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Gavin John McGrath

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PURITANS AND THE HUMAN WILL:

Voluntarism within mid-seventeenth century English  
puritanism as seen in the works of  
Richard Baxter and John Owen

Gavin John McGrath

A Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Durham

Faculty of Arts  
Theology Department  
1989

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## ABSTRACT

Gavin J. McGrath

Puritans and the Human Will: Voluntarism within mid-seventeenth century puritanism as seen in the works of Richard Baxter and John Owen"

Doctor of Philosophy  
University of Durham  
1989

This thesis is a theological study of mid-seventeenth century puritan piety as seen in the works of Richard Baxter (1615-1691) and John Owen (1616-1683). It proposes that central to the practical divinity of Baxter and Owen was a voluntarism. Voluntarism is defined as "the prominence, but not dominance, of the will's response to God's sovereign initiatives in the divine/human encounter". Based on this definition the chapters consider the following.

Chapter 1 presents the historical and theological context in which they wrote, paying particular attention to general developments within Reformed theology, covenant theology, Arminianism and Antinomianism.

Chapter 2 argues that Baxter and Owen were within a tradition which went back to Augustine and extended through to Calvin. This tradition taught that man's will was "free" only in the sense that it was free from constraint and force. Due to sin the will could only respond to God's call through the renovation which God brought about through grace and the Holy Spirit.

Chapters 3 and 4 present the two sides of the divine/human encounter. Chapter 3 considers covenant theology as an important antecedent to Baxter and Owen's interpretations of the divine encounter. Chapter 4 studies human choice, and the ability to choose, as a reflection of the *Imago Dei*. It is noted that Baxter and Owen recognized faith as involving all the human faculties, but especially a crucial "willingness."

Chapter 5 discusses voluntarism and justification: the meeting of the divine initiative and human response. Attention is given to the issues of election, the effectual call, preparation and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Chapters 6 and 7 depend upon the doctrinal observations made in the earlier chapters and present the practical side of Baxter and Owen's voluntarism. Grace and duty, perseverance and assurance are the principal topics. Voluntarism shaped the importance of a willingness to fight sin, and the hope and promise of the saints as they lived their life in Christ.

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DECLARATION

I confirm that no part of the material contained in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or in any other University.

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Eileen and Megan endured their father's prolonged absences and occasional grumpiness. Above all others, my wife, Janet, deserves my deep, albeit inadequate, thanks. Her unflinching support and gracious willingness is not forgotten. It is to her that this work is dedicated.

Finally, as every research student knows, it is a dangerous possibility, when spending hours in a library, to divorce one's studies from the rest of reality. This is the subtle snare of academic theology; thus it is an added bonus that I frequently found personal benefit from Baxter and Owen. In the end I can only join in the Reformers' praise, *Sola Deo Gloria*.

ABBREVIATIONS

- ARG Archiv fur Reformationsgeschichte.
- Calamy Revised Calamy Revised, Being a revision of Edmund Calamy's Account of the Ministers and others Ejected and Silenced, 1660-1662, edited by A.G. Matthews (1934).
- CH Church History.
- Comm. Calvin's New Testament Commentaries, 12 vols, edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance (reprinted, 1975-1980).
- CR Corpus Reformationum: Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia, ed. G. Baum, E. Cunitz and E. Reuss (Brunswick and Berlin, 1863-1900).
- Correspondence The six volumes of Baxter Correspondence in Dr. Williams's Library, London (MS 59, vols. i-vi).
- CTJ Calvin Theological Journal.
- DNB Dictionary of National Biography, 63 vols. edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee (1885-1900).
- EQ Evangelical Quarterly.
- Goold The Works of John Owen, 24 vols, edited by William H. Goold (1850-55).
- HTR Harvard Theological Review.
- Instit. Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion. Vols XX and XXI of The Library of Christian Classics edition, edited by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles. (1960).
- JEH Journal of Ecclesiastical History.
- LW The Works of Martin Luther. American edition. 56 vols, general eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Tilehmann (1955-1975).
- Offor The Whole Works of John Bunyan, 3 vols, edited by George Offor (1862-).
- Orme The Practical Works of Richard Baxter, 23 vols, edited by William Orme (1830)

- OS Joannis Calvini Opera Selecta, 5 vols. 2nd edition, edited by Petrus Barth and Guilemus Niesel (1926-59).
- SJT *Scottish Journal of Theology.*
- Treatises The twenty-one volumes of Baxter Treatises in Dr. Williams's Library, London (MS 59, vols. vii-xiii, and MS 61, vols. i-vi, xi-xviii).
- Wing *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed...1641-1700*, 3 vols, compiled by Donald Wing (1972).
- WMQ *William and Mary Quarterly.*
- WTJ *Westminster Theological Journal.*

## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Voluntarism defined

This thesis is a study of one aspect of mid-seventeenth century puritan theology and practice: the importance of the human will in the Christian life, or voluntarism. Broadly speaking, voluntarism refers to the choosing acts of the human will; more precisely, however, the will's choice with particular reference to the following points. First, the very etymology of voluntarism, derived from voluntarius and from the verb volo (to be willing, to wish, to purpose, to determine), suggests an intrinsic choosing capability (arbitrium) or function of man. In mid-seventeenth century puritan theology it was held that along with his reason and affections, man's will (his choosing) was central to his identity and activity. Mid-seventeenth century puritans like Richard Baxter (1615-1691) and John Owen (1616-1683) believed that man's reason, will and affection (man's faculties) constituted the human soul. Equally the faculties were evidence that man was made in the image of God. This study argues that while no one faculty was considered more important than the others by Baxter and Owen, nevertheless, they taught that the will played a

prominent role in a person's Christian life. In short, the voluntarism of Baxter and Owen assumed the prominence but not the dominance of the will. The first point, then, is that voluntarism refers to the choosing of the human will yet within a context of man's other faculties.

Secondly, it must be appreciated that voluntarism ultimately relates to the divine will. When Baxter and Owen considered the question of free will (*liberum arbitrium*) it was in reference to God's will. Following Augustine they argued that just as man was not autonomous vis-a-vis his Creator, so the human will was not independent from the Creator's will.

Thirdly, voluntarism relates to the Christian's life and experience. Within the Augustinian tradition (to which Owen and Baxter were indebted) the will was important in regeneration, justification, and sanctification. Thus, the role of the human will was central to Baxter and Owen's understanding of a person's Christian experience. How did he come to faith? How could he grow in grace? How could he fight sin? How could he be sure that he would persevere to the end? In answering these questions Baxter and Owen's practical theology detailed the role of the will and stressed the importance of willingness.

Voluntarism is therefore a way of describing the will's response to the divine initiative: it is part of the human side of the divine/human encounter. Nevertheless, voluntarism necessitates a study of the human response to God and a study of the divine

initiative. Accordingly, it is important to show the will's activity in relation to a number of associated doctrines which explain the divine initiative and activity. Throughout this study, then, Baxter and Owen's views on election, predestination, justification, sanctification and perseverance are presented. Their voluntarism was so closely related to each of these doctrines, each never fully isolated from the other, that the methodology of this thesis must include an appreciation of this broad doctrinal context.

The definition of voluntarism offered in this thesis, is therefore, the prominence, but not dominance, of the will's response to God's sovereign initiatives in the divine/human encounter. It will be shown that this definition best expresses the views of Baxter and Owen concerning the role of the human will in the Christian life.

This definition goes further than what has been presented by a number of studies on puritan theology in recent years and to which this thesis responds and interacts. On one hand, voluntarism is not voluntarism: a term which helpfully explains how some Elizabethans stopped attending their local parish church, or went in addition, to another another parish church or Separatist gathering where a more "powerful" or more "edifying" preacher was present.<sup>1</sup> On the

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<sup>1</sup> See the study by Patrick Collinson, "Voluntary Religion: Its Forms and Tendencies" in *The Religion of Protestants. The Church in English Society 1559-1625*. The Ford Lectures, 1979. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982, paperback 1984), pp.242-83. See also the earlier work by Geoffrey Nuttall, *Visible Saints: The Congregational Way 1640-1660*. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1957).

other hand, with regard to those who have rightly confined voluntarism to the role of the will, this thesis particularly responds to a number of modern scholars.

In his book, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*, R.T. Kendall has drawn a contrast between Calvin's definition of faith and that of later "Calvinists".<sup>2</sup> His main argument is that later English puritans, notably William Perkins (1558-1602), accepted a view of faith which was not Calvin's, but Theodore Beza's (1519-1605). According to Kendall, Calvin understood faith and the assurance of faith to rest principally in a passive persuasion of the mind; faith had more to do with knowledge through illumination rather than any sense of voluntarism or experimental test. In contrast, Beza promoted the idea of a limited atonement and this, concluded Kendall, led to the implication that assurance was not to be found in looking to Christ's death. Furthermore, Beza allegedly suggested a distinction between faith and assurance. From this distinction developed the practical syllogism (*syllogismus practicus*), or what Kendall has called the "reflex act": a person gained assurance by looking inward to detect if certain fruits of sanctification were evident; if they were present, and such fruits were characteristic of the elect, then the person could conclude he was regenerate.<sup>3</sup> Following Beza rather

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<sup>2</sup> R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

<sup>3</sup> Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p.93.

than Calvin, Perkins and his followers (Richard Greenham, Paul Baynes, Richard Rogers, John Cotton, Richard Sibbes and the Westminster Confession of Faith) stressed the role of the will over knowledge.<sup>4</sup> According to Kendall their voluntarism was "faith as an act of the will in contrast to a passive persuasion of the mind."<sup>5</sup> From this definition he has identified an element within English Calvinism which he has called "experimental predestinarianism", and so argued that faith became more than a knowledge but an involvement of the will in response to grace and the preparatory work of the law.<sup>6</sup> In this sense Kendall's conclusion is that by the time of Baxter and Owen the theological consensus was far different than Calvin's teaching.

Apart from a number of critical reviews of his book, there has not yet been an adequate appraisal of Kendall's assumptions.<sup>7</sup> This thesis argues that his definition of voluntarism is erroneous. To draw such a sharp contrast between faith resting in a passive persuasion of the mind and faith as an act of the will is too neat and tidy. Far more importantly, a reading

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<sup>4</sup> For Greenham see *DNB*, vol 23, p.77; Baynes see *DNB*, vol 3, p.455; Rogers see *DNB*, vol 49, p.137; Cotton see Richard L.Greaves and Robert Zaller eds. *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982), vol I, pp.178-79. See also Larzer Ziff, ed. *John Cotton on the Churches of New England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Sibbes see *DNB*, vol 52, p182.

<sup>5</sup> Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p.3 and *passim*.

<sup>6</sup> Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p.62.

<sup>7</sup> Kendall has received considerable criticism: notably from W. Stanford Reid, *WTJ*, 43, 1980, pp.255-62; A.N.S. Lane, *Themelios*, 6, 1980-81, pp.29-31; A. Skevington Wood, *E.A.*, 53, April - June, 1981, pp.124-25; Dewey D. Wallace, *C.H.*, 50 September, 1981, pp.348-49; Paul Helm, *SJT*, 34, 1981, pp.179-85, later expanded in *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Banner of Truth, 1982); M. Charles Bell, *SJT*, 36, 1983, pp.535-40; George Harper, *CTJ*, 20, no.2, November, 1985, pp.255-62.

of Perkins and other later Puritans suggests that Kendall has allowed his definition to blur some of the contradictions and paradoxes of English Calvinist theology; equally one cannot help but question his reading of Calvin.

The fact of the matter is that Calvin considered justifying faith and assurance to be inextricably related.<sup>8</sup> In pointing to this unity Calvin argued from his conviction that true faith was a certainty of God's gracious promises of mercy and forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

Therefore our mind must be otherwise illumined and our heart strengthened, that the Word of God may obtain full faith among us. Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.

The strength of faith rested solely in the object of faith: Christ Jesus the Redeemer for sinners, and for me, a particular sinner.<sup>10</sup> Of course it is necessary to appreciate the implications of Calvin's teaching on "temporary faith", particularly with reference to Simon Magus (Acts 8.13). Kendall has suggested that it was

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<sup>8</sup> A.N.S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance", *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979), p.32; Paul Helm, *SJT*, 34, 1981, p.182 argues that there are passages in Calvin's *Institutes* in which "saving faith is clearly distinguished from assurance." Helm refers to III.2.11 and III.2.12. See a criticism of Helm's view by M. Charles Bell, "Was Calvin a Calvinist?" *SJT*, 36:4 (1983), pp.535-40.

<sup>9</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.7. *OS*, IV, p.6: Nunc iusta fidei definitio nobis constabit si decamus esse divinae erga nos benevolentiae firmam certamque cognitionem, quae gratuita in Christo promissionis veritate fundata, per Spiritum sanctum et revelatur mentibus nostris et cordibus obsignatur.

<sup>10</sup> A.N.S. Lane, "Calvin's Doctrine of Assurance", *Vox Evangelica* 11 (1979), p.36.

actually Calvin's teaching on temporary faith -- because it left some questions unanswered -- which gave rise to later voluntaristic definitions of faith and the use of the practical syllogism.<sup>11</sup> Yet, as David Foxgrover has suggested, the issue of temporary faith in *Institutes* III.ii.10-11 did not challenge the certainty of assurance. Calvin wanted to explain the nature of hypocrisy and warn believers only so as to encourage them in perseverance.<sup>12</sup> Calvin's emphasis was on a faith which knew, by persuasion and illumination by the Spirit through the Word, the trustworthiness of God's mercy and forgiveness offered in Christ. Accordingly, Calvin argued faith and assurance are united in essence.<sup>13</sup>

Nevertheless, Calvin recognised, and was sympathetic towards, those who doubt of their assurance. In this sense there was a degree of paradox in Calvin's teaching on faith and assurance.

