the Christian Church
Ed. J. D. Douglas p. 1039

and judicious Divines to consult and advise of such matters and things as should be proposed unto them."¹

The King, however, pronounced the Assembly illegal and many of the Anglicans therefore refused to attend.

Upon the Westminster Assembly's approval of the Solemn League and Covenant, the Church of Scotland sent six commissioners (four ministers and two lay people) to the Assembly, including Robert Baillie.

The Westminster Assembly continued from the 1st July 1643 to 22nd February 1649, less than a month after the death of the king and the establishment of the Commonwealth. It had no ecclesiastical authority of its own; it was simply a council giving advice to Parliament on its work of replacing episcopacy.

The main work of the Assembly was the preparation of the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, the Form of Church Government, and the Directory for Public Worship. The Confession is a systematic exposition of orthodox Calvinism and became the credal standard in the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The Catechisms also enjoyed great success, especially the Shorter Catechism which begins with the famous declaration that 'man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.' The Directory for Public Worship was adopted by Parliament in 1645 as a replacement for the Book of Common Prayer. Its purpose, as its title indicates, was to provide direction, rather than to lay down a liturgy

1. New International Dictionary of the Christian Church. p. 1039.

that was to be followed exactly. The preface declares that the obligatory use of the Anglican Prayer Book had proved to be a detriment rather than a help to true worship, as it had insisted on read prayer, had curtailed preaching, and had generally made worship a mechanical act. Therefore the Directory had been prepared in order to guide ministers in the conduct of services of worship, but not to provide a set form, since different circumstances might call for different orders and different actions.

Thus Parliament ordered the establishment of Presbyterianism. It was, however, a modified Presbyterianism, which left the church still ultimately under Parliamentary control, and one which was never to become nationwide, being successfully set up only in London and some parts of Lancashire.

There were very few Independents who were invited to take part in the Westminster Assembly. Those who did take part agreed to the Confession of Faith and the Catechisms but objected to the Presbyterian Form of Church Government. These 'Dissenting Brethren', Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, William Bridge, Jeremiah Burroughes and Sidrach Simpson, published in 1644 the "Apologeticall Narration" to explain the Congregational principles which they held. This work had a marked effect on the development of John Owen's doctrine of the church, as we shall see later.

The Dissenting Brethren argued that as a pastor is made overseer of his flock, his governing power should not

exceed the limits of his teaching power. This was Christ's order but the Presbyterians destroyed it by making a preaching elder rule over congregations where he did not preach. In presbytery all members were ruling elders, but were only preaching elders to their own flocks. This set aside the distinction between the elder that rules and the preaching elder.

They also objected that Presbyterian polity made an 'incongruous disproportion' between the eldership and the diaconate. If there was one presbytership over all churches, why not a deaconship over all churches? The presbyterians' argument was that as there were many elders in one town, Jerusalem, for example, there were many churches and the elders formed a presbytery to govern the churches. But the Dissenting Brethren believed that there was only one congregation in Jerusalem, though it had many elders and therefore that no elder had jurisdiction except over the people to whom he ministered. The Independents therefore differed from the Presbyterians in rejecting government by presbyteries and synods. Every congregation was a church and independent of other churches.

However, in spite of these objections, weight of numbers gave victory to the Presbyterians in the Assembly point by point.

Soon, the Commonwealth collapsed and the Protectorate began. In 1657 Cromwell gave his consent to a petition from Parliament that the polity of the Independents might become the church polity of the nation. Toleration, however,

was to be granted to those who differed from them in worship and discipline, but who agreed in doctrine. All others were to be without protection, disqualified from holding any civil office and incapable of receiving the public maintenance appointed for the ministry. The Savoy Synod was called in 1658 and about two hundred delegates met in order to draw up a new Independent Confession of Faith in which task John Owen bore his share. The synod accepted, with some minor alterations, the doctrinal statements of the Westminster Confession. From the point of view of the doctrine of the church, the most important alteration is that made to Article 25 of the Westminster Confession (26 in the Savoy Confession). The Westminster Confession gives two definitions of the church; the Catholic, invisible church, which consists of the elect, and the visible church which is also catholic and universal and consists of the professors of Christianity and their children. Unto this latter church Christ has entrusted the ministry, oracles and ordinances. This, according to the Presbyterians, was the primary church - the universal church of which the local church is part.

The Independents rejected this. The ministry, oracles and ordinances are given to the local church. There is no visible catholic church really; one can describe the professors of Christianity as the visible catholic church of Christ but they are not an organised body to which Christ has entrusted oracles or officers.

This divergence is the root of all the differences between the Presbyterians and Anglicans, and the Independents. The formers' view of the catholic, visible church was compatible with the idea of a national, territorial church; a church co-extensive with the state; the latter, however, rejecting the concept of the church catholic and visible, regarded the local church, that is, the local manifestation of the catholic invisible church as the true church.

The really original work of the Savoy Conference was, however, the thirty sections relating to church order which are appended to the Confession. They contain a brief and lucid presentation of the main features of congregational church polity.

They declare that by the will of the Father, all authority in the church belongs to Jesus Christ. It is he who through the ministry of preaching and by the Holy Spirit, calls people out of the world into communion with himself. Those whom he thus calls he commands to walk together in gathered churches for the purpose of mutual edification and for public worship. To each particular church, composed of regenerate saints who obey God's will, Christ gives all the necessary power and authority for the administration of worship and discipline. In a church there are four types of church officer: pastor, teaching elder, ruling elder and deacon. The ordination or setting apart of any church officer is administered by the local church, usually in the presence of 'messengers' from other churches. Only the pastor or teacher may administer the

seals of the covenant of grace (baptism and the Lord's Supper), but in some cases 'gifted brethren' who do not hold any office may preach. A pastor or teacher may hold a parish living within the state-church and receive the 'publique maintenance' and at the same time be an officer within a gathered church. By the powers given by Christ the individual church has full internal authority to govern its affairs and excommunicate guilty members, but synods of representatives from churches are helpful and may give advice to churches.

The Savoy Synod was, however, doomed never to become effectige in England, because, even before it was convened, the Lord Protector had died and its work was swept out of men's minds by the turmoil of Richard Cromwell's Protectorate. According to Williston Walker, the Synod's lasting use was to be in New England, where it was adopted by a Massachusetts Synod at Boston in 1680 with a few immaterial modifications and was similarly accepted for Connecticut at Saybrook in 1708, its doctrinal confession long continuing a recognised standard for the Congregational churches of America.

D. The Restoration

Cragg, in his book 'The Church in the Age of Reason', explains why the Restoration took place: "By 1660 the impetus of the Puritan Revolution had spent itself. It had produced no leader to replace Cromwell, it had no policy or plans, it had failed to solve the constitutional problems of England, it had failed to satisfy their religious

aspirations and by regimenting the details of their daily lives, it had aroused general exasperation. The Restoration took place because the majority of Englishmen were weary of experiments and wanted to return to familiar ways."¹

The years of peace, consolidation and growth under Cromwell, had given to the Dissenters a strength and a confidence which the thirty seven years of intermittent persecution which followed the Restoration failed to crush.

At first, however, there was no hint of persecution when Charles II returned. From Breda in Holland he had issued a declaration which promised consideration for 'tender consciences' and he appointed Presbyterians to royal chaplaincies and offered them high preferment in the re-established church. But gradually, pressure from the Anglicans, newly repossessed of power, caused the ejection of Puritan ministers and the reintroduction of old forms of worship. Presbyterian hopes for some basis for comprehension were gradually eroded. The axe finally fell at the Savoy Conference which had met to discuss Puritan requests for modifications of the Prayer Book. After the Conference had made inadequate concessions to the Puritans, the government introduced the Act of Uniformity. This Act stipulated that only those who had received episcopal ordination could officiate in church and demanded that all incumbents and schoolmasters should swear 'unfeigned assent and consent' to all that the Prayer Book contained. This

1. Cragg: The Church in the Age of Reason. ch. 4

was to take effect on St. Bartholemew's Day 1662. The result was a substantial exodus from the church and the beginning of modern dissent. X

The Presbyterian, John Howe, gave the reasons why he could not assent to the Act of Uniformity: firstly, because he could not submit to reordination as it would imply the invalidity of his previous ordination; secondly, because he could not submit to the enforcement of ceremonies not warranted by the Word of God; and thirdly, because the Anglican church could not maintain a strong scriptural discipline for the maintenance of the parity of the church members. *parity*

The Independent, John Owen, also gave his reasons for not conforming. He explained that he could not accept the imposition of a liturgy for several reasons; firstly, because it leads to an atrophy of spiritual gifts; secondly, because uniformity of liturgy makes impossible the application of grace to the varying needs of different congregations; and thirdly, it abridges the liberty of the disciples of Christ in unnecessary matters.

The ejected ministers suffered greatly and their sufferings were increased by further acts against them. In 1664 the Five Mile Act debarred any minister from going within five miles of the place in which he had formerly ministered; in 1664 and 1670 the Conventicle Acts, which Andrew Marvell called 'the quintessence of arbitrary malice' 1

1. Quoted in Cragg: Puritanism in the Period of the Great Persecution' p. 16

forbade people to gather together to hear the Word preached.

But persecution caused Puritanism to rediscover its soul. Some of the most inspiring and enduring devotional treatises were written during this period; Baxter's 'The Saints' Everlasting Rest', Howe's 'The Living Temple', Owen's 'A Discourse on the Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer' and Bunyan's 'Grace Abounding'.

Dr. R. W. Dale, the nineteenth century Congregationalist writer, summed up this period by saying: 'It was the salvation of evangelicalism when Evangelicals were rejected.'¹

Eventually, this period of persecution under the Stuarts came to an end with the Revolution of 1688, when the Roman Catholic James II was exiled and a measure of toleration was granted by William III.

1. Dale: History of English Congregationalism p. 421.
Quoted in Davies: The English Free Churches p. 104.

2. The Life of John Owen: A Brief Survey.

Owen entered Oxford university just as the high-church and Arminian influence of Laud was beginning to be felt. Calvinist beliefs were discouraged, 'Romish' practices were reintroduced. Owen, having to decide one way or the other, felt his way to a Puritan position and chose to leave Oxford rather than to submit to Laud's demands.

He became tutor and chaplain in the household of Sir Robert Dormer of Great Milton and afterwards with Lord Lovelace. He soon had to part with Lovelace, however, because the latter's sense of honour bound him to his king's cause, whereas Owen's conscience would let him do no other than support the Parliament.

He then went to stay with friends in London. At this stage, Owen was convinced of the truth of the great Puritan doctrines in his head, but the warmth, strength, and assurance to be drawn from them had not yet touched his heart. It was while he was in London that he was granted this spiritual experience, when 'the Holy Spirit witnessed with his spirit that he was a child of God.' He had gone with a friend to hear the Presbyterian, Edward Calamy preach at St. Mary's, Aldermanbury, only to find that at the last minute he had been replaced by an unknown preacher. It was through the words of this unknown man that God spoke to the heart of John Owen, and try as he might in later years, he never found out who the preacher

had been on that night.

Owen published his first work in 1642 - 'The Display of Arminianism', which was a defence of the doctrine of predestination against the attacks made on it by the Arminian Laudians. He was soon afterwards offered the living at Fordham near Colchester. For his congregation here he wrote in 1643 'The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished'. It was written because many ecclesiastics refused to allow the private members of a church any active part in the running of their church. The Preface shows that at this stage he regarded Presbyterianism as the only habitable earth between 'the precipitous rock of hierarchical tyranny', which was Prelacy, and 'the valley (I had almost said the pit) of democratical confusion', which was Congregationalism. William Bartlett, who wrote 'A Model of the Primitive Congregational Way', described Owen at this period of time as 'a moderate and learned Presbyterian.'

He then moved from Fordham to Coggeshall, and it was here that he gave up Presbyterianism. The Westminster Assembly was in session and his attention was drawn to the 'Apologeticall Narration' of the Five Dissenting Brethren, in which they explained their Congregational principles. They also recommended the reading of 'The Keyes of the Kingdom' by John Cotton, a leading Independent colonist in New England. This reading led Owen to accept the Congregational way and he identified himself with it soon afterwards in a sermon before Parliament.

At Coggeshall, Owen put these newly accepted principles into practice and gathered a church within the

parish at St. Peters. He held normal Sunday services for the whole parish, but during the week the 'visible saints' gathered together for edification. He gave Holy Communion only to these 'visible saints'. For those outside the gathered church he explained the Congregational principles in a work published in 1647 called 'Eshcol; or Rules of Direction for the walking of the Saints in Fellowship according to the order of the Gospel'. The rules were arranged in two parts; those which relate to the duty of members, first to their pastors and secondly to each other.

Owen soon became one of Cromwell's chaplains and trusted friends, accompanying him on several military expeditions including those to Scotland and Ireland, and receiving from Cromwell the honour of the position as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University.

Anthony Wood has the following description of Owen in 'Athene Oxonienses': 'his personage was proper and comely and he had a very graceful behaviour in the pulpit, an eloquent elocution, a winning and insinuating deportment, and could by the persuasions of his oratory... move and win the affections of his admiring auditory almost as he pleased."¹.

Goold points out that while he was vice-chancellor, he demonstrated his spirit of tolerance by allowing a society of episcopalians to meet every Lord's Day, very near to his own house, and worship according to the forms of the liturgy even though the laws of that period put it in Owen's power to disperse the assembly. In the same conciliatory spirit

1. Toon: God's Statesman p.55.

he won the confidence of Presbyterians by giving to their ablest men some of the vacant livings that were at his disposal and asking their advice in all difficulties and emergencies.¹

Owen played his next major role at the Savoy Assembly which met in 1658 to prepare a confession of faith and order of Independent churches. A committee, which consisted of John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, William Bridge, Joseph Caryl and William Greenhill - the most influential divines of whom Congregationalism could boast -, prepared a statement of doctrine each morning which was laid before the Assembly, discussed and approved.

In 1657 Owen published 'Of Schism' after having been himself accused of schism. He felt that this charge derived its chief power to injure from its very vagueness and he therefore wrote to distinguish between the scriptural and the ecclesiastical use of the term, and by simply defining it, to deprive it of its power.

In 1672 a dispute arose between Owen and Richard Baxter about whether the occasional attendance of non-conformists at parish churches was permissible. Baxter believed that for the sake of peace it was, but Owen disagreed. He therefore published 'A Discourse Concerning Evangelical Love, Church Peace and Unity' describing what would really bring peace and unity to churches. He was convinced of the necessity to separate from the episcopal churches and it was in reply to Dr. Stillingfleet's sermon 'The Unreasonableness of Separation' that he wrote one of his best defences of

1. Life of John Owen: Works Vol. 1.

nonconformity. He longed, however, to see the various branches of nonconformity joined together in mutual confidence and united action in spite of the differences between them. It was to this end that he wrote "Union among Protestants" and "Inquiry into the origin, nature, institution, power, order and communion of evangelical churches'. Some have regarded this treatise as a recantation of his Congregational views on church polity and a return to Presbyterianism but it was really Owen's attempt to show how far he could come to meet the moderate Presbyterian and to lay down a platform on which united action in times of trouble could take place.

Apart from these and many other works which Owen wrote defending nonconformity and expounding the Congregational way, he also wrote a series of works which, according to Peter Toon, 'rank amongst the greatest theological books of seventeenth century European Protestantism'¹. There were three types of work - doctrinal divinity, practical divinity and biblical commentaries. Central to the understanding of these works is Owen's conception of the written word of God as the sole authority in religion.

One of Owen's greatest works is his 'πνευματολογία - the Discourse on the Holy Spirit. In his preface he writes "I know not of any who ever went before me in this design of representing the whole economy of the Holy Spirit'. In it Owen was concerned to draw out the implications of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit for faith and practice. He also deals thoroughly with the great Calvinistic doctrines

1. Toon p. 165

of predestination, justification by faith and the perseverance of the saints, as well as with the person and work of Christ.

Owen's works are characterised by profundity thoroughness and consequently, by authority. Andrew Thompson wrote that Owen 'makes you feel when he has reached the end of his subject, that he has also exhausted it.'

But all of Owen's works, whether polemical, practical or doctrinal, were dedicated to what in 1664 he called restoring 'the old glorious beautifull face of Christianity.'^{1.}

1. Vindication of the Animadversions of Fiat Lux.
Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 3.

3. Other Doctrines which helped to mould Owen's Doctrine of the Church.

No one doctrine can be treated in isolation. A man's theology is a rounded whole and all the doctrines within it are interrelated segments of that whole. Owen's doctrine of the church is shaped by the great importance he attaches to several other doctrines in Christian theology.

A. The Person and Work of Christ.

The first and most important of these is the doctrine of the person and work of Christ. Two of his greatest theological treatises deal with this subject, his *Χριστολογία*, first published in 1679, and his 'Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ, published in 1684.

Owen believed that by the will of the Father all authority in the church belongs to Jesus Christ. This is because God has made Christ to be the only foundation of the whole church. Christ himself declares that he is the rock on which the church is built: "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church." (Mtt. 16:18). Owen disputes the Roman Catholic claim that Christ meant Peter, and therefore all the subsequent Popes of Rome, to be the rock, marshalling the testimonies of a formidable array of Early Church Fathers to his support. He quotes Ignatius: "Ὁὗτος (ie. Christ) ἔστιν ἡ πρὸς τὸν πατέρα ἀγούσα ὁδὸς ἡ πέτρα, ἡ κλεις, ὁ ποιμην...", and Origen: "Quod si super unum illum Petrum tantum existimes totam ecclesiam aedificari, quid dicturus es de Johanne, et apostolorum unoquoque? Num audebimus dicere quod adversus Petrum unum non praevaliturae sunt portae inferorum". He

also quotes Eusebius, Hilary, Epiphanius and finally Augustine: "Upon this rock which thou has confessed - upon myself, the Son of the living God - I will build my church. I will build thee upon myself and not myself upon thee;"

Owen declares that the variation in expression proves that whatever the signification of the name Peter, yet the person so called is not the rock intended. The words are 'Σὺ εἶ πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ'. If he had intended the person of Peter he would have expressed it plainly 'Σὺ εἶ πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ σοὶ' 'Thou art a rock and on thee will I build... .' At the least, he would not have altered the gender but would have said, "ἐπὶ τούτῳ τῷ πετρῷ."

He argues that there is but one rock, one foundation. There is no mention in Scripture of two rocks of the church. The rock and the foundation are the same for the rock is that whereon the church is built, that is, the foundation. If Christ is this rock, then neither Peter nor his pretended successors can be. And Christ is this rock as is expressly confirmed by the apostle Paul: "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Christ is the foundation of the church in two senses: he is the real foundation and he is the doctrinal foundation. He is the real foundation "by virtue of the mystical union of it unto him, with all the benefits whereof, from thence and thereby, it is made partaker. From thence alone hath it spiritual life, grace, mercy, perfection and glory." ¹.

1. John Owen: Works Vol. 1 p.34

And he is the doctrinal foundation of it "in that the faith or doctrine concerning him and his offices is that divine truth which in a peculiar manner animates and constitutes the church of the New Testament. Without faith and confession hereof, no one person belongs unto that church." ^{1.}

One aspect of Christ's being the foundation of the church, is that he is the foundation of all the holy counsels of God with respect unto the vocation, sanctification, justification and eternal salvation of the church. He was the delight of God, as he in whom all his counsels for his own glory in the redemption and salvation of the church were laid and founded: "My servant, in whom I will be glorified ... by raising the tribes of Jacob, restoring the preserved of Israel, in being a light to the Gentiles and the salvation of God unto the ends of the earth." (Isaiah 49:3, 6).

Right at the beginning of his treatise 'The Death of Death in the Death of Christ', Owen sought to establish how Christ accomplished this work on behalf of the church. It was, he said, through Christ's bearing the punishment for the sin of the elect, and his defeat of sin and death in his own death and resurrection that the church was to be 'saved, delivered from the evil world, purged, washed, made holy, zealous and fruitful in good works, rendered acceptable and brought nigh unto God.' ^{2.}

1. John Owen: Works Vol. 1 p.34

2. John Owen: Works Vol. 10 p. 158

What is accomplished by the death, blood-shedding, or oblation of Jesus Christ is often more clearly expressed in the following ways:- first as reconciliation with God, by removing and slaying the enmity that was between him and us; secondly, justification, by taking away the guilt of sins, procuring remission and pardon of them, redeeming us from their power, with the curse and wrath due unto us for them; thirdly, sanctification, by the purging away of the uncleanness and pollution of our sins, renewing us in the image of God and supplying us with the graces of the Spirit of holiness; and fourthly, adoption, with that liberty and all those glorious privileges which appertain to the Son of God.

Owen illuminates further the concept of justification in a long and detailed work entitled 'The Doctrine of Justification by Faith'. He explains that the foundation of this doctrine is the union of Christ and the church in one mystical person, which state they coalesce into through the uniting efficacy of the Holy Spirit. Christ is the head and the believers are the members of that one person. Hence, as what he did is imputed unto them, as if done by them, so what they deserved on account of sin, was charged upon him. Our sins were transferred to Christ and made his, thereon he underwent the punishment that was due to us for them, and the ground hereof is the union between him and us.

Owen summarises the work of Christ by saying: "The death and bloodshedding of Jesus Christ hath wrought and doth effectually procure, for all those that are concerned

in it, eternal redemption, consisting in grace here and glory hereafter." 1.

In a sermon of great reverence, devotion and simplicity, entitled 'The Branch of the Lord the Beauty of Zion' which Owen preached in 1650 at Berwick, where he had joined Cromwell and his army, he took as his text Isaiah 56:7 'For mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people! In this sermon Owen traces, as its sub-title explains 'the glory of the church in its relation unto Christ', showing that the church owes its very existence and all its benefits to Jesus Christ.

Owen first of all carefully establishes what he means by the word 'church'. These definitions we will come across many times as they are crucial to the difference in the doctrine of the church between the Independents and both the Presbyterians and Anglicans. Owen's definitions are as follows: "Christ's church is of saints and believers. It is primarily the whole multitude of them who antecedently are chosen of his Father and given unto him; consequently are redeemed, called and justified in his blood ... And secondarily also every holy assembly of Mount Zion whereunto the Lord Christ is made beauty and glory - every particular church of his saints, inasmuch as they partake of the nature of the whole, being purchased by his blood." 2.

The church is God's house, as he calls it in the sermon's text. The foundation of this house is Jesus Christ, the materials are the elect, the living stones, and the architects

1. Works Vol. 10 p. 159.
2. Works Vol. 8 p. 286.

or builders, are principally the Holy Spirit and instrumentally the apostles and prophets, at first personally and afterwards doctrinally through their writings.

The church, as a house, has three chief qualities: it is a living house, because Christ, the foundation, is a living stone, and they that are built upon him are living stones. Hence they are said to grow together into a house; it is a strong house - Christ himself promised that 'the gates of hell cannot prevail against it' (Matthew 16:18); it is also a glorious house in a three fold respect. Firstly it is glorious in respect of the inward glory, brought unto it, of God in the face of Jesus Christ, being beautiful through the comeliness that he puts upon it. It has the beauty and glory of justification whereby the filthy garments of iniquity are taken away and replaced by the 'garments of salvation', 'the robe of righteousness'. It has the beauty and glory of sanctification, for the beauty of a sanctified soul is above all the glory of the world. Secondly, it is glorious in respect of its outward structure, "Behold I will lay thy stones with fair colours, and thy foundation with sapphires. I will make thy windows of agates and carbuncles and all thy borders of pleasant stones." (Isaiah 34:11,12). This, says Owen, refers to the glory of the ordinances of gospel worship which Christ has given. Thirdly, it is glorious in respect of the exaltation it has above and its triumph over all its opposers.

Owen maintains that Jesus Christ stands in a two fold relation unto this house. Firstly, in respect of its fabric and building, and secondly, in respect of its state and condition.

In respect of its fabric and building, Christ relates

to this house as its foundation, its ark, its altar and its candlestick.

That Christ is the foundation of the church has already been partly discussed. Owen declares that just as the foundation is first laid in the building so Jesus Christ is the first that is laid in the holy fabric of the church, he is the 'firstborn among many brethren' the one who must first be laid in the heart of every individual stone before they are laid up in this building, the one who must be laid in the midst of every particular assembly, otherwise "they will prove to be pinnacles of Babel, not towers of Zion." ¹.

The foundation also bears the whole weight of the house, but it is hidden to the men of this world, who, because they do not see the foundation, do not believe in it.

Christ is also the ark of this house, In the tabernacle and afterwards in the temple, the ark contained the law of the old covenant of works. Over it was the mercy-seat. This signified that unless the law with its condemning power were hid in the ark and covered with the mercy-seat, no person could ever stand before the Lord. Jesus Christ as the ark and the mercy seat hides the law as being the end of it. He is the ark of this house also as containing in himself the new covenant.

Thirdly, Christ is the altar of the house. There were two altars in the old tabernacle and temple - an altar for sacrifice and an altar for incense. Christ is now the

altar of sacrifice, the altar of offerings for expiation and atonement. He is also the altar of incense. Incense is prayer and it is only prayer offered through Christ which is accepted.

Christ is the candlestick of this house. In the tabernacle the candlestick gave out light for all the worship of God in that most holy place. Jesus Christ gives out light in this house by way of doctrinal revelation through the prophets and apostles, and by way of real communication in that every one who has any spiritual light really communicated to him has it from Christ.

In respect of the state and condition of the house, Jesus Christ stands in a five-fold relation to it, as owner, builder, watchman, inhabiter and avenger.

Christ is the owner of this house by inheritance because he is by his Father "appointed heir of all things". He is owner also by right of purchase because when he came to take possession of the house he found it was heavily mortgaged and this mortgage he paid completely with his blood. He is owner by conquest; a usurper, Satan, had seized this house but Christ conquered him in that 'through death he destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.' If, therefore, Christ is the owner of this house, the order and disposal of it must be left to himself. Men must not tamper with his house and household. They must take heed how they despoil it for themselves.

Jesus Christ is the builder of the house, "I will build my church". (Matthew 16:18). The church is built two ways, spiritually and ecclesiastically. In the first

sense, only Christ can give life to dead stones in order that they may be built into Christ's mystical house. The second sense has regard to the order and worship appointed by the gospel. Christ would never allow that the will of the creature should decide this. It is his building: from him, his word and his spirit is the institution, direction and perfection of it.

Christ is also the watchman or keeper of this house. He watches his house to see what it needs: 'The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout, the whole earth to show himself strong in its behalf. He watches, moreover, to see that it comes to no harm.

Jesus Christ is the indweller of this house: 'This is my rest: ... here will I dwell: (Psalm 132:13, 14). He dwells in his house by his Spirit: "The spirit of him that raised up Jesus dwells in you." (Romans 8:11). Hence, believers are said to be 'temples of the Holy Ghost'. He dwells in his house by his graces. All the graces we are made partakers of, we receive from his fulness and by them he inhabits in us. "Christ will not dwell in a soul whose mind is darkness, his will stubbornness and his affections carnal and sensual. He puts light and life and love upon the soul that it may be meet for him to dwell in." ¹. He also dwells in his house by his ordinances - the ordinances of gospel worship.

Christ is the great avenger of this house and of all

1. Works: Vol. 8 p. 305

the injuries and wrongs done to it. Sooner or later, temporally or eternally, he will avenge all the injuries and destroy all the enemies of his holy dwelling. (2 Thessalonians 1:6 - 10).

These, then, are the relations in which Jesus Christ stands to the house of God. Owen forcefully argues that Jesus Christ, the Branch of the Lord, is the whole of the beauty of Zion, the church.

If Christ has brought such privileges to the church, the church for its part surely owes more duty and service to Christ than can be expressed. The first of these duties which the church owes to Christ is faith on the person of Christ. Owen, in his *Χριστολογία*, declares "yea, such a duty it is, as our eternal condition doth more peculiarly on the performance or nonperformance of it, ^{depend} than on any other duty whatever. For constantly under those terms it is prescribed unto us. 'He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him.' (John 3:36)." 1.

He goes back to the first promise, the *πρωτευαγγέλιον*, (Genesis 3:15) in which the destruction of Satan and his work by a Saviour and Deliverer is foretold. Owen calls this 'the very foundation of the faith of the church.' 2.

This promise was confirmed and the way of the deliverance of the church by virtue of it declared, in the institution of expiatory sacrifice by which God declared from the

1. Works: Vol. 1 p. 126

2. Ibid

beginning that 'without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin.'. With respect to them Jesus Christ was called 'The Lamb of God which taketh away the sins of the world' (John 1:29). All the Old Testament saints were justified by faith in this Saviour who was to come. Faith in the Saviour, Jesus Christ, was therefore required right from the very entrance of sin.

Owen defines what exactly this faith is that God requires. "It is the person of Christ which is the first and principal object of that faith wherewith we are required to believe in him; and that so to do, is not only to assent unto the truth of that doctrine revealed by him, but also to place our trust and confidence in him for mercy, relief and protection - for righteousness, life and salvation - for a blessed resurrection and eternal reward." ^{1.}

"Faith in Christ", says Owen, "is that grace whereby the church is united unto him - incorporated into one mystical body with him. It is thereby that he dwells in them and they in him. By this alone are all the supplies of grace derived from him unto the whole body. Deny his person to be the proper and immediate object of this faith and all these things are utterly overthrown - that is, the whole spiritual life and eternal salvation of the church." ^{2.}

The second duty of the church to Christ is obedience. His great injunction to his disciples is "that they keep his commandments."

The law under the Old Testament had two parts, the moral

1. Works: Vol. 1 p. 127

2. Works: Vol. 1 p. 130.

preceptive part of it and the institutions of worship; In respect of the first part, Christ gave no new law, nor was the old abrogated by him; in fact he came to confirm it. (Matthew 5:17). In respect of the second part, the institutions of worship given by Moses, this was abolished by Christ and as supreme Lord and Lawgiver of the Gospel Church, he gave a new law of worship.

Therefore, obedience to Christ is required with respect to the moral law which he confirmed and the law of evangelical worship which he gave and appointed.

This obedience is founded on that which is the third great duty of the church to Christ - that is, love. Love is the foundation of all that is acceptable to him. "If ye love me, keep my commandments." Owen sets out to prove that "there is and ought to be, in all believers, a divine, gracious love unto the person of Christ, immediately fixed on him, whereby they are excited unto and acted in, all their obedience unto his authority." ¹.