Surely, while we teach that faith ought to be certain and assured, we cannot imagine any certainty that is not tinged with doubt, or any assurance that is not assailed by some anxiety. On the other hand, we say that believers are in perpetual conflict with their own unbelief. Far, indeed, are we from putting their consciences in any peaceful repose, undisturbed by any tumult at all. Yet, once again, we deny that, in whatever way they are afflicted, they fall away and depart from the certain assurance received from

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<sup>11</sup> Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, pp.23-24.

<sup>12</sup> David Foxgrover, "Temporary Faith" and the Certainty of Salvation", *CTJ*, 15 (1980), pp.220-32.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.16.

God's mercy.<sup>14</sup>

Kendall has passed over this aspect of Calvin's teaching: doubting, fearing and trembling were not minimised by Calvin. The problem was not with the nature of faith but with the constant struggle against unbelief and sin. Likewise, faith could be weak and in need of further growth.<sup>15</sup> True knowledge of assurance, however, overcame this doubt.<sup>16</sup>

How was assurance experienced? This is at the heart of voluntarism. Calvin argued that it was gained through the Spirit validating the Word.<sup>17</sup> In the revelation of God's word one was shown the certainty of perseverance and above all else the preserving power and promise of God in Christ.<sup>18</sup> As the Spirit testified to the believer of God's faithfulness to his promises in his Word, confidence and assurance were gained. For Calvin assurance was a special work of the Holy Spirit.<sup>19</sup> What Calvin seems to have rejected was any notion that the conscience was the basis for detecting assurance: "if you contemplate yourself, that is sure damnation."<sup>20</sup> Certainly Calvin suggested that

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<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.17. *OG*, IV, p.27.

<sup>15</sup> George W. Harper, "Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649: A Review Article", *CJ*, 20, no.2, 1985, p.257, is surely wrong to suggest that Calvin was unwilling to devote much attention to the idea of true believers struggling with assurance.

<sup>16</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.15.

<sup>17</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.i.1-4.

<sup>18</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.21.

<sup>19</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.7-8.

<sup>20</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.24.

the conscience, if it was humble and tender, strengthened a believer's progress in the life of faith, but to set the conscience between faith and assurance was dangerous. Assurance originated from the promise of God in Christ.<sup>21</sup> Personal morality would not provide infallible assurance.

But what about Calvin's comment on 2 Peter 1.10, singled out by Kendall as a key text in experimental predestinarianism? Again, Kendall has missed some of Calvin's subtlety:

purity of life is rightly regarded as the illustration and evidence of election, whereby the faithful not only show to others that they are the sons of God, but also confirm themselves in this faith, but in such a way that they place their sure foundations elsewhere.<sup>22</sup>

This raises the question of works and assurance and, further, the issue of the practical syllogism, *syllogismus practicus*.<sup>23</sup> On the whole Kendall and others seem to be right: Calvin did not stress the practical syllogism, at least as it came to be understood by those who came after him.<sup>24</sup>

The problem, however, which should not be ignored, is that Calvin accepted that works could strengthen and serve as signs of one's justification. In his exposition of the Lord's Prayer Calvin explained that

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<sup>21</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.24.

<sup>22</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* 2 Peter 1.10, p.334.

<sup>23</sup> This was defined above, p.4. See John S. Bray, "The Value of Works in the Theology of Calvin and Beza", *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 4 (1973): 77-86 who draws attention to this issue.

<sup>24</sup> Wilhelm Niesel, *The Theology of Calvin*, English trans. by Howard Knight (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), pp.171 and 178; Lane, *op.cit.*, p.46; Bell, *op.cit.*, pp. 538-39.

the conditional clause, "as we forgive" (Mt. 6.12 and parallels), while not that upon which forgiveness rested, was nevertheless a warning "to prevent anyone from daring to approach God to seek forgiveness without being quite free and clear from hatred." At the same time, however, one's forgiveness of others can serve to "confirm our own absolution, as by the imprint of a seal."<sup>25</sup> Similarly in his exposition of the Lord's Prayer in the 1559 *Institutes* he referred to forgiveness of others as a condition which could be a "sign to assure us he has granted forgiveness of sins to us just as surely as we are aware of having forgiven others."<sup>26</sup>

Yet, surely the context of Calvin's argument about works and his exposition of the Lord's Prayer was one which insisted on the primacy of justification through Christ's righteousness. Calvin, of course, wanted to address criticism from Rome and stressed a justification by faith which did not exclude works, but works were subordinate signs of one's justification. The flow of Calvin's argument in *Instit.* III.xiv.18-20 was that while works helped a believer in assurance they did so only in that they referred to God's adopting them as sons. As Lane has put it, works of this kind were never to be, "the primary ground of our confidence."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospel*, Torrance edition, Vol 1, p.212; CR 45, p.201: "et simul absolutionis nostrae fiduciam quasi impresso sigillo melius ratam facere."

<sup>26</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.xx.45; OS, IV, p.361: addidit enim hoc tanquam signum quo confirmemur tam certo nobis factum a se remissionem peccatorum...

<sup>27</sup> Lane, *op.cit.*, p.34.

The above examples of Calvin's writings suggest that Kendall has not presented an entirely balanced interpretation of Calvin. A number of conclusions can be drawn here which will be shown in later chapters to be relevant to understanding voluntarism in later English puritanism. First, assurance was of the essence of faith, and should not be separated from faith. Second, Calvin recognised that many doubted, and while this was not ideal, it was not a reflection on the nature of faith but the reality of one's struggle with the flesh. Third, Calvin may not have embraced introspective reflection in order to determine election, still he allowed, and encouraged, a person to see the signs of sanctification and to gain assurance that such evidence confirmed one's union with Christ and participation in the life of the Spirit.

Kendall's interpretation of William Perkins (1558-1602) also needs a certain amount of qualification. Kendall has referred to Perkins as "the fountain head of the experiential predestinarian tradition".<sup>28</sup> Perkins was a committed follower of Calvin but with modifications received from Beza and Zanchius.<sup>29</sup>

Perkins's view of assurance, which was not necessarily original, can be summed up in the following way. First, Perkins claimed that there were different degrees of faith. In *Foundation of Christian Religion* he referred to the "least" measure of faith and the

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<sup>28</sup> Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p.51.

<sup>29</sup> Ian Breward, *The Works of William Perkins*. The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics. Vol. 3. (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), p.85.

"greatest" measure of faith.<sup>30</sup> Here is the implication: there was an assurance of faith which was the essence of faith, but there was an assurance of faith which came after faith and over a long period of time in the Christian life. It was the latter with which Perkins was primarily concerned.<sup>31</sup> Perkins did not fully separate faith from assurance, but because of his experiential approach he gave greater emphasis to the long process of assurance. "You may have to wait, but by faith it will come."<sup>32</sup> It was this assurance which became infallible.<sup>33</sup> In *Golden Chain* Perkins declared,

[the] highest degree of faith is plerophoria, a full assurance, which is not only a certain and true but also a full persuasion of the heart, whereby a Christian much more firmly taking hold on Christ Jesus maketh full and resolute account that God loveth him, and that he will give to him by name Christ and all his graces pertaining to eternal life. Man cometh to this high degree after the sense, observation and long experience of God's favour and love.<sup>34</sup>

A second observation about Perkins' theology of perseverance is that he widened the gap between certainty of God's benevolence and the experiential apprehension of this assurance. His resolution of this

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<sup>30</sup> Breward, *Perkins*, p.159; cf. p.229.

<sup>31</sup> This observation is also made by Gordon J. Keddie, "Unfallible Certenty of the Pardon of Sinne and Life Everlasting", *EQ*, 48, p.237.

<sup>32</sup> Perkins, *A Treatise tending unto a Declaration in The Works of the famous and Worthie Minister of Christ...gathered into one volume, and newly corrected*. John Legat: Cambridge, 1605, p.492.

<sup>33</sup> Keddie, *op.cit*, p.243.

<sup>34</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chain* Chap. XXXVI.80-81, in Breward, *Perkins*, pp.230-31.

problem was found within a covenant theology.<sup>35</sup> According to Ian Breward, while Perkins's use of the covenant was not central to his theology, nevertheless the covenant of grace expressed the outward means of the decree of election. The covenant had seals or means, which if used by the believer, could provide a way to assurance. This point, however, led to an increased reflection on one's sanctification and the use of the covenant means.

Q. How may a man know that he is justified before God? A. He need not ascend into heaven to search the secret counsel of God, but rather descend into his own heart to search whether he be sanctified or not. Rom. 8.1; 2 John 3.9.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, Perkins advocated the practical syllogism, not in a way which subordinated his Christocentrism but which called for the conscience to determine the appropriateness of the will's choice. The practical syllogism was also only suitable for someone under the influence of the Spirit, and in fact, Perkins in *Golden Chain* inferred the practical syllogism only after he stressed the independent testimony of the Spirit. However, he moved on to an affirmation of the practical syllogism.<sup>37</sup>

It is arguable that Kendall missed certain subtle qualifications to be found in Calvin's and Perkins' soteriology: especially the role of the Spirit and

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<sup>35</sup> The nature of covenant theology is considered below, 1.5, pp. 54-56 and more fully in 3.1, pp.144-75.

<sup>36</sup> Perkins, *Foundation of Christian Religion*, in Breward, *Perkins*, p.159.

<sup>37</sup> Perkins, *Golden Chain*, Chap. LVIII.113-114 in Breward, pp.256-59.

Christology.<sup>38</sup> To be sure, there are differences between Calvin, Perkins and later puritans; this is hardly surprising, given that Reformed theology was shaped not only by Calvin but by the Heidelberg divines, Dutch theologians as well as English writers.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, as shown in the previous pages, Kendall's interpretation of Calvin and Perkins is open to legitimate challenge. We argue that, however different Calvin was from later "Calvinists" there were voluntaristic themes which continued. A reading of Calvin and Perkins actually points to far more paradox and qualification than Kendall has acknowledged. In the final analysis Calvin's theology *did* include a voluntarism: but a voluntarism more in keeping with the definition offered above -- the prominence, but not dominance, of the will's response to God's sovereign initiatives in the divine/human encounter.

William K.B. Stoever's '*A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*'. *Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (1978) is an indispensable study into the nature of covenant theology and its relationship to seventeenth century puritan theology.<sup>40</sup> Stoever has made a number of important advances in modern

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<sup>38</sup> See Richard A. Muller, *Christ and Decree. Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), p.132 who makes a similar criticism and adds that Kendall, among others, has missed the relation between Perkins' theology and pietism. This is a fascinating observation, but regrettably Muller never clearly explains it.

<sup>39</sup> The developments in Reformed theology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are presented below in 3.1 - 3.1.3, pp.144-75.

<sup>40</sup> William K.B. Stoever, '*A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*'. *Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1978).

scholarship, particularly noting the way in which seventeenth century Reformed theology argued passionately that faith was the result of God's sovereign initiative in predestination and, yet, there also was the importance of human choice. In many ways Stoever's findings are conclusive, but, as the title suggests, he has concentrated on New England Antinomianism. The nature of Antinomianism in England in the seventeenth century remains to be studied; equally the voluntarism to which Stoever alludes needs fuller exposition.

One work which is notable because of its treatment of voluntarism is John Von Rohr's, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (1986). It is one of the few more recent works which has analyzed the nature of voluntarism.<sup>41</sup> Unlike Kendall, he has accurately noted that Augustine's influence led many puritans to hold a view of faith which involved both the intellect and the will. Von Rohr highlights voluntarism's importance in covenant theology. The difficulty, however, is that he never fully defined voluntarism beyond concluding that it was one of the two paradoxical points of puritan theology which enabled them to affirm human responsibility and contingency.<sup>42</sup> He comes closer to the view of this thesis when he writes, "The basic antinomy is that of divine sovereignty and human freedom. If predestination affirms the ultimacy and

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<sup>41</sup> John Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought*. American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion, Number 45. (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986).

<sup>42</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p.1.

final efficiency of God's choice, piety urges at least some effective free participation on the part of the human subject."<sup>43</sup>

The study of voluntarism in the thought of Richard Baxter and John Owen, as representatives of mid-seventeenth century puritanism, which will be presented here inevitably becomes a study of puritan spirituality. As such, it stands beside the contributions of other modern writers. The invaluable work in recent years by Stoever, Dewey D. Wallace, Jr. and Charles L. Cohen has, nevertheless, been more concerned with practical piety and an overview of a large number of late puritans than with a close theological study of certain central figures.<sup>44</sup> This thesis, as a close study of doctrine, can also serve as a complementary aid to Paul Seaver's insightful work, *Wallington's World*.<sup>45</sup> Seaver has drawn on the personal writings of Nehemiah Wallington, a London artisan whose diaries provide a fresh insight into the puritan life; in short Seaver has gone out into the congregation and provided an example of a "common man". This approach

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<sup>43</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p.8.

<sup>44</sup> Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*. Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *Puritans and Predestination. Grace in English Protestant Theology 1525-1695*. Studies in Religion. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982). Wallace provides a good survey of predestinarian theology. His section on the seventeenth century is quite good, particularly noting the contrast between Baxter and Owen. The major draw back is that his work, as a survey, does not provide close theological detail. Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) is unique in its study of puritan spirituality. It by far surpasses the earlier works of G.S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion* (London: Epworth Press, 1957), Owen C. Watkins, *The Puritan Experience* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972) and Irvonwy Morgan, *Puritan Spirituality* (London: Epworth Press, 1973). Cohen, however, accepts certain assumptions about Calvin and Calvinism which, as we show, are open to further question.

<sup>45</sup> Paul Seaver, *Wallington's World. A Puritan Artisan in Seventeenth-Century London* (London: Methuen & Co., Ltd., 1985).

is most welcome, for it helps us get beyond the personalities of notable figures ~~as~~<sup>like</sup> Baxter and Owen. Yet the historical theologian cannot help but press the issue: on what doctrinal bases did Wallington predicate his life?

Finally, recent works on Richard Baxter and John Owen suggest that there is need for more theological studies. F. J. Powicke's biographies of Baxter are helpful, but now quite out of date.<sup>46</sup> Geoffrey F. Nuttall has presented a meticulous biography of Baxter but provided little theological observation.<sup>47</sup> The illuminating study of Baxter as a literary figure by Neil H. Keeble is complementary to Nuttall's work, but it too refrains somewhat from close theological analysis.<sup>48</sup> By far the fullest study of Baxter's theology is J.I. Packer's D.Phil thesis; yet it is now some thirty years out of date.<sup>49</sup> The most thorough work on John Owen has been by Peter Toon.<sup>50</sup> Regrettably, his biography of Owen contains very little theological analysis. Sinclair B. Ferguson's recent

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<sup>46</sup> Frederick J. Powicke, *A Life of the Reverend Richard Baxter 1615 - 1691* (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1924) and *The Reverend Richard Baxter Under the Cross* (London: Jonathan Cape, Ltd., 1927).

<sup>47</sup> Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965).

<sup>48</sup> N.H. Keeble, *Richard Baxter. Puritan Man of Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

<sup>49</sup> James I. Packer, "The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter" unpublished D.Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1954.

<sup>50</sup> Peter Toon, *The Correspondence of John Owen (1616-1683)* (Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co., Ltd., 1970). This work is most helpful due to the small amount of extant manuscripts of Owen. Toon, *The Oxford Orations of Dr. John Owen* (Linkinhorne: Gospel Communication, Linkinhorne House, 1971). This is a collection of translated Latin orations delivered at Oxford between 1652 and 1657. Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen, Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1971).

study of John Owen is a welcome popular introduction to Owen's theology. The deficiency of Ferguson's work, however, is the absence of any critical evaluation of Owen and his period.<sup>51</sup> Thus, because of the need for more doctrinal studies of mid-seventeenth century puritan theology and the desirability of further work on Baxter and Owen this thesis was undertaken.

This thesis presents voluntarism as a key to understanding late puritan spirituality, and explores this through the ~~working~~<sup>works</sup> of the leading writers Baxter and Owen. As argued above, the present field of secondary scholarship has room for more work not only on Baxter and Owen but on the theological nature of mid-seventeenth century English puritan piety. It is desirable to know, from a theological/historical perspective, what inspired and motivated the spirituality of these Christians.

## 1.2 Was there a mid-seventeenth century puritanism?

To describe Baxter and Owen as mid-seventeenth century puritans, however, is to face an apparent contradiction: neither arrogated to himself the name "puritan". While it is worth noting that Baxter's father was labelled "puritan" by his contemporaries and Owen's father was a clear non-Conformist, by the time Baxter began writing in 1649 the term had a specific

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<sup>51</sup> Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen On The Christian Life* (Edinburgh/Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1987). This work is largely written for a popular audience, based in part on his Ph.D thesis, "The Doctrine of the Christian Life in the teaching of Dr. John Owen (1661-1683)", unpublished Ph.D thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1979.

implication: associated more with a term of abuse than a compliment. <sup>52</sup> So, can Baxter and Owen be called puritan? Or is this the "vertical" hermeneutic to which William Lamont referred in his book, *Richard Baxter and the Millennium*: that is, "to discard the seventeenth-century dross... and to extract the gold -- the piety which has moved Christians throughout the next three hundred years" ? <sup>53</sup>

There are valid reasons for placing Baxter and Owen within what may be called a puritan tradition. To understand why it is necessary to consider first the term in its Elizabethan context: the context of both Baxter and Owen's fathers. This is done immediately below. After this (in 1.3) Baxter and Owen's biographies are presented, particularly with an eye towards their non-Conformity.

What did the term puritan imply for the generation before Baxter and Owen? Patrick Collinson has demonstrated in his work, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, that the expression was a term of derision. Yet, Collinson cautions that the substance of this derision must not be made too precise. More recently,

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<sup>52</sup> For Baxter's father see his comments in *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. Matthew Sylvester (1696) I.i.1, pp.2-3. For Owen's father see William Orme, "Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Dr. John Owen" in *Works of John Owen*, edited by T. Russell, Vol. 1 (London: Richard Baynes, 1826), p.5. Orme is dependent upon John Asty's, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," in *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen, D.D.* (London, 1721), p.3. As for modern studies see Ferguson, *John Owen* p. 1 and n.2. Toon, *God's Statesman*, likewise assumes that Henry Owen was a puritan, p.1. (But, while we offer this point, we must hasten to add that Owen only considered his father a non-Conformist. We do not have specific evidence, as with Baxter's father, that Henry Owen was called "puritan" by his contemporaries.) Neither Ferguson nor Toon define what they mean by puritan.

<sup>53</sup> William Lamont, *Richard Baxter and the Millennium* (London: Croom Helm, 1979), pp.20-21.

Peter Lake has argued that the Elizabethan puritan movement was even more enigmatic because there were a number of "moderate" puritans. In other words, according to Lake, it is incorrect simply to say that puritans wanted out of an episcopal system or were more "Calvinist" than others. Furthermore, an individual may well have demonstrated more "puritan leanings" (if puritan is equated over-simply with nonconformity) at one point than at others.<sup>54</sup> "Different aspects of that over-all position were given different degrees of emphasis by different men in different situations."<sup>55</sup>

Prior to the work by Collinson the major studies on puritanism were those by R.G. Usher, William Haller, Christopher Hill, Charles and Katherine George and J.F.H. New.<sup>56</sup> While each offered various interpretations, they shared the broad view that puritans were those within the Church who were frustrated with the Elizabethan settlement; they wished for further reform. It was not that puritans were more Calvinist than others, rather they felt that Elizabeth

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<sup>54</sup> Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982). Lake's chief example is Laurence Chaderton (1538?-1640), one time Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Chaderton was a puritan representative at the Hampton Court Conference.

<sup>55</sup> Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, p.283.

<sup>56</sup> R.G. Usher, *The Presbyterian Movement in the reign of Queen Elizabeth*, as illustrated in the *Minute Book of the Dedham Classis 1582-1589*, Camden 3rd series, vol 8, 1905; William Haller, *Liberty and Reformation in the Puritan Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1955); Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); J.E.Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church. From Archbishop Whitgift to the Long Parliament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); Hill, *Intellectual Origins of the English Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965); Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Panther, 1969); Charles and Katherine George, *The Protestant Mind of the English Reformation 1570-1640* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961); and J.F.H New, *Anglican and Puritan. The basis of their opposition 1558-1640* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964).

and certain of her bishops were not moving far enough.

What makes Collinson's work important is not that he took any innovative steps to offer a new definition of puritan, rather he has presented a picture of a political movement theologically motivated. The implication is that there may well have been a theological unity to puritanism: a unity important to, but not always evidenced in, the vestments controversy of the 1560s and 1570s and the debates between those who advocated episcopacy and those who called for a presbyterian model. Taking it a step further Collinson also challenged the assumptions held by Christopher Hill and Michael Walzer who have maintained that puritanism was primarily a radical social phenomenon among a growing mercantile group.<sup>57</sup> Contrary to Hill and Walzer, Collinson sees no clear evidence of a politically radical and socially revolutionary movement.

Collinson has had his critics. Paul Christianson challenged Collinson's interpretation and insisted that puritan can be defined more precisely.<sup>58</sup> He maintained that puritan describes those who were firmly within the Genevan sphere of influence and who advocated *jure divino* presbyterianism up to the 1580s. Whereas Collinson hesitated to equate puritan with anti-episcopal sentiments, Christianson defined puritans as

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<sup>57</sup> For Hill see above, n.56. Michael Walzer, *The Revolution of the Saints: a study in the origins of Radical Politics* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966).

<sup>58</sup> Paul Christianson, "Reformers and the Church of England under Elizabeth I and the Early Stuarts", *JEH*, (31,4), 1980, pp.463-82. Collinson responded to this article in the same issue, "A Comment: concerning the name Puritan", *JEH* (31,4), 1980

those strongly against episcopacy. Furthermore, he suggested a clear distinction between those puritans who remained within the Church, however strongly presbyterian, and those who separated. Separatists must be seen, claimed Christianson, as a distinct group or entity from those whom he identified as puritan.

Ironically, therefore, the heart of the present debate on the definition of puritan is the question of precision. Collinson has introduced the idea of a "nominalist" understanding of puritan: namely that there was not a "puritan" type, rather individuals who manifested certain attitudes and practices.<sup>59</sup> Peter Lake has insisted that any understanding of puritan which is rigidly defined as a party-based opposition is inappropriate.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, Richard Greaves has suggested that puritan is more than a relative term and can be illustrated along a continuum. In fact, argued Greaves, one can and must draw a distinction between puritan and Anglican (*sic*), "it is historically irresponsible to deny the substantial dissimilarity."<sup>61</sup> Clearly, in the light of the present debate it would seem difficult to offer a definition of puritan which could go unchallenged. Nevertheless, to insist too much on the fluidity and relativism of the term puritan does not altogether aid the historian. There must be something to the term which can help determine whether

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<sup>59</sup> Collinson, "A Comment: concerning the name Puritan," *JEH* (31,4) 1980, p.487.

<sup>60</sup> Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, p.280.

<sup>61</sup> Richard L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), p.29.

it is appropriate to describe Baxter, Owen and others in the mid-seventeenth century as puritans.

It is credible to offer initially that *puritan* suggests those who were dissatisfied with the state of the Church as it was from 1558 onwards. Yet, since this obviously could include Catholic recusants and certainly even some "conformists", it must be argued that a key to understanding the puritans' dissatisfaction with the English Church was their concern for *edification*. John S. Coolidge drew attention to this distinction.<sup>62</sup> Curiously, Coolidge's work is rarely considered in some of the more modern studies of English Puritanism. Peter Lake addressed the issue of *edification* in a fashion similar to Coolidge, but with a more intuitive argument rather than one based on detailed theological examination. While Coolidge's methodology is possibly problematic in that he presupposes that one can accurately interpret Pauline theology and then look for evidence of this theology in puritan writings, his findings are most stimulating. He writes, "The puritan versus conformist understanding of *edification* may well provide the key to Elizabethan Puritanism."<sup>63</sup>

Elizabethan puritans evaluated everything on the basis of whether or not the body of believers would be

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<sup>62</sup> John S. Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England - Puritanism and the Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp.23-54.

<sup>63</sup> Coolidge, *Pauline Renaissance*, p.27.

built up, encouraged, disciplined and instructed.<sup>64</sup> It was precisely this theological orientation and understanding which pushed some puritans into nonconformity. The questions of adiaphora were not so much the result of excessive biblicism as they were a matter of conscience. Peter Lake, while reluctant to stress a sharp definition along party lines, expressed the point being made.

For the refusal to conform was justified and motivated by the need to avoid the offense of the godly and the delusion of the weak in faith... In short, rejection of conformity was justified in terms of 'edification', that process through which a true community of godly and properly self-conscious true believers was called together and sustained within the church.<sup>65</sup>

To understand how and in what sense Baxter and Owen may rightly be placed within the category of puritan the term needs to be interpreted as a sensibility resulting from a conflict of conscience among certain English Protestants. At the centre of this conflict was the issue of edification. It was the political failure of those who pressed for reform in the 1580s to have the issues of conscience resolved which resulted in the numerous and diverse puritan responses; and the emphasis, as Peter Lake has shown, is on the plurality and diversity of responses. There were moderates

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<sup>64</sup> Coolidge rightly notes that many "conformists" were concerned with edification as well. What distinguished the "conformist" from the puritan was, in Coolidge's opinion, the conformists reluctance to see edification including ceremony, vestments and church government. As long as right doctrine was maintained there was edification. Coolidge, *Pauline Renaissance* pp.45-46.

<sup>65</sup> Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, p.2. I agree with Lake, only wishing that he had taken it further and asked why edification was *theologically* important. In this sense, Coolidge is helpful as a complementary study.

willing to protest against certain points of conformity yet capable of accepting a reformed episcopate. Equally there were radicals whose consciences were affected with greater consequence: vituperative expressions and even separation.

The definition of puritan, therefore, is elusive. Still, it suggests an active protest against the outward forms of the Elizabethan Church. The protest came from a theological conviction that for the sake of the godly and the elect, which some saw as the nation, certain matters of polity and liturgics were unedifying. Without doubt there were various expressions or temperaments within this puritan conscience. Yet the diversity of practice and expression need not hide the possibly unifying element. That this unifying element was at times also expressed by individuals not recognised as puritan should not be too surprising. Neither should the fact that some puritans eventually became Separatists preclude interpreting Separatism as one of the logical consequences of puritan thought and sentiment: thus suggesting a possible unity rather than dissimilarity between Elizabethan puritans, Jacobean puritans, Stuart puritans, later Separatists, and even later Independents and Congregationalists.

This observation points forward to a continued longing for a national Church truly reformed after 1603, beyond Elizabeth's reign. The influence of a puritan concept of edification was still evident. This can be seen in the biographies of Baxter and Owen, to

which we now turn.

### 1.3 The significance of Richard Baxter and John Owen

Richard Baxter (1615-1691) and John Owen (1616-1683) were men of prominence and influence during a period of English history which can be best described as tumultuous. As detailed below, Baxter and Owen attracted a number of important associates and followers; both were, to use an expression, "lodestars" in mid-seventeenth century puritanism. This is not to suggest that there were sharp party lines drawn around them. Nevertheless, they well represent important theological opinions within seventeenth century English puritanism.