Not only is Christ the principal object of the love of God himself: "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased", he is also the principal object of the love of both the heavenly church and the earthly church. For the church above, love proceeds from sight; for the church below, love proceeds from faith. The love of the earthly church for the person of Christ is that which the nature of their relation to him necessitates - that in which they express their renovation into the image of God, that which the Scripture indispensably requires of them and on which

all their spiritual comforts do depend.

The foundation of the love of the earthly church to Christ is the revelation of him to us in the Scripture as 'altogether lovely'. The whole Book of Canticles is nothing but a mystical declaration of the mutual love between Christ and the Church.

Our love for Christ springs from all the acts of his mediatory office and all the fruits of them of which we are made partakers. When we consider all the benefits which Christ's mediation has brought us, that consideration must produce love, as is expressed in Psalm 103: 1 - 5: "Bless the Lord, o my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the Lord, o my soul and forget not all his benefits: who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all they diseases, who redeemeth thy life from destruction: who crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies: who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's."

That which the Bible puts forward as the principle motive of the love of the church for Christ, is Christ's love for the church. This love was the sole spring of all the mediatory acts of Christ, both in his becoming man and his suffering and death. No believer, meditating on the death of Christ, can fail to have his heart affected with deep love for him.

Christ's love for the church is absolutely pure and absolutely undeserved. It was when man was defiled and deformed by sin that Christ placed his love on us, that love,

on account of which he died for us. It was because of this that St. Paul ascribed a certain constraining power to the love of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:4), for no suitable return can be made for love but love.

Another great duty which the church owes to Christ is conformity to him. According to Owen, love is the principle of assimilation and conformity. "For when it (this vital principle of love) is duly affected with the excellencies of God in Christ, it fills the mind with thoughts and contemplations on them and excites all the affections unto a delight in them. And where the soul acts itself constantly in the mind's contemplation, and the delight of the affections, it will produce assimilation unto the object of them. To love God is the only way and means to be like unto him." ¹.

There are two parts of this duty of conformity, the first respecting the internal grace and holiness of the human nature of Christ, and the other, his example in duties of obedience.

With respect to the first, God's great design is that as we have borne the 'image of the first Adam' in the depravity of our natures, so we should bear 'the image of the second' in their renovation. Therefore, the 'fulness of grace' was bestowed on the human nature of Christ and the image of God planted on it so that it might be the prototype and example of what the church was to be, through him, make partaker of. That which God intends for

us in the internal communication of his grace and in the use of all the ordinances of the church, is, that we might come to the 'measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.'" (Ephesians 4:13). This duty is to be fulfilled in an opposition to all sin, because Christ 'did no sin, neither was there any guile found in his mouth', and in continual growth in every grace as Christ himself was 'full of grace'. (John 1:14).

With respect to the second part of this duty, the church must follow the example of Christ in all duties towards God and men, especially in his meekness, condescension to all sorts of persons, love and patience, and also in his self-denial and readiness for the cross.

The church owes to Christ the duty of confidence in the present and hope for the future; the ground of this confidence and hope being the mediatorial work of Christ. The church rests in complete certainty that Christ, in his mediatorial exaltation and power, will subdue all the enemies of its eternal welfare, namely sin, death, the world, Satan and hell, and that he will ensure the preservation, continuation and rule of his church, both as to the internal state of the souls of believers and the external order of the church in its worship and obedience and in its preservation under and from all oppositions and persecutions in this world.

Christ's mediatorial work for the church consists in pleading for them on the grounds of the effectual atonement he has made for sin, being the advocate of their cause

against the accusations of Satan, interceding for them with all the supplies of the Spirit and rendering the worship of the church acceptable to God.

Owen summarises as follows: "All the present faith and worship of God in the church here on earth, all access unto him for grace, and all acceptable ascriptions of glory unto his divine majesty, do all of them in their being and exercise, wholly depend on and are resolved into, the continuation of the mediatory actings of Christ in heaven and glory." ¹.

The last duties of the church to Christ which Owen discusses are those which ascribe divine honour to Christ, namely adoration and invocation. Adoration is "the prostration of the soul before him as God, in the acknowledgement of his divine excellencies and the ascription of them unto him." ². In Revelation 5: 6 - 14 is a description of the adoration of Christ by the church. In this description are shown the object of divine adoration, the motives behind it and the nature of it.

The object of it is Christ, not separately, but distinctly from the Father and jointly with him. He is adored as having fulfilled the work of his mediation in his incarnation and oblation - as a "Lamb slain", and in his glorious exaltation "in the midst of the throne of God". The motives of the worship are the unspeakable benefits which we receive by his mediation. "Thou art worthy... for

1. Works: volume 1 p. 271

2. Works: volume 1 p. 107

thou was slain and has redeemed us to God by thy blood ... and hast made us unto our God kings and priests and we shall reign on the earth."

Invocation consists of "an ascription of all divine properties and excellencies unto him whom we invoke and a representation of our wills, affections and desires of our souls, unto him on whom we call, with an expectation of being heard and relieved, by virtue of his infinitely divine excellencies."¹

Genuine invocation needs a proper object and proper motives. These are laid down as the foundation of all religion in Exodus 20: 2, 3: "I am the Lord thy God" - that is the proper object of all religious worship - "which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage"; which, representing all divine benefits, temporal, spiritual and eternal, is the proper motive.

To invoke the name of Christ is the ordinary, solemn way of the worship of the church: "Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." But there are also particular times when the invocation of Christ is our special duty; times of great distresses of conscience through temptations, times of gracious discoveries of the glory of Christ or his love for us, times of persecution for his sake, times of realisation of our lack of grace, and finally, at the time of death.

These, then, are some of the duties which the church owes to Christ in return for the great salvation which he

1. Works: Vol. 1 p. 110

has accomplished on their behalf.

In his work 'Meditations and Discourses on the Glory of Christ', Owen maintains that there is yet another way in which Jesus Christ is the foundation of the church, and that is because he is the image of God to the church. The glory of Christ consists in the representation of the nature of God and of the divine person of the Father, unto the church, in him; for we behold 'the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ', because he is the image of God. "This", says Owen, "is the foundation of our religion; the rock whereon the church is built, the ground of all our hopes of salvation, of life and immortality; all resolved unto this - namely the representation that is made of the nature and will of God in the person and office of Christ. If this fail us, we are lost for ever; if this rock stand firm, the church is safe here and shall be triumphant hereafter."¹

God does not represent to us the properties of the divine nature in their own essential glory but as they are in the exercise of the powers for the salvation of the church. It is in Christ that we behold the wisdom, goodness, love, grace, mercy and power of God acting to accomplish the salvation of the church.

It is as God's representative in the church that Christ is given all authority in the church. In 'An Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches', Owen ascribes to Christ a three-fold right or title to all authority in the church.

1. Works: Volume 1 p. 294-5

He has this right by donation from the Father who appointed him 'heir of all things' (Hebrews 1: 2,3); he has the right by virtue of purchase, 'he purchased the church with his own blood' (Acts 20:28); he has this right by conquest, for all those who were thus to be disposed by him were both under the power of his enemies, and were themselves enemies to him in their minds. Christ therefore achieved a double conquest, first of their enemies by his power and then of themselves by his word, his Spirit and his grace.

This authority is peculiar to Jesus Christ: "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," (Matthew 28:18). He is therefore the "one lawgiver" of the church (James 4:12). There is a derivation of power and authority from him to others, but it extends itself only to directing, teaching and commanding those to whom he sends them, to do and observe what he has commanded.

If, therefore, Christ is the church's sole authority, only those things directly commanded by Christ concerning the church's conduct, worship and government are to be performed. It was for this reason that Owen attacked the liturgy of the Church of England. It was not the liturgy itself which he opposed primarily, but its imposition by civil and ecclesiastical enactment which he believed was an interference with the authority of Christ.

Owen, in his work 'Discourse concerning Liturgies', deals with this question with characteristic thoroughness, and we shall discuss his conclusions when dealing with the ideas of the Independents about the Scriptural way to conduct church worship.

Another question which is connected with the question of the authority of Christ and which we will deal with in detail when discussing Owen's doctrine of the church, is that of the authority of the magistrate in religion. What is the magistrate's duty in religion? How far can he go without usurping the authority of Christ? The question is a particularly interesting one as the Independents in New England came to different conclusions from the Independents in Old England. The Old England Independents believed that the magistrate had a duty to put down heresy and error and to create a climate conducive to the true worship of God, but they had no authority to impose particular methods of worship or church government. The New England Independents, who were in a position, in a new land, to put into practice all the beliefs for the sake of which they had left their native country, gave to the magistrate powers almost identical to those which their brethren across the seas strongly opposed, for they feared the effects of overmuch toleration.

B. The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

Owen's beliefs about the Holy Spirit also had a formative effect on his doctrine of the church. In his *Πνευματικὸς Λόγος*, the 'Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit', he declares that 'the doctrine of the Spirit of God, his work and grace, is the second great head or principle of those gospel truths wherein the glory of God and the good of the souls of men are most eminently concerned. ... The one was the giving of his

Son for them, and the other was the giving of his Spirit unto them."¹ Owen explains how this second great gift of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit, plays such a vital part in the life of the church.

The foundation of all church relation, order and worship consists in acceptance and acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord. But no-one can accept or acknowledge this of themselves; it is an effect of the working of the Holy Spirit in them, for "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost". (1 Corinthians 12:3). Therefore, without the direct working of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of men, revealing the Person of Christ to them, there would be no belief in Christ and therefore no church.

Not only is the Spirit concerned in the foundation of the church but he is also concerned in its building up. He does this by the bestowal of the spiritual gifts, which Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 names as wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discerning the spirits, tongues and the interpretation of tongues. The aim of the Spirit in granting these gifts is that they should be used to the profit, advantage and edification of others. They are not to be used as Simon the magician wished to use them in Acts 8, to gain riches and reputation, nor merely for the spiritual benefit of those who receive them, but for the edification of the church and the furtherance of faith and its profession in others.

1. Works Vol. 3 p. 23

The Holy Spirit founded the church in that he equipped the apostles for the task of evangelisation and church building, and he does the same for the disciples of Christ in all ages. Jesus had called his apostles to propagate X his gospel and build the church, but of themselves they had no ability to do this. Jesus promised them, however, that whatever they lacked, whether light, wisdom, authority, knowledge, utterance or courage, he would supply. He did this by sending the Holy Spirit to them and it was upon the presence and assistance of the Holy Spirit that the success of their ministry depended. It was 'through the Holy Ghost that he gave commandments unto them.' (Acts 1:2). It was on this promise of 'power from the Holy Ghost' that Christ founded and built the church. If there were no dispensation of the Spirit, there would be no church. This is as true now as it was at the inception of the New Testament church, for even though we have the Scriptures which proclaim the saving truth about Christ, men's eyes would still be blinded to this truth if the Holy Spirit did not cause the scales to be removed and Jesus, the 'true light' to be apprehended. "He that would utterly separate the Spirit from the word had as good burn his Bible. The bare letter of the New Testament will no more ingenerate faith and obedience in the souls of men, no more constitute a church-state among them who enjoy it, than the letter of the Old Testament doth so at this day among the Jews."¹

1. Works: Vol. 3 p. 192

So if men institute forms of church government and religious worship without regard to the work of the Spirit of God, there will never be a true church-state among them.

It is the Holy Spirit whose presence is always with the Church in fulfillment of Christ's promise "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world". Christ's bodily presence was to be taken away from them, but the Spirit was to be sent to them instead. It is through the Spirit that Christ is in the midst "wherever two or three are gathered together in his name".

The Holy Spirit, then, is present with every individual believer and in every church assembly. In a sermon entitled 'The Nature and Beauty of Gospel Worship' which was published posthumously in 1721, Owen maintains that the right performance of gospel worship depends on the Holy Spirit. He says that there are three things needful for this right performance - light and knowledge, that we may be acquainted with the mind and will of God in it, grace in the heart so that there may be a true, saving communion with God in our acts of faith, love and obedience, and ability for the performance of the duties that God requires in his worship. All these do believers receive by and from the Spirit of Christ and consequently have by him their access to the Father.

It is the Spirit who enables them to discover the mind of God and his will concerning his worship. He does this by causing believers to listen carefully to the word, the voice of Christ alone, for their direction in worship, and by revealing Christ's will to them in his word.

It is through the Holy Spirit that believers have access to God because he enables them to approach God in a spiritual manner with grace in their hearts as he is the Spirit of grace and supplication. The Holy Spirit reveals the spiritual needs of their souls to believers and impresses these needs on their hearts and souls. It is the Spirit alone who reveals the saving relief which God has provided in the promises of the gospel for all the wants of the saints. It is also the Holy Spirit who works in believers faith, love, delight, fervency, watchfulness, perseverance and in Christ renders their prayers effectual.

Every assembly of God's people requires leaders to act as the hand or mouth or eyes of the whole body or assembly. The Holy Spirit endows those whom he calls to this task with spiritual gifts that they may be able to perform it. In a sermon entitled 'The Ministry the Gift of Christ', Owen states; "Gifts make no man a minister but all the world cannot make a minister of Christ without gifts."¹

Book Nine in his *Πνευματολογία*, which is entitled 'A Discourse of Spiritual Gifts' deals with this subject at length. In it Owen declares that the spiritual gifts are essential for the order, government and teaching of the church, not for the content of its worship: "Although the spiritual life of the church does not consist in them, yet order and edification of the church wholly depend on them."²

1. Works: volume 9 p. 432

2. Works: volume 4 p. 421

This is because the gifts equip those who are to hold the offices of ruler and teacher in the church.

Owen, following in the footsteps of Calvin, divides the offices and therefore the gifts which supply them into extraordinary and ordinary. The extraordinary offices were those which were required at an extraordinary time - the inception of the New Testament church. These were the apostles; prophets and evangelists who were all extraordinary teaching officers of the church. The extraordinary spiritual gifts with which these officers were endowed, consisted of two sorts; those which were granted only for a special occasion or need such as the gifts of miracles and healing, and those which consisted of an extraordinary improvement in the faculties of the souls or minds of these men, such as wisdom and knowledge. These gifts are of the same kind as those that are ordinary and still continued; they differ only in degree as they were bestowed on the apostles and evangelists in an extraordinary degree.

Owen then proceeds to discuss the different spiritual gifts which St. Paul enumerates in 1 Corinthians 12. The 'word of wisdom' concerns the defence of the gospel and its truth against powerful persecuting adversaries. It was a gift which was particularly eminent at the beginning of the New Testament church, when a company of unlearned men were able on all occasions to maintain and defend the truth which they believed and professed before and against doctors, scribes, lawyers, rulers of synagogues, princes and kings

continually, and thus confound their enemies.

This gift was also pre-eminent in those times in the production of the New Testament Scriptures. Peter, speaking of Paul's epistles, says that they were written "according to the wisdom given unto him" (2 Peter 3:15); that is, that especial gift of spiritual wisdom for the management of gospel truths to the edification of the church.

But this gift is available, to a lesser degree, to the church in all ages. Believers have only to be aware of their own insufficiency and "if anyone lacks wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him." (James 1:5).

The 'word of knowledge' is the second gift spoken of. To a certain extent all believers possess this gift because a certain measure of knowledge is necessary for faith and confession. But the knowledge intended here is a peculiar and especial insight into the mysteries of the gospel, so that those who possess it can teach others. This gift was, of course, especially necessary for those who first proclaimed the gospel. St. Paul affirms that by his writings those to whom he wrote might perceive his "skill and understanding in the mystery of Christ."

The 'faith' which is mentioned as a gift is not that saving grace of faith which is common to all believers, but rather that freedom, confidence and 'boldness in the faith' or profession of the faith 'which is in Christ Jesus.' (1 Timothy 3:13).

The two gifts of healing and miracles are next mentioned. They are distinguished from each other because

miracles were signs for unbelievers whereas healings were signs for believers. This was because healings were a sign that the Kingdom of God had come: "Heal the sick and say unto them, The Kingdom of God is come nigh unto you." (Luke 10:9). They were a sign that Christ had borne and taken away sin, which was the cause of all diseases. Miracles, however, were for the propogation of the gospel amongst unbelievers. At the beginning, the Christian doctrines were new and strange, the believers few, poor and contemptible in the world. The working of miracles compelled the unbelievers round about to consider what was done and what was purposed by it. Miracles gave authority to the ministers of the church who were despised when judged by the worldly standards of wisdom and learning and helped to establish in the faith the weak and newly converted who were subject to contempt and mockery.

The sixth gift, prophecy, Owen takes as both signifying a faculty of prediction, which is rare, and as an ability to declare the mind of God from the word, which is more common. This gift was used, in the former sense, for the conversion of unbelievers who entered the church occasionally and, in the latter sense, to expound and apply the Word of God to the church.

The gift of the discerning of spirits was especially useful to the early church because as genuine spiritual gifts abounded, so did the pretence to these gifts. God therefore gave this gift to some so that the church would not be led astray by those making false claims to spiritual gifts.

The last two gifts which Paul mentions are speaking with tongues and their interpretation. According to Owen, God first sent this gift at Pentecost to signify that the grace and mercy of the covenant was now no longer to be confined to one nation, language or people and to testify by what means he would establish and maintain his kingdom in this world, that is, not by might but by the preaching of the word whereof the tongue is the only instrument. The gift was largely as a sign for unbelievers for whose benefit the last gift, the interpretation of tongues was given, so that they might understand the things spoken in that miraculous manner.

Owen maintains that the life of the primitive church consisted in the grace of the Spirit and their glory in his gifts. He contrasts this with the Anglican and Roman churches of his day whose glory consisted in "numberless superstitious ceremonies instead of religious worship, worldly grandeur instead of humility and self-denial and open tyranny over the consciences and persons of men, in the room of spiritual authority, effectual in the power of Christ and by virtue of the gifts of the Holy Ghost." ¹ All divisions in the church, he says, are caused by a departure from its primitive pattern and all these divisions would be healed if everything inconsistent with the walking in the Spirit and in the use of the gifts of the Spirit in administration, were renounced.

Ordinary gifts are then discussed in distinction from

1. Works: Vol. 4 p. 476

extraordinary gifts. He calls them ordinary because of their continuance in the ordinary state of the church. The ministry of the church, which is the gift of Christ, is the foundation and subject of these spiritual gifts.

'A ministry without gifts is no ministry of Christ's giving.'¹ Ministers need these spiritual gifts because the gospel with which they are entrusted is called the ministration of the Spirit and it is therefore only by ministers of the Spirit that it can be proclaimed: "Who hath also made us able ministers of the new testament: not of the letter but of the Spirit". (2 Corinthians 3:6 - 8).

The communication of such gifts to the ordinary ministry of the church is plainly asserted in many different places in the Scriptures, for example, in the parable of the talents (Matthew 25: 14 - 30) the servants are employed in the service of Christ, that is, they were all ministers of the gospel, and all receive talents or gifts for their work. Wherever there is a ministry which Christ appoints, he gives his ministers gifts and abilities suitable for their work; where he gives no gifts, he gives no work to be done. If anyone receives gifts and does not use them, he is setting up his wisdom and authority against Christ.

Owen quotes Romans 12: 4 - 8 as an example: "As we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and everyone members of one another. Having then gifts differing

1. Works: Vol. 4 p. 491

according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy ..." etc. Here, Paul is speaking to the church in all ages and conditions and to suppose a church devoid of gifts mentioned here is to overthrow the whole nature and end of a gospel church. The text shows that the principle behind all the administrations in the church state is the gifts received from Jesus Christ by his Spirit and that these gifts give not only ability for duty but the rule for all acts of service to be performed in the church, for everyone is to act in the church only according to his gifts. These gifts are indeed indispensably necessary unto gospel administrations for 'spiritual administrations cannot be exercised in a due manner without spiritual gifts.' ¹ The proof of this is that the Holy Spirit still does continue to give spiritual gifts to those ministers of the gospel called according to his mind and will.

Owen explains the nature of the gifts given to the ministry in order that it may perform its duties. The first great duty of the ministry, with reference to the church, is the dispensation of the doctrine of the gospel for its edification. Certain spiritual gifts are necessary for the right performance of this duty. The ministers need wisdom or knowledge or understanding in the mysteries of the gospel: that is "such a comprehension of the scope and end of the Scripture, of the revelation of God therein; such an acquaintance with the systems of particular doctrinal truths, in their rise, tendency and use; such a habit of

1. Works: Vol. 4 p. 506

mind in judging of spiritual things, and comparing them one to another; such a distinct insight into the springs and the course of the mystery of the love, grace and will of God and Christ, - as enables them in whom it is to declare the counsel of God and to make known the way of life, of faith and obedience, unto others and to instruct them in their whole duty to God and man thereon." ¹ That this is a gift of the Holy Spirit is clearly declared in the Bible. (1 Corinthians 12:8).

The gift of skill to 'divide the word' aright is also needed for the right performance of this duty. The man who would wish to use this gift aright also needs sound judgement concerning the state and condition of those to whom he is dispensing the word; he needs a knowledge of the methods of the work of God's grace in the minds and hearts of men so that he may comply with its design in the ministry of the word; he needs an acquaintance with the nature of temptation and he needs an understanding of the nature of spiritual sicknesses and their cures.

The third gift required for the duty of preaching the gospel, is the gift of utterance. Paul asks the Ephesian church to pray that this gift may abide and abound in him (Ephesians 6:19). This gift of utterance is not a natural eloquence but it consists of a liberty in the declaration of the truth, a boldness and holy confidence, a dignity in expression and soundness of speech which are becoming to the sacred majesty of Christ and his truths, and an

1. Ibid p. 509

authority in the delivery of the word.

The second great duty of the ministerial office respects the worship of God. Worship comprises various acts, according to the variety of Christ's institutions and the church's occasions, but the manner of its performance is always prayerful. Prayer does not depend on the natural abilities of men, but on the Holy Spirit.

Another ministerial duty is the rule or administration of the church. This has nothing in common with the administration of the powers of the world; it is spiritual, its objects are the minds and souls of men only, and its end is the edification of the church.

There are other gifts too, which respect the duties of ordinary believers and without which they are unable to discharge their duties to the glory of God. Most men have some duties which they cannot discharge without the aid of the Holy Spirit; for example, fathers have a duty to instruct their children in the knowledge of God and to lead them in worship. This they cannot do without spiritual gifts. Every member of the church has some use in the body of Christ which he cannot fulfill without some spiritual gift and these supplies are communicated to the body from the Head through the Holy Spirit.

But how do men attain participation in these gifts, whether ministerial or private? Preparation of the soul by humility and teachableness is required, for the Holy Spirit will not endow the proud with his gifts. Prayer

for these gifts and study of the word of God in order to understand his mind and will in the matter, are needed also. Faithful use of these gifts, once given, cause their growth and improvement. God also uses men's natural gifts such as eloquence and judgement, improved by reading, learning and diligent study, to enlarge and adorn spiritual gifts.

God has not only promised gifts through his Spirit to help each Christian to perform those duties which are required of him, he has also promised his Spirit to believers to help them to pray. According to Owen, prayer is the life-force of the church, drawing its members into closer communion with their God and with each other. It is therefore essential for the well-being of the church that this aspect of its life be performed according to the mind of God, which he has said can only be done through the Spirit. Each believer, therefore, has a duty to expect that promised aid from the Spirit to pray according to the ability they receive from it. If they do this, they will certainly be able to pray according to the will of God.

Owen, in the seventh book of his Πνευματολογία, which is entitled 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer,' defines prayer as 'a gift, ability or spiritual faculty of exercising faith, love, reverence, fear, delight and other graces in a way of vocal requests, supplications and praises unto God.'¹

It is the Spirit who furnishes the mind with an

1. Works: vol. 4 p. 271

understanding of the matter of prayer, that is, what ought to be prayed for: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groaning which cannot be uttered." (Romans 8:26).

The believer does not know his needs either physical or spiritual, he does not know the supplies for them expressed in the promises of God and he does not know the end he should aim at in the things he prays for. But all these needs the Spirit supplies. It is he who reveals to the believer his need of greater faith, causing him to pray 'Lord, help thou mine unbelief'; it is he who acquaints us with the grace and mercy which are prepared in the promises of God for our relief; it is he who keeps the minds of believers on the true aims of prayer - that all the success of their petitions may be to the glory of God, for without the help of the Holy Spirit we would only aim at self in all we do, and that the issue of our prayers may be an improvement in holiness.

Not only does the Holy Spirit furnish the matter of prayer, he also causes the believer to pray in the right manner. He gives the believer a delight in God as the object of prayer by presenting to him by spiritual illumination the prospect of God as on a throne of grace ready to dispense mercy and grace to a suppliant sinner: "Let us come boldly unto the throne of grace that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:16). Our delight is enhanced by the sense which

the Spirit gives to us of God's relation to us as Father: "The Spirit that beareth witness with our spirit that we are thus the children of God." "We have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15). It is God as Father who is the ultimate object of all evangelical worship and of all prayer. Richard Sibbes, a great Anglican Puritan divine said: "In a word, the word 'Father' is an epitome of the whole gospel." The whole Puritan emphasis in prayer is shown by Sibbes' frequent use of the word 'familiar' in the following passage from his Works. "... there is a great deal of familiarity in the Spirit of adoption.... that 'Abba, Father', it is a bold and familiar speech ... there is an inward kind of familiar boldness in the soul, whereby a Christian goes to God, as a child when he wants anything goes to his father. A child considers not his own worthiness or meanness, but goeth to his father familiarly and boldly.... Take another man, in the time of extremity, he sinks; but take a child in extremity, he yet hath a spirit to go to God and to cry Abba, Father."¹ This is an emphasis about which Puritans of all parties, including the Independents, agreed wholeheartedly.

The delight of believers in God as the object of prayer is further increased by the boldness they have in their access to the throne of grace. Believers 'have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear' but they have received the spirit of adoption. Where the spirit of bondage is, men cannot cry 'Abba, Father' or pray in an acceptable manner;

1. Sibbes' Works: 1 p. 364; 3 p. 456f; 4 p. 232f. Quoted in Nuttall: The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience p. 64.

but 'where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.' (2 Corinthians 3:17). This liberty consists in liberty of speech in prayer to God and a confidence of being heard in prayer.

The Holy Spirit also keeps the souls of believers intent on Jesus Christ as the only way and means of acceptance with God. This is the fundamental direction for prayer under the gospel - we are to pray in Jesus' name: "Through him we have access by one Spirit unto the Father." (Ephesians 2:18).

On the basis of the facts that the Spirit helps all believers both in the matter and manner of prayer, Owen concludes that set forms of prayer, those used in the Prayer Book of the Church of England, for example, are unnecessary. The child of God does not need forms of prayer because he can cry 'Abba, Father,' and will, therefore, with the assistance of the Holy Spirit, be able to pray according to the will of God.

On account of this incalculable privilege of prayer to God through the Holy Spirit, the church has certain duties to perform. They have the duty of continual praise to God for the blessings brought to them by the Spirit of grace and supplication and because of the great increase of this blessing under the gospel as compared with the Old Testament dispensation. The church has a duty not to neglect this gift of the Spirit by undervaluing it or failing to exercise it diligently. On the contrary the gift must be stirred up and improved by constant use and

constant meditation on the glory of God and Christ.

The final work of the Holy Spirit on behalf of the church which we shall consider, is that of supporting it after the departure of the human nature of Christ into heaven. Owen discusses this aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit in Book Eight of his Πνευματολογία, which is entitled 'The Holy Spirit as a Comforter'. He declares that the Holy Spirit was already performing this task while Christ was on earth; that is, he communicated spiritual light, grace and joy to the souls of believers. But the disciples had as yet no insight into the mystery of the dispensation of the Holy Spirit and therefore they looked on themselves as utterly undone when their Lord began to acquaint them with his leaving of them. Therefore, he lets them know that this great work of relieving them from all their sorrows and fears, of dispelling their disconsolations and supporting them under their trouble, was committed to the Holy Spirit who would perform it in such a wonderful way, that his departure from them would be completely to their advantage.

But Christ did not cease to be the comforter of his church when he ascended to heaven, for what he does through his Spirit he does himself. The Lord Christ and the Holy Spirit are one in nature, essence, will and power and therefore, all the works of the Holy Spirit are his also. This in itself is a great means of consolation to believers, to consider that not only is the Holy Spirit their comforter but that he is sent by both the Father and

the Son to be so. It is also evidence of the care that Jesus Christ has for his church and his disciples, that he sends his Holy Spirit to be their comforter.

The Holy Spirit has a special name which reveals his office - ὁ Παράκλητος - which some translate Comforter, and others Advocate. But that the Spirit is principally a comforter is obvious from the context of the promise of his coming in John 14. Jesus consoles his disciples, fearful because of his impending departure from the world, by promising: 'I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.' The office of Comforter is also most suited to his nature as he is the Spirit of love, joy and peace, for "he who is the eternal, essential love of the Divine Being, as existing in the distinct persons of the Trinity, is most meet to communicate a sense of divine love unto the souls of believers." ¹

But the Spirit is also an advocate for the church in, with and against the world. It is he who furnishes the witnesses of Christ with arguments against adversaries; it is he who communicates spiritual gifts to believers, for these are things, the effects of which are visible to the world. Finally, it is he who applies the word of God, and reproves the world of 'sin and of righteousness and of judgement.' (John 16:8).

1. Works: Volume 4 p.361

C. The Doctrine of Holy Scripture.

The doctrine of Holy Scripture was the third great Christian doctrine which helped to shape Owen's doctrine of the church. Paul Wernle stated that the watchword of the Reformation was 'Word and Spirit', and many scholars do indeed believe that the Reformation was caused by the rediscovery of the doctrines of the Word and the Spirit; The doctrine of the Holy Spirit we have already looked at, observing that Owen followed the moderate and conservative Puritan line, steering well clear of what he believed were the excesses of such left wing sects as the Quakers.

In his doctrine of Holy Scripture, Owen was again conservative; indeed some have claimed that it was this very obdurate conservatism which led to deadlock with such people as Richard Baxter and the Anglican divines who had a more open view as to the application of Scripture to church government.

Owen, however, was a Calvinist and followed the classical Calvinistic lines in his beliefs about Scripture. He believed that the Bible was God's word, written down by men under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As such, he maintained, it is the sole, infallible rule for the Christian in all matters of doctrine, conduct and worship. In the Scriptures, Christ has laid down the rules for the governing of his church. Everything necessary has been included; therefore, nothing must be added or taken away, otherwise one despises the authority, love and faithfulness of Christ concerning his church.