Another aspect is also worth considering. As indicated above, both have been the subject of a number of studies; yet a recognition of their association and inter-relationship has never been fully presented.<sup>66</sup> They not only knew each other, but, as suggested below, quite frequently their work interacted. A study of the events which brought them together and the theological controversies in which they met suggests that they are representatives of two somewhat different perspectives.

The expression "perspectives" is used deliberately. On many aspects of voluntarism and the Christian life they agreed, but on others they differed: sometimes it was a matter of qualification or emphasis, at others fundamental disagreement. Thus, Baxter and Owen show that this mid-seventeenth century "puritanism" was a

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<sup>66</sup> See above, pp.17-18.

consciousness which manifested itself in varying degrees and measures. Based on what Baxter and Owen argued, this period of puritanism should be studied with an eye towards fluidity and paradox rather than clear cut terms and categories. As this section now considers Baxter and Owen's biographies, it will be seen that their concern for edification led them to their respective breaks with the national church in the 1630s and later their views on church government; in this sense they represent a continuity with earlier Elizabethan puritans.

Richard Baxter was born on 12 November, 1615 at the village of Rowton, near Shrewsbury in Shropshire. His days as a youth were not necessarily the most pleasant.<sup>67</sup> Baxter's academic education was unfortunate. He attended neither Oxford nor Cambridge: all the more intriguing when one considers his prolific writing and observes within his work one very well read in the classics, Scholastic theology and contemporary political thought.

For his spiritual education, Baxter gave large credit to his father's influence. His father, also Richard, was labelled by his contemporaries as a "puritan".<sup>68</sup> In *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, Baxter's autobiography which presents his personal reflections on some of the controversies in which he was engaged as a writer and as a church statesman, he records that his father was more concerned with reading the Bible,

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<sup>67</sup> Nuttall, *Baxter*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>68</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae*, I.i.1, p.3.

prayer, and reprovng drunkards than with church polity.<sup>69</sup> It was this type of puritanism, concerned with godliness and edification, which influenced Baxter.

But though we had no better teachers, it pleased God to instruct and change my father, by the bare reading of the Scriptures in private, without either preaching, or godly company, or any other books but the Bible. And God made him the instrument of my first convictions, and approbation of a holy life, as well as of my restraint from the grosser sort of lives.<sup>70</sup>

While he was never able to pinpoint the exact occasion of his conversion, he enumerated some of the significant points of his spiritual development. At the age of fifteen he read *Bunny's Resolution*, a practical work originally written by the Jesuit, Robert Parsons, and later corrected by Edmund Bunny (1540-1619).<sup>71</sup> Through this book, "it pleased God to awaken my soul, and show me the folly of sinning, and the misery of the wicked, and the inexpressible weight of things eternal, and the necessity of resolving on a holy life, more than I was ever acquainted with

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<sup>69</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.1, pp.2-3. It is worth noting, however, that while this autobiography is invaluable, Matthew Sylvester, the subsequent editor, did not always completely follow Baxter's manuscript. F.J. Powicke, *Under the Cross*, p.10, has written, "there are frequent omissions and alterations and deviations from Baxter's directions." Geoffrey Nuttall also corroborates this conclusion: in particular Nuttall observes that Sylvester toned down Baxter's criticism of John Owen. Nuttall, "The MS. of *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696)" *JEH*, Vol vi.1 (April, 1955), pp.73-79.

<sup>70</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.1, p.2.

<sup>71</sup> Pollard and Redgrave record that there were at least two editions of this work (1584 and 1589). STC number 4088. A.W. Pollard and G.R. Redgrave, *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad*, Second edition, revised and enlarged, 2 vols., edited by W.A. Jackson, F.S. Ferguson and Katherine F. Panzer (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1986). For Bunny see *DNB*, vol 7, pp.271-72.

before."<sup>72</sup> Baxter found great comfort and benefit from the works of Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), especially Sibbes' *Bruised Reed*, which showed him the "mystery of redemption."<sup>73</sup> In *Reliquiae* he recorded that he delved deeply into the earlier puritan works of William Perkins, Edmund Bolton, John Preston, William Whately and Richard Harris.<sup>74</sup> He was also concerned to read the works of the school men, as he called them, namely Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Durandus and Ockham.

Richard Baxter's non-conformity is not altogether easy to define. Throughout his life he advocated both a reformed episcopacy, guided by Archbishop James Ussher (1581-1656), and a Presbyterian model.<sup>75</sup> He was ordained deacon in 1638 by the bishop of Worcester, John Thornborough, and possibly ordained priest in 1641.<sup>76</sup> Nevertheless, Baxter's non-conformity developed during his stay in Shrewsbury in the 1630s. In *Reliquiae* he wrote that the "Etcetera Oath" of 1640, "roused him from his drowsiness to consider some of the issues of conformity."<sup>77</sup> After his ordination he

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<sup>72</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.3, p.3.

<sup>73</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.3, p.4. Richard Sibbes was influenced by William Perkins (1558-1602) and was converted by Paul Baynes. Sibbes became a lecturer at Gray's Inn, London. Later he was master at St. Catherine's Hall. Lecturer for a period in 1615 and then again in 1633 at Holy Trinity, Cambridge.

<sup>74</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.4, pp.4-5. For Bolton see *DNB*, vol 5, p.325; for Preston see *DNB*, vol 46, p.308; for Whately see *DNB*, vol 60, p.430; and for Harrison see *DNB*, vol 25, p.22.

<sup>75</sup> For Ussher see *DNB*, vol 58, p.64 and R.B. Knox, *James Ussher Archbishop of Armagh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967).

<sup>76</sup> Geoffrey Nuttall, *Baxter*, p.18 presents the case for concluding that Baxter was ordained priest.

<sup>77</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae*, I.i.22.6, p.16.

spent a short period in Dudley and then moved to Bridgnorth, to whom he later dedicated part of *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650). Geoffrey Nuttall has argued that in Bridgnorth Baxter's frustration with poor church discipline and inadequate preaching marked him as a clear non-conformist.<sup>78</sup>

Baxter is perhaps best known for his ministry in Kidderminster, Worcestershire. By the time he arrived in Kidderminster, in April, 1641, as a lecturer under a Rev. George Dance, Baxter's non-conformity was evident.<sup>79</sup>

His first period of ministry at Kidderminster was interrupted by the initial fighting of the Civil War.<sup>80</sup> Leaving Kidderminster under some pressure and threats, he went to Coventry. Here he eventually attached himself to the Army as a preacher. Baxter gradually became engaged as chaplain, first to the Earl of Essex's army then later to a regiment under Colonel Whalley. Baxter rejected an offer from Cromwell to serve as chaplain: a post later forced upon John Owen.<sup>81</sup>

His years in the Army were most important in the development of his theology, notably his observance of the more radical sects, whom he called "hotheads", and the rising influence of Antinomians.<sup>82</sup> Baxter later described his days in the Army as days when, with a

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<sup>78</sup> Nuttall, *Baxter*, pp.20-21.

<sup>79</sup> For Dance see Nuttall, *Baxter*, pp.24-27.

<sup>80</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.57, p.40.

<sup>81</sup> See below p.<sup>36</sup>29. Baxter's relationship with Cromwell was mixed. He appreciated the religious tolerance but frequently questioned Cromwell's power and intentions.

<sup>82</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.61-75, pp.43-52. For Antinomianism see below, pp.56-58.

sense of mission, he debated, taught and corrected soldiers regarding issues of liturgy but as well, "sometimes about free-grace and free-will, and all the points of Antinomianism and Arminianism."<sup>83</sup>

By 1647/48 Baxter returned to Kidderminster as their "minister".<sup>84</sup> His ministry at Kidderminster was exceptional because of his emphasis upon visitation and catechism teaching. In *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) Baxter detailed how he and his assistant visited fifteen or sixteen families a week among the 800 families of the congregation, with the specific purpose of teaching and encouraging. At Kidderminster Baxter also refined his views on church government and liturgy. He also exercised a wider sphere of influence: most notably his contacts with other ministers through his leadership of the Worcestershire Association.<sup>85</sup> His success in Kidderminster not to the contrary, Baxter was forced to leave in 1660 due to the Act for Confirming and Restoring of Ministers (this restored George Dance to his incumbency). Arriving in London he was initially accepted by the returning Royalists; Edward Hyde, Lord Clarendon, offered Baxter the bishopric of Hereford -- which Baxter declined.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.77, p.53.

<sup>84</sup> Nuttall, *Baxter*, pp.40-63, provides the best detail of his years at Kidderminster.

<sup>85</sup> Geoffrey Nuttall provides details and membership of this group in "The Worcestershire Association: its membership," *JEH* 1:2 (1950), 197-206.

<sup>86</sup> Clarendon offered Norwich to Edward Reynolds (1599-1676) which Reynolds accepted, Hereford to Baxter and Coventry and Lichfield to Edmund Calamy, the Senior (1600-66) who turned down the offer. For Reynolds see *DNB*, vol 48, pp.40-41 and for Calamy see *DNB*, vol 8, pp.227-30. Ian Green, *The Re-establishment of the Church of England 1660-1663* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp.83-87 explains the circumstances of this offer to Baxter and his rejection. Green concludes that these offers of bishoprics were an expression of Charles'

The years after 1660 were in many ways dark years for Baxter. He was asked to serve on a Royal Commission which sought to revise the Book of Common Prayer, but this proved fruitless.<sup>87</sup> While his writing continued, indeed it was his prime occupation, life was full of frustration and problems. A highlight was his marriage on 10 September, 1662 to Margaret Charlton, twenty-one years younger than him yet who preceded him in death.<sup>88</sup> In ~~1682~~<sup>1669</sup> and again in 1684 he was arrested and imprisoned for preaching contrary to the Clarendon Code and for engaging in a paraphrase of the New Testament.<sup>89</sup> For the remaining five years of his life he lived in London, active yet with an increased sense of frustration.

John Owen was born in 1616 in Oxfordshire.<sup>90</sup> In contrast to Baxter, very little is known about Owen's early days; for that matter there are few autobiographical insights to be gained from any of Owen's published works or the little correspondence

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serious intention to bring a comprehensive settlement.

<sup>87</sup> Nuttall, *Baxter*, p.89.

<sup>88</sup> John Howe (1630-1705) preached the funeral sermon of Margaret Baxter. For Howe see, *Calamy Revised*, pp.279-80.

<sup>89</sup> See Nuttall, *Baxter*, pp.107-110. Powicke, *Richard Baxter Under the Cross*, Appendix 8, p.285 provides Baxter's own account of the reason for his arrest in 1684. See also Lamont, *Richard Baxter and the Millennium*.

<sup>90</sup> Peter Toon counters the suggestion of the *DNB* that Owen was born in Stadhampton. (*DNB* vol 42, pp.424-28). Toon points out that only after Owen was born did his family move to the village of Stadham (now Stadhampton), Toon, *God's Statesman*, p.2. Sinclair Ferguson gives Owen's birthplace as Stadham. Ferguson, *John Owen*, p.1.

that survives. His father, Henry, was a clergyman quite sympathetic to puritan sentiment and exercised a non-conformist ministry in Stadham. According to Peter Toon, the parish church in Stadham was of the puritan sort, largely due to the guiding influence and patronage of the D'Oyley family.<sup>91</sup> In 1631 John followed his older brother, William, to Oxford. A student at Queen's College, he was admitted to the degree of B.A. in 1632 and his M.A. in 1635. At Queen's Owen was under the tutelage of Thomas Barlow, who eventually became Bishop of Lincoln and for whom Owen had a high regard years later. Orme described Barlow as "a Calvinist in theology, an Aristotelian in philosophy, and an Episcopalian in church government."<sup>92</sup>

Oxford at that time underwent changes, largely due to the influence and reforming concerns of William Laud.<sup>93</sup> What Owen thought about the growing influence of what some contemporaries believed to be Laud's Arminianism, is difficult to ascertain. It is known that he eventually left Oxford in 1637, and in all probability his departure had much to do with the implications of Laudianism and Arminianism.<sup>94</sup> Owen, however, was not anti-episcopalian, for just prior to leaving Oxford he was ordained by the Bishop of Oxford,

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<sup>91</sup> Toon, *God's Statesman*, p.2 and n.3.

<sup>92</sup> Orme, "Memoir", p.12. For Barlow (1607-1691) see *DNB*, vol 3, pp.224-229.

<sup>93</sup> Nicholas Tyacke provides the best overview of Arminianism at Oxford during this period. Tyacke details how Oxford was different from Cambridge during this period: Oxford Arminians were far more assertive. Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists. The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp.78-86. For Laud see *DNB*, vol 32, p.185.

<sup>94</sup> For Arminianism see below, pp.49-51.

John Bancroft, nephew of Archbishop Bancroft.<sup>95</sup>

After his departure from Oxford Owen spent time in the private service of, first, Sir Robert Dormer, as a tutor for his son, and then as chaplain to Lord Lovelace. In 1643 he accepted the living at Fordham in Essex, a living offered to him by Parliament. Already Owen's non-conformist inclinations were evident. According to Toon, Owen recorded in the parish register that he was "pastor" not vicar.<sup>96</sup> At this time he was more closely aligned with the Presbyterians, yet gradually modified this view after reading John Cotton's *Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven* (1644).<sup>97</sup> Here too he married his first wife, Mary Rooke.

Owen was forced to leave Fordham by the patron in 1646 and became minister to a gathered church at Coggeshall, Essex. St. Peter's was a puritan stronghold: the Earl of Warwick, to whom Owen dedicated his work on the atonement, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu* (1648), was the patron. Owen's immediate predecessor was Obadiah Sedgwick, a member of the Westminster Assembly. The previous clergy included, among others, John Dod Sr. and Ralph Cudworth.<sup>98</sup> It was here that Owen's Independency developed. As to the popularity of Owen's preaching ministry, Asty's "Memoir" reports that

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<sup>95</sup> Orme, "Memoirs", p.22.