In a work entitled 'Truth and Innocence Vindicated',

which was a reply to Samuel Parker's 'Discourse on Ecclesiastical Polity and the Power of the Magistrate in Matters of Religion', Owen defended the premiss which Parker attacked as 'the foundation of all Puritanism', namely 'that nothing ought to be established in the worship of God but what is authorised by some precept or example in the Word of God, which is the complete and adequate rule of worship.'¹ Parker maintained that there would be no peace among churches if this principle were admitted, but Owen denied that there could be any possibility of peace if it were rejected. He elaborates this 'Puritan principle' by declaring that the nonconformists have other general maxims which they build upon in the management of their plea. The first is that whatever Scripture has definitely appointed to be observed in the worship of God and government of the church, that must be done. 'Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:20). The second is that no addition to what is appointed ought to be admitted if it is contrary either to the general rules or particular instructions of Scripture. The third maxim is that nothing ought to be added to what is appointed in Scripture without some cogent reason making it necessary. Fourthly, if it is found necessary to add anything, only those things which are most consonant with the general rules of Scripture should be added.

He believes that these maxims are reasonable and will

1. Works: Vol. 13 p. 462

be accepted by all men "who dare not advance their own wills and wisdom above or against the will and wisdom of God." ¹

The above expression of his attitude to Scripture and worship was, however, Owen's most moderate expression of it. He states it in a much more characteristically uncompromising way in a tract called "Twelve arguments against any conformity of members of separated churches to the national church", which was passed round in manuscript form before 1684. There the chief proposition reads: "That God's worship hath no accidentals; that all that is in it and belonging to it and the manner of it, is false worship, if it have not a divine institution in particular; that is all liturgies, as such, are such false worship (and not the English only) - used to defeat Christ's promise of gifts and God's Spirit." ²

Concerning this attitude, Davies comments "John Owen must take the chief responsibility for this reverence for the very silences of Scripture which prevented the Independents from any participation in liturgical worship. ... Such a dogmatic statement (as the one above) by the leader of the Independents made accommodation impossible, whilst also rendering any negotiations entered upon by Presbyterians with Anglicans liable to the charge of desertion." ³

In another tract entitled 'The Church of Rome no Safe Guide', Owen clearly states his reasons for judging

1. Works Vol. 13 p. 464.
2. Quoted in Davies 'Worship of the English Puritans' p. 112 - 13.
3. Ibid.

all things by 'the touchstone of his word',¹ for placing all his confidence in 'the Bible, I say, the Bible only.'²

This particular tract was written in 1679, while a state of great alarm prevailed in England in case Catholicism should be re-established. It was one of many pamphlets and tracts published by Anglicans and nonconformists alike containing warnings against their common enemy, popery. In it Owen states that there were so many difficulties and divisions in the religion of England at that time, that a man who really wanted to know the truth needed a safe and infallible guide. Two things at that time were pleaded to be this guide, the Church of Rome, to which Owen gives short shrift, and the Holy Scripture. It is, of course, the Scripture, he says, which is the only possible safe guide. This is because Scripture is not only a divine, supernatural revelation of God, his mind and his will, but it is also a divine revelation of the whole will and mind of God. Therefore, no more can be required of us in order to obtain our eternal salvation, but that we understand, firmly believe and yield obedience to the revelation of the mind and will of God that is made there. To help those who are truly seeking, to find a certain infallible understanding of his mind in Scripture, God has appointed assured and effective aids. The Scripture then is man's only safe guide in all things and this, of course, includes

1. Waldegrave Prayer Book. This was the version of the Genevan Service Book used in England. Published around 1584.
2. Chillingworth: Religion of the Protestants (1638) p. 375. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 59

the government of Christ's church.

The difference of opinion which really lay between Owen's view of Scripture and the view taken by the Anglicans resembled the difference which lay between Calvin's view of Scripture and that of Luther, Luther's concept of the Bible was that it contained the articles of belief necessary for salvation, but that in matters of worship and church government, the Bible does not lay down a blueprint. Men must therefore, in prayerful dependence on God and a willingness to be led by the Holy Spirit, establish forms of worship and government suitable to their situations, taking care that they do nothing contrary to the general teaching of Scripture. Calvin, however, regarded the Bible as authoritative in doctrine, government and worship. This view was directly connected with one of the most characteristic of the Calvinistic doctrines, the one which is insisted upon as the first of the five points of Calvinism - the total depravity of man caused by the original sin of the first man, Adam. Not only, then, was human ordering of the worship of God mere presumptuousness, since God had already laid down how he was to be worshipped, but "if man was by nature corrupt then he was utterly incapable of worshipping God aright until God should lighten his darkness. To attempt to order his own worship was therefore futile where it was not blasphemous."¹

The majority of the Established clergy accepted a doctrine

1. Davies: Worship of the English Puritans p. 50

of the authority of the Bible similar to Luther's whilst most nonconformist Puritans accepted one similar to Calvin's. The two sides entrenched themselves behind their respective beliefs and refused to give any ground to the enemy.. It could be argued that it was this difference in opinion with regard to the doctrine of Scripture which led to the separation of the majority of Puritans from the Established Church and therefore gave rise to nonconformity. There was very little doctrinal disagreement between the two parties. Indeed, McGiffert states: "There would have been no serious Protestant nonconformity in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the grounds of the Thirty-Nine Articles alone. They stated the common platform so sanely and moderately that most Protestants could find no particular fault with them." ¹

Both parties subscribed to the sixth of the Thirty-Nine Articles which declared: 'Holy Scripture conteyneth all thing necessarie to saluation; so that whatever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man that it should be believed as an article of faith, or be thought required as necessary to saluation.'

The division was caused by the Puritan's insistence that if the Bible is binding on one issue, it is binding on all issues. He could see only inconsistency in the attempt of the Established clergy to regard the Bible as authoritative in matters of belief but not binding in

1. McGiffert: Protestant Thought Before Kant. p. 124-5.

matters of government and worship. The Established clergy, on the other hand, notably represented by Richard Hooker in his "Ecclesiastical Polity", believed that the Bible is authoritative in doctrine and in the outstanding ordinances of worship, such as prayer, praise and the proclamation of the Word, and the two sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion. But in the details of the arrangement of worship it was never intended to be authoritative. Times, circumstances and ceremonies are rightly to be decided by church rulers in accordance with the proved wisdom of antiquity and the use of right reason.

Owen, was of course, in the forefront of this battle for the authority of Scripture to be recognised in all matters. It is a position which is condemned by Davies: "The Pauline epistles, originally produced as occasional writings, dealing primarily with the exigencies and controversies of the moment, were carefully scanned for liturgical directions. Such occasional hints were erected into principles. This is also the reason why the Puritans came to despise all liturgies. They had so extolled the principle of reverence for the Scriptures as to ignore the accumulated liturgical wisdom of the centuries, and deny, in theory, the continued guidance of the Holy Spirit in the church." ¹

Peter Bayne, however, in his book 'Puritan Documents', takes a more sympathetic stand. He takes the contemporary situation into account: the overriding fear of Rome with

1. Davies: The Worship of the English Puritans p. 258

which the Puritans were filled and the horror with which they contemplated its re-establishment in England. He believes that the Puritans turned to Calvin because in his theology he opposed the Word of God to the infallibility of the Pope. "In considering that urgency of appeal to Scripture, and Scripture alone, which throughout its whole history was made by English Puritanism, an appeal which, with our modern prepossessions, may seem to us to be a wilful searing of the eyeballs of reason and conscience, it is essential to recollect that it was against the authority of Rome that Calvin and his followers asserted the authority of God's written word."

This defence may go a long way towards explaining this error, but it does not, of course, justify it.

R. W. Dale, the nineteenth century congregational ⁵ writer, in a book written just a few years after Bayne's, holds a similar point of view and for similar reasons. He calls the early Puritan insistence on the production of definite authority from the Holy Scriptures in support of every detail of church organisation and every church rule and practice "a noble and perhaps a necessary error." He explains why he thought that it was unavoidable: "In endeavouring to correct the enormous abuses and corruptions which had paralysed the divine forces of the church and obscured the glory of Christian worship - abuses and corruptions which had become inveterate by the usage of many centuries and which were supported by the whole force

of the church and the state - they were driven to this incessant and exclusive appeal to the Holy Scriptures. It seemed to them that, as soon as they allowed any departure from the words of the written authority, no limits could restrain men from the grossest doctrinal errors and the most pernicious ecclesiastical innovations and if they themselves left the sure ground of Scripture, they felt that it was impossible for them to make a firm stand against their opponents." ¹

But even though Dale understood the reasons for their actions, he regarded the principle behind them as false. The church of Christ is not under the bondage of the letter, it has the freedom of the Spirit. It cannot be assumed that every direction given by the apostles to churches of their own times has authority for churches in altogether different circumstances. "Apostolic precedent is not a formal law. Principles remain: methods are subject to continual change. We have to distinguish between what is essential and what is accidental, what is permanent and what is temporary both in apostolic action and apostolic precept." ²

It has been pointed out, however, that Owen is perhaps not entirely consistent in this view that nothing but that which is found in Scripture should be adhered to in worship. For in several places in his works he acknowledges the

1. Dale: A Manual of Congregational Principles p. 37

2. Ibid p. 40

necessity of using in God's worship, the natural abilities which he has given. For example, in discussing one aspect of worship, namely prayer, Owen states: "There is a use herein of the natural abilities of invention, memory and elocution. Why should not men use in the service and worship of God what God hath given them that they may be able to serve and worship him?"¹ But this is the argument behind Luther's view that man should use his God-given powers of reason in deciding which methods of worship are suitable for contemporary circumstances.

D. The Doctrine of Grace.

The Doctrine of Grace can be subdivided into two separate doctrines - predestination and the perseverance of the saints. The doctrine of predestination is one of the outstanding features of Calvinism. The very first work Owen wrote, 'A Display of Arminianism', and the work which is regarded as perhaps his greatest, 'The Death of Death in the Death of Christ', were defences of this doctrine against the encroachment of the high-church Arminianism of the Laudians.

Owen and most of the Independents believed that the basic concept of the church was the catholic invisible church which consisted only of the saints, the elect, those who had been predestined by God to salvation from before the foundation of the world. Each local church must therefore be the local manifestation of the church catholic invisible - that is, it too must consist only

(insofar as mere human beings are enabled to judge) of visible saints, the elect. The local church is therefore a gathered church composed of all those who have been predestined to salvation, separated from the unconverted, yet ministering unto them particularly in the preaching of the gospel which God is pleased to use as an instrument to gather in those of his elect who are yet unconverted.

The deduction, then, which the Independents made from their Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, was that the gathered church of the elect was the Scriptural outworking of this belief.

There were others, however, who held this doctrine as firmly as the Independents but who did not draw the same conclusions. There were many divines of the Established Church who were Calvinists, such as Richard Sibbes, and the Presbyterians were, of course, Calvinists as is eminently witnessed in the Westminster confession which was formulated by Presbyterian divines.

For the Independents, the belief in Predestination encouraged the growth of the concept of the gathered church. For the Calvinistic Anglicans and the Presbyterians, however, the doctrine of predestination was quite compatible with the concept of the territorial, or the state-established church. This was because although they accepted the idea of the catholic church invisible, they placed more practical emphasis on the concept of the catholic church visible, which the Independents denied. The catholic church visible consisted of all those who acknowledged in some way the main

doctrines of the Christian faith. It therefore included all those who only paid lip-service to these beliefs and those who gave mental assent to them without committing their lives to them, as well as those who were truly elect. The Independents believed that God had given the gift of the ministry, the sacraments and the ordinances to the local gathered church, but the Presbyterians and the Anglicans believed he had given them to this catholic church visible and they were to be exercised within it. To facilitate this, the national church was subdivided into presbyteries or dioceses and these into local parish churches over each of which was an authoritative synod. Everyone within the parish belonged to the local church which was therefore to be a mixture of the converted and the unconverted, just as the catholic church visible was; the wheat and the tares must grow together until harvest time when the Lord of the Harvest would sort them out.

There was a third group, however, the group with which Owen was most concerned when he wrote his defences of predestination. These were the Arminian Anglicans, who were usually the high churchmen. They did not believe in predestination to salvation, but that man was elected or not according to his own choice. If he chose Christianity he was elected to salvation; if he rejected it he remained unelected. If, therefore, God has not predestined certain people to salvation, then all men are potential Christians; some Arminians even going as far as to say that all men will

eventually become actual Christians. They also rejected the fifth of the five points of Calvinism - the perseverance of the saints. If man could, of his own choice, become of the elect, then he could also of his own choice, cease to be of the elect by rejecting the Christian beliefs he had once accepted. There was therefore no assurance of salvation, of remaining eternally of the elect for the Arminians. These beliefs therefore were not conducive to accepting the concept of the gathered church in which were, ideally, only those who knew that they were elected. They too therefore held the idea of a territorial church of which everyone within a certain area was a member, for if only the elect were to be members, no Arminian, even if he knew that by his own choice he was today elect, would know whether tomorrow he would cease to be elect and therefore cease to qualify for membership.

One of the most important passages which the Arminians used to uphold their denial of the perseverance of the saints was Hebrews 6: 4-6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away to renew them again to repentance, seeing they crucify again to themselves the Son of God and put him to open shame." This passage proves, say the Arminians, that it is possible for the elect to fall away. Owen, however, in his work 'The Nature and Causes of Apostacy' sets out to prove that those referred to in this Scripture had never been of the elect in the first place. He expounds

the text in an unusual way, but carefully and in great detail, arguing, for example, that 'those who were once enlightened' does not mean the elect, who receive insight into spiritual truths through the Holy Spirit, but those who have merely a natural, intellectual knowledge of the doctrines of Christianity. He explains that the word 'tasted', which is used twice, does not refer to those who have eaten, digested and turned into nourishment what is tasted but to those who are simply making trial or experiment of what they taste, receiving or rejecting as they see occasion. They tasted 'the word in its truth, not in its power; the worship of the church in its outward order, not in its inward beauty; the gifts of the church through the Holy Spirit, not its graces.'¹

The writer, then, is not describing true believers, but those who, from the outside, have seen and recognised the truth and beauty of Christianity and yet have voluntarily and totally renounced it, which casts the greatest reproach imaginable on the person of Christ.

Thus Owen seeks to maintain the truth of the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints. In a similar way he defends the doctrine of predestination. A brief survey of this defence would elucidate the importance he placed on this doctrine and how it was so closely connected with his doctrine of the church.

In 'A Display of Arminianism', he argues that a desire for the self-sufficiency was the first cause of Arminianism.

1. Works Vol. 7 p.25

Men did not want to feel that their election into the church of Christ's redeemed, rested wholly and solely upon God. They wanted to free themselves from the dominion of his all-ruling providence. In so doing they deny the sovereignty and supremacy of God. They do this in various ways:

They deny the eternity and unchangeableness of God's decrees for fear that they should be kept within bounds from doing anything but what his counsel has determined should be done. Arminius: "It is certain that God willeth or determineth many things which he would not, did not some act of man's will go before it." ¹

Men are elected, say the Arminians, because they believe. If a man has faith then God elects him, but if he then apostasizes, God's decrees must be changed and he will be numbered among the reprobate.

The Arminians also question the foreknowledge of God; for if God knew from the beginning those who were to comprise the church, it seems to cast an infallibility of event upon all the actions of men. They question this even in the face of the firm Scriptural statement that 'known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.' (Acts 15:18).

They deny the all-governing providence of God by denying its power to turn the hearts, rule the thoughts, determine the wills and dispose the actions of men, by granting only a general influence, to be limited and used

1. Quoted in Works Vol. 10 p. 15

according to the inclination and will of every particular agent. They also deny the irresistibility of God's will, believing that he often wants to do something he cannot accomplish: "God would have all men to be saved, but, compelled with the stubborn and incorrigible malice of some, he will have them to miss it." ¹ The church is therefore composed not of men whom God has elected, but of men who have caused themselves to be elected. }

It could, however, be argued that his insistence that a desire for self-sufficiency was the first cause of Arminianism is a weakness in Owen. Arminians themselves would state that they were motivated by a desire to correct the picture of God which was distorted by the Calvinists. They would put forward the view that the God of the Calvinists could not be the God of love, and that if God handled men in the way the Calvinists said he did, he would no longer be treating them as persons but as things. Arminianism, they would say, corrected these errors.

Owen then puts forward the truth about predestination as he saw it. Predestination is "the counsel, decree or purpose of the Almighty God concerning the last and supernatural end of his rational creatures, to be accomplished for the praise of his glory." ² It is an eternal decree; it is an immutable decree and the only cause of it is God's own counsel. It is God who bestows faith on those who are chosen, not as Arminius declares,

1. Arminius. Quoted in Vol. 10 p. 16

2. Vol. 10 p. 53

"that faith, in the consideration of God choosing us unto salvation, doth precede and not follow as a fruit of election." ¹

If predestination did depend on faith foreseen, then election is not of God but of believers and God could not have mercy on whom he would have mercy but only on believers, It would then follow that God would not be a free agent, which, says Owen, is absurd.

Predestination could not rest on faith because God sees no faith, obedience or perseverance in man; he sees nothing but sin and wickedness except what he himself freely gives to him, for 'faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.' (Ephesians 2:8). This gift God gives only to those whom he has antecedently ordained to everlasting life.

Owen denies that there could exist any such people as the elect if Arminian beliefs were true. "If final perseverance in faith and obedience be the cause of, or a condition required unto election, then none can be said in this life to be elected; for no man is a final perseverer until he be dead, until he hath finished his course and consummated the faith. But certain it is that it is spoken of some in the Scripture that they are even in this life elected." ²

The Arminians place the weight of their arguments on the various Scriptural texts which state that Christ died

1. Works: Vol. 10 p. 60

2. Ibid p. 63

for "all" or for "the whole world", Owen put forward several points of refutation. He affirms that in some senses Christ may be said to die for "all" and "the whole world", for the worth and value of his death was sufficient to have been made a price for all their sins. Also, the word "all" is frequently used in the Bible to mean "some of all sorts", not "every one of every sort". For example, when Christ was lifted up, he "drew all unto him", that is, believers out of all sorts of men. The apostles cured "all" diseases, or some of all sorts: they did not cure every particular disease, but there was no kind of disease exempted from their power of healing. Therefore, where it is said that Christ "died for all" it means either all the faithful, or some of all sorts, or not only Jews but Gentiles - to combat the Jews' ingrained particularism.

In a situation like this, one must also compare Scripture with Scripture. Although in some places Christ is said to die for "all", in other places his death is limited to his 'people', his 'elect', his 'church' and his 'sheep'. The "all" must therefore be interpreted in this context.

The foundation stone of Arminian beliefs is that man has total free will. Owen grants man as much freedom as "a mere created nature is capable of"¹ but denies that this freedom is supreme and independent, for the creature is subject to the supreme rule of God's providence. In spiritual things we have some freedom but we are not truly

1. Works: vol. 10 p. 116

free until the Son makes us so. But the Arminian claims total freedom in the spiritual realm too: "For grant all the operations of grace which God can use in our conversion, yet conversion remaineth so in our own free power that we can be not converted; that is, we can either turn or not turn ourselves." ¹ Owen countenances this, however, with the Scriptural affirmation that it is "the work of God that we do believe." (John 6:29).

In 'The Death of Death in the Death of Christ', Owen uses John 10 to prove that mankind is divided into the elect and the non-elect. Christ says that he would die to give eternal life to 'his sheep' as distinct from those who were not his sheep, Christ's sheep are believers: 'My sheep hear my voice'; the others are not: 'Ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep.' Therefore, the foundation of the distinction between them is not that some believe and some do not (as the Arminians would say) but that some are antecedently Christ's sheep and others are not; They believe because they are sheep; they are not sheep because they believe. The church is therefore composed only of those who were chosen antecedently to be the sheep for whom Christ laid down his life.

Owen also discusses in this work the Arminian differentiation between the impetration (that is, the obtaining) of redemption, and its application. They say that Christ has obtained salvation for every man in the world if they will believe; but in respect of application it is bestowed only on a few because only a few believe.

1. Corvinus. Quoted in Vol. 10 p. 117

Owen replies, however, that the only condition that there is in these things is in the will of God not the will of men. God wills that salvation is bestowed conditionally, but faith, the condition on which it is bestowed is actually absolutely procured for the saints. Salvation is by faith, but it is God who gives the faith.

Therefore, says Owen, "impetration and application have for their objects the same individual persons" ¹ otherwise Christ would be "but a half mediator that should procure the end, but not the means conducing thereunto." ²

With many another detailed and weighty argument does Owen reach his conclusions: "God out of his infinite love for the elect, sent his dear Son in the fulness of time, whom he had promised in the beginning of the world and made effectual by that promise to die, pay a ransom of infinite value and dignity, for the purchasing of eternal redemption and bringing unto himself all and every one of those whom he had before ordained to eternal life, for the praise of his own glory.." ³

It was this utter conviction that God was in control of all things pertaining to their salvation and that nothing was left to chance or to their own free wills, vitiated by sin, that God had elected them from before the beginning of time and nothing in heaven or hell or

1. Works vol. 10 p.224

2. Ibid p. 235

3. Ibid p. 231

earth could alter that, which gave to the Puritan saints their indomitable confidence and courage in the face of difficulties, opposition and persecution.

The concept of the church as the gathering of those who had been predestined to salvation was therefore fundamental to the Puritans and shall be discussed in detail at a later point.

4. The Resultant Doctrine of the Church.

The first thing to be considered concerning Owen's doctrine of the church is the explanation he puts forward for the very existence of the church. He maintains that the church is an institution of Christ, even though some of the corruptions it contained might cause men to think that it was the mere creation of man. God has placed the necessity for church societies in the law of nature because he made man to be, by nature, a social being. The purpose of God's creation of man was for his own worship and service and his nature is so fitted for society that it is this acting in society that is principally designed for the worship of God. Therefore, without this worship of God in societies, there would be a failure of one principal end of the creation of man.

In his work 'The Grace and Duty of Being Spiritually Minded', Owen puts forward more reasons for the existence of the church. He argues that through the ordinances of divine worship believers not only find faith, love and delight in God through Christ, but also find that they are the means of the communication of a sense of God's love in Jesus Christ and supplies of divine grace, internal, sanctifying, strengthening. The ordinances of the church are the way which God has instituted whereby believers may give him glory. "This", he says, "is the first and principal end of all duties of religion as they respect divine appointment, namely, to ascribe and give unto God the glory that is his due. For in them all, acknowledgement

is made of all the glorious excellencies of the divine nature, our dependence on him and relation unto him." ¹

Another reason for the existence of the church, which Owen describes in 'An Enquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches' is that each believer has a craving for spiritual fellowship with other believers. It is "the instinct of the new creature and those in whom it is to associate themselves in holy communion for the joint and mutual exercise of those graces of the Spirit which are the same as unto the essence of them, in them all. The laws of Christ in and unto his church, as unto all outward obedience, are suited unto those inward principles and inclinations which by his Spirit and grace he hath implanted in the hearts of them that believe. Hence his yoke is easy and his commandments not grievous. And therefore none of his true disciples since he had a church on earth did or could satisfy themselves in their own faith singularly and personally, but would venture their lives and all that was dear to them for communion with others and the associating themselves with them of the same spirit and way for the observances of the commands of Christ. The martyrs of the primitive churches of old lost more of their blood and lives for their meetings and assemblies than for personal profession of the faith; and so also have others done under the Roman apostasy." ²

1. Works Vol. 7 p. 444

2. Works Vol. 15 p. 256

According to R. W. Dale "an organised Christian church is the natural creation and expression of the great law that those who are in Christ are to reach the perfection of their righteousness and blessedness in union with each other as well as with him."

We mentioned previously that the necessity for the church was partly seen by the light of nature, that is, in man's being created as a social being, but the directions given by the light of nature concerning the outward worship of God were general only. Because a church state in good and holy order could not therefore be erected by them alone, God has given, from the beginning, special revelations. The directions for the Old Testament church-state were revealed in the law given to Moses, and those for the New Testament church-state were instituted by Jesus Christ. Owen's basic concern in all his works on the church is to draw out, explain and apply those directions stated in the Scriptures which Jesus Christ gave for the government of his church.

The first thing which must be noted is that Owen believes that the word 'church' is capable of a three-fold application, as has been mentioned previously.

There is, first of all, the catholic church invisible which is Christ's real, living and spiritual body. "They are his elect, redeemed, justified and sanctified ones, who are savingly united unto their head

by the same quickening and sanctifying Spirit, dwelling in him in all fulness and communicated unto them by him according to his promise. This is that catholic church which we profess to believe; which being hid from the eyes of men, and absolutely invisible in its mystical form, or spiritual saving relation unto the Lord Christ and its unity with him, is yet more or less always visible by that profession of faith in him and obedience unto him which it maketh in the world and is always obliged so to do." ¹

There is, in a second place, the church considered as to its outward profession, the church catholic visible to which they all universally belong who profess the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the visible kingdom of Christ as distinguished from the world. Yet, nevertheless, many who belong to this church on account of some kind of profession that they have made, also belong to the world on account of the ungodliness of their lives.

Thirdly, there are particular churches which are local manifestations of the universal church.

One could not, of course, worship with the catholic church invisible; church government could not be exercised in it; the catholic church invisible could not come together to hear the word preached or to receive the sacraments. There must therefore be a more practicable framework within which to work. The Presbyterians and

Anglicans believed that church practice and government belonged to the catholic church visible and organised their systems accordingly but Owen and the Independents believed that "whereas the Lord Jesus Christ hath instituted sundry solemn ordinances of divine worship to be observed jointly by his disciples unto his honour and their edification, this could not be done but in such societies, communities or assemblies of them to that purpose,"¹ - that is, in particular churches.

In 'Inquiry concerning Evangelical Churches', Owen puts forward arguments to back up his belief that the particular church is the church state which Christ has prescribed. He maintains that the duties which Christ requires from the churches can only be performed in particular churches.

The first duty is the subjection of the souls and consciences of believers to his authority in their observance of his commandments, and their open profession of this subjection. But he will not have this done singly and personally only, but in society and conjunction. This therefore cannot be done in any church state in which the members of the church cannot meet together for this end; which they can only do in a particular or congregational church.

The second great duty is the joint celebration of all gospel ordinances and worship. Assemblies of the whole church, at once and in one place, for the celebration of

1. Works Vol. 15 p. 86

divine worship is of the essence of a church, without which it has no real being. This duty can only be fulfilled by a particular church.

Thirdly, there is the duty of the exercise and preservation of the discipline appointed by Christ to be observed by his disciples. This includes the preservation of the doctrine of the gospel in its purity, the preservation of love entire among his disciples, a due representation of his own love in the actings of his authority in the church and a realisation that church discipline is an evidence of the future judgement when the whole church shall be judged before the throne of Jesus Christ. It is in particular congregations alone that these things can be done, because for all of them, assemblies of the whole church are required. One cannot watch over the discipline, doctrine and love of a particular church from a distance, it must be done within the congregation itself.

Owen also maintains that the very meaning of the word 'church' limits the sense of it to a particular congregation. ἵπρ , the verb in the Old Testament, means to congregate, to assemble, to call and meet together, and nothing else. The septuagint translates it mostly by ἐκκλησιάζω , to congregate in a church assembly. It can sometimes apply to the church catholic invisible which is a mystical society or congregation, but wherever it is used to denote an outward visible society, it connotes their assembling together in one.

This latter view has been challenged because the

Septuagint sometimes uses the word ἑκκλησία to mean the whole congregation of Israel and therefore it has been argued that the word could refer to the whole visible church. Owen, however, still believed that ἑκκλησία connotes an assembling together in one, because the congregation of Israel assembled before the Lord at the annual feasts in the persons of its representative males.

It is in this sense that the word is used in Matthew 18:17: 'And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church'. This is in the context of the exercise of discipline within the church. Owen maintains that the church here referred to can only be a particular church, for it would be impossible to tell it to the catholic church invisible or the catholic church visible. It is obvious that a single congregation, gathering together for its duties and enjoyments is intended. The persons referred to, the offending and the offended, must belong to the same society which is to be told the offence, because the circumstances of both must be known, otherwise a right judgement cannot be made. It must also be a church of easy address, because the command 'Go, tell the church' supposes that free and immediate access which all members of the church have to the whole church of which they are members; that is, Christ was referring to a particular church.

The third reason Owen puts forward for maintaining that particular congregation is the true gospel church-state, is that all the churches founded by the apostles were particular congregational churches. He supports this

by stating that there were many churches planted by the apostles in very small provinces and it is nowhere intimated that they had any one head or mother church, metropolitanical or diocesan. Instead the apostles appointed in them ordinary elders and deacons to administer all the ordinances unto the whole church and to take care of all the poor. The church could therefore extend no farther than a particular congregation. It is also said of the churches founded by the apostles that they 'met together in one place', which again can only be done by particular congregations.

Owen's conclusion therefore is that " particular churches or congregations are of divine institution and consequently that unto them the whole power and privilege of the church doth belong: for if they do not so, whatever they are, churches they are not." ¹

He goes on to declare that in no approved writers for the space of two hundred years after Christ is there any mention made of any other organical, visibly professing church, except the particular congregational churches. For example, in the epistle of Clement of Rome to Corinth concerning the schism in the church over the deposition of the elders, there is never any mention of sending them to the bishop or church of Rome as head of the churches, nor of a diocesan church or bishop. Nowhere in the epistle is the church reprov'd for assuming an authority which did not belong to them; they were reprov'd rather for the abuse

1. Works. Vol. 15 p. 277

of their power which the body of the church had in concurrence with their leaders. This can only happen in congregational churches. Indeed, says Owen, the purposes of the institution of a church-state are attainable only in particular congregations. For example: mutual love among believers can only be attained in particular churches. He explains this in a sermon entitled 'Gospel Charity' preached in 1673 on the occasion of the uniting of his congregation with that of the recently deceased Independent minister, Joseph Caryl. Owen declares that one of the purposes of Christ's institution of the church was a direct exercise of his other great command - of love to believers. " 'I will try you here', said Christ. 'I require this of you indispensably to love all the saints, all believers, all my disciples. You shall not need to say you must go far, this way or that, for objects. I appoint you to such an order as wherein you shall have continual immediate objects of all that love which I require of you.' " ¹

The church is also meant to be the pillar and ground of the truth. This can only be done when church officers have immediate inspection over all members of their own church and when members can examine the doctrine taught to them, as can only happen in particular churches.

Owen therefore concludes that there is no other form of church order to which the Christian is obliged to submit. He defines this true gospel church-state as 'an especial

society or congregation of professed believers, joined together according unto his mind, with their officers, guides or rulers whom he hath appointed which do or may meet together for the celebration of all the ordinances of divine worship, the professing and authoritatively proposing the doctrine of the gospel with the exercise of the discipline prescribed by himself, unto their own mutual edification, with the glory of Christ, in the preservation and propagation of his kingdom in the world.' ¹

It can be seen from this definition that Owen believed that the church should be composed of visible saints who could credibly give an account of their conversion. This is in contradistinction from the views of the Anglicans and Presbyterians who thought that as man cannot scrutinize the heart of man, the church should be composed of credible professors who give rise to no serious doubts as to their profession of faith from their lives. They held that in a Christian country parents could be required to bring their children to the church for baptism and that they could therefore have a territorial church, although granting that all are not elect.

The Independent belief led them to form what they called 'gathered churches'. This phrase was taken from one of the most important of the ecclesiological passages in Matthew. In chapter 18 verse 20, Christ promises: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in

1. Works vol. 15 p. 262

the midst of them." The church is therefore constituted of those who gather together in Christ's name, that is, believers. The Independents therefore held that a true church is one which restricts membership to professed believers and believed that 'A union of hearts rather than a vicinity of houses, is to make up a congregation.' (John Cook).

Dale comments "By the institutions of Judaism, the symbol of the Divine presence was assured to a consecrated place; by the laws of the kingdom of Christ, the reality of Christ's presence was assured to an assembly of consecrated persons." ¹

In Owen's 'The True Nature of the Gospel Church and its Government' he maintains that the Kingdom of Christ must consist only of saints, otherwise the holiness and honour of Christ would be impugned: "To reckon such persons to be subjects of Christ, members of his body, who would not be tolerated, at least not approved, in a well-governed kingdom of the world, is highly dishonourable unto him. But it is so come to pass that let men be never so notoriously and flagitiously wicked, until they become pests of the earth, yet are they esteemed to belong to the church of Christ. ... Howbeit, the Scripture both in general represent the kingdom or church of Christ to consist of persons called saints..." ²

Owen then gives a description of these saints who

1. Dale: Manual of Congregational Principles p. 43

2. Works. vol. 16 p. 11

are to make up the Kingdom of Christ. They must be such as do "make an open profession of the subjection of their souls and consciences unto the authority of Christ in the gospel and their readiness to yield obedience unto all his commands." ¹

Several things are necessary to show the genuineness of this profession; a competent knowledge of the doctrine and mystery of the gospel, especially concerning the person and offices of Christ is required. "The promiscuous driving of all sorts of persons who have been baptised in their infancy unto a participation of all church privileges is a profanation of the holy institutions of Christ." ² There is also required a professed subjection of soul and conscience unto the authority of Christ in the church. This is usually performed at baptism by those who are baptised as adults, but those baptised as infants must make a separate profession.

Another requirement is an instruction in and consent unto the doctrine of self-denial and bearing of the cross. It is too often thought that to be a Christian will cost nothing, whereas the gospel warns that hatred, sufferings and even death will be the lot of the Christian.

The conviction and confession of sin with the way of deliverance by Jesus Christ, together with the constant performance of all known duties of religion and the careful abstinence from all known sins are also required.

1. Works p.14 vol. 16

2. Ibid p.15

These then are the hallmarks of the visible saints who have entrance into the church of Christ. But certain people are to be excluded; the grossly ignorant, the reproachers of those that are good, or of the ways of God in which they walk, the idolators, those who commit sin or omit duties, those who would partake of gospel privileges and ordinances, yet openly state that they will not submit to the law and commands of Christ in the gospel. The Scripture orders: "From such turn away."

The early church, says Owen, was very careful and diligent concerning those admitted to the church. But this diligence was forsaken when Christianity was accepted by the Roman emperors. Then the glory of the church was not in its purity but in the greatness of its numbers. Churches accepted into membership those who were not true believers and as they therefore were not able to understand spiritual worship, the churches had to introduce superstitious rites and colourful ceremonies in order to appeal to the carnal mind. Thus, when the church ceases to be composed only of visible saints, the worship and doctrine of the church soon becomes corrupt.

At the Reformation the purity of doctrine was restored but not the purity of the composition of the church. The first Reformers were unable to do this because if they had cut out everybody not worthy of communion, the paucity of members would have forced them to abandon the idea of the reformation of doctrine and worship. But those coming after the reformers were reluctant to make this further reformation

which was one of the reasons for the rise of Congregationalism.

Owen believed that 'communion with particular churches is to be regulated absolutely by edification.'¹ A believer cannot obtain edification in a church whose members are visibly unholy and it is therefore his duty to peacefully separate himself from that church and gather together with other believers to partake of true worship and teaching. This inevitably gave rise, as we shall see afterwards, to charges of schism against the nonconformists.

The Savoy Declaration gave a prominent place to this idea of the gathered church. It proclaimed that Christ calls men out of the world into communion with himself and commands those thus called to walk together in particular societies or churches. These gathered churches were to consist of officers and members, the members being "saints by calling visibly manifesting and evidencing (in and by their profession and walking) their obedience unto that call of Christ."²

Different Independent writers supported this statement. Henry Burton wrote: "A particular church or congregation rightly collected and constituted consists of none, but such as are visible loving members of Christ the Head and visible saints under him, the one and only King of Saints."³ Thomas Hooker in 'A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline',

1. Works Vol. 16 p. 21

2. Walker: Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism p. 404

3. Protestation Protested fol. B 3. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 132

stated "Visible Saints only are fit Matter appointed by God to make up a visible church of Christ." ¹

"Congregationalism in its doctrine of the church, as indeed in all else, has thus been built upon a foundation of what was once called 'visible holiness': what would now be called 'consecrated personality'. Theologically this has been an expression of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, discovered anew in the Scripture and sealed by known continuing activity of the Spirit in men's hearts." ²

There is, however, a danger in this emphasis on 'consecrated personality', the danger of subjectivism, of turning the attention away from Christ to the interior condition of the individual. This tendency is reflected in the Puritan love of diaries or journals in which writers would indulge in frequent introspective self-examinations.

The insistence on holiness even above orthodoxy sometimes led to interesting results. The Dissenting Brethren wrote in the Apologeticall Narration: "We took measure of no man's holinesse by his opinion." They believed that every Christian should have a firm grasp of the essential doctrines of Christianity but holy living was more important than total agreement in minutiae.

In two of his practical works, 'The Duties of Pastors and People Distinguished' and 'Eshcol: a cluster of the

1. Hooker: A Survey of the Summe of Chruch Discipline p. 14
2. Nuttall: Puritan Spirit p. 60

Fruit of Canaan', Owen gives guidance as to the working out of this visible holiness in day to day living. In the former he posits, drawing on many Scriptural precepts, that in the context of the church the saints must warn the unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, admonish offenders, instruct the ignorant, exhort the negligent, comfort the afflicted, restore the fallen, visit the sick, contend for the faith, pray for the sinner, edify one another, speak to each other in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs and to be ready to answer every man in giving account of their faith.

Again, within the context of the church, 'Eshcol' emphasises the necessity for fellowship among the brethren as the visible outworking of their holiness. Indeed the sub-title for the work is "Rules of Direction for the Walking of the Saints in Fellowship." Fellowship within the church was regarded as not only vital for the honour of God and the orderly government of his church, but as a witness to the world outside of the love of God in Christ and the regenerating and cohesive power of the Holy Spirit, that they again might remark to each other, "See how these Christians love one another;" God's Spirit creates community because God is love and a community of those who are in God's love must be very different from ordinary intercourse with men. In 'Eshcol', Owen declares that this *κοινωνία* is shown forth by willing submission to the word and the ordinances, and a willing submission also to their pastor for his work's sake. It is shown

in the care taken for the preservation of unity which is the aim of love. Unity must be preserved in three fields: spiritual unity, as members of the body of Christ; ecclesiastical unity, opposing divisions in spiritual things concerning the Kingdom of Christ; and civil unity, each seeking the welfare of the other in things of this life.

Fellowship is shown in the fact that in church affairs no distinction of persons is made: "Men in the church are considered as saints, not as great or rich. All are equal, all are naked before God." ¹

It must be noted in passing, however, that although this was the ideal, it is questionable whether it was, or can be, ever fully realised. A glaring instance of inequality can be seen, for example, in the position of women in congregational churches.

The bearing of each other's burdens in prayer made by the whole church for any in distress, the watchfulness over each other's conduct, not maliciously but with a sense of the glory of God, honour of the gospel and care of each other's souls, are marks of true fellowship. The Congregational spirit of fellowship not only bound each church together in love, but united each individual Congregational church to the others with the strong bond of fellowship. Robert Baillie, the Scottish Presbyterian remarked, 'Congregationalism is become a uniting principle', ² and Philip Henry, another Presbyterian and father of the famous Bible commentator Matthew Henry, commented thus on

1. Works Vol. 13 p. 81

2. Baillie: A Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time. 1645. p. 93. Quoted in Nuttall: The Puritan Spirit p. 64

the 'Independent Way', "In two things they are to be commended: that they keep up discipline among them and that they love and correspond with one another." ¹

These then are some of the practical ways of showing forth the holiness of the saints within the church. Christopher Hill in his book 'Society and Puritanism' comments on the wider aspects of the effects which the Puritans' outworking of their concept of the responsibilities of sainthood had in the social and economic spheres. Of particular importance was the Calvinistic work ethic. The Puritans were sometimes called 'that industrious sort of people', because they believed that they must witness to their Christianity by doing 'all to the glory of God', including their daily work. They taught that work was an honourable duty, which differed from the general attitude of the time which was a hangover from the middle ages, that work was not honourable in itself as it was the consequence of sin. In a country which had become much less agrarian and much more commercial, the ethic held by 'the industrious sort of people' was needed for personal and national survival.

The nonconformist Puritans also helped to raise the sagging moral standards of the country. Professor Haller commented: "The unloveliness of the (Puritan) code in some of its later manifestations should not blind us to its positive and bracing effect upon common life in Stuart times. The merry England doomed by Puritan asceticism was

1. Philip Henry 'Diaries' p. 277. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 98

not all cakes and ale, maypole dancing and frolics on the village green." In the face of the "social chaos and moral corruption of many a swollen town and decaying country neighbourhood," the Anglican church seemed to be "being used simply as a bulwark to protect privilege against reform": it gave little spiritual guidance. The puritan preachers were trying "to adopt christian morality to the needs of a population which was being steadily driven from its old feudal states into the untried conditions of competition between man and man in an increasingly commercial and industrial society under a money economy." ¹

One of the most important features of the gathered church was that it was a voluntary society. No-one was compelled to belong. This principle stretched back as far as Robert Browne who stated: "The Lords people is of the willing sorte."

Later, William Bartlett in his book "Model of the Primitive Congregational Way" supported this view by writing that the church is "a free society of saints, embodied and knit together in one, by voluntary consent."

The third of the four main 'principles in Church Affairs' to be found in the 'Advertisement to the Reader' prefixed to John Owen's 'Eschol' reads: 'that every man's own voluntary consent and submission to the ordinances of Christ in that church whereunto he is joyned, is required for his union therewith and fellowship therein.' ²

1. Haller: The Rise of Puritanism pp 116 - 17

2. Works Vol. 13 p. 53

This was, of course, the complete antithesis to the view of the time that the only way to have a strong, united church and peace within its ranks, was to enforce membership by law on everybody. But this cut across the Congregational idea of the church as composed only of visible saints. They believed that those who were unbelievers should not be forced to go to church as this was detrimental to themselves and to the believers. This voluntary principle did not, however, mean that believers had an option as to whether they would attend church or not, as Dale explains: "When Christian churches are described by congregationalists as 'voluntary societies', it is not meant that christian people are at liberty to please themselves whether they will form churches or not, but that churches are to be formed in free obedience to the authority of Christ - not by the power of the State. Nor is it meant that where churches exist christian people are at liberty to please themselves whether they will be members of these churches or not, but that their membership is to depend on the free consent of those who enter membership: that no man ought to be a member of a christian church by birth and that no civil law ought to enforce membership."¹

The voluntary principle led the Congregationalists to the rejection of the submission to an imposed creed as the basis for entry into membership of the church. The Christian church, as a free society under Christ, should require nothing of an applicant for membership but a personal faith in Christ and evidence of this faith in their

1. Dale: A Manual of Congregational Principles p. 26

daily lives. Part of the evidence for this faith lies in the voluntary desire to join with the saints in fellowship. But it is taking away a man's liberty in these things to tell him that before he can become a member of the church, he must submit to a creed. Evidence of faith in Christ may be present in persons who have as yet no clear intellectual apprehension of some of the great Christian truths. Men come into the church not because they have already mastered the contents of Christian revelation but because they want to be taught them.

Instead of creeds then, the Congregational churches formulated confessions of faith which were simply means to express their common faith and salvation and were in no way to be made use of as an imposition upon anyone. The Savoy Declaration, which Owen was instrumental in drawing up, was in fact a confession of the doctrinal faith of the English Congregational Churches and their principles of church polity; it was not a creed. The preface to the declaration, in explaining the use of confessions rather than creeds, states that "the Spirit of Christ is in himself too free, great and generous a Spirit to suffer himself to be used by any human arm to whip men into belief; he drives not, but gently leads into all truth.... The character of his people is to be a willing people in the day of his power. ∴∴∴ And where this Spirit of the Lord is, there is Liberty." ¹ Therefore, instead of

1. Williston Walker: 'Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism' p. 355

submitting to a creed, candidates for admission into a Congregational church had to witness to their faith in Christ and their experience of him before the whole church. The account of Sidrach Simpson's acceptance into membership of the church at Rotterdam, has been preserved in the memoirs of Ambrose Barnes. When he became a member 'two things were required of him, a profession of his faith and a confession of his experience of the grace of God wrought in him.' The church members wrote: 'For a whole hour he poured out his soul into our bosom and we as heartily embraced him in the bosom of the church.'¹

However, it has been argued that there are certain anomalies in this non-acceptance of creeds. According to Owen, confessions of faith had no binding authority, they were simply declarative, making known Congregational beliefs. Therefore, on Owen's view, could a Christian community reject a man because he rejected a central doctrine of Christian faith? There was much Arianism in eighteenth century nonconformity; could a church impose the doctrine of the deity of Christ on a man who says his own study of Scripture does not convince him of its truth? After all, a man might have a genuine experience of God but his intellectual formulation of it may be imperfect. These were the questions that the early church faced and it was because of them that it first formulated authoritative creeds. It is because of the congregational denial of any

1. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 111

doctrine of the universal visible church, transmitting its tradition and experience throughout the centuries that these problems arose again for them.

Sidrach Simpson had been asked for a confession of his 'experience'. The Independents placed great importance on experience. This helped to emphasize the new importance which the doctrine of the Holy Spirit had gained in their theology. It was the Holy Spirit who had brought them into a saving experience of Christ and he would also enable them to bear witness to it. The emphasis on experience also differentiated between the piety of the Congregationalists and that of the Presbyterians. The Presbyterians regarded a simple declaration of faith as sufficient for admission to church membership, but the Congregationalists required a testimony as to the work of grace in their hearts.

As a result of their demand for declarations of experience rather than an assent to doctrine, this led to variation in less important matters and inevitably therefore nurtured the spirit of tolerance. They preferred sincerity of conversation and godly living to complete uniformity in things 'of lesser consequence and moment'. There was, however, always room for argument over what constituted 'things of lesser moment.'

This religious experience is so important to the Puritan because, according to Simpson it is this 'experience of conversion which separates the Puritan from the mass of mankind and endows him with the privileges and duties

of the elect.' ¹

John Rogers wrote: "Everyone to be admitted gives out some experimental evidences of the work of grace on his soul (for the church to judge of) whereby he (or she) is convinced that he is regenerate and received of God." ²

They emphasised that only God could really know the truth concerning a man's regeneration; the task of the church meeting was simply to assess 'its evidences and fruits in their external demonstration, as unto a participation of the outward privileges of a regenerate state and no farther.' ³ Critics would say, however, that once it is granted that only God can know the inner heart, the Independent case is destroyed and all that can be required for church membership is the Presbyterian 'credible profession of faith'.

Owen made such frequent use of the personal testimony in this way that Baxter accused him of extirpating godliness "by taking a very few that can talk more than the rest and making them the church." ⁴ This criticism is very important and gives rise to the question of how the Christian's personal relation to God is connected to its verbal formulation. Some people were undoubtedly encouraged to be articulate about their religious experience but is this necessary in order to

- 1. Simpson: Puritanism in Old and New England. p. 2
- 2. Watkins: Puritan Experience p. 29
- 3. Owen: Works Vol. 16 p. 13
- 4. Quoted in Nuttall: Puritan Experience p. 30

become a member of Christ's church? Again, the problems of subjectivism and emotionalism are encountered. The emphasis would seem to be on 'me and my experience' rather than upon Christ and the truth that he has revealed. It is indeed vital to have a genuine experience of God but to make the public voicing of this the main criterion of entry into the church can be, as Baxter fears, a dangerous practice.

The importance of religious experience is demonstrated by Owen in a sermon entitled 'The Chamber of Imagery in the Church of Rome Laid Open'. He explains that without a living experience of Christianity, religion can become dead and deformed. "All the benefit which any men do or may receive by the Word, or the truth of the gospel, depends on an experience of its power and efficacy in communicating the grace of God unto their souls. ... The loss of an experience of the power of religion hath been the cause of the loss of the truth of religion; or it hath been the cause of rejecting its substance and setting up a shadow or image in the room of it." ¹

He illustrates this by giving the example of the religion of Rome which is "but a dead image of the gospel, erected in the loss of an experience of its spiritual power." ² For example, Rome has lost the spiritual light to discern the glory of Christ in the gospel and to experience him in their worship. They therefore create images of him to make him present to the worshippers. This worship of God ought to be beautiful and glorious, but the glory is

1. Works vol. 8 pp 548/9

2. Ibid p. 551

spiritual, not carnal. There is a spiritual light required to experience of its power and efficacy in reference to the ends of its appointment. The church of Rome has lost this spiritual light and therefore needs "ceremonies, vestments, gestures, ornaments, music, altars, images, paintings and prescriptions of great bodily veneration."¹ Christians experience a near, intimate communion with Christ and a participation of him, in the Lord's Supper. But this is a spiritual and mystical experience caused through faith, not carnal or fleshly. The church of Rome, however, having lost this spiritual experience of participation in Christ, has reduced the Lord's Supper to a carnal eating of the flesh of Christ and drinking of his blood.

Thus Owen underlines the crucial importance of constantly maintaining a living experience of the living Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, not just in the life of the individual, but in the life of the church as a whole.

Again, the voluntary principle, together with the importance of the idea of fellowship, gave rise to the congregational concept of the 'covenant'. It was not a common creed that bound the godly together to form a church, but a covenant which they took together. Bartlett writes that the saints 'are voluntarily to give up themselves to the Lord, and one another ... to walk together in all

1. Works p. 558 Vol.8

the ordinances of Christ, ... in a mutuall consent, covenant or agreement." ¹

Owen, in his 'Brief Instruction in the Worship of God', writes that a group of saints becomes a church 'upon their own voluntary consent and engagement to walk together in the due subjection of their souls and consciences unto his authority, as their king, priest and prophet, and in a holy observation of all his commands, ordinances and appointments." ²

Many of these engagements or covenants have survived, for example, the one signed at Cockermouth on October 2nd 1651: "Wee poor worms, lost in Adam, being by the grace of God, through the Spirit, called to be saints, (conceiving it to be our duty to observe gospel ordinances) for the future do agree together to walke as a people whom the Lorde hath chosen, an holy communion of saints; and we do mutually promise to watch over one another in the Lord: and to do all such things, according to our best light, that are required of a church in order, and to submit to our lawful officers, that shall from time to time be chosen out from among us. And this in the presence of the Lord we resolve and promise, hoping that of his goodness and according to his wonted dealing with his people, he will carry us on to his praise." ³

There are two more important corollories to belief

1. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 75
2. Works Vol. 15 p. 486
3. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 79

in the voluntary principle; the first is the limitation of the power of the magistrate in religion and the second is the distinctive Congregational support for religious toleration.

Nuttall, in his book 'Visible Saints', put it in the following way: "Their (the Congregationalists') demand for liberty of conscience has received detailed study ... but mainly on what may be called its negative side - their opposition to persecution, oppression and imposition. But the more positive, and to some extent new, religious motives which lay behind the congregational men's opposition to persecution and compulsion in matters of faith have perhaps been insufficiently appreciated. It was not only that no man likes to be persecuted, and that every man has a right to freedom from oppression. It was rather that, since both Christian faith and Christian practice are essentially voluntary things, persecution crosses their very nature."

John Cook, who died on the scaffold in 1660 for his involvement with the death of Charles I, stated in a tract entitled 'What the Independents would have' that 'the Independent is a professed enemy to all imperative co-active violence in matters of conscience', because 'compulsion can no more gain the heart, than the fish can love the fisherman'; and that 'to force men to church is but to make them hypocrites.'

Their belief in toleration was, however, at this early stage, still very limited. For example, Owen

believed in the legal prohibition of Anglican and Roman Catholic worship and the right of the magistrate to punish atheism and blasphemy. Opponents could also justifiably point to the practices of the New Englanders, which were markedly lacking in toleration.

There was one very notable example of non-toleration both in Old England and New England - the treatment of the Quakers. Owen wrote a strongly anti-Quaker tract, 'Pro Sacris Scripturis Adversus hujus temporis Fanaticos Exercitationes', and when he was Vice-Chancellor of Oxford he ordered two Quaker girls who were wandering naked through the streets, proclaiming the coming wrath of God, to be beaten and expelled from the city. Owen's main arguments against the Quakers were that not only did they cause civil disturbances but they also seemed to deny some of the basic doctrines of Christianity. For example, they seemed to deny the fundamental importance of the Bible itself by placing so much emphasis on their concept of the Inner Light. They also denied the ministry and the sacraments.

Owen puts forward his views on the voluntary principle and those principles which are derived from it - the limited power of the magistrate with reference to the church, and religious toleration, in several works.

In 'Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches', one of Owen's main propositions is that it is the duty of every Christian professor voluntarily and by his own choice to join himself to some particular congregation of Christ's

institution for his own spiritual edification and a right discharge of Christ's commands. But in the Church of England all choice is prevented because of where a man happens to live and in which church he happens to have been baptised as an infant. A man does not even have the choice about whether he will go to church or not, but, whether he is a believer or an unbeliever, he is forced into church membership. This is in complete contrast to the practice of the Early Church which kept new converts as catechumens for a long time before they were allowed to become full members.

In Owen's 'Truth and Innocence Vindicated', a reply to the 'Discourse of Ecclesiastical Polity and of the Power of the Magistrate in Matters of Religion' which was written by Samuel Parker, Bishop of Oxford, he argues that compulsion leads to atheism, whereas liberty does not. "Are not men taught here to keep the liberty of their minds and judgements to themselves, whilst they practise that which they approve not nor can do so? which is directly to act against the light and conviction of conscience." Yet we are informed by colleague of Parker that "there is not a wider step to atheism than to do anything against conscience." ... "And indeed if once men find themselves at liberty to practice contrary to what is prescribed unto them in the name and authority of God, as all things are which conscience requires, it is not long that they will retain any regard of him or reverence unto him. ... Exempt conscience from an absolute, immediate, entire, universal dependence on the authority, will and judgement

of God, according to what conceptions it hath of them, and you disturb the whole harmony of divine providence in the government of the world, and break the first link of that great chain whereon all religion and government in the world do depend. Teach men to be like Naaman the Syrian, to believe only in the God of Israel and to worship him according to his appointment, by his own choice and from a sense of duty, yet also to bow in the house of Rimmon, contrary to his light and conviction, out of a compliance with his master; or with the men of Samaria, to fear the Lord but to worship their idols - and they will not fail, at one time or other, rather to seek after rest in restless atheism than to live in a perpetual conflict with themselves, or to cherish an everlasting sedition in their own bosoms." ¹

In 'Indulgence and Toleration Considered', Owen sadly states that the people of his time were the first to have ever thought of ruining those of the same religion merely because of different ways of worship in that religion. He gives the example of the Romans who forbade private gods but who had no law concerning ways of worship. The Jews also allowed anyone to dwell in peace with them as long as they owned the fundamentals of the Jewish religion; and force against those who differed within the Christian religion had not even been contemplated by the early Christians for three whole centuries. Later experience proved, said Owen, that the use of such force can only lead to outward conformity, whereas inwardly it often only

1. Works vol. 13 p. 365

confirms men in their own persuasion and into an alienation from the things into which they have been compelled. It has been proved over the ages that violence in matters of religion has never yet succeeded anywhere to extinguish that persuasion and opinion which it was designed to extirpate.

Owen concludes with a very accurate prophecy of the results of the compulsion practised by the prelates of the Church of England. "Some may be ruined, multitudes provoked, the trade of the nation obstructed, some few be enforced unto an hypocritical compliance with what is against the light of their consciences, compassion be stirred up in the residue of the people for innocent sufferers and by all indignation against themselves and their way increased." ¹

The nonconformists claimed that they did not want any special treatment, just to be allowed to exist in peace alongside the established church. They would not interfere with the Church of England anymore than they would wish the Church of England to interfere with them. Their whole desire, said Owen in 'A Plea for Indulgence and Liberty of Conscience', was that of Israel of old to their brother Edom: "Let us pass, we pray through thy country: we will not pass through the fields, or through the vineyards, neither will we drink of the water of the wells: we will go by the King's highway, we will not turn to the right hand nor to the left, until we have passed

1. Works: vol. 13 p. 534

through thy borders." ¹

This peaceful co-existence should not have been too difficult, as the Independents agreed to everything that was doctrinal in the articles of religion (except, of course, the doctrine of the church) and it was only in things relating to outward order and worship in which they dissented. There were many amongst those demanding severity against the nonconformists with ⁱⁿ the ranks of the Church of England, who differed amongst themselves in things much more important than outward forms; they had deep differences in doctrine and it was surely inconsistent of the Anglican church to deal severely with the matter of lesser importance whilst ignoring the matter of greater importance.

Owen deals with the question of the authority of the magistrate in religion in 'Truth and Innocence Vindicated'. Parker, the writer whose work Owen is refuting, contends that the magistrate may command whatever he pleases in religion provided that it 'doth not countenance vice or disgrace the Deity', ² but Owen replies that there is a power antecedent to that of the magistrate, that is, whatever God commands us in religion and worship. The Christian must assent to the magistrate's commands if, in conscience, he can, but if the commands go against what God has previously commanded, the Christian cannot assent and must quietly bear the consequences without withdrawing civil

1. Works vol. 13 p. 549

2. Ibid p. 375

obedience to the magistrate.

Parker also maintained that a man could have liberty of conscience as far as concerns judgements but not practice, but Owen refuted this with the argument that if conscience is to do with the inward thoughts of men's minds only, a man may think something to be his duty yet be under no obligation to perform it. This could lead to atheism and the subversion of all religion and government in the world.

Owen returns time and again to his basic premiss that it is the Word of God which is the sole rule of worship, not the magistrate. Christ has laid down everything that is necessary for his church in the Holy Scriptures; to formulate modes of government and worship apart from those which Christ has established, is to usurp the authority of Christ in his church. He ends this work with a question: "Shall their dissent in religious observances which do not appear in Scripture be judged a crime to be expiated only by their ruin? Doth it suit the Spirit of the gospel and of Christ to destroy good wheat for standing, as it is supposed, a little out of order, who would not have men pluck up the tares? Does it answer to his mind to destroy his disciples, who love to obey him, who blamed his disciples of old for wanting to destroy Samaritan enemies?"¹

The only reasons for the punishment of dissenters and heretics, argues Owen in 'A Country Essay on Church

1. Works vol. 13 p. 503

Government', should be if they caused public disturbances or were openly licentious. Doctrinal errors should be countered by reasonable arguments and Spiritual weapons, not the power of the sword which church history shows leads to no lasting good. "Heresy is a canker, but a spiritual one; let it be prevented by spiritual means. Cutting off men's heads is no proper remedy for it." ¹

Indeed, direct scriptural authority must be produced before such drastic action as the punishment of erring persons should be countenanced. Something more definite is needed than 'there is nothing in the word against them'. ² 'Clear light is needful for men who walk in paths which lead directly to houses of blood', ² writes Owen in his essay 'Of Toleration and the Duty of the Magistrate about Religion.' In any case, the magistrate's sword is not necessary to the Christian church, because it has the sword of the Spirit: "Hath the sword of the Spirit no edge? Is there no means of instruction established in the New Testament but a prison and halter? Are the hammer of the word and the sword of the Spirit, which in the days of old broke the stubbornest mountains and overcame the proudest nations, now quite useless? God forbid! Were the churches of Christ established according to his appointment, and the professors of the truth so knit up 'in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace' as they ought to be, and were in primitive times, I am persuaded

1. Works vol. 8 p. 64

2. Works vol. 8 p. 164

that those despised instruments would quickly make the proudest heretic to tremble." ¹

This was, after all the only method used by the early church. For three hundred years the church had no assistance from any magistrate against heretics; and yet in all that space there was not one long-lived or far-spreading heresy. The early church fathers' treatment of heretics was simply to avoid them, admonish them, carefully refute their arguments and finally to cast them out of Christian society. There was no physical punishment: "Count them enemies, and separate from them who hate God; but for beating or persecuting them, that is proper to the heathen who know not God nor our Saviour, do not you so." (Ignatius). ²

If then, it is not the magistrate's task to extirpate error in religion by the use of civil measures, what is his duty to the Christian faith and those professing it?

According to Owen in this same essay, the supreme magistrate (that is, the King) must enable the gospel to be preached to all the nation, protect it against all who try to hinder its progress and provide places suitable for the performance of gospel worship. He must help to support the proclamation of the gospel materially, but not support those deviating from the gospel or allow any public places for false worship. Those who propegate false principles in a disorderly manner are to be restrained as are those

1. Works vol. 8 p. 171

2. Ibid p. 184

who offer violence to professors of the true worship of God, but this is a civil rather than an ecclesiastical duty. Owen adds that the magistrate is obliged to punish anyone who reviles God and his truth, in order to vindicate the honour of God.