<sup>96</sup> Toon, *God's Statesman*, p.17. For Mary Rooke see Toon, *op.cit.*, p.17.

<sup>97</sup> For Cotton (1584-1652) see Richard L.Greaves and Robert Zaller eds. *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982), vol I, pp.178-79. See also Larzer Liff, ed. *John Cotton on the Churches of New England* (1968).

<sup>98</sup> For Dod see *DNB*, vol 15, p.145 and for Cudworth see *DNB*, vol 13, p.271.

on some Sundays close to 2,000 came to listen to him.<sup>99</sup>

John Owen's preaching and potential were recognized beyond the boundaries of Fordham and Coggeshall. His first publication, *A Display of Arminianism* (1643) was dedicated to the Parliamentary Committee of Religion. In this work he strongly urged this body to heed his warnings about the threat of Arminianism. As early as 1646, having recently arrived at Coggeshall, he was invited to preach before Parliament, at one of its fast-day meetings.<sup>100</sup> The thirty year old preacher took as his text Acts 16.9 and urged Parliament to press on in the advancement of the gospel: interpreting some of the recent Army victories as God's blessing and encouragement in the face of so much spiritual darkness in the land. From this sermon, not the only time Owen preached on a parliamentary fast-day, his wider sphere of influence developed. In 1647 he was introduced to Henry Ireton, Oliver Cromwell's son-in-law, and other officers of the New Model Army at the time of the battle of Colchester. Owen later preached Ireton's funeral sermon, published in 1651 as *The Labouring Saints Dismission to Rest*. Owen too was involved in ministry to the Army, beginning with those under the command of General Fairfax. He continued to gain the favourable regard of Parliament, culminating, in a sense, in his being called to preach after the

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<sup>99</sup> John Asty, "Memoirs of the Life of John Owen," in *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen D.D.* (London: 1721) p. vii. Quoted in Toon, *God's Statesman*, p.26.

<sup>100</sup> Owen, *A Vision of Unchangeable Free Mercy* (1646). Goold ed., vol VIII. The *DNB* erroneously dates this sermon as 1648.

execution of Charles I on 30 January, 1649.<sup>101</sup>

It would be fair to say, however, that Owen's influence upon the affairs and leaders of the nation reached its apex in his relationship with Oliver Cromwell.<sup>102</sup> Undoubtedly Owen's preaching skill, manifested on those occasions when he preached before Parliament, was noted by Cromwell. Cromwell met Owen, in April/May of 1649 through Fairfax. Following this meeting Cromwell persuaded him to accompany his army to Ireland as chaplain and later to investigate certain activities at Trinity College, Dublin.<sup>103</sup> Later Owen, with Joseph Caryl, was ordered by Cromwell to accompany him to invade Scotland late in 1650.<sup>104</sup>

In 1651 Oliver Cromwell appointed Owen Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, an appointment he held until 1659.<sup>105</sup> A year later Owen was appointed Vice-Chancellor of Oxford.<sup>106</sup> His years at Oxford were not idle. Besides exercising a number of reforms to

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<sup>101</sup> This was later published as *Righteous Zeal encouraged by Divine Protection* (1649), Goold ed, vol VIII.

<sup>102</sup> Toon, *The Correspondence of John Owen (1616-1683)* (Cambridge and London: James Clarke & Co. Ltd., 1970) provides a total of seventeen items of correspondence between Cromwell and Owen: 13 from Cromwell to Owen, 4 from Owen to Cromwell. These letters are predominately concerned with practical matters regarding Oxford.

<sup>103</sup> Ferguson, *John Owen* p.7, notes that Cromwell urged the congregation at Coggeshall to accept Owen's absence. It was also true that Owen's younger brother was with Cromwell's troops heading for Ireland. This probably was his brother, Philemon, who was eventually killed in Ireland, Toon, *God's Statesman*, p. 2, n.2. As noted below it was in Ireland that he had occasion to write his response to Baxter's *Aphorismes of Justification* in his *Of the Death of Christ, the Price He Paid, and the Purchase He Made* (1650).

<sup>104</sup> For Caryl see *Calamy Revised*, pp.103-104.

<sup>105</sup> See Toon, *Correspondence*, #3, pp.52-53.

<sup>106</sup> See Toon, *Correspondence*, #13, pp.62-63; #24, p.74; #35, pp.84-85; and #45, p.94. It was a position which had to be renewed each year.

student life and attempts to enhance lecturers' pay, Owen joined forces with Thomas Goodwin, then president of Magdalen College, in a preaching ministry at St. Mary's Church.<sup>107</sup> From this shared preaching ministry, during 1652-57, Owen produced some of his significant pastoral works, eventually published for a wider audience as *On the Mortification of Sin* (1656) and *Of the Nature and Power of Temptation* (1658): both preached mainly to young university students!

Owen played an important role at the Savoy Conference which resulted in the Savoy Declaration of 1658. Along with Philip Nye, Thomas Goodwin, William Bridge, William Greenhill and Joseph Caryl he helped to formulate this Congregational confession.<sup>108</sup> While there is no significant doctrinal differences between this Declaration and the earlier Westminster Confession of Faith, its uniqueness was the clear call for the autonomy of local congregations.

Owen's relationship with Cromwell is not altogether clear. Certainly there was a mutual regard.<sup>109</sup> Owen dedicated *Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and Confirmed* (1654) to Cromwell, who by this time was Lord Protector. He joined the efforts of the

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<sup>107</sup> Goodwin was appointed president of Magdalen by Cromwell at the same time Owen was recommended to Christ Church. Toon, *Correspondence*, #3, p.53. For Goodwin, a member of the Westminster Assembly and the Savoy Congregational Conference see *Galaxy Revised*, pp.228-229.

<sup>108</sup> Toon, *God's Statesman*, pp.103-107 provides a helpful summary and interacts critically with the earlier work by A.G. Matthews, *The Savoy Declaration of Faith* (1959). For those mentioned see.

<sup>109</sup> Toon, *Correspondence*, #16, pp.64-65 is a letter in which Owen expresses his appreciation for Cromwell. While it is in an elaborate style, Owen's sincerity need not necessarily be questioned.

"Cromwellian" church to ensure that "godly" preachers were in as many parish churches as possible by serving as a "Trier" following the 1654 Settlement of Religion.<sup>110</sup>

Throughout the Protectorate Owen frequently preached before Parliament at such crucial moments as the dissolving of the Barebones Assembly, the gathering of the Nominated Assembly of Saints and Cromwell's second Parliament in 1656. Yet there is no clear knowledge of Owen's opinion of Cromwell's Irish campaign and his invasion of Scotland. Equally, Owen challenged the proposal that Oliver Cromwell become King. As will be presented shortly, Owen also contributed to the downfall of Richard Cromwell, following Oliver's death in 1658.

With the return of the monarchy Owen's political influence diminished. In 1659/60 he was removed from Christ Church and subsequently moved to Stadhampton. Apart from his involvement in 1667 to persuade Parliament to pass a Toleration Act, his life and ministry shifted more towards matters of church polity and to his theological writing. There was the notable invitation from the First Congregational<sup>church</sup> in Boston, New England, to become their pastor. This church, earlier led by John Cotton and latterly by John Norton, was well known to Owen, but for reasons known only to

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<sup>110</sup> Toon, *God's Statesman*, p.84, n 1, points out that Owen was associated with Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye (*Calamy Revised*, p.369), Sidrach Simpson (*DNB*, vol 52, p.277), George Griffiths (*Calamy Revised*, p.237), William Strong (*DNB*, vol 55, p.62), William Bridge (*Calamy Revised*, p.74), William Greenhill (*Calamy Revised*, p.233), Adoniram Byfield (*DNB*, vol 8, p.111) and Thomas Harrison (*Calamy Revised*, p.250).

himself he declined the offer.<sup>111</sup> His ministry moved to London and by 1673 his Congregational flock combined with the Leadenhall church led by the recently deceased Joseph Caryl.

In this period of Owen's life a large proportion of his works were published. Equally, Owen's leadership role amongst Congregationalists was notable at this time. His first wife, Mary, died in 1675. A year later he married Dorothy D'Oyley. Owen's final days were spent in "retirement" at Ealing. Here, in failing health, Owen still managed to produce his *Meditations on the Glory of Christ*, which perhaps tells us something of Owen's thoughts and concerns in those last months. In one of those ironic moments of history, John Owen died on 24 August, 1683, the twenty-first anniversary of the Great Ejection of 1662, known as "Black" Bartholomew's Day. His funeral sermon was preached by David Clarkson, one of Owen's London assistants.<sup>112</sup>

#### 1.4 Baxter and Owen's controversies in print and person

It is not surprising to learn that Richard Baxter and John Owen knew each other quite well. Their relationship, however, was strained from time to time. When Baxter published *Aphorismes of Justification* in 1649 he included an Appendix in which he rather pointedly criticised Owen's thoughts on the death of

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<sup>111</sup> Toon, *Correspondence*, #71, pp.135-36 is a transcription of a letter from the General Court of Massachusetts affirming and ratifying this invitation to Owen. Later in 1671 Owen was invited to become President of Harvard: this too he declined.

<sup>112</sup> For Clarkson see *Calamy Revised*, p.120.

Christ.<sup>113</sup> Owen soon responded with *Of the Death of Christ, the Price He Paid, and the Purchase He Made* (1650). This initial clash affected Owen less than Baxter. Years later Baxter admitted,

Two faults I now find in the book: 1. it is defective, and hath some propositions that need correction, being not cautiously enough expressed. 2. I meddled too forwardly with Dr. Owen, and one or two more that had written some passages too near to Antinomianism. For I was young, and a stranger to men's tempers, and thought others could have born a confutation as easily as I could do my self; and I thought that I was bound to do my best publicly, to save the world from the hurt of published errours; not understanding how it would provoke men more passionately to insist on what they once have said. But I have now learned to contradict errours, and not to meddle with the persons that maintain them. But indeed I was too raw to be a writer.<sup>114</sup>

Again, as will be explained introduced more fully in chapters 3 and 4, Baxter's first publication embroiled him in controversy for most of his remaining years. Evidence suggests that he received responses from at least seventeen different individuals in the period 1649-1675.<sup>115</sup> The number of books, letters or treatises in which *Aphorismes of Justification* was either attacked or mentioned is well over thirty. If one also considers that at least eight of Baxter's later works deal directly with his first publication, then it is safe to say that he never really escaped criticism of this work.

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<sup>113</sup> The full details of this controversy are given below in 3.3.2, pp.193-205.

<sup>114</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.156, p.107.

<sup>115</sup> See Appendix, pp.392-95 for a list of the major works.

Owen's response in *Of the Death of Christ* (1650) was measured, but to the point.

Indeed most of his exceptions do lie rather against words, than things; expressions, than opinions; ways of delivering things than the doctrines themselves, as the reader will perceive... Notwithstanding, because I am not as yet convinced by anything in Mr. Baxter's censure and opposition, that there was any such blamable deviation as is pretended, but rather the words of truth and especially, because the things pointed at are in themselves weighty, and reading some exactness in the delivery, to move to attempt whether the grace of God with me, who am the least of all the saints, might give any farther light into the right understanding of them, according to the truth, to the advantage of any that love the Lord Jesus in sincerity.<sup>116</sup>

If some of his euphemisms and rhetoric are overlooked, it is evident he was perturbed that Baxter even thought to challenge him. What is relevant is that Baxter continued the controversy in his *Rich. Baxter's Apology* (1654), a work in response to criticism he received from Thomas Blake, George Kendall, William Eyre and John Crandon.<sup>117</sup> In the context of his reply to Eyre, Baxter referred to Owen's *Of the Death of Christ*. He explained that he decided "not to answer that book of Mr. Owen's, till I saw a clear call proving it my duty, because I had been foolishly drawn to be the beginner of the controversy."<sup>118</sup> Nevertheless, a year later, 1655, Baxter responded to Owen's publication in *Rich: Baxter's Confession of his Faith*. To this Owen replied

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<sup>116</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, Gould ed., X, p.435.

<sup>117</sup> See Appendix. For those mentioned see : *Appendix*

<sup>118</sup> Baxter, *Rich. Baxters Apology*, Part IV, p.36.

in the same year with *Vindicae Evangelicae* (1655). This book was principally against John Biddle, a prominent proponent of Socinianism.<sup>119</sup> Baxter interpreted this move, however, as an attempt by Owen to inculcate him in the Socinian controversy. Years later Baxter wrote,

I thought it unfit to make any reply to it, not only because I had no vacancy from better work, but because the quality of it was such as would unavoidably draw me, if I confuted it, to speak so much and so offensively to the person, as well as the doctrine, that it would be a temptation to the further weakening of his charity, and increasing his desire of revenge. And I thought it my duty (when the reader's good required me not to write) to forbear replying, and to let him have the last word, because I had begun with him. And I perceived that the common distaste of men against him and his book made my reply the more unnecessary.<sup>120</sup>

As will be argued in chapters 3 and 4, Baxter's views on the death of Christ, the covenant of grace and justification did not alter significantly. In *Reliquiae* he quite clearly stated:

And yet, that I may not say worse than it deserveth of my former measure of understanding, I shall truly tell you what change I find now, in the perusal of my own writings. Those points which then I thoroughly studied, my judgment is the same of now, as it was then...<sup>121</sup>

While he admitted that certain points regarding justification and the doctrine of the covenants were "raw unmeet expressions" and that he "put off matters

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<sup>119</sup> For Biddle see *DNB*, vol 5, p.13; for Socinianism see below p.58.