It could perhaps be argued that Owen is not very consistent here. He claims that for spiritual problems, spiritual answers only should be considered. A magistrate can use only civil, not ecclesiastical censures, so how can he punish the blasphemer? This surely is the task of the church, as he argues in other places. Again, Owen states that Christ has not committed the power of determining between truth and error, to the magistrate, but to the church. But according to Owen's conception of the magistrate's duty, he has to act upon a decision as to what is truth and what is error, so that he would know, for example, whom to support and whom to restrain. It is the church then, which advises the magistrate as to what is and what is not in accord with Scripture. But which 'church' the magistrate will listen to depends on his own beliefs about the church and whether he is inclined towards Anglicanism, Presbyterianism, Independency or Catholicism. Owen surely meant that in an ideal situation, the magistrate should heed the 'visible saints', as indeed Cromwell tried at first to do - with disastrous results!

Another logical extension of the idea of the gathered church of visible saints, is the principle of separation which was held so firmly by the Congregationalists. They declared that they followed the Scriptural injunction

"Come ye out from among them and be ye separate." Not only were they to be separate from the world of unbelievers as Bartlett makes clear in his definition of the church-state as 'a society or fellowship of visible saints ... chosen out of the world',¹ but Owen points out that they were also to be separate from all churches which were not true churches, and from all false worship.

Not long after coming to accept the Congregational way, he published 'Eshcol' in 1648 in which he gives fifteen rules for the saints' walking in fellowship. The fifth of these rules is about the 'Separation and Sequestration from the world and men of the world, with all ways of false worship.' He remarks: 'Causeless separation from established churches, walking according to the order of the Gospel (though perhaps failing in the practice of some things of small concernment) is no small sin; but separation from the sinful practices and disorderly walkings and false unwarranted ways of worship in any, is to fulfill the precept of not partaking in other men's sins. ... He that will not separate from the World and false worship, is a separate from Christ.'²

One of the central points which the Congregationalists believed belonged to the New Testament pattern for the church was the idea that each separate local church is independent. The Congregationalists were indeed often known as Independents, and this principle is perhaps the greatest

1. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 53

2. Works Vol. 13 p. 67/8

difference between the Congregationalists and both the Presbyterians and the Anglicans. The two latter believed that each local church was responsible to the national church. The national church made all the decisions about doctrine, worship and discipline, and the parish church was bound to obey. This, of course, cut right across the dearly held voluntary principle of the Congregationalists, one willing mind refusing to compel another.

Owen often states in his works on schism, that there is no case in the New Testament in which a Christian assembly acknowledges any ecclesiastical authority external to itself; that there is nothing in the New Testament to suggest that the apostles intended that the separate Christian assemblies should be drawn into a larger ecclesiastical organisation under central government. This idea of independency is partly the reason for the refusal of the independent churches to accept the idea of imposed creeds. "Every church stands apart and claims to be under the immediate government of the Lord Jesus Christ; loyalty to him compels it to resist the interference of any synod or assembly, however venerable for learning or for sanctity, either with its faith or its discipline." ¹

Independency cannot, of course, countenance the idea of authoritative synods, which can impose their wills on local churches and which occurs in the Anglican and

1. Dale: Manual of Congregational Principles p. 186

Presbyterian systems. Owen regarded synods as the out-working of the fellowship or communion which should exist between particular churches. He defines synods as 'meetings of divers churches by their delegates to consult and determine of such things as are of common concernment unto them all by virtue of this communion which is exercised in them.'¹ They had no jurisdiction, they could only give advice; they had moral but no legal authority; '....a synod convened in the name of Christ by the voluntary consent of several churches concerned in mutual communion, may declare and determine of the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, and decree the observation of things true and necessary, because revealed and appointed in the Scripture; which are to be received, owned and observed on the evidence of the mind of the Holy Ghost in them, and on the ministerial authority of the synod itself.'² If any church refuses to take the advice of the synod, it has no power to do anything against that church, being simply a gathering of other churches through their delegates, except to "admonish them of their faults and withhold communion from them."³

We must now turn to a consideration of the internal government and worship of the gathered church. One of the main Independent contentions, which we have already noted, was that their form of church government and worship was

1. Works vol. 16 p. 195
2. Works vol. 16 p. 208
3. Works vol. 15 p. 530

based squarely on Scriptural principles and that everything they did had Scriptural support: "If Scripture be the rule of faith, our faith is not, in any of its concerns to be extended beyond it, no more than the thing regulated is to be beyond the rule." ¹ Owen does acknowledge, however, that there are certain things "without the church but about it, (without worship but about it)" ², that is, peripheral things concerned with the practical arrangements needed for the correct functioning of the church and its worship, which are left to common prudence, guided by the general rules of Scripture. There is not, therefore, "express warranty in words of Scripture for every circumstance that belongs to the action whereby the worship of God is performed." ³

In 'Truth and Innocence Vindicated', Owen elucidates more fully this principle of the Scripture being the sole criterion for church government and worship. He explains that 'wherever in Scripture we meet with any religious duty that had a preceding institution, although we find not expressly a consequent approbation, we take it for granted, that it was approved; and so, on the contrary, where an approbation appears, an institution is concealed.' ⁴ These institutions then, are warranted as

1. Works vol. 13 p. 473
2. Ibid p. 469
3. Ibid p. 470
4. Works vol. 13 p. 470

suitable practices in the church without needing any further authority. However, "singular and occasional actions, which may be variously influenced and regulated by present circumstances, are no rule to guide the ordinary stated worship of the church. David's eating of the shew-bread, wherein he was justified because of his hunger and necessity, was not to be drawn into an example of giving the shew-bread promiscuously to the people. And sundry instances to the same purpose are given by our Saviour himself." Occasional actions precipitated by unusual circumstances are not therefore to be elevated into institutions of the church. In the same way, nothing uncommanded in Scripture is to be made into an institution of the church which men are obliged to observe. These

'uncommanded rites' are 'said in their own nature, antecedent to their injunction for practice, to be indifferent, and indifferent as unto practice.'" ¹ Why then, asks Owen, are things 'indifferent as unto practice' made necessary practices? Discernment must be used concerning the "many observances in and about the worship of God which are recorded in Scripture without especially reflecting any blame or crime on them by whom they were performed ... and yet the things themselves are not approved or justified, but condemned of God." ² Such observances should be judged in the light of the general principles of Scripture and rejected if found contrary to them.

1. Works vol. 13 p. 470/1

2. Ibid p. 472

What forms of government and worship did Owen and Independents find justification for in the Scriptures?

With regard to the ordinances of worship, Owen believes that an important end of their institution is that through them faith, love and delight in God through Christ are increased and that by them a sense of divine love and supplies of divine grace are communicated to believers. It is the Holy Spirit who is the immediate efficient cause of all these things in us, but the "outward way and means whereby he communicates these things to us and effects them in us, is by the dispensation of the gospel, or the preaching of it ordinarily." ¹ But the most important reason why spiritually minded believers take delight in the duties of divine worship is because they are the great instituted way whereby they may give glory unto God. For in worship, acknowledgement is made of all the glorious excellencies of the divine nature, our dependence on him and new relation to him. Owen believed that 'the divine nature is the reason and cause of all worship' and that worship is 'the outward expression of the experience of a new relationship with God'. Therefore, he maintained, worship would be direct and intimate; the believer could come to God immediately, without need of priestly mediation. "Here in general lieth its (i.e. the order of gospel worship) decency, that it respects the mediation of the Son, through whom we have access and the supplies and assistance of the Spirit, and a regard unto God as Father. He that fails in

1. Works vol. 7 p. 437

any and one of these, he breaks all order in gospel worship." ¹

Worship would be simple because its dignity would not depend on elaboration. It would be in the name of Christ because it appeals to his true nature and relies on his completed work. 'Go to the mass book and the rubric of it: - you will see how many instructions and directions they give priests about the way of going into their sanctum and to their altars; how they must bow and bend themselves, sometimes one way and sometimes another; sometimes kneel and sometimes stand; sometimes go backwards, sometimes forward. This is their way to their breaaden god; this they call order and beauty and glory; and with such like things are poor, simple sots deluded, and carnal wretches, enemies to Christ and his Spirit, blinded to their eternal ruin. Surely, methings, this way of gospel access to God is far more comely and glorious - it is in and by Christ." ²

It would be free worship, guided by the Holy Spirit. This of course precluded liturgy and set forms of prayer. Owen and the Independents objected to read prayers because they believed that this practice was directly contrary to Paul's teaching in Romans 8:26: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." Owen's 'A Discourse of the Work of the Holy Spirit in

1. Works vol. 9 p. 57

2. Works vol. 9 p. 57

Prayer' is an extended sermon upon that text.

In this work he appeals, as always, to the practice of the primitive church. "I do acknowledge that the general prevalency of the use of set forms of prayer of human invention in Christian assemblies, for many ages (more than any other argument that is urged for their necessity) requires a tenderness in judgement as unto the whole nature of them, and the acceptance of their persons in the duty of prayer by whom they are used. Yet no consideration of this usage, seeing it is not warranted by the Scriptures nor is of apostolical example, nor is countenanced by the practice of the primitive churches, ought to hinder us from discerning and judging of the evils and inconveniences that have ensued thereon; nor from discovering how far they are unwarrantable as unto their imposition." ¹

He felt that the imposition of liturgies was "the gilding of the poisonous pill, whose operation when it was swallowed, was to bereave men of their sense, reason and faith." ² He claimed that in apostolic times extempore prayer was used. This seems to have been the case for the first three hundred years. Owen quotes many of the Early Church Fathers for support. For example, Justin Martyr and Tertullian wrote that the Christians prayed "not as they who repeat their prayers after their priests or sacrificers,

1. Works vol. 4 p. 12

2. Ibid p. 15

but pouring out our prayers conceived in our breasts." ¹

Later, where liturgies were introduced they were never imposed on other churches: "every church seemeth to have done what seemed good in the church's own eyes. ... In the Latin church, Ambrose used one form, Gregory another and Isidore a third. Nor is it unlikely but the liturgies were as many as the episcopal churches of those days." ²

There were many arguments put forward in favour of the use of liturgies. The first one, posited by an African council at the beginning of the fifth century was that they should be used 'lest anything contrary to the faith creep into their way of worship.' ³ They also pleaded that the ministry was now ungifted for the edification of the church, and therefore needed set forms to read. They claimed that this was because the number of Christians had multiplied so much that they needed to appoint officers who had not the gifts and qualifications that otherwise would have been thought necessary. Owen, however, replied that 'it is impossible that Christians should be multiplied in the way of Christ faster than he is ready to give out gifts for their edification.' ⁴ This excuse was 'blasphemously to accuse our Lord Jesus Christ of breach of promise, he having solemnly engaged to be with his disciples, not for an age

1. Works vol. 15 p. 23

2. Ibid p. 26

3. Works vol. 15 p. 26

4. Ibid p. 27

or two, but to the end of the world and that by the graces and gifts of his Spirit'.¹ The real reason for this decay in spiritual gifts among the ministry was that men 'were negligent and careless in the receiving of them from him - either not seeking them at his hand, or not exercising and improving of them according to his will and command.'²

The third reason put forward to support the use of liturgies is the need for uniformity in the worship of God to safeguard the unity of the church. But Owen objects: "The administration of the same ordinances, according to the same rule of his word, by virtue of the same gifts of his Spirit, constitutes the uniformity he requires. To imagine that there should be a uniformity in words and phrases of speech and the like is an impracticable figment."³

In the two works principally concerned with this subject, 'A Discourse concerning Liturgies' and 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer', Owen puts forward his arguments against the use of liturgies. He remarks that the guides of the Church soon became discontented with the mere free use of liturgies, decided to impose them. This was a usurpation of the authority of God in Christ. "The Worship of God is of that nature that whatsoever is performed in it is an act of religious obedience. That anything may be esteemed such, it is necessary that

1. Works vol. 15 p. 27

2. Ibid

3. Works vol. 15 p. 48

conscience be in it subject to the immediate authority of God. His authority alone makes any act of obedience religious." ¹ God has given the authority in the church to Christ to command all that is needed to perform the worship of God. But men commanded liturgies, not Christ, hence the obedience yielded is purely civil, not religious. If men claim it to be religious, then they are also claiming for themselves that authority which only Christ has. "Our duty is not to command, but to enjoin what Christ has commanded."

Owen also complains that liturgies have led to the cessation of all spiritual gifts in the church both among ministers and people; for they are 'talents given to trade with and will not reside if not improved by continual exercise. "We daily see men napkinning their talents until they are taken away from them." ²

The gift of prayer is a promise from God. In the Preface to his work on the Holy Spirit in Prayer, Owen writes that the sum of what he is pleading for in the work is that "whereas God hath graciously promised his Holy Spirit, as a Spirit of grace and supplications, unto them that do believe, enabling them to pray according to his mind and will, in all the circumstances and capacities wherein they are, or which they may be called unto, it is the duty of them who are enlightened with the truth hereof to expect those promised aids and assistances in and unto

1. Works p. 43 vol.15

2. Works vol. 15 p. 52

their prayers, and to pray according to the ability which they receive thereby." ¹

If, however, this gift is neglected, it will atrophy: "And some are so accustomed unto and so deceived by pretended helps in prayer, as making use of or reading prayers by others composed for them, that they will never attempt to pray for themselves, but always think they cannot do that which indeed they will not: as if a child being bred up among none but such impotent persons as go on crutches, as he groweth up should refuse to try his own strength and resolve himself to make use of crutches also." ²

Set forms of prayer, therefore, hinder the progress of the individual in the gift and grace of prayer, whilst maintaining a remiss and negligent ministry. Such a ministry is unable to perform the function for which it was instituted and for which the spiritual gifts were promised, that is the edification of the church. Thus it seems that the imposition of liturgies is an effective means for the achieving of an untaught, strengthless church.

According to Owen, liturgies were also responsible for the introduction of errors into the church: "In and by additions made unto the first received forms, corrupt doctrines of apostasy in several ages were insinuated into the worship of the church." ³

1. Works vol. 4 p. 239

2. Ibid p. 309

3. Works vol. 4 p. 243

An error which accompanied the regular use of liturgies was that it persuaded the people that liturgies were necessary and that God could not be worshipped in any other way. John Owen regards their very uniformity as a danger. As they are repeated at every act of worship, they appear to the unlearned to be as indispensable as the Scriptures. Therefore, any error which the liturgies contain, the people will "adhere unto as articles of their faith."

Owen also blamed on the use of liturgies, the error of the introduction into the church of a multiplication of ceremonies: "Devised forms of prayer led to a supposed necessity of adorning the observance of them with sundry arbitrary ceremonies. Having lost the Spirit of grace and supplication ... they found it necessary by these means to set off and recommend their dead forms ... with this variety of ceremonies." ¹

Another reason given for opposition to liturgies is that they cannot be adapted to meet the various needs of a congregation. "It is the work and duty of the ministers of the gospel to make application of the grace of Christ, whereof they are stewards, to the flocks committed to their charge, and that according to the especial state and condition of all especial wants which may anyway be made known unto them. ... These wants are very far from being the same, in the same degree, in and unto every congregation, or unto any one congregation at all times,

1. Works vol. 4 p. 244

or unto all persons in any congregation. ... Now how this duty can be attended unto in the observance of a prescribed form of liturgy, from whence it is not lawful to digress, is beyond my understanding to apprehend." ¹

Set forms of prayer are also inconsistent with Christian Liberty; "That abridgement of the liberty of the disciples of Christ, by impositions on them of things which he hath not appointed ... are plain usurpations upon the consciences of the disciples of Christ, destructive of the liberty which he hath purchased for them, and which, if it be their duty to walk according to gospel rule, is sinful to submit unto. ... A necessity to its observation ... is directly destructive to our liberty in Jesus Christ." ² A further criticism of the constant use of set prayers was that they conduce to hypocrisy. Either familiarity breeds contempt, or it simulates an attitude which is not really felt.

The final charge against set forms of prayer is that their imposition has brought persecution in its train. Owen accuses the imposers of liturgies of bringing 'fire and faggot into the Christian religion' ³ because there are always men who prefer to submit to the authority of Christ rather than the authority of men.

Although Owen is obviously against the use of liturgies

1. Works vol. 15 p. 53
2. Ibid p. 55
3. Works vol. 4 p. 23

in worship, he makes clear that it is the imposition of such forms to the exclusion of free prayer which he regards as unlawful. If a church freely chose to use a certain liturgy, Owen would not regard this as sinful, but simply a method of worship inferior to the worship which relies directly on the Holy Spirit. He comments that there is nothing intrinsically evil in forms of prayer, but they are hindrances to the right discharge of the duty of prayer according to the mind of God.

The Independents, with their rejection of set forms of prayer, were often accused of rejecting and despising the Lord's Prayer, which, it was said, was a set form of prayer given by Christ himself. Owen, however, regarded the prayer as 'a summary symbol of all the most excellent things they were to ask of God in his name.'¹ In other words, the prayer was to be used as a pattern on which to base one's own prayers, but not to be repeated word for word.

But if, says Owen, Jesus did mean that a repetition of those words should be used, this was because the Holy Spirit, the inspirer of prayer, had not yet been given. Jesus was at that time a 'minister of the circumcision'² and in this sense the form of the prayer belonged to the economy of the Old Testament.

Owen, however, obviously subscribes to the former view, regarding the Lord's Prayer as simply a model prayer,

1. Works vol. 15 p. 13

2. Works vol. 15 p. 14

showing men the sort of things they should pray for. In any case, he concludes, the Lord's Prayer was obviously meant for private devotion not public worship.

Owen's position is clear and well-argued, but certain criticisms can be brought to bear. It could be argued with some justification, for example, that the use of lectionaries was the practice of the synagogue in Jesus' time, and it is therefore conceivable that the early Christians who were all Jews, took over this practice. It can also be asked whether Owen's repudiation of set forms includes hymns, which are usually either prayers or statements of faith.

Richard Baxter was amongst those who accepted the use of set forms because he realised the dangers of extempore prayer, but he did insist that it must have some place in worship. The dangers of which Baxter was wary were that 'it was too easy to be verbose and undisciplined. It was possible unintentionally to impose on others the moods to which the minister was subject. Through laziness or lack of care, a man might fall into habits so pronounced that his own prayers had all the defects of a liturgy without any of the compensating advantages.' ¹

With regard to the form of worship which Owen believed was Scriptural, much can be learned by a contemplation of the name of the church to which Owen adhered, that is, Congregational. "The great contention of Congregationalism is not that every Christian has a right to share in the government of the church, but that every Christian is

1. Quoted in Cragg: Puritanism in the Great Persecution.
p. 200

directly responsible to Christ for securing in the discipline, doctrine and worship of the church, the supremacy of its Divine Founder and Lord. This responsibility rests on the wonderful union between Christ and all who are restored to God through him. Congregationalism is an attempt . . . to assert the truth that all Christian men are really 'in Christ' and that therefore the whole church is the organ of his will."¹

The only way church power could then be regarded as a right is because it rests on a privilege granted by Christ to those who are his, Church power is not power as usually understood by the world; it is simply the ability and duty to obey Christ's commands.

Congregationalism is a true outworking of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, claim the Congregationalists, quoting 1 Peter 2: 9: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people . . ." The essay 'The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished' explains the implications of this doctrine. All Christians are priests because of their union with Christ, the great High Priest and because all are partakers of a holy unction. All Christians offer sacrifices (metaphorically) of prayers and thanksgiving, of good works and self-slaughter. Therefore, because of their priesthood, all Christians are answerable to Christ for the government of the church and the worship of God in it; it is not a responsibility restricted to the officials of the Church, as in Anglicanism.

1. Dale: A Manual of Congregational Principles p. 62

There are, however, certain functions in the church, which are, for the sake of order and edification, best performed by those set apart by God and equipped for those tasks, such as teaching and the administration of the sacraments. But those who are thus set apart are not designated 'priests' but *διακονοι* or *ὑπητηραι*, that is, ministers or servants, because their priesthood is in common with all other Christians.

The idea of the equality of all Christians in their privileges as well as their duties, is expressed in 'The True Nature of Gospel Church'. "Every individual believer hath power or right given unto him, upon his believing, to become a Son of God (John 1:12). Hereby as such, he hath a right and title radically and originally unto, with an interest in, all church privileges, to be actually possessed and used according to the rules by him prescribed; for he that is a Son of God hath a right unto all the privileges and advantages of the family of God, as well as he is obliged unto all the duties of it. Herein lies the foundation of all right unto church power; for both it and all that belongs unto it are a part of the purchased inheritance, whereunto right is granted by adoption."¹

But, as we have mentioned before, every society or assembly needs officers if it is to be able to function in an orderly fashion: "The very law of nature and reason requires that some one or more should go before the rest of the assembly in the worship they have to perform, and be

1. Works vol. 16 p. 36

as the hand or mouth or eyes to the whole body or assembly."¹

Owen claims that there are only two sorts of officers of the church; 'bishops and deacons' (Philippians 1:1).. The bishops, who are otherwise called elders are, in their turn, of two sorts; those having authority to teach and administer sacraments, that is the teaching elders and those having only the power for rule, who are known as ruling elders. The teaching elders are distinguished into pastors and teachers. If a church is very large and needs many elders, one must preside, 'but the Scripture knows no more of an archbishop or archdeacon than of an archapostle, archevangelist or [^]chprophet.'² The presiding elder of a church is the pastor, that is the elder who feeds and rules the flock.

The basic ministry of the church consists then of pastors, elders and deacons. This is the usual Calvinistic breakdown of the ministry, except that the distinction between pastor and teacher has been abandoned.

Owen, however, makes clear that he believes that a church can exist without a pastor.. A church is formed when a number of visible saints covenant together to serve God and love each other. Normally, the first step taken after this 'embodying' is to secure a pastor, yet the church was in being before it had a pastor and could continue to exist, for a considerable time if necessary, without a pastor. "The Ministry is not essential to the church. We are thus at the opposite pole from John Henry

1. Works vol. 9 p. 74

2. Works vol. 16 p. 46

Newman's assertion: 'A sacerdotal order is historically the essence of the church.' " 1

Thomas Hooker, in his 'Survey', writes: "There must be a church of believers to choose a Minister lawfully. ... Therefore here is a church before a Minister." 2 This can be illustrated by the procedure adopted at Axminster, by the gathered church there who were without a pastor. Two Congregationalist pastors recommended a young man called Stephen Towgood, a member of the gathered church at Maiden Bradley, Wiltshire. The records of the Axminster church state: "This Mr. Stephen Towgood had the office of a deacon amongst them; on certain Sabbaths appointed him he came and preached to this congregation and although he was but young in years, yet such were his Ministeriall Gifts and Abilities as did render him more like An Old Disciple and An Aged Minister of Christ. ... The Church having had a Tast of his Spirit, his gifts and graces, the hearts of the people were soon knitt to him and the major part of the Congregation were inclined to give him a call to the Pastorall Office amongst them." 3

Owen believed that the members "become a church essentially before they have any ordinary Pastor and Teacher," but that they "cannot come to that Perfection and Completeness which is designed unto them. That which

1. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 85

2. Ibid p. 86

3. Axminster Ecclesiastica pp. 50ff. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 84

renders a church completely organical" is "the gift of Christ in the Ministry." ¹ According to Owen, therefore, the ministry is of the "bene esse", not the "esse" of the church.

That the ministry is the gift of Christ is stated in Ephesians 4:11: "And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers."

Christ gives this gift of the ministry to the church in several ways: "He doth it by his law constituting the office, - the law in the gospel which is an everlasting ordinance; he doth it by his Spirit, communicating gifts unto persons; he doth it by his church calling of them and by a submission to them according to the will of God and testifying that submission by their suffrage, he doth it by his ordinance of solemnly setting them apart with fasting and prayer." ²

Any office, adds Owen, which is not appointed by Christ, for example, popes, cardinals, metropolitans and diocesans, is no true office because it is no gift of Christ, and if anyone without spiritual gifts be appointed to a true office, while there is not a nullity as to the office, there is a nullity as to the persons.

There are several purposes behind this gift of the ministry. It is for the gathering of the saints into complete church-order. The saints may have become a church

1. Works vol. 4 p. 496

2. Works vol. 9 p. 435

before, but the ministry "renders a church ... the proper seat and subject of all gospel worship and ordinances." ¹ The purpose of the ministry, states Owen emphatically, is work, not preferment: "It is usually observed that all the words whereby the work of the ministry is expressed in the Scripture do denote a peculiar industrious kind of labour, though some have found out ways of honour and ease to be signified by them." ² And the purpose of this "work of the ministry" is "the edification of the body of Christ". "The excellency of the ministry is declared in that the object of its duty and work is no other but the body of Christ himself; and its end, the edification of this body, or its increase in faith and obedience, in all the graces and gifts of the Spirit, until it come unto conformity unto him and the enjoyment of him. And the ministry which hath not this object and end is not of the giving or grant of Christ." ³

A negative purpose which the ministry fulfills is that it delivers the church from the evil of deception by false doctrine and from a child-like state characterised by weakness, instability and wilfulness.

What then are the prerequisites for the appointing of a church-officer? Or, as Owen asks in 'A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God', "What is required unto the due constitution of an elder, pastor or teacher of the church?"

1. Works vol. 4 p. 496

2. Ibid p. 497

3. Works vol. 4 p. 497

He answers, "That he be furnished with the gifts of the Holy Spirit for the edification of the church and the evangelical discharge of the work of the ministry: that he have a willing mind to give up himself unto the Lord in the work of the ministry; that he be called and chosen by the suffrage and consent of the church: that he be solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer and imposition of hands unto his work and ministry." ¹

The basis of the ministry is charismatic as the apostle declares in Ephesians 4 : "But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, when he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets and some evangelists and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man." The duty of those ^{who} have received these gifts is to exercise them: "Neglect not the gift that is in you." (1 Timothy 4:14)

It is the duty of the church as a whole to make "an exploration or trial of those gifts and abilities as unto their accommodation unto the edification of the church whereunto any person is to be ordained a pastor or minister." ²
The church at Axminster, for example, invited Stephen Towgood

1. Works vol. 15 p. 493

2. Works vol. 16 p. 73/4.

to preach there several times in order that they might have 'a tast of his spirit, his gifts and his graces.' ¹

The Independents, however, believed that the gifts were not confined exclusively to the ministry of the church, particularly the gift of prophesying or preaching. The Spirit also bestowed this gift on certain brethren in the congregation, who were therefore known as 'gifted brethren'. John Robinson, an early Independent and pastor of the church at Leyden from which the Pilgrim Fathers came, declared that "... into this fellowship, to wit of prophets, should be admitted not only the ministers but also ... of the very common people." ²

There was a great dispute during the commonwealth as to whether gifted brethren should be allowed to preach. The Congregationalists, of course, believed that they should, but the Presbyterians disagreed because it was their principle "not to hear a man not bred up at the university and not ordained." ³ They believed that lay preaching was ecclesiastically out of order: "God is the God of order; ... God hath appointed orders in his church ... his canon is, let all things be done in order." ⁴

Petto, John Martin and Frederick Woodal, the co-authors of 'The Preacher Sent: or A Vindication of the Liberty of Publick Preaching, By some men not Ordained'—(1658) put

1. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 85/6
2. Works II pp 334/5. Quoted in Nuttall: The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience p. 78
3. E. Terrill: Records of a church of Christ meeting in Broadmead, Bristol. Quoted in Nuttall: The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience p. 78
4. Nuttall: The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience p; 80/A. 7888

forward the Congregational view: "Every man, ... to whomsoever the Spirit hath afforded a gift, either wisely to speak, and apply Gospel truths to the souls of others ... or understandingly to give exposition of the Scriptures, every man that hath such gifts, it belongeth to his place and calling, to use those gifts ... else he crosseth the end of the Spirit." ¹

One of the main objections to lay preaching put forward by some of the Presbyterians, was that the 'gifted brethren' tended to preach as they prayed, extempore. However, the more judicious Congregationalists also condemned this practice: "whereas some men are for preaching only extempore and without study, Paul bids Timothy meditate and study. ... Neither can they be said to preach extempore, or what is at the present revealed, for they preach those things which their thoughts and speeches have been exercised in before. So as ordinarily the extemporariness is in respect of memory, for it is what comes to their memories of notions again and again meditated upon." ²

Having made 'an exploration or trial of those gifts and abilities' of the prospective church officer, and having been satisfied, the church must also ensure that he is 'unblameable, holy and exemplary in his conversation'. ³ This is to comply with the instructions given by St. Paul which Owen quotes in 'Brief Instruction': "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God: not self-willed,

1. ~~Nuttall~~, The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith & Experience. p.79
2. Thomas Goodwin. Quoted in Nuttall: Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith.
3. Works vol. 15 p. 493

not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre: but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate; holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers." (Titus 1: 7 - 9). He must also be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the Church of God?) (Timothy 1:3). The officers of the church are therefore to be "an example unto the flock, in a universal labouring after conformity in their lives unto the great bishop and pastor of the church, our Lord Jesus Christ." ¹

The church must also make sure that he is willing to give himself up to God in this work, for in a voluntary society, constraint would be quite out of place: "The elders which are among you, I exhort: feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock." (1 Peter 5: 1-3)

The church must take care that those they wish to set apart for the ministry have the correct motivation - that is, a free and willing desire to serve God. They should not be constrained by "personal outward necessities, compulsions of friends and relations or want of other ways of subsistence in the world" ² Neither should they be motivated by a desire

1. Works vol. 15 p. 494

2. Ibid p. 495

for worldly profit or honour.

The next task is to call or elect the person judged qualified for the church office. This, says Owen, "is an act of the whole church. ... For election is not an act of authority but of liberty and power, wherein the whole church in the fraternity is equal." ¹ Owen, gives several provisos concerning this power in the sermon entitled 'The Ministry the Gift of Christ.' He says that this power in the church is not despotical, lordly and absolute. It is not from any authority of their own; but it consists in an absolute compliance with the command of Christ. Also, there is no power in the church to choose anyone whom Christ hath not chosen before. Finally, the way in which the church calls or constitutes any person to this office is by giving themselves up unto him in the Lord, which they testify by their solemn choive ^a and election by suffrage..

Owen gives two examples to show that election was the New Testament practice. The first of these is in Acts 6 "where all the apostles together, to give a rule unto the future proceeding of all churches in the constitution of officers among them, do appoint the multitude of the disciples, or community of the church, to look out from among themselves, or to choose the persons that were to be set apart therein unto their office." ² "Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report,

1. Works vol. 16 p. 55

2. Works vol. 15 p. 495

full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom whom we may appoint over this business." (verse 3).

The second example is in Acts 14:23, where Paul and Barnabas are said to ordain elders in the churches by their election and suffrage. Owen's argument here is that in all Greek writers, the word 'ordain' - *Χειροτονεῖν* - is always connected with the suffrage of the people. In 'True Nature' he quotes Aristophanes, Demosthenes and Thucydides to prove this. It is open to question, however, how much this classical Greek usage bears on Biblical use four thousand years later.

"A church-state", he adds, "is an estate of absolute liberty under Christ, not for men to do what they will, but for men to do their duty freely, without compulsion. Now nothing is more contrary to this liberty than to have their guides, rulers and overseers imposed on them without their consent." ¹

Although the Independents believed in the doctrine of election and the priesthood of all believers and therefore did not regard the ministry as a priestly hierarchy, it did not mean that they depreciated the value of ordination. They, of course, disowned episcopal ordination which, they believed, meant that the imposition of the hands of the bishop conveyed, in some way, the power of grace needed to transform a layman into a man of the church. This is a valuation of ordination which Anglicans themselves would reject, however. The Congregationalists believed that ordination

1. Works vol. 15 p. 496

"presupposeth an officer constituted, doth not constitute; therefore it is not an act of power but order." ¹ It is simply a solemn recognition by the man ordained and the church that God has set him apart for the work of the ministry. When the church at Axminster ordained Stephen Towgood into the ministry to serve as pastor of their church, a church-meeting prior to the ordination concluded: "Ordination is not essentially necessary to the work of the ministry. The essence of a minister lies in the consent of three wills. The will of God, the will of the people and the will of the minister. ... And ordination is for order sake." ²

Concerning ordination the Savoy Declaration stated that "the way appointed by Christ" is that "the person fitted and gifted by the Holy Ghost and chosen ... by the common suffrage of the church itself, 'be solemnly set apart by fasting and prayer, with the imposition of hands of the eldership of the church.'" ³ There was, however, some uneasiness about the imposition of hands because of its sacerdotal connotations. Owen felt that it was not absolutely necessary, but that different churches should be allowed to exercise their own choice about it. He and the other compilers of the Savoy Declaration are careful to add that those chosen and separated by 'fasting and prayer ... though not set apart by the imposition of hands are

1. Thomas Hooker II p. 59. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 88
2. Axminster Ecclesiastica p. 101. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 88
3. Of the Institution of Churches. Article XI in the Savoy Declaration

rightly constituted ministers of Jesus Christ." ¹ They regarded prayer as the most important part of ordination: "The maine weight of the worke lyes in the solemnity of prayer." ²

There was an important difference between the Independent belief concerning ordination and that of the Anglicans and Presbyterians. The former believed that a man was ordained only as the minister of the particular congregation which had called him. Logically therefore, if he ceased to be a pastor at all and if later he was called by another congregation he should really be re-ordained. The Congregationalists, however, did not follow their beliefs to this conclusion. The Presbyterians and Anglicans did not face this problem as they believed that a man was ordained into the church catholic visible and he therefore retained his status as a minister whether he had a church or not.

What are the duties of a duly elected and ordained pastor? In a sermon Owen declared that three things were required of those engaged in the work of the ministry. Each pastor was to be an imitation of Christ, a representation of Christ, and a zealot for Christ. He is to be an imitation of Christ as the great shepherd of the flock whom he is to feed by diligent preaching of the word. He expands this important point in other works. To perform this duty a pastor requires spiritual wisdom and understanding in the mysteries of the gospel that he may declare unto the church "all the counsel of God". He also needs experience of the

1. Ibid. Article XII

2. Thomas Hooker: Works vol. 2 p. 74. Quoted in Visible Saints p. 93

power of the truth he preaches upon his own soul. "He that does not feed on and thrive in the digestion of the food which he provides for others will scarce make it savoury unto them." ¹ He needs 'skill to divide the word aright'. This consists in diligent study of the word and practical wisdom to know what is appropriate food for his hearers. A pastor also requires "a prudent and diligent consideration of the state of the flock" ² over which he is set, so that he may know what are their strengths and weaknesses and preach according to this knowledge. Finally, a zeal for God and compassion for the souls of men must be constantly evidenced, otherwise, there will be no life in the preaching of the word.

The pastor must also be a representation of Christ. First of all with respect to the rule and conduct of the church, for the government of Christ is spiritual and holy, but "what a woful representation of Christ is made by men who undertake to rule the church of Christ with rods and axes, with fire and faggot. Is this to represent the meek and holy king of the church, or rather a devouring tyrant unto the world?" ³

He must represent Christ in his prophetic office as the great teacher of the church, for the principle work of ministers is "to preach the word in season and out of season". (2 Timothy 4:2).

Christ is also to be represented in the "imitable part of his sacerdotal office; which, is, to make continual

1. Works vol. 16 p. 76
2. Works vol. 16 p. 76
3. Works vol. 9 p. 437

prayers and intercessions for the saints." ¹ They must pray particularly for the success of the preaching of the word, for strength for the church to withstand the temptations it is generally exposed to, for the physical and spiritual state of the individual members of the church, for the continual presence of Christ in the assemblies of the church and for the preservation of the church in faith, love and fruitfulness.

The third way the pastor is to represent Christ is in his zeal for all the concerns of Christ in the church. These concerns are many and various and include the correct administration of the seals of the covenant. The pastor is to consider all the necessary circumstances of their administration and he is to take care that these holy things be administered only to those who are worthy according to the rule of the gospel. The pastor's zeal must also ensure that he preserve the truth or doctrine of the gospel. This means that he himself must have a clear, sound, comprehensive knowledge and love of the entire doctrine of the gospel and a conscientious avoidance of giving encouragement to novel opinions. He must also be able to refute from the Scriptures those holding opinions contrary to the truth and must keep a diligent watch over their own flocks in case these errors take root in them.

Zeal for Christ must inevitably be shown by a constant labouring for the conversion of souls unto God, particularly by the preaching of the word. It will be shown by a care for Christ's church; a readiness "to comfort, relieve and

1. Works vol. 9 p. 437

refresh those that are tempted, tossed, wearied with fears." ¹ "The tongue of the learned" is required in them, "that they should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary." '(Isaiah 50:4). The practical duties of care of the poor and visitation of the sick, and, very important, the rule and government of the church, are also required of pastors.

Zeal for Christ is shown in attempting to live a life which is pleasing to him, that is "a humble, holy, exemplary conversation, in all godliness and honesty." ²

These, then, are the duties of the pastor of a church, but we must now turn to a consideration of the other elders of the church.

According to Owen, the Scripture teaches that there is a work and duty of rule in the church, distinct from the work and duty of pastoral feeding and that obviously different and distinct gifts are required for the discharge of these distinct works and duties. The work of rule, as distinct from teaching is in general to watch over the walking of the members of the church with authority. Now the work and duty of the ministry in prayer and the preaching of the word is ordinarily enough to occupy the pastor wholly, because Christ makes provision for the office of ruling elders as distinct from teaching elders. But this does not mean that those called unto the ministry of the word as pastors and teachers (for these are elders

1. Works: vol. 16 p. 85

2. Works: vol. 16 p. 88

also) have not the right to rule in the church. The ruling elders, who are not called to teach, are appointed to help them in the government of the church. This distinction between teaching elders and ruling elders is common to all Calvinist teachers on the subject.

Owen bases his argument for the existence of both teaching and ruling elders on several passages of Scripture, including Romans 12:6-8: "Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given us, whether ... ministry let us wait on our ministering, or he that teacheth on teaching; ... he that ruleth, with diligence." But the most important passage is found in 1 Timothy 5:17: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in the word and doctrine." Here the words clearly assign two sorts of elders, some of which attend to rule only and others who attend also to 'the word and doctrine'. Owen expounds this text in 'The True Nature of the Gospel Church': "This is the substance of the truth in the text:- There are elders in the church; there are or ought to be so in every church. With these elders the whole rule of the church is intrusted; all these and only they, do rule in it. Of these elders there are two sorts; for a description is given of one sort distinctive from the other and comparative with it. The first sort doth rule and also labour in the word and doctrine. These works are distinct and different; yet as distinct works they are not incompatible, but are committed

unto the same person. They are so unto them who are not elders only, but moreover, pastors or teachers. Unto pastors and teachers as such there belongs no rule; although by the institution of Christ the right of rule be inseparable from their office, for all that are rightfully called thereunto are elders also, which gives them an interest in rule. They are elders, with the addition of pastoral or teaching authority. But there are elders which are not pastors or teachers; for there are some who rule well, but labour not in the word and doctrine - that is, who are not pastors or teachers. Elders that rule well but labour not in the word and doctrine, are ruling elders only."¹

The authority of rulers of the church is, however, neither autocratical, nor legislative nor absolute, but ministerial only. By nature it is spiritual; its object is spiritual, that is, the souls and consciences of men; its end is spiritual, that is, the glory of God in the guidance of the minds and souls of Christians; and the law of it is spiritual, that is, the command and direction of Christ.

This authority then, is committed to the elders, but although they were chosen and set apart to their office by the church, yet they were actually made overseers by the Holy Spirit, and therefore, although they have their powers to rule by the church, they do not have it from the church. Their authority therefore comes from Christ himself who appointed the offices and chose them to fill it. The

1. Works vol. 16 p. 116/17.

reason for which the consent of the church is required for the authoritative acting of the elders in it, is not because they have their authority from the church but because no act can take place in the church without or against its own consent whilst its obedience is voluntary, of choice.

What do the elders need in order to carry out their duties of rule in the church and the administration and church government? As the sole rule and measure of the government of the church is the law of Christ as recorded in the Scriptures, the elders need to have a clear understanding of Christ's will as revealed in them and to be able to apply it unto the edification of the church. This rule of Christ in the Scriptures reveals that the elders have a threefold duty in the church. They are to regulate the admission and exclusion of members. "Every righteous, voluntary society, coalescing therein rightfully, upon known laws and rules for the regulation of it unto certain ends, hath naturally a power inherent in it, and inseparable from it, to receive unto its incorporation such as being meet for it, do voluntarily offer themselves thereunto; as also to reject or withhold the privileges of the society from such as refuse to be regulated by the laws of the society."¹ This power belongs to the whole church, but is administered on their behalf by their elected elders.

Their second duty is the direction of the church and

1. Works vol. 16 p. 136

all its members unto the observance of the rule and law of Christ in all things, unto his glory and their own edification, and the third is the management of all the practical details in the church, for example the management of church meetings and assemblies.

These are the general duties of all elders, but there are more specific duties which are assigned to either the teaching or the ruling elders. The teaching elders, of course, have the responsibility of assisting the pastor in his work of teaching or preaching the gospel. The ruling elders are, in particular to attend to the rule and discipline of the church, taking care that the commands of Christ are kept by the members. For example, they must watch over the lives of the members of the church to see that they are blameless and exemplary, and must instruct, admonish, exhort, encourage or comfort as they see cause. They are to watch out for the appearance of any divisions or disorders in the church. They are to visit the sick and imprisoned and to help and advise the deacons with the organisation of poor relief. They are to acquaint the pastor with the state of his flock and consult with the other elders about all the things which concern the present duty of the church.

The third order of officers within the church is that of the deacons. Owen explains that deacons are "approved men chosen by the church to take care for the necessities of the poor belonging thereunto, and other outward

occasions of the whole church, by the collection, keeping and distribution of the alms and other supplies of the church; set apart and commended to the grace of God therein by prayer." ¹ The institution of the office of deacon is described in Acts 6: "There arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen .. whom they set before the apostles and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them."

It appears from Scripture therefore that the persons called are to be of honest report and furnished with the gifts of the Holy Ghost especially with wisdom and that they are to be elected by the whole church. Their duty was to minister to the needs of the poor saints or church members. To do this properly they had to acquaint themselves with the outward condition of those that appear to be poor and needy in the church and inform the elders and church of what was necessary for the alleviation of poverty and suffering amongst the church-members. Their duty was to dispose of what they were entrusted with faithfully and without partiality and to give an account to the church of

1. Works vol. 15 p. 506

what they have received and how they have disposed of it.

Dale quotes an interesting account of the organisation of the church of Congregationalist exiles at Amsterdam, which shows that as well as several deacons, they seemed ahead of their time in also electing a deaconess: "Before their division and breach they were about three hundred communicants; and they had for their pastor and teacher those two eminent men before named (Francis Johnson and and Henry Ainsworth), and in our time four grave men for ruling elders and three able and goodly men for deacons, also one ancient widow for a deaconess, who did give them service for many years although she was sixty years of age when she was chosen. She honoured her place and was an ornament to the congregation. She usually sat in a convenient place in the congregation with a little birchen rod in her hand and kept little children in great awe from disturbing the congregation. She did frequently visit the sick and the weak and especially women; and, as there was need, called out maids and young women to watch them and do them helps as their necessity did require: and if they were poor, she would garner relief for them of those that were able, or acquainted the deacons, and she was obeyed as a mother in Israel and an officer of Christ." ¹

There is, of course, New Testament precedent for the appointment of deaconesses. In chapter sixteen of his letter to the Romans, Paul commends to them Phoebe, 'a

1. Quoted in Dale: Manual of Congregational Principles
p. 113

deaconess of the church at Cenchrease'.

We have considered the duties of the officers to the church, but what are the duties of the church to the officers? Owen considers that they must hold them in honour for the sake of the office they hold and the work they are doing and obey them conscientiously in all they say in the name of the Lord; that they pray earnestly for them, that they may, and exhort them, if need be, to fulfil the work of the ministry, that they supply their material needs, and that they stand with them and support them in their sufferings for the gospel.

We have discussed what, according to Owen, is the Scriptural organisation of the true church-state. But what are the ends for which Christ appointed this church-state?

Owen considers that there are three main ends: - the preaching of the word, the administration of the sacraments and the exercise of discipline. The Reformers all held to the vital importance of preaching; from one of the earliest men who could be called a reformer, John Hus, who believed that preaching is necessary to salvation, to the Puritan, Stephen Marshall, who, two hundred and thirty years later, told the House of Commons that the preaching of the word was a chariot on which salvation came riding into the hearts of men. The proposition that preaching was one of the marks of the true church had been laid down by Luther and the Augsburg Confession, by Calvin and Bullinger, by the Thirty-Nine Articles and the Homilies. U

The Puritans regarded preaching to be more important than the sacraments, since although theologically they were a particular application of the gospel to the individual, such was the emphasis placed on the Word, that the sacraments came to be regarded as but dramatic representations of the Word and therefore necessarily subordinate to the Gospel. The sacraments were, indeed, seals of the Word and their value should not therefore be depreciated, but "for the Puritan, who emphasised the great abyss that separated God from man, it was more important that God should cross it and speak to him through the sermon, than that he should traverse it in prayer and praise."¹

Owen was recognised in his day as one of the greatest of the Puritan preachers. He believed that there were three purposes which preaching should promote. The first is 'the conversion of the souls of men unto God'; they are to be warned of the perils of sin and persuaded to turn to God. The second object is 'the edification of them that are converted unto God and do believe'; as Christ commanded, they are to feed the sheep and the lambs of his flock. The third purpose is to 'promote the growth of light, knowledge, godliness, strictness and fruitfulness of conversation in the members of the household of faith.'²

The practical aim of the preacher determined even the structure of his sermon. There were usually three main

1. Davies: Worship of the English Puritans p. 183

2. Works vol. 15 pp. 115-18

divisions: the doctrine, the reason, the use, that is, the declaration, the explanation and the application of the Christian faith.

So important did the Puritans believe the sermon to be that they insisted that they 'should not die at their birth'. The preachers used alliteration for the main divisions of the sermon in order to facilitate the remembering of them. It became a common practice for the members of the congregations to make notes during the sermon and to learn the main points at home. Indeed, many of Owen's sermons were preserved only because Sir John Hartopp, a close friend, took down verbatim many of the sermons in shorthand whilst Owen was preaching, afterwards transcribing them into longhand and carefully preserving them..

Often, the head of a Puritan household would gather his children and servants together on a Sunday evening, and sometimes during the week as well, and ask them questions about the sermons they had heard during the day. Some pastors used to call unexpectedly at the houses of their church-members to see if they could repeat the sermon and then questioned them to make sure that they really understood what they had heard.

The insatiable appetite for sermons among the Puritans led to the growth of a group of freelance preachers called lecturers. These were usually Anglican Puritans who had been ordained and were therefore qualified to preach but

who had been appointed to no benefice. The lecturer's congregation assembled voluntarily and subscribed to pay for the lecturer. Many of these voluntarily maintained lectureships evolved in the direction of Congregational independency. But the official government policy was to harry lecturers. Archbishop Laud believed that, by their economic dependence they were "the people's creatures, and blow the bellows of their sedition." ¹

In spite of such opposition, however, the people's thirst for sermons was not abated. Twice each Sunday and several times during the week they listened to sermons of at least an hour's duration which were usually very detailed and deeply theological. Because each man was responsible to God for his own salvation and for his own understanding of God's truths, the Puritan preachers tried to ensure that each member of their congregations had a firm grasp of all the great Biblical doctrines. John Bunyan tells of how deeply moved he was before his conversion by overhearing the conversation of two ordinary Bedford housewives who were discussing theological issues with knowledge and understanding as they stood on their doorsteps. Theology now belonged to the people instead of simply to the church divines!

Together with true preaching, discipline was regarded by all Calvinists as one of the marks of the true church. "An iron discipline it was; but when allowed to operate it

1. Quoted in Hill: Society and Puritanism p. 111

produced men of the same quality, capable of standing up to crowned monarchs without flinching." ¹ Hill points out that in their insistence on this 'iron discipline', the Puritan preachers were challenging the whole ecclesiastical order. "Discipline I wanted in the church, and saw the sad effects of its neglect. But I did not understand that the very frame of diocesan prelacy excluded it, but thought it had been only the bishops' personal neglects," ² wrote Richard Baxter. Professor H. J. C. Grierson explained: "It is not what Land did that Baxter seems to complain of, so much as what he would not allow them, the parish pastors, to do, viz. to exercise a moral discipline co-extensive with the parish". ³

The fact was that the courts of the established church had their own standards of discipline, inherited from before the Reformation. But these standards had become more and more out of touch with those which prevailed among the congregations and so the disciplinary system came to be regarded as something alien, imposed from outside. A great part of the strength of the Puritan concept of discipline was that it would have restored a local immediacy to the censures of the church. Instead of an anonymous lay chancellor administering from a distance an obsolete law, the minister and elders of the parish

1. Knappen: Tudor Puritanism pp. 92f
2. Reliquiae Baxterianae I p. 14
3. Cross Currents in English Literature in the Seventeenth Century (1948) p. 185. Quoted in Hill: Society and Puritanism p. 240

would have spoken paternally to and for the congregation about matters on which both parties had first hand knowledge.

The Puritans, then, revolted against the ecclesiastical courts. They maintained that the word 'ἐκκλησία' in Christ's command 'Go, tell it to the church', meant congregation, not an unknown, unseen, professional lawyer attached to the church courts. In 1632 a Durham gentleman complained bitterly of these church courts: "You officers have gotten a trick to call many poor men into your courts, and thereupon to excommunicate them and then to bring them into the court of the High Commission. ... The King's people and we all do suffer and groan under the burden thereof. ... Their courts ... are but bawdy courts and merely to oppress people and get money for themselves." ¹

The Puritan system brought the whole process of discipline within the familial setting of the local congregation, but Davies remarks that there were dangers in this system also, into which some of the Puritan churches fell. He feels that there was the danger of ethical earnestness evaporating into legalistic scrupulesity. The loving concern with which church members were to watch over one another's conversation could degenerate into hypocrisy and lead to the whole church acting as informers for the most trifling offences.. However, as Owen points out, just because the system is open to abuse, it does not mean that it should not be used at all, if one is convinced

1. Quoted in Hill: Society and Puritanism p. 311.

that it is Scriptural. And Owen is convinced that this system of discipline is scriptural, as he explains in "A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God;"

He first of all defines what he means by 'the discipline of the church'. "It consists in the due exercise of that authority and power which the Lord Christ, in and by his word, hath granted unto the church, for its continuance, increase and preservation in purity, order and holiness, according to his appointment." ¹

The foundation of this discipline is a grant of power and authority to the church from Christ; the means by which Christ communicates this power and authority unto his Church is his law concerning it in the gospel; the purpose of this discipline is the continuance, increase and preservation of the church according to the rule of its first institution. This includes "the preservation of the doctrine of the gospel in its purity, and obedience unto the commands of Christ in its integrity". ² The suppression of doctrinal errors by external force, "by the sword of the magistrates, in prisons, fines, banishments and deaths, was not then thought of, nor directed unto by the Lord Jesus Christ, but is highly dishonourable unto him; as though the ways of his own appointment were not sufficient for the preservation of his own truth, but that his disciples must betake themselves unto the secular powers of this world, who for the most part are wicked, profane

1. Works vol. 15 p. 512

2. Ibid p. 265

and ignorant of the truth, for that end." ¹

The second purpose of discipline is the preservation of love entire among disciples. This is done by the prevention or removal of offences that might arise among believers, and in mutual exhortation and admonition. Discipline is also to gain the offender, by delivering him from the guilt of sin and therefore from the wrath of God; it is to preserve his person from dishonour and therefore keep up his usefulness in the church. This is why Christ appointed the discharge of this duty in private, that the failings of men may not be unnecessarily divulged. Discipline is to preserve the church from that scandal that might befall it by the hasty opening of all the real or supposed failings of its members.

The power and administration of this discipline is committed by Jesus Christ in the first place to the elders of the church, as a part of their duty of rule in the church. Their authority consists in "personal private admonition of any member or members of the church, in case of sin, error or any miscarriage known unto themselves; in public admonition in case of offences persisted in, and brought orderly to the knowledge and consideration of the church; in the ejection of obstinate offenders from the society and communion of the church; in exhorting, comforting and restoring to the enjoyment and exercise of the church privileges such as are recovered from the error of their ways: all according to the laws, rules and

direction of the gospel." ¹

Not only the elders, but the whole body of the church, has an interest in the administration of this power of discipline in the church. Their duty is to consider the temptations of the offenders and the nature of their offence when they are put before the whole church and to judge with the elders what is necessary to be done for the good of the offenders themselves and for the edification and vindication of the whole church. They are also entrusted with the privilege of giving their consent to all actions of church-power, to the admonition, ejection, pardoning and restoring of offenders, as the matter shall require.

Not only does the church as a body have a responsibility concerning the discipline of the church, but so does each individual member of the church. "It is their duty, in their mutual watch over one another, to exhort each other unto holiness and perseverance; and if they observe anything in the ways and walkings of any of their fellow-members not according unto the rule and the duty of their profession, which, therefore, gives them offence, to admonish them thereof in private, with love, meekness and wisdom: and in case they prevail not unto their amendment, to take the assistance of some other brethren in the same work; and if they fail in success therein also, to report the matter by the elders' direction unto the whole church." These duties are based on Christ's words in Matthew 18: 16-18.

1. Works vol. 15 p. 516

The whole duty of discipline should be grounded in 'love without dissimulation',¹ and carried out in such a way that the person offending may be convinced that it is done out of love and care for him and in obedience to an institution of Christ.

If private admonition fails to reclaim the offending brother, a report of the whole matter should be made by the elders to the whole church. The report should consist of an account of the offence, the testimony given as to the truth of it, the means used to bring the offender to repentance and his behaviour under the previous private admonitions. After the offender has been given the opportunity to speak, the whole church together with the elders are to judge the offence in a spirit of love. If the offence is found to be evident and persistent, the offender is to be publicly admonished by the elders, with the consent of the church. If the offender despises this admonition and refuses to repent, he is to be excommunicated.

The Puritan idea of excommunication was very different from that prevalent amongst their contemporaries for whom it was not just a spiritual sanction but also a legal one. The excommunicated person could not buy or sell, could not be employed, could not sue or give evidence in the courts (and so could not recover debts), could not make a will or receive a legacy, or serve as administrator or guardian. All these are economic penalties; what Bishop Hacket called 'discipline by the purse'. Worse still, an

excommunicate could be imprisoned. If he had not submitted to the authority of the church within forty days the secular power might be invoked. If Chancery issued the writ 'De excommunicate capiendo', sheriffs were expected to sieze the excommunicate and commit him to gaol until he submitted to the laws of the church and was absolved. Eventually men grew to fear excommunication, not as a spiritual discipline but because the power of the state was also involved. "Men do not care for excommunication, because they are shut out of the church, or delivered up to Satan, but because the law of the Kingdom takes hold of them." ¹

It was Henry Parker who finally 'kicked punishment for sin upstairs into the after life', by putting before those who defended the secular sanctions of excommunication a set of propositions to which they could find no answer: "In case of utter impenitence and open perverseness, heaven is shut without the minister's power: and in case of feigned penitence, the minister's key cannot open effectually, though he discern not the fraud: and in case of true penitence, if the minister be mistaken, yet heaven will not remain shut." ²

Owen, himself is at pains to declare that excommunication is a spiritual not a temporal measure. It is an authoritative act belonging to the elders of the church with the consent of the body of the church, and its effect

1. Selden: Table Talk p. 69. Quoted in Hill: Society and Puritanism p. 362
2. The True Grounds of Ecclesiastical Regiment (1641) p. 69 Quoted in Hill: Society and Puritanism p. 369

is to cut off the offender from the communion of the church so that he is left unto the visible kingdom of Satan in the world. But the purpose of the act is to win back the offender by bringing him to repentance, humiliation and acknowledgement of his offence. It is also to warn others not to act in a similar manner and to preserve the church in its purity and order.

Owen mentions some of the offences which, if obstinately persisted in, would deserve excommunication. These include moral evils ('and in cases of this nature, the church may proceed unto the sentence whereof we speak without previous admonition in case the matter of fact be notorious, publicly and unquestionably known to be true')¹, offences against the mutual love of the church, false doctrines against the fundamentals in faith or worship, blasphemy and total causeless desertion of the communion of the church, 'for such are self-condemned, having broken and renounced the covenant of God, that they made at their entrance into the church'.² But the excommunicate is still to be regarded as a brother because his excommunication is intended for his amendment and recovery: "Count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (2 Thessalonians 3:15). The only exception to this, is if he shows his final impenitency by blasphemy and persecution: "Whom I delivered unto Satan, that they

1. Works vol. 15 p. 522

2. Ibid p. 523

may learn not to blaspheme.." (1 Timothy 1:20).

As he is still a brother, the church must still perform their duties of love and care towards him. They must pray for him that he "may be converted from the error of his way". (James 5: 19, 20). They must withdraw from him in order that he may be convicted of his state and condition: "With such an one no not to eat" (Corinthians 5:11), and they must admonish him 'as a brother'.

If, under these conditions, the excommunicate repents, he is to be forgiven, both by those whom he offended and by the whole church. The church must comfort him by showing him in the Scriptures the promises of Christ's forgiveness, and manifesting their readiness to receive him back into the love and communion of the church. And so, the repentant excommunicate must be finally restored and re-admitted into the exercise and full enjoyment of his former privileges in the fellowship of the church. Restoration in the fellowship of both God and the church is, then, the purpose of the discipline of excommunication.

The third purpose and mark of the true church is the administration of the sacraments. The Congregationalists believed that God's Spirit had elected two means by which to work on men's hearts, the word and the sacraments. The sacraments, as seals of God's covenant, ought to be administered only by an ordained pastor and only to the faithful. This means that not only a pastor but a genuine coetus fidelium was a sine qua non. Where there was no pastor, the ordinances would not be celebrated. For

example, the Pilgrim Fathers lived without the ordinances for many years. This led to a weakening of the idea that the sacraments were indispensable, and to a strengthening of the idea that the preaching of the word was more important than the celebration of the sacraments.

Baptism could be administered to 'professing believers, if not baptized in their infancy, and their infant seed.'¹ This retention of infant baptism by the Congregationalists, led to the loss of all its sacramental character, because as infants were baptised long before they believed and the church was composed only of believers, baptism meant primarily that believers took a pledge to bring up all those dependent on them in the admonition of the Lord. In other words, baptism was the dedication of the parents rather than of the child. If when the child grew up, he became a believer, he would enter into full membership of the church by making a covenant with the other members of the church, to walk in love and fellowship with God and with them.

Certain Independents, however, rejected infant baptism and seceded in order to form the first Baptist church. They taught that baptism was for believers only, as it was a sign of being associated with Christ in his death and resurrection and no-one was so associated until he was converted. It was wrong therefore to baptise infants who might grow up to spurn Christ. Baptism was also, according

1. Works vol. 15 p. 512

to the New Testament teaching, the means of entry into the church. As no-one but believers should enter the church, so no-one but believers should be baptised. They regarded the Congregationalists as being untrue to the New Testament in replacing baptism with the covenant as the means of entry.

Owen, however, defended the baptism of children of believing parents in a tract entitled 'Of Infant Baptism'. He maintained that "no instance can be given from the Old or New Testament since the days of Abraham, none from the approved practice of the primitive church, of any person or persons born of professing believing parents, who were themselves made partakers of the initial seal of the covenant, being then in infancy and designed to be brought up in the knowledge of God, who were not made partakers with them of the same sign and seal of the covenant." ¹

He further argued that 'all children in their infancy are reckoned unto the covenant of their parents, by virtue of the law of their creation "for it is contrary to the justice of God and the law of the creation of human-kind, wherein many died before they can discern between their right hand and their left, to deal with infants any otherwise but in and according to the covenant of their parents." ²

Another argument he uses is from the reference in

1. Works vol. 16 p. 258
2. Works vol. 16 p. 260

Malachi 3: 1 to the Christ as 'the messenger of the covenant', 'that is', he says 'of the covenant of God made with Abraham'. The covenant was that he would be 'a God unto Abraham and to his seed'. If this covenant did not persist under the new testament, then was not Christ a faithful messenger, nor did confirm the truth of God in his promises.' ¹ Any denial of this continuity, Owen believes, 'overthrows the whole relation between the old testament and the new, the veracity of God in his promises, and all the properties of the covenant of grace.' ²

Not only was the subject matter of baptism in dispute, but also the method. The Independents, Presbyterians and Anglicans practised sprinkling, but the Baptists believed that total immersion was the only way which truly symbolised the association with Christ's death and resurrection. The recipient of baptism went down into the water, the place of death and rose again out of it into the fresh air, the place of life.

Although the Anglicans and Independents were in agreement over the baptising of infants by sprinkling, there were certain features of the Anglican Baptismal service which were criticised by the Independents and indeed by all Puritans. They disapproved of the crossing of the child in baptism; "But of all our ceremonies, there is none that I have more suspected to be simply unlawful than the cross in Baptism." ³ They believed that this was

1. Works p. 261 Vol. 16

2. Ibid p. 262

3. Richard Baxter: Quoted in Davies: Worship of the English Puritans p. 217

to add to the prescribed worship of God.