<sup>120</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.163, p.111.

<sup>121</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae*, I.i.213.2, p.125.

with some kind of confidence, as if I had done something new or more than ordinary in them, when upon my more mature reviews," nevertheless, "I find that I said not half that which the subject did require: as e.g. in the doctrine of the covenants and of justification..."<sup>122</sup> He concluded by telling the reader that he did not realize how others would respond so vehemently to his criticism. While he did not mention Owen, or anyone specifically, his criticism of Owen is surely thinly veiled: "And withal I know not how impatient divines were of being contradicted, nor how it would stir up all their powers to defend what they once said, and to rise up against the truth which is thus thrust upon them, as the mortal enemy of their honour..."<sup>123</sup>

In addition to this clash of publications, Baxter and Owen differed sharply over the leadership of Cromwell's son, Richard. Baxter actually accused Owen of orchestrating Richard Cromwell's downfall.<sup>124</sup> In a series of events in March-May, 1659, which came to be known as the "Wallingford House Affair", Owen was prominent in the discussions about the Army's rising frustration with the Protectorate.<sup>125</sup> The Army had complained bitterly about overdue pay and what they considered to be Parliament's failure to resist

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<sup>122</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.213.2, p.125.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.145, p.101.

<sup>125</sup> Toon, *God's Statesman*, pp.109-114, provides a clear account of the Wallingford House Affair.

Cavalier influences. Richard Cromwell faced an increasingly frustrated and rebellious Army. Owen's culpability was exacerbated in that many of the Army leaders were part of a gathered church which had begun to meet at Wallingford House under his care. His pastoral oversight of this "church" suggests surely his awareness of its members' dissatisfaction with Parliament and with Richard's leadership. Peter Toon has shown that Owen was frequently an intermediary between certain Army leaders and Cromwell, but by the re-calling of the Rump Parliament in May he had sided with those who wished Richard to be Protectorate in title only. Richard Cromwell rejected this modified position and on 25 May, 1659 resigned. Baxter sharply denounced Owen for what he perceived to be Owen's responsibility. It is hard to tell whether Baxter was angrier about Owen's political views or that the group which had begun to meet with Owen at Wallingford House was strongly Independent. What is certain is that he never forgave Owen, and in both the manuscript and published versions of *Reliquiae* his disapproval of Owen was conspicuous.<sup>126</sup>

On various occasions Baxter and Owen met one another over the issue of the fundamentals of the faith in order to come to some sort of union among the various factions of the period. In 1654 Baxter and Owen were

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<sup>126</sup> Sylvester, in his preface to *Reliquiae* writes that he attempted to soften Baxter's censure of Owen. He even stated that he wrote to Owen's widow, Dorothy D'Oyley, "to desire her to send me what she could, well attested, in favour of the Doctor, that I might insert it in the margin, where he is mentioned as having an hand in that affair at Wallingford House; or that I might expunge that passage. But this offer being rejected with more contemptuousness and smartness than my civility deserved, I had no more to do than to let that pass upon record...". Baxter, *Reliquiae*, Preface VII.

members of a Parliamentary committee set up in the attempt to achieve a modicum of theological unity.<sup>127</sup>

In the course of this committee's work Baxter and Owen fell out due to Baxter's reluctance to define the fundamentals beyond the Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer and the Decalogue. Apparently the other members thought he was too broad and undefined. In turn they produced some sixteen articles, but these were never accepted by Parliament. Baxter accused Owen and Cheynell in particular as "over-orthodox Doctors" and clearly had no doubt about the origins of the more rigid articles: "Dr. Owen; Mr. Nye and Mr. Sydrach Sympson were his assistants and Dr. Cheynell his scribe...".<sup>128</sup>

Fourteen years later they met again at Baxter's initiative in an abortive effort to reach union between Baxter's Presbyterians and Owen's Congregationalists. Baxter drew up a list of proposals relating to various points of church order, liturgy and government.<sup>129</sup> Owen, however, let the whole effort drag on, much to Baxter's frustration. No resolution came out of his efforts and, judging from the surviving correspondence between them, Owen was not committed to the attempt.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Baxter mentioned that along with Owen this committee consisted of Stephen Marshal (*DNB*, vol 36, p.243), Edward Reyner (*DNB*, vol 48, p.38), Francis Cheynell (*DNB*, vol 10, p.222), Thomas Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sydrach Sympson, Richard Vines (*DNB*, vol 8, p.369), Thomas Manton (*DNB*, vol 36, p.101) and Thomas Jacombe (*DNB*, vol 29, p.126). Baxter, *Reliquiae*, I.ii.50, p.197.

<sup>128</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.ii.53, pp.198-99.

<sup>129</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* Part III.141 - 145, pp.61-69.

<sup>130</sup> See Powicke, *Under the Cross*, pp.202-211 for the subsequent implications of this incident.

### 1.5 Their writing in its historical and theological context

Richard Baxter and John Owen preached, ministered and wrote in a time when there were important developments within Reformed theology. Interpreting these developments has never been trouble free.<sup>131</sup> The main question concerns continuity and discontinuity: did later Reformers continue along the lines of Luther and Calvin or were there fundamental developments? If there were developments, were these inherent to Luther's and Calvin's theologies, or methodological novelties which Luther and Calvin never considered? Much of the difficulty in answering these questions has had to do with identifying what was central to Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth century: was it predestination, Christology or covenant theology? To answer these central questions is another thesis in itself, but it is relevant to this study of Baxter and Owen as it must <sup>be</sup> recognized that a number of developments within Reformed theology influenced them.

One such development involved differing views on the doctrine of predestination. The late sixteenth and

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<sup>131</sup> Some of the major studies on the development of Reformed theology in this period are: Paul Althaus, *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik im Zeitalter der aristotelischen Scholastik* (Leipzig, 1914); Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*. Translated by G.T. Thomson, G.W. Bromiley, et al. 4 vols. (Edinburgh, 1936-69); Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*. Translated by Neil Buchanan. 7 vols. (New York, 1961); Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*. Edited by Ernst Bizer. Translated by G.T. Thomson (London, 1950); and Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus*. 3 vols (Göttingen, 1927). These studies are themselves part of the ongoing debate: for they represent different viewpoints and philosophical assumptions about history and the development of doctrine.

seventeenth century was a period in Reformed theology when increasingly the question of God's decrees and their relation to predestination was debated. Brian G. Armstrong is one of a number of scholars who have argued that there developed within Reformed theology a Scholasticism.<sup>132</sup> Scholasticism, according to J.P. Donnelly, evolved largely out of the theology of Theodore Beza, Jerome Zanchi, and Peter Martyr.<sup>133</sup> In its broadest sense Scholasticism developed a theological "system", based on logical and rational deductions. There was a concentrated concern with metaphysical matters, particularly the sovereignty of God and its relation to causality.<sup>134</sup> It is Armstrong's contention that Protestant Scholasticism was a departure from Calvin's theology and stood in sharp contrast to French humanism -- which stressed a less speculative approach to theology and which resisted an emphasis upon logic and reason.<sup>135</sup> Basing his study on Walter Kickel's, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Theodor Beza* (1967), Armstrong argued that Beza, Zanchi and Martyr developed a more systematic theology than Calvin: and in so doing gave greater emphasis to limited atonement, the

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<sup>132</sup> Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy. Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France*. (Madison, Milwaukee and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969). Some of the earlier studies are: Ernst Troeltsch, *Vernunft und Offenbarung bei Johann Gerhard und Melanchthon* (Göttingen, 1891); Robert Scharlemann, *Aquinas and Gerhard: Theological Controversy and Construction in Medieval and Protestant Scholasticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964); John W. Beardslee ed. and trans. *Reformed Dogmatics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965); and John Patrick Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism in Vermigli's Doctrine of Man and Grace* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976).

<sup>133</sup> Donnelly, *Calvinism and Scholasticism*, p.207.

<sup>134</sup> See Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, p.32.

<sup>135</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pp. 121-23.

centrality of the doctrine of predestination and the theory of supralapsarianism.<sup>136</sup> Supralapsarianism maintained that God decreed the elect before the fall of humanity; an opposing view also emerged, identified as infralapsarianism, which suggested that out of the mass of fallen humanity God elected those predestined to salvation. Thus, the order of God's decrees was debated.

In this context of Scholasticism and the debate over predestination there developed a number of varying theological expressions. Most notable was the reaction put forward by Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). Arminius disputed the idea of an unconditional divine decree and supralapsarianism, and thus refuted the theology of Frances Gomarus (1563-1641), and eventually Pierre du Moulin (1568-1658) and Gisbertus Voetius (1588-1676). "Arminianism", as it was later called, has been described as a "protest against those tenets in the theology of the Reformed Church that dealt with God's Election and Reprobation of individuals to eternal life or death."<sup>137</sup> Arminianism spread on the Continent as a counter-reaction to Calvinist orthodoxy. As Nicholas Tyacke has written, "Arminianism itself can plausibly be understood as part of a more widespread philosophical scepticism, engendered by way of reaction to the dogmatic certainties of the sixteenth-century

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<sup>136</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, pp. 38-41.

<sup>137</sup> A.W. Harrison, *Arminianism* (London: Duckworth, 1937), Preface.

Reformation." <sup>138</sup> Orthodox Calvinism responded to Arminianism particularly in the Synod of Dort (1619): giving further weight to the ideas of supralapsarianism, limited atonement, unconditional and irresistible grace, total human inability, and the assurance of the final perseverance of the elect.

Arminianism in England was not merely an English reaction to a Dutch conflict as Dewey Wallace has supposed. <sup>139</sup> While the theological issues are not his primary object, Nicholas Tyacke has, nevertheless, made a more convincing argument: within English protestantism there was already, by 1619, a reaction against the Calvinist status quo. <sup>140</sup> Tyacke has drawn attention to the controversy surrounding one William Barrett, chaplain for Gonville and Caius College, who in 1595 openly challenged the Calvinist predestinarian schema. Barrett had been influenced by Peter Baro (at that time Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, and who resisted William Perkins). Barrett preached against Calvinist predestinarianism; and thus incurred the wrath of the Regius Professor of Divinity, William Whitaker. Barrett was eventually called before the Cambridge Consistory Court and forced to recant. Archbishop Whitgift had to mediate in the controversy. With the ensuing debate and controversy came the

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<sup>138</sup> Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists. The Rise of English Arminianism c. 1590-1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p.245.

<sup>139</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.80.

<sup>140</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.1.

Lambeth Articles (1595).<sup>141</sup> These proved to be "anathema to English Arminians during the 1620s".<sup>142</sup> While these articles were Calvinist, the controversy they produced marked the growth of an undercurrent of opposition to continental predestinarianism.

Accordingly, by the time of the Synod of Dort there was already within English Protestant theology a reaction against Scholasticism. Interestingly, Tyacke has concluded that the participation of the English Representatives at Dort -- George Carleton, bishop of Llandaff, Joseph Hall, Dean of Worcester, John Davenant, Professor of Theology at Cambridge and Samuel Ward, Archdeacon of Taunton -- acted as a catalyst for subsequent English Arminians.<sup>143</sup> The lines were sharply drawn, and with the reluctance of James and Charles I to embrace the canons of Dort the next twenty years saw a clear schism. The theology of Richard Neile, bishop of Durham, Lancelot Andrewes, bishop of Winchester and John Cosin, Neile's successor to Durham stressed a dislike of predestinarian language. Tyacke has concluded that by 1628 the Arminian faction had gained significant ecclesiastical power within the English Church: clear Arminians such as Richard Neile and William Laud were in positions of leadership. In 1633 the death of Archbishop Abbot made way for Laud to move to Canterbury. Tyacke has maintained:

Laud and Neile actively sought to enforce Charles's religious declaration

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<sup>141</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.5.

<sup>142</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.31.

<sup>143</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.87.

of 1628, throughout the dioceses of England and Wales, which meant in effect the proscription of Calvinism. Because of royal support, Laud and Neile were now increasingly able to implement ideas which they had held for many years.<sup>144</sup>

Thus, by the time Baxter and Owen were beginning their ministries Arminianism had played a great role in shaping the theological and ecclesiastical context. Along with an increased interest in ceremony, and a dislike of excessive preaching, Arminians challenged some of the central doctrines of Calvinist orthodoxy: of special relevance to this study on voluntarism was the Arminian insistence that man was free to chose to comply with grace, for predestination had less to do with God's decree than with God's foreknowledge of those who would believe and remain steadfast in their faith. Tyacke has put it well: "Arminians, therefore, not only rejected Calvinist orthodoxy -- they transformed the issue of Protestant nonconformity. Not surprisingly, with their reinterpretation of the Prayer Book and imposition of new ceremonies, Arminians became the *bête noire* of Puritans."<sup>145</sup>

Another reaction to Protestant Scholasticism came from the works of John Cameron (1579-1625) and his pupil, Moïse Amyraut (1596-1664); and both proved to be important influences upon Richard Baxter. Brian Armstrong has produced the most comprehensive study of Cameron and Amyraut; and while his thesis that Amyraut rescued Calvin's theology from the snares of

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<sup>144</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.181.

<sup>145</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.246.

Scholasticism (thus preserving true Calvinism) can be questioned with regard to Amyraut's view on the atonement and election, his work is otherwise helpful.<sup>146</sup> Central to Cameron and Amyraut's theology were two claims. First, they taught that "all true religion necessarily consists in some covenant which occurs between God and man."<sup>147</sup> Covenant theology, to be explained in this section shortly, enabled Cameron and Amyraut to describe the way in which God and man interacted. Essential to their theology was the notion that whereas the covenant of works made with Adam before the fall required perfect obedience, the covenant of grace involved only faith. Second, the covenant of grace, however, was not limited only to the elect but was universal; in fact both Cameron and Amyraut referred to a "hypothetical universalism". This unorthodox theory suggested that grace and mercy shaped the covenant of grace, not God's decree of election. Cameron claimed that before the decree of election there was God's merciful decree to send Christ into the world as a saviour. In this sense, Christ has redeemed all humanity potentially.<sup>148</sup> The important qualification, however, was that this potential redemption was only sufficient for those who came to personal faith and repentance.