They disliked the Anglican requirement that god-parents should answer the interrogatories on the child's behalf, promising that it should be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. The Puritans maintained that the parents themselves alone should be responsible for the spiritual well-being of the child. As they so frequently pointed out, the Scripture promise is 'to you and to your children', and therefore children were baptised on the understanding that their parents were believers and would train their children to be so.

The third criticism was against the not infrequent custom of private baptism by a private person. Puritans maintained that baptism was a sacrament of the church and that it ought therefore to be administered in the church by an ordained minister.

The Puritans never used the titles 'communion' or 'eucharist', preferring to call this sacrament 'the Lord's Supper'. This title was an indication of puritan loyalty to the word of God. They believed that no other name sufficiently indicated the Dominical authority for this sacrament or its Scriptural foundation. They frequently criticised the communion service of the Anglican church for its variations from the Scriptural precedent. This, they felt, implied the insufficiency of the Scriptures as a guide to worship. They, on the contrary maintained the all sufficiency and the clarity of the Word of God as a liturgical guide. But, if this was the case in theory,

it was not substantiated in practice. There is a considerable diversity of modes of celebration of communion amongst the Puritans, which implies that the guidance of the Scriptures was not as definite as the Puritans suggested.

The Independent celebration of the Lord's Supper varied from accepted Reformed usage both in point of frequency and also in the manner of the delivery of the elements. Owen, on behalf of the Independents, stated that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated "every first day of the week, or at least as often as opportunity and conveniency may be obtained." ¹ The Baptists, however, administered it once a month.

It was the Reformed custom for the receivers of the elements of the Lord's Supper to come to the Lord's Table and to partake of the elements whilst sitting around the table. The Independents, however, used to receive the elements sitting in their pews. Either the bread and wine were brought to them by the Deacons, who sat at the table with the Minister, or by the Minister himself. All Puritans, of course, rejected the posture of kneeling at communion which they believed lent colour to the doctrine of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

A further Independent innovation was the characteristic double consecration at their communion services. Their reason for its introduction was Christ's precedent given at the Last Supper, when he blessed both bread and wine.

1. Works vol. 15 p. 512

To sum up, although the Independents agreed with Richard Sibbes that 'There is grace by them (that is, the ordinances), though not in them',¹ and although the correct administration of the sacraments was regarded as a mark of a true church, they were in practice subordinated to the all important task of the preaching of the gospel for the salvation of sinners and the edification of the saints.

1. Works IV p. 295. Quoted in Nuttall: The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience p. 91

5.

SCHISM

This doctrine of the church held by Owen and the Independents led to their being charged with schism. Both the Anglicans and the Presbyterians believed in the concept of the ^{community} national church. The Congregational practice of drawing the visible saints out of the parochial church to form a gathered church seemed to them to be spurning the communion of the true (that is, the national) church and therefore to be schismatical.

Owen and his fellow Independents denied the very validity of a national church because Christ had never instituted such a church and in an age when the close association (not to say, the identity) of the church, the State and society was still scarcely questioned, this also seemed to imply an attitude dangerous to government and disruptive of social relationship. "Does not this open a door to all confusion, in church and State and give every man (all as well as any) liberty, if they judge anything amiss in church or State, to turn Reformers, if Superiors cannot or will not Reform it. ... I think I may safely say, this is an Anabaptisticall Munster principle, at the bottome: and say no more." ¹

Therefore, Owen was attacked on two fronts, two of his chief opponents being Dr. Stillingfleet, an Anglican, and Daniel Cawdrey, a Presbyterian.

In his work entitled 'Of Schism', Owen examines the Scriptural import of the term schism and argues that it

1. Cawdrey: Independency a Great Schism (1657) pp. 189ff.

means not a rupture in ecclesiastical communion, but causeless divisions within the pale of a local church.

He points out that in its ecclesiastical sense, the word 'schism' is used frequently by Paul in 1 Corinthians denoting 'differences of mind and judgement with troubles ensuing thereon, amongst men met in some one assembly, about the compassing of a common end and design'.¹

Therefore, according to Paul, for people to be guilty of schism it is required that they and those from whom they separate belong to one church; that they raise or entertain causeless differences with others of that church, and that these differences appertain to the worship of God. It does not have the meaning which the Anglicans and Presbyterians put on it, that is 'a causeless separation from the communion and worship of any true church of Christ.'² In fact, separation from some churches is commanded in Scripture "so that the withdrawing from or relinquishment of any church or society whatever, upon the plea of its corruption, be it true or false, with a mind and resolution to serve God in the due observation of church institutions, is nowhere called schism, nor condemned as a thing of that nature, but is a matter that must be tried out; whether it be good or evil, by virtue of such general rules and directions as are given us in the Scriptures for our orderly and blameless walking with God in all his ways."³

1. Works vol. 13 p. 101

2. Ibid p. 110

3. Ibid p. 110

Schism therefore is defined by Owen as 'a causeless division or difference amongst the members of any particular church that meet together, or ought to do so, for the worship of God and celebration by the same numerical ordinances, to the disturbance of the order appointed by Jesus Christ, and contrary to that exercise of love in wisdom and mutual forbearance which is required of them.'¹

The guilt of schism, avers Owen, lies in the despising of the authority of Jesus Christ whereby he commanded his people to have peace with one another; the despising of the wisdom of Jesus Christ, whereby he has ordered all things in his church to prevent schism; and the disregarding of the grace and goodness of Christ whence he has promised peace which the world cannot give.

This being the case, says Owen, wherein does the guilt of the Independents consist, for there are no disputes and contentions within the Independent assemblies. Their separation from the Anglican church is not, according to Scripture, schism: "For a man to withdraw or withhold himself from the communion external and visible of any church or churches, on the pretension and plea, be it true or otherwise, that the worship, doctrine or discipline instructed by Christ is corrupted among them, with which corruption he dares not defile himself, it is nowhere in the Scripture called schism."² Note, for example, 2

1. Works vol. 13 p. 112

2. Ibid p. 122

Thessalonians 3:16 "Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the tradition which he received from us."

According to Owen, schism is a breach of the union instituted by Christ. To prove that the Independents are not guilty of such a breach of union, Owen discusses the nature of the union involved in each of the three acceptations of the word 'church'.

He deals firstly with the church catholic invisible which consists only of the elect. The union which the church in this sense has from its head Jesus Christ, is its union with him as the members are united to the head, and therefore to each other, and the inhabitation of the same Spirit in him and them, whereby they are made partakers of the divine nature.

A breach in this union must therefore consist in the casting out and losing that Spirit, which, abiding in us, gives us this union, and the loss of that love which then flows into the body of Christ and believers as members of it.

But this can hardly be called schism, and, says Owen, 'unless men can prove that we have not the Spirit of God, that we do not savingly believe in Jesus Christ, that we do not sincerely love all the saints, his whole body and every member of it, they cannot disprove our interest in the catholic church.'¹ Besides which, he adds, schism against

1. Works vol. 13 p. 132

the church catholic invisible is utterly impossible, for only the elect are members of this church and every saint will persevere to the end. It is therefore impossible for anyone, having been elected into the church catholic invisible, to separate from it or be lost to it.

He deals next with the Catholic Church Visible - the 'universality of men professing the doctrine of the gospel and obedience to God in Christ according to it, throughout the world.' ¹ The union of this church cannot be the same as that of the catholic church invisible because many belong to it who are not 'in Christ'. It does, however, consist in 'One Lord, One Faith, One Baptism.' "It is the unity of the doctrine of faith which men profess, in subjection to one Lord, Jesus Christ, being initiated into that profession by baptism." ²

The preservation of this union requires that all the grand and necessary truths of the gospel be visibly and outwardly professed. It requires that no other internal principle of mind, inconsistent with these truths be manifested; for example, a wicked life. Lastly, it requires that no false doctrine be professed.

No-one, declares Owen confidently, can prove that the Independents are guilty of a breach of this union. Such a breach would not, in any case, be schism but heresy, apostacy or profligacy.

1. Works vol. 13 p. 137

2. Ibid p. 145

Finally, Owen deals with the particular church which is 'a society of men called by the word to the obedience of the faith in Christ, and joint performance of the worship of God in the same individual ordinances, according to the order by Christ prescribed.' ¹

The union of such a church is "the joint consent of all members of it, in obedience to the command of Christ, from a principle of love, to walk together in the universal celebration of all the ordinances of the worship of God, instituted and appointed to be celebrated in such a church and to perform all the duties and offices of love which, in reference to one another, in their respective stations and places, are by God required of them, and doing so accordingly, is the union inquired after." ²

This being the case, the secession of any man or men from a particular church is not necessarily schism, but is to be judged according to its circumstances. If they depart without strife and the condemning of others, because according to the light of their consciences, they cannot in all things in them worship God according to his mind, they are not schismatics.

Owen declares that the Independents cannot be guilty of schism against the national church in the presbyterian sense because there has never been any such thing. No more can they be schismatics from the Church of England, because

1. Works vol. 13 p. 174

2. Ibid p. 179/80

they have never become members of it by their own voluntary consent and have therefore never broken any bond or disturbed any unity.

He concludes his arguments thus: 'Here then I profess to rest, in this doth my conscience acquiesce: Whilst I have any comfortable persuasion, on grounds infallible, that I hold the head, and that I am by faith a member of the mystical body of Christ: whilst I make profession of all the necessary saving truths of the gospel; whilst I disturb not the peace of that particular church whereof by my own consent I am a member, nor do raise up nor continue in any causeless differences with them, or any of them with whom I walk in the fellowship and order of the gospel: whilst I labour to exercise faith towards the Lord Jesus Christ, and love towards all the saints, - I do keep the unity which is of the appointment of Christ. And let men say, from principles utterly foreign to the gospel, what they please or can to the contrary, I am no schismatic.'¹

Owen's work 'Of Schism' provoked a reply from Daniel Cawdrey, a Presbyterian minister. He wrote 'Independency a Great Schism' in 1657 to which Owen replied in the same year with 'A Review of the True Nature of Schism.' Cawdrey answered this in 1658 with 'Independency further proved to be a Schism,' and Owen had the last word in this particular round of polemics with 'An Answer to a Late

1. Works vol. 13 p. 205

Treatise of Mr. Cawdrey about the Nature of Schism.'

The main burden of Cawdrey's arguments in all his works is to refute Owen's rejection of the catholic visible church as an institutional body. Owen states this rejection in 'Of Schism.' "Some have said, and do yet say, that the church in this sense is a visible, organical, political body. That it is visible is confessed; both its matter and form bespeak visibility, as an inseparable adjunct of its subsisting. That it is a body also in the general sense wherein that word is used, or a society of men embodied by the profession of the same faith, is also granted. Organical in this business is an ambiguous term; the use of it is plainly metaphorical, taken from the members, instruments and organs of a natural body. Because Paul hath said that in "one body there are many members, as eyes, feet, hands, yet the body is but one, so is the church," it hath usually been said that the church is an organical body. What church Paul speaks of in that place is not evident, but what he alludes unto is. The difference he speaks of in the individual persons of the church, is not in respect of office, power and authority, but gifts or graces, and usefulness on that account. Such an organical body we confess the church catholic visible to be. In it are persons endued with variety of gifts and graces for the benefit and ornament of the whole.

An organical political body is a thing of another nature. ... An entire form of regimen and government peculiar thereunto is required for the constitution of a

distinct political body. In this sense we deny the church whereof we speak to be an organical, political body, as not having indeed any of the requisites thereunto, not one law of order. ... All the members of it are obliged to the same law of order and polity in their several societies; but the whole as such hath no such law. It hath no such head or governor, as such. Nor will it suffice to say that Christ is its head; for if, as a visible political body, it hath a political head, that head also must be visible." ¹

This was the deepest thrust of the whole Congregational argument. Not only did they plead the duty of separation from the church because of false worship, but they said that the Church of England, as a national church, and therefore the catholic church visible in England, was not, and never had been, truly the church at all, because the church in the institutional sense did not exist. Therefore, if the body which those accused of schism were charged with rending never was, never could have been, the church, then obviously there could be no schism from it. It is obvious then, why Owen's opponents were determined to refute this argument.

In 'A Review of Mr. Hooker's Survey of Church Discipline', Cawdrey argues "The prime mistake and cause of many (if not all) the following deviations in the Independent way, seems to lie here, that whatever they find spoken of the House,

1. Works vol. 13 pp. 151/2

Body, Church of Christ, they apply to a Congregation of Visible Saints, denying and indeed deriding an universal visible church as a Chymaera.' ¹

He declares that the whole multitude of professors in all places of the world, are the body, house, city, kingdom of Christ and that this body may be fairly said to be political. Christ himself is the political head of the whole church so the whole must therefore be a political body. This political nature cannot be limited to a particular congregation but is true of the whole church first and secondarily of a particular congregation which is but a member of that body.

Cawdrey was preceded in his arguments for the existence of the catholic visible church by Samuel Hudson, presbyterian minister at Capell in Suffolk who, in 1649, wrote in 'The Essence and Unity of the Church Catholic Visible', "There are two sievs or garbles which God useth, the first is, to sift the world into a visible Ecclesiastical body, over which Christ is a mystical, political, governing head and ruler, and this sieve is managed by the hands of the ministers; the second is to sift the visible Ecclesiastical body into a spiritual invisible body; and that is in God's hand only." ²

Cawdrey uses the same arguments as Hudson to prove that the church catholic visible exists. Both quote

1. P. 49 (pp 1-46 misplaced at end of book)
2. p. 8 Ibid

Matthew 16:18 'And upon this rock will I build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.'

Cawdrey comments: "If you take the rock for Christ himself and the building on him, for Internal union with him, then the invisible church onely is built upon the rock, and against that the gates of hell shall never prevail. But if you understand the rock to be the confession of Peter, or rather Christ, so confessed, as he was by Peter; and the building on that foundation, for an external profession, or in an outward form; then, I say, the visible church is so founded upon the rock: But this I adde, that it must not be restrained to a particular church (against which the gates of hell have prevailed, which contradicts our Saviour's promise) but declared to be the Catholic visible church ... against which the gates of hell ... shall never prevail." ¹

Both Cawdrey and Hudson quote Acts 8:3: "Saul made havoc of the Church". "It was not of any particular church but the church indefinitely as opposed to the World. Nor was it the catholic invisible church, for they could not know them to be such." (Cawdrey).²

Both mention the fact that the church is often referred to as the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ 'compares this kingdom to a field of wheat mingled with tares. This must be the church visible in this world because it is where the sower ordinarily soweth his seed

1. Vindiciae Vindiciarum p. 12 (pp 1-46 misplaced at the end of book)

2. Ibid p. 7

visibly and audibly, which is the preaching of the Word. And because here are good and bad, wheat and tares, and the tares visibly discerned after the wheat. And it is the Catholic Church, for Christ himself expounds it so, the field is the world ... And this must be the Christian world; for the other is a field of tares onely, where there could be no danger of plucking up of wheat because none grew there. ... It is a barn floor with wheat and chaffe. It is a draw-net gathering together good and bad. It is a marriage, where were wise and foolish virgins, some had oil and some onely lamps of profession. It is a feast, where some had wedding garments, some had none. Now these things cannot be spoken solely or primarily of any particular congregation, but they agree to the church catholic visible." ¹

Owen, however, does not deny the existence of an entity which could be called the church catholic visible, but he strongly denies that Christ had given the ministry and ordinances to it, as it is too amorphous a concept; it cannot meet together or worship together, it cannot hear the word preached together or take communion together. It is only in a particular church that the whole church can meet together so that these actions may be performed and it is therefore only to a particular church that Christ has entrusted the ministry and ordinances.

Over twenty years later, Dr. Edward Stillingfleet, the Dean of St. Paul's, renewed the charge of schism against the

1. Hudson p. 55

Independents in a Sermon entitled 'The Mischief of Separation' preached in 1680 at the Guildhall chapel before the Lord Mayor.

Stillingfleet took as his text Philippians 3:16: "Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same Rule, let us mind the same things."

This text, he says, proves that the apostle presupposed two things: "the necessity of one fixed and certain rule, notwithstanding the different attainments among Christians." ¹ This rule, says Stillingfleet, is not 'only a rule of charity and mutual forbearance with a liberty of different practice', but 'a rule which limits and determines the manner of practice.' ² The second thing which Paul presupposed was 'the duty and obligation that lies upon the best Christians, to walk by the same rule, to mind the same things'. ³ Stillingfleet then charges the non-conformist ministers with being aware that the people had a duty to be in communion with the Church of England, which most of them regarded as a true church, but of not informing them of this duty in case they should forsake their ministry: "In the judgement of some of the most impartial men of the Dissenters at this day, although they think the case of the Ministers very hard on account of Subscriptions and Declarations required of them: yet they confess very little is to be said on the behalf of the People from whom none

1. 'Sermons 1663-1703'. p. 9 in this particular sermon

2. Ibid p. 10

3. Ibid p. 15

of those things are required. So that the people are condemned in their Separation, by their own Teachers; but how they can preach lawfully to a People who commit a fault in hearing them, I do not understand." ¹

The Congregationalists' defence, says Stillingfleet, is that Christ instituted only Congregational churches, which, having the sole church power in themselves, are under no obligation of communion with other churches, but only to preserve peace and charity with them. But Stillingfleet is not convinced that Christ did only found Congregational churches: "It is possible, at first, there might be no more Christians in one city than could meet in one Assembly for worship, but where doth it appear that when they multiplied into more congregations, they did make new and distinct churches under new officers with a separate power of government? Of this I am well assured, there is no mark or footstep in the New Testament, or in the whole history of the primitive church. I do not think it will appear credible to any considerate man, that the five thousand Christians in the church of Jerusalem made one stated and fixed congregation for divine worship. ... It is very strange that those who contend so much for the Scriptures being a perfect Rule of all things pertaining to worship and discipline, should be able to produce nothing in so necessary a point." ²

Finally, Stillingfleet makes the point that he is

1. 'Sermons 1663-1703'. pp. 207 in this particular sermon.
2. Ibid pp. 25/6

prepared to grant that the Nonconformists are dissatisfied with conditions within the Church of England, but 'if the bare dissatisfaction of men's consciences do justify the lawfulness of separation and breaking an established rule, it were to little purpose to make any rule at all. Because it is impossible to make any which ignorant and injudicious men shall not apprehend to be in some thing or other against the dictates of their consciences.' ¹

Owen replied to Stillingfleet's sermon in 'A Brief Vindication of the Nonconformists from the Charge of Schism' published in 1680.

He examines the foundation of Stillingfleet's charge of schism, that is, that the apostles had established a rule of practice which the nonconformists had broken, and declares that they assent to every rule of faith, obedience and worship which they find in Scripture. But he challenges Stillingfleet to produce this particular rule which, he claims, limits and determines practice and requires uniformity in its observation. He denies that such a rule ever existed, pointing to the example of the first churches, who, after departing from the simplicity of the gospel, fell into a variety of practices because they knew no such rule.

According to Owen, what Paul was saying in Philippians 3:16 was that 'whereunto they have attained', that is, wherein they do agree, - which were all those principles of faith and obedience which were necessary unto their

1. 'Sermons 1663-1703'. pp. 38/9

acceptance with God, - they should "walk by the same rule and mind the same thing:" that is, "forbearing one another in the things wherein they differ:"¹ which, says Owen, is the substance of what is pleaded for by the Nonconformists.

In answer to the charge of insincerity on the part of the nonconformist ministers in concealing their true view concerning the lawfulness of their communion with the Church of England, for their own advantage, Owen declares that communion with the Church of England is so lacking in edification for the people that nonconformist ministers are genuine in their rejection of it.

One of Stillingfleet's weightiest arguments is the illogicality of the nonconformists in admitting the Church of England to be a church of Christ and yet in holding themselves justified in their nonconformity. "How does it hence appear not to be a sin to separate from our parochial churches, which, according to their own concessions have all the essentials of true churches?"²

Owen's answer is that there are many things in all parochial churches that stand in need of reformation and that they neither do nor can reform the things which by the rule of Scripture, ought to be reformed, because they are not intrusted with the power of their own government and reformation. In this case it is lawful for any man

1. Works vol. 13 p. 325

2. Sermons 1663-1703 p. 25 in 'The Mischief of Separation'

to withdraw from communion from such churches. There are also many things in the total communion of parochial churches, imposed on the consciences and practices of men, which are not according to the mind of Christ. There is no church discipline administered in such parochial churches; their method of government is unknown to Scripture: there is no liberty of the people and there is a lack of edification.

In such circumstances, says Owen, "it is the duty of those who are necessitated to decline the communion of parochial churches, as they are stated at present, to join themselves in and unto such congregations as wherein their edification and liberty may be better provided for according unto rule." ¹

To Stillingfleet's argument that it has never been proved that the churches planted by the apostles were limited to Congregational churches, Owen answers that there are instances in the New Testament of the erection of new particular congregations in the same province, as distinct churches, with a separate power of government. "So the first church in the province of Judea was in Jerusalem; but when that church was complete as to the number of them who might communicate therein unto their edification, the apostles did not add the believers of the adjacent towns and places unto that church, but erected other particular congregations all the country over."² For example, Paul

1. Works vol. 13 p. 329

2. Works vol. 13 p. 331

speaks of the churches of Judea, not the church of Judea:

"I was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea."

(Galatians 1:22)

It is evident, says Owen, that these churches were not national, metropolitical or diocesan, but governed themselves and had their own elders, as is stated in Acts 14:23: "And when they (the apostles) had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord on whom they believed."

Owen maintains that Churches are for the edification of believers and the Scripture means to this end are "doctrine and fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers". (Acts 2:42). Therefore, he says, all churches must be kept in a state in which this end can be attained. If then, the believers in any place "are so few, or so destitute of spiritual gifts, as not to be able of themselves jointly to observe these means for their edification, it is their duty not to join by themselves in a church state, but to add themselves as members unto other churches; and so when they are so many as that they cannot orderly communicate together in all these ordinances, in the way of their administration appointed in the Scripture, unto the edification of them, it is their duty, by virtue of the divine institution of churches, to dispose of their church-state and relation into that way which will answer the ends of it, - that is, into more particular churches or congregations." ¹

Stillingfleet, of course, did not allow the matter to

1. Works vol. 13 p. 333

rest there, but replied to Owen's 'Vindication' in 1681 with 'The Unreasonableness of Separation'. Owen however, once again seems to have had the last word with 'An Answer to Dr. Stillingfleet's Book of the Unreasonableness of Separation.'

In this, the second round of the argument, many of the points brought forward in the first round are reiterated and expanded. Stillingfleet does, however, put forward the new idea that although the present reasons for separation would have held from the beginning of the Reformation, separation was not allowed by those who were most zealous for the Reformation, and when separation began, it was most vehemently opposed by those Nonconformists who disliked many things in the Church of England and wished for a farther reformation.

Owen, however, in his reply, declared that separation was absolutely the last resort; it was the duty of the Christian who was convinced that his church was practising something contrary to the appointment of Christ to remain within the church and endeavour to reform it by introducing those things appointed by Christ. If this endeavour failed, he was to consider whether he could lawfully stay in the church without these divinely-appointed institutions, and if he possibly could, he was to stay. But if he found that the defects within the church were an obstruction to edification, only then should he contemplate a peaceful separation from the church. This is what many of the early Puritans had done; they had tried to instigate further

Reformation from within the church but, having failed, had finally come to the conclusion that the only course open to them was separation.

One of the arguments which Stillingfleet often brings forward in charging the Independents with schism, is against those who allow occasional but not constant and absolute communion with parochial Churches, saying that if the former is lawful, the latter is a duty in order to preserve the peace and unity of the church. Although Owen was amongst those who would not allow even occasional communion and indeed had constant disagreements with Richard Baxter over this very point, he answered Stillingfleet by saying that "it may be lawful to do a thing with some respects and limitations, at some times, which it may not be lawful to do absolutely and always." ¹ He quotes the example of Jesus, who "did join with the Jews in the observance of God's institutions among them on the one hand; and, on the other, that he never joined with them in the observance of their own traditions and pharisaical impositions, but warned all his disciples to avoid them and refuse them; whose example we desire to follow: for concerning all such observances in the church he pronounced that sentence, 'Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up.' " ²

In another work he asks what is the rule of communion with the Church of England in parochial assemblies, for

1. Works vol. 13 p. 378.
2. Matthew 15:13

they are guilty of schism only if it is divine. But, he says, the rule is the law of the land, the Book of Canons and rubric of Common Prayer. The reason why many cannot conform to the Church of England by joining in constant, complete communion with parochial assemblies, is that by that practice they would approve the rule of that communion.

Stillingfleet puts forward five points to show the insufficiency of the Independent cause for separation. He asserts that it weakens the cause of the Reformation, producing the testimony of Calvin to prove that the two marks of a true church are the Word of God truly preached and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution and that men ought not to separate from such a church even if there are many faults and corruptions in it. Owen, however, asserts that on the contrary, their separation strengthens the Reformation because they adhere firmly to the principles of the Reformation; that is, that Scripture is the perfect rule of faith and religious worship and that this was weakened when men (excepted things of outward worship and gradually began to impose things, a process which led to schism: and that Christian people are not only at liberty but are obliged to judge for themselves concerning belief and practice, a duty which the Anglicans deny.

Stillingfleet's second point is that the separation of the Independents hinders union between Protestant churches; for example the Lutheran Church has more ceremonies and 'unscriptural impositions' than the Church of England.

Owen replies that there is an agreement in all fundamental articles of faith, and all necessary means of salvation, but 'we may as well expect that a river should run backwards' ¹ as expect agreement in all minor points of doctrine and practice of church worship. Because of this, the Independents have their own principles for union on which they act. These include the absolute necessity of a general reformation in the life and manners of the church-members, the preference for their general interest in opposition to Satan before the lesser things wherein they differ, and the legality of making use of other means of edification where men are hindered from communion by impositions they cannot comply with without sin, or are deprived of edification.

The third point put forward by Stillingfleet is that the reasons which the Independents put forward for their separation justify ancient schisms, which have always been condemned by the Christian church. For example, the Independents complain that the Church of England lacks church discipline and the due means of edification and deprives the people of their liberty of choosing their own pastors. But this is exactly what gave rise to the Novatian, Meletian and Donatist Schisms.

Owen rejects this argument by saying that the Independents insist that the causes of their separation are the unwarrantable impositions of unscriptural terms and conditions

1. Works vol. 15 p. 406

of communion upon them.. But those who made the schisms of old were the imposers and separated from the church because the church would not submit to their impositions. For example, Tertullian left the communion of the church because they would not submit to the strict observance of some austere severities in fasting and other things which he thought necessary but were not warranted by Scripture.

Stillingleet's fourth point is that their separation makes separation endless. "Is this an answer becoming a Christian. To swell every small imposition into a huge insupportable Mountain, and to make themselves lie groaning under the weight of a ceremony or two, as though their very heart strings were cracking, and as if Nero had begun a fresh persecution: and at the same time to lessen the guilt of Division and Separation as though it were nothing but a little wantonness in the Lambs of their Flocks, frisking up and down from one pasture to another?"¹

But Owen, of course disagrees that their actions will increase separation. "Is there nothing in the authority of Christ and the sense of the account which is to be given unto him, nothing in the rule of the word, nothing in the work of the ministry and the exercise of gospel discipline, to keep professed disciples of Christ unto their duty, and within the bounds of order divinely prescribed unto them, unless they are fettered and staked down with human laws and constitutions."?²

1. Unreasonableness of Separation p. 198

2. Works vol. 13 p. 418

"Herein", he adds, "lies the original mistake in this matter, - we have lost the apprehension that the authority of Christ in the rule of his word and the works of his Spirit, is every way sufficient for the guiding, governing and preserving of his disciples, in the church-order by him prescribed and the observance of the duties by him commanded." ¹

The last point which Stillingfleet makes is that separation is contrary to the obligation which lies on all Christians, to preserve the peace and unity of the church. Owen agrees, but feels that it is unequal that in the contest for the preservation of the peace of the church, they should be bound by rules to do all that they can, and those who differ from them should be left absolutely at their liberty, so as not to be obliged to forbear what they may lawfully so do.

Owen had been preparing a work on the nature of the evangelical church before 'The Unreasonableness of Separation' appeared, and dedicated the preface of 'An Inquiry into the Original, Nature, Institution, Power, Order and Communion of Evangelical Churches' to another refutation of this work.

Another of Stillingfleet's main lines of attack had been that separation from a church which they admit is a true church of Christ was schism and that no grounds could justify separation where there was agreement 'in regard to doctrine and substantials of religion.'

1.. Works vol. 13 p. 419

Owen, however, in this preface, puts the Church of England on its defence for innovations in its ecclesiastical polity which had no sanction in Scripture or apostolic antiquity, the guilt of schism lying with the church that departed from the apostolic model, not with the church that adhered to it.

In this he was echoing the feelings of William Chillingworth as quoted by Francis Cheynell: "sure the Archbishop was rather Schismaticall, in imposing such burthens upon tender communicants, then the people in separating from external communion. Let Mr. Chillingworth be the Judge, sure he is no Brownist: 'Neither is it alwayes of necessity schismaticall to separate from the external Communion of a church, though wanting nothing necessary. For if this church supposed to want nothing necessary require me to profess against my conscience, that I beleeve some error, though never so small and innocent which I do not beleeve, and will not allow me her Communion but upon this condition; In this case the church for requiring this condition is Schismaticall, and not I for separating from the Church.' " ¹

1. Quoted in Visible Saints (Gustaf) p. 62

6. A Comparison of John Owen's Doctrine of the Church with that of Thomas Goodwin.

The question must be asked, how much of Owen's doctrine of the church is common to the mainstream of Independent thought and how much, if at all, does he differ in his doctrine from other Independents?

One of the other notable Independent theologians of the time was Thomas Goodwin, who was one of the Five Dissenting Brethren at the Westminster Assembly. Goodwin was amongst those who were asked to bring in the Independent platform of church government and present it to the Assembly. For six months he was absent from the Assembly, working on this platform. It never appeared in print, however, because the Independents felt that as most parts of presbytery had already been voted, the Presbyterians would never even debate their model. But the fruit of Goodwin's labour did appear many years later, in 1696, in his book 'Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ.'

Study of this book reveals very little with which Owen would have been at variance. Goodwin makes many of the same points and uses many of the same arguments as his fellow Independent.

He states, as firmly as does Owen, that God has given all things necessary for the government of the church in Scripture and that 'God hath not left the government of his church to be ordered by the laws of nature, or the arbitrary maxims of human reason, but hath prescribed rules for it by his own institution.'¹

1. Of the Constitution, Order & Discipline of the Churches of Christ. p. 8

He was as insistent as Owen on the necessity 'to restore all things to the primitive condition again',¹ arguing that 'there are in the books of the New Testament written by the apostles, manifold particular directions and notes, purposely and professedly written to direct in the government of churches and ordering the worship of them. Thus, in the book of the Acts, which is an historical narration, and in the Epistles there are divers and several passages scattered, which put together will rise up to a platform. ... Thus in 1 Timothy 2, he (Paul) gives many directions about the public prayers of the church. ... Then in chapter 3 he gives directions about officers; their distinction, bishops and deacons; their qualifications, when to be chosen. ... He accordingly, in the conclusion of all this, doth more strongly enforce his former directions: 1 Timothy 3:14,15: 'These things I write unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly (and so not writing all that may be written now). But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God.'²

Goodwin then details what he believes to be the institution of the church which Christ has ordained. He argued that 'the account which the Scripture gives us of a single church established by the apostles in one city, demonstrates congregational churches to have been the primitive institution of Christ.'³ The Church which he

1. Of the Constitution Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 18

2. Ibid p. 17

3. Ibid p. 101

gives as his example, is the church of the Colossians, explaining that 'the apostle, writing to that church, writes to them as a whole church; and also that their ministers that were over this whole church were fixed ministers unto them; and, if so, then that whole Church could be but one congregation, for he that is a fixed minister hath a relation, for his teaching, but to one congregation.' ¹

He supports this belief by stating that "the constitution of a congregational church is evidenced to be by the wise appointment of Christ, because it is so exactly accommodated to the various conditions of the saints." "This institution of congregational churches was such as would suit all times, of the beginning of the gospel and of the continuance of the gospel. The first churches were such necessarily, as was said afore, and when multiplied did still continue so, and might govern themselves, without foreign oppression." "It suits all places, villages as well as cities; and we must suppose saints to be as well in villages as in cities." ² "This institution of congregational churches suits also with all conditions of the church of Christ. a) With the times of persecution as well as the times of peace. b) It suiteth the condition of the saints, being scattered all the world over. Whole nations are not saints fit for churches, for the saints are but a company redeemed out of nations. ...

1. Of the Constitution Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 101

2. Ibid p. 106

Therefore, as synagogue government suited with the scattered and dispersed condition of the Jews, so this suits best with the scattered condition of the saints under the gospel." ¹

In accordance with his belief that the Congregational churches are the institution of Christ, Goodwin argues that "the grand charter of church government, or the power of the keys, is granted not to ministers in particular only, excluding the people, but the whole body of believers." ²

He refers to Christ's promise to Peter 'I will give thee the keys', stating that 'The occasion of the promise was Peter's confessing that Christ was the Son of God, which holds forth nothing proper unto ministers only, or himself as an apostle only; and therefore the privilege here must be common unto that sort that make confession of faith, as well as to ministers.'" ³

Goodwin argues that each particular church is independent: "That a particular church of saints, having a sufficient number of elders is a complete subject of church power and government." ⁴ He puts forward many reasons to support this; for example, he argues from the power which he believes each particular congregation to have, to examine and admit members; from their power of suspending from the sacrament, from their being a perfect political (that is, institutional) church, from his belief that

1. Of the Constitution Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 107

2. Ibid p. 53

3. Ibid p. 57

4. Ibid p. 132.

worship and government are commensurate: 'where constant worship is, there should be constant discipline, especially if excommunication be a part of worship ... as well as admonitions are. It cannot be otherwise, but that the proceedings of the whole discipline, admonitions and all, should be before the whole church, which is as well to be edified by it, as by preaching; and therefore the particular congregations are to be the seat of it. Thus we shewed before that the main end of the church was worship and that discipline was the appendix thereunto, to keep the worship pure." ¹

He refers also to 1 Timothy 5:20: "Them that sin, rebuke before all, that others also may fear" as proof that each separate congregational church is the subject of ecclesiastical power and is therefore the seat of public admonitions. Cyprian is quoted by way of support: 'quod omnes tangit, ab omnibus tractari debet' - 'that which concerns all, the whole community, it should be handled and transacted by all.'

Just as Owen rejected the idea put forward by the Presbyterians and Anglicans, that the church universal is a church political and the seat of instituted government, so Goodwin does battle on the same front, using the same weapons as Owen. He protests that the keys of church government "cannot be given to the whole universal church; for first they do not, nor indeed can, assemble. ... The whole universal church hath not all the keys: for it is not

1. Of the Constitution Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 139

capable of preaching, nor is it capable of receiving the sacraments together." ¹

Goodwin also, of course, rejects the idea of a national church: "God doth not shape a spiritual government unto the political, and the bounds thereof. Political government goes by the bounds of the soil, so doth not the spiritual. All that do live within such a place, or within such a country, because they are of that soil, fall under the same political government; but there is no reason that they should fall under the same spiritual." ²

Owen and Goodwin are fundamentally in agreement when discussing the reasons for the very existence of the church and the matter of which the church should be composed. Concerning the reasons for the existence of the church, Goodwin declares that 'the very nature of God desires it. As it desires communication of itself to the creatures, that they might glorify him, so it designed a communication of itself to many, and to many together united, mutually to praise him.' ³

Not only does the nature of God require this, but so does the nature of man: "The divine nature in us (2 Peter 1:4) breathes after such a fellowship. As reason and understanding desire communion with men, since man is by nature ... animal πολιτικον , sociabile, a social creature, so a saint is also. As it was not good for Adam, the new

- 1. Of the Constitution Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 179
- 2. Ibid p. 192
- 3. Ibid p. 286

creature of the first world, to be alone, so nor for the new creature of Christ's world." ¹

In discussing the composition of the church, Goodwin is ^{as} emphatic as Owen in maintaining that it must be limited to the saints only: "The Kingdom is spiritual, so are the subjects; for Christ is, in relation to his church, a King of Saints, Rev. 15:3. To be in a church is to be fellow-citizens with the saints, Eph. 2:19, and with Christ, 1 Cor. 1:9. And as reason only fits us to have fellowship with men, so grace only qualifies us to have communion with saints and with Christ. A fellowship is of those who are alike in nature and disposition. Thus God would not have Adam joined in fellowship with beasts, and therefore made a woman for him, as a meet companion; much less will God admit his second Adam, Christ, and his members, to be joined with swine. 'What fellowship is there between righteousness and unrighteousness?' 2 Cor. 6:14-17."

Visible Saints then, are to be the matter of both the mystical and the instituted church. Goodwin makes the same concession as Owen, however, that because the gathering of the instituted church is an act of man's and 'they in judging are, and may be often deceived, hence de facto it comes to pass, that in great congregations there may be some found that prove hypocrites.' ²

A company of saints who gather for worship are joined together in one congregation by a special covenant which

1. Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 287
2. Ibid p. 294

expresses their relation with God and with each other. Goodwin supports this idea of the covenant by several references to the covenants of the Old Testament, and also by reference to "the apostle's preface in the New Testament: Acts 2:42, 'They continued' etc. The word signifies, they joined and cleaved together; and this you see more plain in Acts 5:13; none durst join themselves, that is, glue themselves to the church; and it is the same word which Christ useth about man and wife, Mtt. 19:6. Now how doth a man cleave to his wife but by mutual covenant?"¹ The church covenant was, of course, a distinctively Independent ordinance about which Goodwin and Owen would have had no significant disagreement.

The purpose of the existence of this covenanted church was 'that a man therein may enjoy further fellowship and more ways of communion than out of it.' (cf Owen's 'Eshcol' vol. 13). 'Another end of the communion of saints in a particular church is to edify one another in faith and love, which is the end of all gifts, ordinances and of the institution of a church itself.' (cf Owen Vol. 4 p. 497).. "This communion of saints in a particular church is further designed to the glory of God through Christ, which is the end of all."² (cf Owen vol. 7 p. 444)

Owen was noted for his emphasis on the work of the Holy Spirit in the church, and would certainly have agreed with Goodwin's statement that 'This fellowship of saints in

1. Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 491

2. Ibid pp 300/1

a church is all 'through the Spirit', Eph. 2:22 'built through the Spirit.'¹ Goodwin maintains that 'it is the Spirit makes them saints, and so fit matter for this building'; 'it is the Spirit and not man, that makes them willing, and moves their hearts to join in this ordinance'; 'it is the Spirit that gives all the gifts that are in the members' and 'it is the Spirit that is that energy (as the word is, Eph. 4:16) through which every part supplies nourishment to others.'²

Just as Owen believed that ministers were not necessary for the existence but for the completeness (καταρτισμος) of the church (cf. Vol 4 p. 496), so Goodwin stated that: "Ministers make not a church nor are they or their power requisite to the first gathering of it. ... There were churches gathered ere elders were made in them. And then besides, if such a power was resident in the ministers, then when they die, a congregation should cease to be a church."³

The two Independents also agree on the Calvinistic fourfold offices of the ministry of the church, the pastor, teacher, elder and deacon, and make the same distinction between the teaching elder and the ruling elder. They are in accord in their belief that the officers of the church are equipped for their tasks by God-given spiritual gifts

1. Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p.301.
2. Ibid p. 301.
3. Ibid p. 303.

and that the purposes of the ministry are the conversion of those that are without the church and the increase of the graces of those that are within the church.

Goodwin gives reasons similar to those which Owen gives for allowing separation from a church. "Because they are churches defective in ordinances, it is warrant to remove to such a church where all may be enjoyed. ... Because they are defiled churches to our judgements, and so defiled as, to continue in them, a man himself would become defiled also. If to the free enjoying any ordinance anything sinful must be practised, as in receiving the sacrament, let that church be in itself and in my judgement otherwise never so reformed, yet if this be imposed on me, or I must not receive, it is no mother to me, for it denies to me, her child, the bread which is due to me as a child's portion. In other practices it is so defiled, as that I cannot constantly be a member in it but I must also be defiled; as in mixed receiving, in which, since the wicked are made one body with the saints, there is a sin which lies somewhere"¹

All these statements could be paralleled out of Owen's works.

There is a small point on which Owen does differ from Goodwin. Owen rejects as inconsistent, even the occasional reception of the sacrament in the parish churches from which they have separated. Goodwin, however, like Richard Baxter, accepts that occasional communion is permissible:

1. Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 307.

'Though it should be granted that I might occasionally receive the sacrament in them ... yet it will not follow that I should be a constant member to continue with them; for in such an occasional receiving, I am not so made a member as to be called to exercise any such judicial act of casting out the bad: but it lies on them who are constant members of it, who, by their approbations, make themselves one body with them.' ¹

Another slight difference between Owen and Goodwin, though perhaps a difference of emphasis rather than of opinion, is over the position of women in the church. Owen must have felt that there was no need for discussion on the subject and therefore all but ignores it. Goodwin, however, tries to justify his exclusion of women from all positions of authority in the church and in doing so, finds himself occasionally in difficulties. His position is immediately clear when he starts with the uncompromising statement: 'That women should not speak in public, but be silent, it is the law of nature.' ² In denying women any authority, he even goes to the lengths of stating that Apollos was taught by Aquila, neglecting to mention any part Priscilla played in this 'authoritative' process.

Goodwin's problem was that he believed wholeheartedly in the great Reformation doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, but was not prepared to accept that this would logically give priestly rights in the church to women as well

1. Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 308

2. Ibid p. 11

as to men. He believed that the power of the keys was given to all believers but was not prepared to allow women to exercise this power within the church. He did grant, however, that "even they (women) have a sprinkling of the keys in their proportion ... for the keys of conversion and edification maybe, through God's blessing, in their hands. Their speeches and instructions in private may, and often do convert and edify the souls of others." ¹ Goodwin is driven in his explanation of this inconsistency to make a distinction between the authority of the keys and the power of the keys: "The mistake of the objection lies in this, to infer that because women have not the authority, the public power of the keys, that therefore they have no power of the keys committed to them, where none have all that others have, not the apostles themselves." According to R. B. Carter ('The Presbyterian-Independent Controversy') 'the distinction between authority and power was a semantical problem with little possibility of being resolved to the mutual satisfaction of any'.

In common with other Independents, however, he did allow that older widows could act as deaconesses within the church.

A very much more important distinction between Goodwin and Owen is evident in the subject of baptism. It is Owen, however, who seems to remain closer to the mainstream of Independent thought, whereas Goodwin's belief seems to be

1. Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 58

peculiar to him. Goodwin asserts that baptism was to be distinguished from the Lord's Supper by the fact that the former was given to the universal church whereas the latter was entrusted to particular churches. Other Independents believed that both belonged only to the particular church. Goodwin argues that 'the examples in Scripture do clearly hold forth that persons that were not in church fellowship were yet baptised.'¹

He supports this with the example of the eunuch who was baptised by Philip (Acts 8), rejecting the idea put forward by some that as a proselyte he was of the Jewish Church and therefore a subject capable of baptism. When Peter baptised Jews, he says, he did not baptise them because they were 'the seed of Abraham, but upon faith and repentance, which he calls them to. ... So as the ground upon which men were members of the Jewish church, and circumcised, was not the ground upon which they were baptized: and therefore the eunuch was not baptised upon any such account. The dispensation of the covenant was altered and the application of the ordinances had accordingly an alteration. So then if he were not baptised as a member of the Jewish church, and when he was baptized was a member of no gospel church instituted, then it necessarily follows that a person who is not a member of an instituted church, or a particular congregation, may be the subject of baptism'.²

Goodwin further declares that 'because baptism is a

1. Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ p. 451
2. Ibid p. 451

baptizing of a single person into Christ, and consequently into the body of Christ as 1 Cor. 12:13 imports, and is but an act of a single person unto a single person (as the instance of Philip and the eunuch being alone shows); and it belongeth not unto a particular church, as the former instances declared, it must necessarily belong unto the universal church, as Eph. 4:4 seems to hold forth. 'One Lord, one God, one baptism, one body.' As for the Lord's Supper, it is as evident that it was properly the ordinance of a particular church embodied together: 1 Cor. 10 'The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?' " 1

Most other Independents, however, confined baptism to children of godly parents who were members of a particular church, maintaining that the eunuch's baptism was an extraordinary act done by extraordinary officers. Owen, however, seems to stand a little closer to Goodwin in allowing that "professing believers and their seed ... have right unto baptism whether they be joined to any particular church or no,"² but it must be noted that he had already urged that "every believer is obliged, as part of his duty, to joyne himself to some one of those churches of Christ ... if he have the advantage and opportunity so to doe." 3

His allowing all professing believers and their

1. Of the Constitution, Order and Discipline of the Churches of Christ
2. Works vol. 13 p. 259
3. Ibid p. 176

children to be baptised was not, however, because he agreed with Goodwin that baptism belonged to the universal church rather than the particular church, but because of the position he held on the relation of 'the particular church' to the 'church-catholic-visible': a position which was not representative of the Congregational men generally. The church catholic visible he held to be 'but a collection of all that are duely called Christians in respect of their profession; nor are the several particular churches of Christ in the world, so parts and members of any Catholic Church, as that it should be constituted, or made up by them and of them ... Nor do I think that particular Congregations do stand unto it in the relation of Species unto Genus, in which the whole nature of it should be preserved and comprized, which would deprive every one of membership in this Universall Church, which is not joyned actually to some particular church or congregation, then which nothing can be more devoid of truth.' ¹

Here Cawdrey justly notes Owen's difference from 'them of New England' 'who make particular churches to be species of the universal church, as (say they) several drops of water are species of water; and also make a man first a member of a particular church, before he can be a member of the Catholick'. ² In Old England also, Bartlet had observed with approval, that 'the Independents have left it upon Record, that a particular Church is a similar part

1. Works vol. 13 p. 137

2. Cawdrey: Independencie a Great Schism p. 90

of the Catholique, their own expression' ¹; and by the Congregational men the importance of 'particular churches' as 'parts of the universal as a Totum or Integrum' ² was universally agreed.

On the whole, however, the divergencies of opinion and belief concerning the doctrine of the church in the ranks of the Independents were very few. Apart from the one or two points already mentioned, the two great Independent theologians, Owen and Goodwin were fundamentally in agreement on all the main points of Congregational belief and practice. Owen, therefore, in his monumental works, was expounding the 'Congregational way', not a way of his own devising.

1. Quoted in Nuttall: Visible Saints p. 69

2. Cawdrey: Independencie a Great Schism p. 90

7. The Man and His Theology: An Assessment.

The picture of Owen which emerges from his writings is that of an uncompromising yet warm-hearted Calvinist, which would seem, on the surface, to be contradictory, but which in Owen is, in fact, complementary. Having been first an Anglican, and then a Presbyterian, he finally became convinced of the validity of the Congregational way, and, believing wholeheartedly that this was God's chosen way, he refused any compromise, however small. His intractability has been praised by friends and blamed by foes but what is certain is that it was instrumental in leading to the breakdown of any hope of comprehension with the Anglican and Presbyterian churches and was therefore an important factor in the formation of Nonconformity as it is today.

Just as his uncompromising attitude is evident throughout his works, so is his deep, warm love for Christ and his church. In his *Χριστολογία*, Owen sometimes pens passages of such devotion and reverence as are reminiscent of those great Pauline hymns of praise to Christ that are found, for example, in Colossians 1 and Ephesians 1: "This glorious Word, which is God, and described by his eternity and omnipotency in works of creation and providence, 'was made flesh', - which expresseth the lowest state and condition of human nature. Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness! And in that state wherein he visibly appeared as so made flesh, those who had eyes given them from above, saw 'his glory, the glory as of the only

begotten of the Father'. The eternal Word, being made flesh, and manifested therein, they saw his glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father. What heart can conceive, what tongue can express, the least part of the glory of this divine wisdom and grace? So it is proposed unto us in Isa. 9:6 That the mighty God should be a child born, and the everlasting Father a son given unto us, may well entitle him unto the name of Wonderful." ¹

His letters reveal the depth of concern and love which Owen had for each member of his church. For example, he wrote to a church member called Mrs. Polhill while she was staying in her country home after the death of her sister: "The ^{tr}ouble expressed in yours is a great addition to mine; the sovereignty of divine wisdom and grace is all that I have at this day to retreat unto: God direct you thereunto also and you will find rest and peace. It adds to my trouble that I cannot possibly come down to you this week. Nothing but engaged duty could keep me from you one hour: yet I am conscious how little I can contribute to your guidance in this storm, or your satisfaction, Christ is your pilot; and however the vessel is tossed while he seems to sleep, he will arise and rebuke these winds and waves in his own time. I have done it, and yet shall farther wrestle with God for you, according to the strength he is pleased to communicate. ... " ²

Owen also gained praise from those whom he strongly

1. Works vol. 11 p. 47

2. Works vol. 1 p. 117

opposed doctrinally, for his temperateness of language and his civility in the pamphlets and polemical works he produced. It often happened in theological controversies that men would at times sink to the level of vindictiveness and personal abuse against their opponents. But of this Owen was very rarely guilty and indeed, one of his greatest antagonists, Dr. Edward Stillingfleet, Dean of St. Paul's, with whom he had a long debate over the question of schism, wrote of him: "He treated me with that civility and decent language that I cannot but return him thanks for it." ¹

It can be stated without equivocation that Owen's writings spotlight many of the vital issues concerned in the doctrine of the church. However, there are several valid criticisms which can be brought against his teachings.

He believed that if the church wanted to be true to the pattern laid down by God, it should return to the practices of the church of the first three centuries. However, he fails to make allowance for the difference in the historical situations of the first three centuries and the seventeenth century; for the difference between the church as a minority in a non-Christian society and the church in a society which to some extent upholds it. For the first three hundred years of its existence the church had to contend with sometimes indifferent, sometimes actively hostile governments. This situation persisted until Constantine, a Christian, became Emperor and established Christianity as the religion of the empire. He enacted many

1. Quoted in the Prefatory Note to 'An Inquiry Concerning Evangelical Churches' : vol. 15

new laws, prompted by a Christian humanitarianism; he made Sunday an official rest day; he built and maintained churches; he gave official expression to his disapproval of pagan religions and actively protected and encouraged Christianity.

Owen therefore drew his arguments from a situation in which Christianity was distinct from the world around it and in which a pre-Constantinian relation between church and state existed, but he presupposed a Christian country accepting Christian standards, in which a post-Constantinian relationship between church and state existed. For example, he accepted that the magistrate should uphold Christianity, discouraging all heresies, and that the state should provide material support for the church.

It is interesting to note that the church is entering today into a third stage in the world. In this stage the union between church and state is coming or has come to an end. In some countries, the church seems to have returned to its pre-Constantinian situation of being a minority persecuted by the hostile state. In England, however, with the moves towards the disestablishment of the Church of England, one would hope that the idea of a free church in a free state would prevail. It is perhaps only in this situation that Congregational principles can be truly worked out. It could be said that the inconsistencies in Owen's position were forced on him by his historical situation, for this idea of a free church in a free state was totally inconceivable to seventeenth century minds.

Another criticism which has been made of Owen is that he is looking in the New Testament for a perfect, primitive church which never in fact existed. We have the New Testament letters partly because New Testament congregations were distinctly imperfect and therefore required rebuke and corrective teaching. The Galatians were wrong on a basic point of doctrine. The Philippians were suffering from disunity. The Colossians were suffering from a group within the church who regarded themselves as better than everybody else because they had embraced a special new teaching. And Corinth had all manner of problems - problems of immorality, of factions in the congregation, and even unsoundness on such a basic doctrine as that of the resurrection of the dead.

His argument that the divine pattern for the church had been clearly set out in Scripture even though, through human sin and weakness, the churches fell short of it, has also been criticised. R. B. Carter, in his thesis on the Presbyterian - Independent controversy, comments that the experience of the Westminster Assembly and of the controversy between the Independents and Presbyterians supports the claim that in major doctrinal matters it may be possible to find an infallible method of interpretation, but in matters of polity, such an attempt was a total failure.

Indeed, the attitude which Owen and all traditional Calvinistic theologians took to Scripture was one which had been condemned by Martin Luther, at the beginning of the Reformation, as an attitude which turned the New Testament into a new law, a new Deuteronomy, which

contained all the rules for the government of the church. Owen's position is in fact untenable, for the Scripture lays down no comprehensive guide to church government. He has misunderstood the main burden of the New Testament letters: "The Pauline epistles, originally produced as occasional writings, dealing primarily with the exigencies and controversies of the moment, were carefully scanned for liturgical directions. Such occasional hints were erected into principles." ¹

One of the most important of the criticisms raised against the Independent theology as expounded by Owen concerns the apparent devaluation of the universal church and excess emphasis on the local church. P. T. Forsythe, himself a Congregational theologian, declared that the Congregationalists have been "much too atomist. The independence of each congregation or each member has been overdone. This is a fertile source both of their practical overlapping and their theological confusion. Their multiplication paralyses them in many a place. What might be a power is a scandal. And their theology, their truth, becomes a byword as they lose the sense of the great church whose ordered self-consciousness any worthy theology is. It is the vast personality of the church that wins its battle. What victory can await a religion whose regiments have on them the curse of the clans and go each its own way with some pride, following a chief and losing a Head? Each

1. Davies: Worship of the English Puritans p. 258

single church is entitled by the Gospel to no more independence in the great Church than each individual man has in the small, where they are all members one of another. And each Church has the right to live only in virtue of the contribution it makes to the great Church." ¹

Forsythe wrote this century, but the same objection, that is, that the Independent theology was unsatisfactory in its explanation of the relation between the local and the universal church, has been raised from the very inception of the 'Congregational way'. It was the central point of disagreement between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians and Anglicans.

Owen's concept of the church as a community of the regenerate has also been challenged. Owen himself believed that it was impossible for men to be absolutely sure who were the true saints, for only God knew those who were his. The task of the church meeting was simply to assess the "evidences and fruits" of conversion "in their external demonstration as unto a participation of the outward privileges of a regenerate state and no further." ²

Therefore, it was possible for non-elect persons to be members of a gathered church. Many Presbyterians and Anglicans felt that once this admission had been made, the idea of the church of visible saints, a main tenet of Congregationalism, collapsed and there could be no real objection to their idea of allowing people to enter the

1. Forsythe: The Church and the Sacraments pp 7/8

2. Works vol. 16 p. 13

membership of their churches on their making a credible profession of faith.

The Presbyterians also felt that the Independents' limiting the church to the saints only was too narrow, too exclusive, too unevangelistic. "A man had better receive some of whom there may be some doubt and feare, than discourage or refuse any of Christ's little ones!"¹ Since the church was the means of spreading the gospel and since the only means of people's being regenerated was in their hearing the preaching of the Word, then it was unevangelistic to exclude any from the church who otherwise might repent and be born again.

The Independent Church in New England did indeed experience a great lack of evangelistic zeal as a result of their doctrine of the church. The majority of the Puritans there seemed to be much more concerned about retaining purity - of doctrine, worship and church government. Independency tends in certain respects towards introspection and subjectivism, not only in its emphasis on purity, but also, for example, in the public testifying to religious experience as the basis of church membership. An effective missionary church needs on the contrary to be outward-looking and outgoing. Therefore, there was a lack of mission in New England which is culpable in the face of Christ's last clear command 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations'. (Matthew 28:19)

1. Thomas Edwards: *Anatopologia: or A Full Answer to the Apologetical Narration of Mr. Goodwin et al.* (London 1646) p.77

There was only one man amongst all of the New England Independents who was really concerned for the evangelisation of the North American Indians - John Eliot, the man with whom Richard Baxter maintained a steady correspondence during all the years of the former's missionary work on the other side of the Atlantic. One feels that Baxter himself would have experienced no lack of impetus for the work of spreading the gospel, for he believed that 'The Church on earth is a mere hospital' and therefore should admit people precisely because they are sinners in need of treatment. Therefore, whereas Owen felt impelled to separate from the Anglican church because others besides the saints were members, Baxter would have been happy to remain within its ranks, had not the Act of Uniformity forced his departure.

The Independent theology could not come to any compromise between its own exalted view of the church as the glorious, spotless Bride of Christ and the equally true view expressed by Luther, that 'the face of the church is the face of the sinner'.

One of the greatest claims of the Independents was that they had established a polity based wholly and solely on the pages of the New Testament Scriptures. But Owen, Goodwin and the other Independents, introduced a practice which was absent from the New Testament - a fault for which they castigated the Anglicans and Presbyterians. As a result of their attitude to infant baptism, that it was not the rite by which one entered the church, they had

to introduce some other means of entry. They therefore instituted church covenants by which a prospective member had to promise that he would walk in fellowship with the other church members and in love and obedience to God, and upon making this promise he joined the church. According to the Scriptures, however, baptism is the only means of entry into the church and church covenants are consequently neither needed nor used. Therefore, the Independents were doubly at fault here - first of all for rejecting the New Testament significance of baptism, and secondly, for replacing the function of baptism with a non-Scriptural practice.

Furthermore, another argument brought by the Independents against the Presbyterians and Anglicans was that they resorted too much to the Old Testament for their church government. Therefore, it might be thought that the Independents would confine their platform for government to the pages of the New Testament. However they proved the institution of church covenants with arguments taken mainly from the Old Testament; with reference, for example, to the covenant God made with the Israelites at Horeb. This inconsistency is revealed by John Goodwin, himself an Independent, though set apart from others by the fact that he was an Arminian rather than a Calvinist. It was to Thomas Goodwin he wrote, complaining that the Independents had not only introduced a practice absent from the New Testament, but had also tried to prove its validity by arguments from the Old, for both of which practices they

attacked their opponents. Although this attack was made on Thomas Goodwin, the same criticism could also be levelled at Owen, as the latter's opinions on this point were identical to those of the former.

However, one of the most important commendations one could give of the Congregational doctrine of the Church of which Owen gives the greatest theological exposition, is that it is still relevant to Christians today. This is witnessed to by the fact that three hundred years after they were written, his works are still continually in the process of being reprinted. Even his polemical works, largely concerned with issues which time and change have resolved or rendered unimportant today, are still read because they throw such clear light upon many fundamental principles in the doctrine of the church.

The contemporaneousness of Owen's theology is witnessed in the address which the Swiss theologian Karl Barth made in 1948 at the Amsterdam Assembly in which the World Council of Churches was established. His address was entitled "The Church: The Living Congregation of the Living Lord Jesus Christ." After having given an exposition of classical Congregationalism, Barth proceeded to point out its present relevance. He explained that the Congregational way was "not a completely new way. It showed itself quite clearly in its basic lines already in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in an ecclesiastical movement in England, a movement which until now has been too little noticed or too quickly rejected. The congregations which

dared in that time and place to let themselves be formed by this movement made themselves noteworthy at any rate in the critical eighteenth century by having been able to make a far better stand in the face of the Enlightenment, strange as it may seem, than the other English churches, which were apparently so much better armed with their episcopal or presbyterian synodal authority. ...

And it is also no accident that the so-called Younger Churches, on what was once the "mission field", have clearly set forth in this same direction, on their own and without seeing themselves driven by any connection with the former tradition. 'Who knows', wrote Friedrich Loofs as far back as 1901 ... 'whether it might not be the case one day, when the established churches of the old world collapse, that the congregational form of church may yet have a future among us?' " 1

There is indeed an increasing emphasis being placed today on the importance of the local church as a real community. This is true of a great Roman Catholic theologian like Rahner and can be seen in many movements where Christians are seeking to find real community. A small book which has appeared recently is typical in many respects. It is entitled 'Cinderella with Amnesia' by Michael Griffiths, who was for many years a missionary in South East Asia. According to the author, the church, the bride of Christ, today seems like a Cinderella in the ashes, forgotten by

1. Barth: God Here and Now pp 84/5

the world and oblivious of her glorious destiny. His purpose in writing the book is to remind the ordinary people in the pews of the Biblical doctrine of the church, in order that she may become what she is meant to be - a 'dynamic, beautiful, caring community'. In his attempt to do this for the present generation, he uses much of the teaching which Owen used for his very different generation so long ago.

This doctrine, then, in which Owen believed and which he expounded so clearly and so comprehensively, still has something to say to the needs of the church today.

Whether one would accept his theology or not, many would agree that a fair assessment of Owen's life and work can be found in the epitaph which was inscribed on his monument in Bunhill-fields: that Dr. Owen spent his life in trying to "call forth all his knowledge in an orderly train to serve the interests of religion and minister in the sanctuary of God."

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