Amyraut developed his teacher's theories. Armstrong has written, "The more one reads the treatises of

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<sup>146</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and Amyraut Heresy*.

<sup>147</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, p.48.

<sup>148</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, p.59.

Amyraut the more one realizes that the peculiar covenant theology he expounds is the key to the whole theological program at Saumur." <sup>149</sup> He gave considerable attention to the hypothetical quality of the covenant, concluding that the covenant of grace was conditional: faith was the condition. He arrived at this conclusion due to a methodological assumption: the order of events in salvation history implied greater importance to God's offer of mercy and pardon than to a sovereign decree. Election was inscrutable; the gospel call and promises, on the other hand, were clear and straightforward. It was not that Amyraut denied an absolute predestination (ie. that the elect of God came to faith infallibly). He claimed, however, that the elect came to faith through a conditional covenant which God had accommodated to offer to all potentially, provided that they believed. Amyraut's teachings received pronounced criticism from orthodox divines, for he also cut into the core of Reformed theology. His views on predestination were particularly controversial because of his claim that Calvin's predestination had been twisted out of context by Beza. Amyraut insisted that predestination was subordinate to the doctrine of grace. <sup>150</sup> Accordingly, predestination had to be understood as conditional for mankind as a whole, but absolute for those who eventually believed. Armstrong has argued: "Amyraut apparently believed that the predestination doctrine of the orthodox, which was

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<sup>149</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, p.140.

<sup>150</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, p.160.

concerned exclusively with the absolute decree of God and which categorically denied His conditional will, both destroyed the balanced presentation of Calvin and justified his own heavy emphasis on the conditional will." <sup>151</sup> Amyraut was tried for heresy in 1637 at a national synod in Alençon. He is relevant to this study for a number of reasons: first, he reveals a development within Reformed theology which centred on the nature of predestination; second, his theology pronouncedly illustrates the prominence of covenant theology in seventeenth century Reformed theology; and finally, it was Amyraut who shaped Baxter's view of the covenant as a conditional covenant; and as will be detailed in chapter 3 (3.3), in some ways Baxter shared Amyraut's criticism.

Mention has already been made of covenant theology. In general, covenant theology taught that God had established a covenant of works with Adam and after the fall of Adam, there appeared a covenant of grace. Through the covenants God related to mankind: in the first he did so with a demand for full obedience to the law, and in the second He offered pardon and mercy in Jesus Christ. While fuller attention to this subject must be postponed until chapter 3 (3.1) a number of introductory comments can be made. First, covenant theology was a prominent feature of seventeenth century Reformed theology. The nature of its prominence, however, is open to considerable debate among

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<sup>151</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*, p.202.

scholars.<sup>152</sup> Second, caution must be exercised when reading covenant theology. It is not always clear when writers referred to the covenant whether they meant it as a bilateral contract or as a unilateral testament; for at times both terms could be used.<sup>153</sup> Third, when analyzing puritan covenant theology it must be understood that it developed out of earlier Continental traditions. The covenant motif can be found in the writings of William of Ockham (c.1280-c.1349). It appears in Luther and Calvin, becoming more explicit in the writings of Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575), Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), Oecolampadius (1482-1531), Martin Bucer (1491-1551), Ursinus (1534-1583) and Olevianus (1535-1587). The number of Continental theologians who treated the subject of the covenants should suggest alone that covenant theology was diverse and multi-faceted. Finally, and perhaps most important, covenant theology should be seen as a development within Reformed theology full of paradox: on the whole covenant theology nullified neither a sovereign will nor the importance of human response. In many ways it was an evangelical expression: it explained how the gospel was offered and the manner by which a person received the gospel benefits. It is too facile to conclude that covenant theology was simply a

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<sup>152</sup> See below 3.1.1, pp.148-59.

<sup>153</sup> Attention to this distinction is the particular merit of J. Wayne Baker's, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1980). Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p.32, has insisted that the dichotomy between covenant (implying bilateral) and testament (suggesting unilateral) is unacceptable. Von Rohr argues that it was a both/and situation. Provided the paradox of a both/and is acknowledged, the evidence from Perkins' writing and in both Baxter and Owen substantiates Von Rohr's conclusion.

mutual contract between God and man -- notwithstanding the rhetoric of covenant theology. The contradictions and paradox of covenant theology were fundamental to its prominence in the seventeenth century.

Reference to covenant theology raises another aspect of the context in which Baxter and Owen developed their theology -- and to which they both responded: Antinomianism. As the term suggests, this was a movement within English Protestantism which reacted against orthodox Calvinism's use of the law.<sup>154</sup> Dewey Wallace is correct in his claim that Antinomianism was an "extremism concerning predestinarian grace."<sup>155</sup> Led by John Saltmarsh (1612-1647), Tobias Crisp (1600-1643) and John Eaton (d.1575-1642) two essential characteristics can be identified.<sup>156</sup> First, Antinomians challenged the idea of a conditional covenant. Saltmarsh wrote; "He that offers Christ offers all the conditions in him, both of Faith and Repentance."<sup>157</sup> In this sense, they reacted against Arminianism. It was argued that conditionality implied human capability: and this was strongly denounced.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> See Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p. 50.

<sup>155</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.113.

<sup>156</sup> Of importance are the following illustrative works: Saltmarsh, *Free Grace; or, the Flowings of Christ's Blood freely to sinners* (1645); Eaton, *The Honey-Combe of Free Justification by Christ alone* (1642); Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted, in Fourteen Sermons* (1643). For Saltmarsh see Greaves and Zaller, *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals*, III, pp.136-37; for Crisp see Greaves and Zaller, *op.cit*, I, pp.191-92; and for Eaton see Greaves and Zaller, *op.cit*, I, p.242.

<sup>157</sup> Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace* (1st edition, 1645, 10th edition corrected, 1700), p.147. All subsequent references taken from the 10th edition.

<sup>158</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p.53.

Von Rohr has written:

Antinomians warned that this view of covenant could lead to another works-righteousness. To rely on the fulfillment of conditions is to rely on one's own doing, and that is an unstable foundation for covenant security. Even to build<sup>on</sup> one's faith is to build on both unsatisfactory and improper grounds.<sup>159</sup>

Antinomians argued that the act of justification was not dependent upon the performance of a covenant condition. It was held that Christ's death procured the salvation of the elect unconditionally: the believers' faith in no way merited justification, Christ satisfied all. "Christ hath believed perfectly," wrote Saltmarsh, "he hath repented perfectly, he hath sorrowed for sin perfectly, he hath obeyed perfectly, he had mortified sin perfectly, and all is ours, and we are Christ's, and Christ is God's."<sup>160</sup> Accordingly, Antinomians frequently stressed the idea that justification was from eternity (or the other phrase used was "immanent"): for the death of Christ was from eternity and arose out of the eternal decree of God.

It was precisely this diminution of human activity and exaltation of divine sovereignty which gave rise to the second distinct characteristic of Antinomianism. Stoever has called attention to the Antinomian idea that led to a denial of obligations from ordinary worldly existence.<sup>161</sup>

This disruptive potential, moreover, lay less in antinomianism's conclusions about the uses of the law than in its

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<sup>159</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p.54.

<sup>160</sup> Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, p.71 see also pp.102 and 137.

<sup>161</sup> Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*, p.161.

premises about the work of the Holy Spirit. Both forms of the syndrome exalted the conditioned, unmediated operation of the Spirit in the application of redemption, to the point of seriously minimizing, if not altogether overruling, the Christian's continuing rootedness in the ontological and moral orders of creation.<sup>162</sup>

Antinomianism, therefore, in many ways may be seen as a reaction both to Arminianism and orthodox Calvinism. Both Arminianism and Antinomianism addressed the issues of predestination and human responsibility: their differing responses, however, related to that school of thought reflected best by the Westminster Confession of Faith. The Confession reflects a mid-seventeenth century theology concerned with both Arminianism and Antinomianism.<sup>163</sup> Thus, Arminianism and Antinomianism were the two poles between which Baxter and Owen's theology was expressed, and both writers have to be read with an eye towards these movements.

Yet, it is also necessary to appreciate that in addition to Arminianism and Antinomianism there were other influences. The seventeenth century was also shaped by the rise of Socinianism: a movement developed from the thought of Leo Sozzini (1525-62). Socinianism denied the importance of substitutionary atonement, imputed righteousness and, principally, the divinity of Jesus. In this context was furthermore the development

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<sup>162</sup> Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*, p.162.

<sup>163</sup> See John H. Leith, *Assembly at Westminster. Reformed Theology in the Making* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1973, second reprinting, 1978), pp.41-42.

of what C.F. Allison has called, "moralism".<sup>164</sup> In certain respects moralism was not confined to one particular theological group. Moralism can be best understood as an emphasis upon the capability of the human will to make a necessary response to the ethical demands of the gospel. At the heart of moralism lay particular soteriological implications: faith became more an issue of dutiful response rather than the appropriation of Christ's righteousness.

Thus the context of Baxter and Owen's writings was complex. It was shaped by developments within Reformed theology both on the Continent and within English theology. By the mid-seventeenth century, Reformed theology had given rise to divergent counter-reactions. When Baxter and Owen's theologies, and voluntarism in particular, are considered this theological context is highly germane: the remainder of this section pursues this theme.

Baxter is noted for his rather exhaustive and prodigious writing. He reported that his wife, Margaret, "thought I had done better to have written fewer books, and to have done those few better." Baxter does not seem to have resented this opinion.<sup>165</sup>

This "pen in the hand of God" produced in his life time a staggering list of works.<sup>166</sup> It is with his writing

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<sup>164</sup> C.F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism. The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (London: SPCK, 1966).

<sup>165</sup> See *A Breviate of the Life of Margaret Baxter* (1681), pp.47, 66 and 77. Cf. Nuttall, *Baxter*, p.95, n.1.

<sup>166</sup> The expression "pen in the hand of God" comes from Baxter's funeral sermon preached by William Bates. For Bates see *Calamy Revised*, pp.35-36. For Baxter's works see the bibliography provided by Geoffrey Nuttall, *Baxter*; more helpful is Neil Keeble's "A Baxter Bibliography" in *Puritan Man of Letters*, pp.156-84. Roger Thomas, *The Baxter*

that this study is primarily concerned. It is helpful to indicate here that Baxter's publications engaged in controversy with some of the more prominent puritan writers of the period. In addition to John Owen Baxter's publications received criticism from: Anthony Burgess, Richard Vines, John Tombes, William Twisse, Christopher Cartwright, William Allen, Giles Firmin, William Eyre, Bishop Edward Stillingfleet, John Wallis, George Lawson, Joseph Caryl, and Joseph Crandon.<sup>167</sup>

Baxter also wrote commendatory prefaces for some forty-three works, by such notable figures as Joseph Alleine, Samuel Clarke Sr, Samuel Clark Jr, Thomas Gouge, Matthew Hale, John Howe, Thomas Manton, Cotton Mather, and Richard Vines. Baxter's stature among his contemporaries is evident.<sup>168</sup>

Nevertheless, while Baxter may have been prominent, his theology was controversial. Baxter himself preferred to consider his theology "Catholick"; he likened himself to express only "mere Christianity".<sup>169</sup> The evidence, however, suggests another story.

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*Treatises: A Catalogue of the Richard Baxter Papers (other than letters) in Dr. Williams's Library* (London: Dr. Williams's Trust, Dr. Williams's Library, Occasional Paper No.8, 1959) is a helpful guide to the unprinted manuscripts.

<sup>167</sup> For Anthony Burgess see *DNB*, vol 7, p.308; Richard Vines (*DNB*, vol 53, p.369); John Tombes (*DNB*, vol 52, p.2); William Twisse (*DNB*, vol 52, p.397); Christopher Cartwright (*DNB*, vol 9, p.220); Giles Firmin (*DNB*, vol 19, p.45); William Eyre (*Calamy Revised*, p.187); Bishop Edward Stillingfleet (*DNB*, vol 54, p.375); John Wallis (*DNB*, vol 59, p.141); George Lawson (*DNB*, vol 22, p.289); Joseph Caryl (*DNB*, vol 9, p.253); and Joseph Crandon (Greaves and Zaller, *op.cit.*, I, pp.188-89).

<sup>168</sup> For ~~the~~<sup>a</sup> full list of those works for which Baxter wrote a preface see Keeble, *Puritan Man of Letters* pp. 170-72. For Alliene see *DNB*, vol 1, p.299; for Clarke Sr. see *DNB*, vol 10, p.441; for Clarke Jr. see *DNB*, vol 10, p.442; for Gouge see *DNB*, vol 22, p.269; for Hale see *DNB*, vol 24, p.18; for Howe see *DNB*, vol 28, p.85; for Manton see *DNB*, vol 26, p.101; and for Mather see *DNB*, vol 37, p.8.

<sup>169</sup> See Keeble, *Puritan Man of Letters*, pp.23-24.

First, by the time he published *Aphorismes of Justification* (1649) his theology had already gone through a period of change and consolidation. Prior to 1649 Baxter agreed with the writings of William Twisse.<sup>170</sup> Twisse promoted the ideas of justification before faith, limited atonement, imputed righteousness and even a degree of determinism. By 1649, however, Baxter consistently expressed views closer to those expressed by the Saumur divines, Amyraut and Cameron. J.I. Packer has interpreted his theology "as an improved Amyraldism."<sup>171</sup> It is arguable that after 1649 Baxter never significantly changed or modified his position on most points of theology; he had already reached most of his conclusions pertinent to the issue of voluntarism. In fact, it will be contended here that his first publication, *Aphorismes of Justification*, was a work from which he was never able to escape. In this sense throughout this study no reference is made to any linear development of Baxter's work but considers it as a whole.

Secondly, however, it is suggested that his views on the death and merits of Christ, the nature of the covenant and the practical character of the Christian life must not be interpreted solely as a mimicking of

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<sup>170</sup> For Twisse see *DNB*, vol 52, p.397.

<sup>171</sup> J.I. Packer, "The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter", Oxford D.Phil (1954), p. 9 of Abstract. Cf. Peter Toon, *God's Statesman*, p.40 who likewise identifies Baxter's view of the atonement as similar to those of Amyraut. As will be detailed below in chapters 3 and 4 this interpretation is justifiable. While Baxter never explicitly identifies Amyraut as his chief influence (he preferred to stress his exegesis of Scripture), he did mention his favourable views toward the French theologian. Owen recognized this in Baxter's writing and attacked this dependency, particularly in *Of the Death of Christ* (1650), Gould ed., X, p.479.

Amyraut. He is not so easily defined. A possible clue to the whole of his theology is his experience of Antinomianism in the Army.

But for all the writings and wrath of men which provoked against me, I must here record my thanks to God for the success of my controversial writings against the Antinomians: when I was in the Army it was the predominant infection. The books of Dr. Crisp, Paul Hobson, Saltmarsh, Cradock, and abundance such like were the writings most applauded; and he was thought no spiritual Christian, but a legalist that favoured not of Antinomianism, which was figured with the title of Free-grace; and others were thought to preach the Law, and not Christ.<sup>172</sup>

As detailed in chapter 3, Baxter's understanding of Antinomianism led him to argue consistently for a view of the covenant of grace which included covenant conditions (ie. the benefits of Christ's universal atonement were available upon the condition that a person repents, believes and lives in obedience). To be sure this may well explain what Owen and others regarded as Baxter's unorthodox theology.

John Owen was a prodigious writer as well.<sup>173</sup> It is significant for this study that, apart from his views on church government, Owen's theology underwent few if any major modifications in the course of his lifetime. The major influence upon Owen, and the person he quoted more frequently than anyone else, was Augustine. Besides Augustine, Owen drew upon many of

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<sup>172</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.163, p.111.

<sup>173</sup> For a partial list of Owen's works see Wing and Toon, *God's Statesman*, pp.179-81 (yet there are a number of inaccuracies in Toon's list) Owen wrote commendatory prefaces as well for the following: Theophilus Gale (*Calamy Revised*, p.216), Edward Polhill, Samuel Petto (*Calamy Revised*, p.388), James Durham, Patrick Gillespie, Bartholomew Ashwood (*Calamy Revised*, p.16) and Elisha Coles and Henry Whit.

the church fathers, Aquinas, Bradwardine and occasionally some of the early Reformers. One will not find in Owen's writings (or for that matter Baxter's) a great number of references to Calvin; yet Owen's exegesis is similar to Calvin's on a number of central Reformed doctrines. This study suggests that Owen is representative of an ongoing tradition within seventeenth century English Reformed theology. Dewey Wallace has referred to those in this tradition as "high Calvinists": those who responded to the issues of moralism, the satisfaction of Christ and predestination.<sup>174</sup> Wallace makes sense up to a point, though his contrast between Owen's high Calvinism and, what he has called, Baxter's "moderate Calvinism" only accentuates the problem of defining "Calvinism". Owen consistently criticised moralism, Arminianism and Socinianism: he repeatedly stressed the work of grace and the Spirit in sanctification to counter moralism; the sovereignty of God over against human independence in response to Arminianism; and the meritorious atonement in the death of Christ for the elect in sharp defence against the Socinian denial of the divinity and satisfaction of Jesus. His theological roots, however, were not only in Calvin, but in Augustine and the Church Fathers.

This investigation into voluntarism, an important aspect of seventeenth century English puritanism, looks at the works of Baxter and Owen and detects both a

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<sup>174</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.144.

unity of opinion and a diversity. The presence of unity and diversity is worth highlighting: it suggests that, at least as evidenced by Baxter and Owen, one must be cautious when making general statements about puritan theology. Owen represents an element within seventeenth century puritanism more clearly in line with the Augustinian tradition. Baxter was still largely dependent upon the Augustinian tradition, but, by 1649, he was also pronouncedly influenced by Amyraldism, from which he received many of his ideas about a universal atonement and a universally offered conditional covenant. These aspects of their theologies are presented more fully in later chapters, but have been introduced here in order to suggest that Baxter and Owen represent not so much two opposing poles in mid-seventeenth century puritanism as different shades of opinion: agreeing on some points and yet strongly disagreeing on others. When the influence they each had upon contemporaries, as evidenced by their stature during this period as well as the others they drew into printed debate, is considered, it is arguable that Baxter and Owen provide legitimate theological paradigms of mid-seventeenth century English puritanism.

### 1.6 Methodology

This thesis is largely concerned with doctrine and its relevance to puritan practice. It is recognised, however, that a study of a doctrine expressed by individuals at any given time must take into

consideration the overall historical context. There are two major aspects to an historical context, and in this work the two approaches converge: a consideration of antecedents and an awareness of the contemporary context. With regard to the first, Baxter and Owen's writings are considered within a larger doctrinal development. Specifically, the doctrines of the will as explained by Augustine and others within an Augustinian tradition, a tradition which influenced many in the mid-seventeenth century, are examined. As Baxter and Owen are studied, it will be noted that their arguments on voluntarism were influenced, to some degree or other, by particular antecedents. The obvious evidence for this is their direct reference to earlier writers. The less obvious evidence is suggested in their use of various terms, concepts and expressions. Certainly, the question arises: did Baxter and Owen themselves suggest explicitly their consciousness of doctrinal antecedents? Sometimes this is the case. Furthermore, to what extent did their interpretation of, say, Augustine compare and/or contrast with that of Aquinas' and even that of their contemporaries'? This is less easy to answer: for often their references to earlier writers were given in passing.

With regard to the second aspect, an attempt is made to place Baxter and Owen within the context of the period 1640-1690. While the predominate concern is with an exposition of their writings, there was an immediate context for much of Baxter and Owen's work.

The importance of Arminianism, Antinomianism and covenant theology, as earlier introduced in 1.5, is not ignored. Nevertheless, this study is restricted to a detailed theological examination of Baxter and Owen, whose significance has been outlined above. Thus, it is beyond the scope of this work to give a broader picture of voluntarism in seventeenth century English theology as a whole. Such a restriction is warranted by, first, Baxter and Owen's prominence and influence and, secondly, the rather startling absence of studies on puritan theology which pay attention to the theology of particular individuals. It seems that in the attempt to "discover" the pulse of seventeenth century puritanism many of the finer details (which help constitute the whole) are forfeited for the sake of the "broad picture". Surely both methodologies are quite necessary and legitimate; and while neither approach is self-sufficient, there is merit in a study predominately opting for one or the other.

Therefore it is largely the printed works of Baxter<sup>and</sup> Owen which are examined. While both were active preachers, their major medium was published work. In numerous cases, either the cause of publication or the nature of the publication was due to specific pastoral or polemical issues. Even some of the printed works were reshaped sermons. In other words, a microcosm of mid-seventeenth century puritan thinking, and even experience, can be seen in printed works.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> This assumption was made by Basil Hall, "Puritanism: The Problem of Definition," In *Studies in Church History*, edited by G.J. Cumming, 2:283-96. (London: Thomas Nelson, 1965), p.295. See also Dewey Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, pp.ix-x.

The printed works by Baxter and Owen have been selected on the following criteria.<sup>176</sup> First, having observed that issues like Church polity were not directly pertinent to voluntarism, only those works which were concerned with the doctrines of election, predestination, justification and sanctification have been taken as relevant. In Baxter's case he himself provided recommendations.<sup>177</sup> Second, if there was any obvious internal evidence which either suggested that one work was in response to another, or was in conjunction with an earlier work of the same author, then this was included. Third, works by other mid-seventeenth century puritan writers which received either a commendatory preface, praise or a scathing rebuke from Baxter and Owen have been examined.

Finally, it must be pointed out that the methodology of this study assumes the validity of exposition. Inasmuch as in 1.1 a call was given for more theological studies of puritan spirituality, the importance of examining in detail the texts of Baxter and Owen has been presumed. This way we are made aware of some of the nuances in their theology as well as the ways in which sometimes they balanced their practical assertions with either paradoxes or important

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<sup>176</sup> In this thesis reference is made to both first edition and later editions of Baxter and Owen's publications; availability determined whether to use first edition or later edition. In contrast to the studies of Baxter by Nuttall and Keeble and those on Owen by Toon and Ferguson, I have chosen to provide the title of the book cited and where appropriate to later editions to add the volume number and the collection editor (eg. Orme's edition of Baxter's works and either Goold's edition of Owen's work (predominately) or the Banner of Truth reprint of Goold's edition). I sense this makes better reading.

<sup>177</sup> This is given in the bibliography which Baxter provides in *Compassionate Counsel to all Young Men* (1681).

qualifications. Throughout this work mention is made of the development of Baxter and Owen's ideas from one publication to another; yet, as argued in 1.4 neither Baxter nor Owen significantly changed his ideas from 1649 to 1691.

### 1.7 The Aim of the thesis

John Owen wrote:

It is the power of truth in the heart alone that will make us cleave unto it indeed in an hour of temptation. Let us, then, not think that we are anything the better for our conviction of the truths of these great doctrines of the gospel, for which we contend with these men, unless we find the power of truths abiding in our own hearts, and have a continual experience of their necessity and excellency in our standing before God and our communion with him.<sup>178</sup>

Owen reveals here one of the characteristics of puritan theology and practice: its experiential quality. Sinclair Ferguson's assessment of Owen is correct: "[his] interests were primarily pastoral rather than systematic. He was a theologian because he was a pastor."<sup>179</sup> Dewey Wallace has suggested, "Theological formulations function in relation to religious experience, but that latter phenomenon is the soil out of which they grow and in which they thrive."<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655), Preface to the reader, Goold ed., XII, p.52.

<sup>179</sup> Ferguson, *John Owen*, p.262. Emphasis his.

<sup>180</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.ix.

Puritan theology was a theology rooted in the experience of men and women.<sup>181</sup> F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* and August Lang, *Puritanismus und Pietismus* have both made convincing arguments that puritan theology should be seen within a pietistic context.<sup>182</sup> While Stoeffler and Lang have avoided some of the complexities of defining puritan, their assessments of puritan spirituality has validity. To understand the nature of puritan piety one must recognise that there was an internalisation of doctrine. Peter Lake has aptly concluded, "Protestant religion had two sides to it: firstly the objective realm of doctrinal truth, and secondly the subjective religious experience undergone by the godly in their internalisation of those truths."<sup>183</sup> Truth was that given in God's word; puritan practice was far more than subjectivism run wild, there was an objective element, the word of God. This revelation, however, was expected in turn to engage, transform and govern the individual. In addition, this individual internalisation of doctrine cannot be stressed at the expense of the puritan insistence on corporate life.

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<sup>181</sup> The following also make the point above. Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p.viii, New, *Anglican and Puritan*, p.6, Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p.8, Lake, *Moderate Puritans* p.116; see also Richard Greaves, "The Nature of Puritan Tradition." in *Reform, Conformity and Dissent: Essays in honour of Geoffrey Nuttall*, edited by R.B. Knox (London: Epworth, 1977), p.258. Elsewhere, however, Greaves suggests that the puritan experiential element came more from Luther than from Calvinism. Greaves makes the questionable assertion that Calvinism was more an intellectual expression, Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1969), p.29.

<sup>182</sup> Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Puritanism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1965), especially chapter 2 and A. Lang, *Puritanismus und Pietismus* (Darmstadt: 1972), chapters 2-3.

<sup>183</sup> Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, p.155.

Thus, the experiential aspect of puritan theology is appreciated as each chapter develops this study of voluntarism.

Based on the definition of voluntarism given in 1.1 this thesis is structured within a specific framework. As suggested earlier when defining voluntarism, the human will chose in response to the divine initiative. For Baxter and Owen explaining the divine initiative involved examining the will of God, the sovereignty of God, the grace of God, and the covenants of God. These issues related proportionally to the nature and function of the human will, the nature of faith, the nature of repentance, the use of the means of the gospel and the character and experience of one's Christian life. Thus, the experiential aspect of puritan theology is appreciated as each chapter develops this study of voluntarism.

Chapter 2 presents certain antecedents to Baxter and Owen's voluntarism. Here close attention is given to the influence of Augustine, for it is arguable that mid-seventeenth century puritans were within a tradition originating with Augustine. Certainly, Calvin too is of great concern in this study. The one qualification is that comparing Calvin with later "Calvinism" is fraught with difficulties. On the other hand, it is necessary to appreciate that the role of the human will in Calvin's theology encompassed his anthropology, soteriology and Christology in ways that reveal Calvin to be not nearly so free from

qualification, paradox and tension.<sup>184</sup> With this in mind not only will more insight into Calvin's theology be gained, but a more profitable comparison and contrast between Calvin and mid-seventeenth century puritans is possible. The contribution to the "Calvin versus Calvinists" debate made in this thesis is the suggestion that voluntarism as seen in Owen and, to a lesser extent, in Baxter reveals an affinity between Calvin (and the Augustinian tradition) and certain notable mid-seventeenth century puritans.

Chapters 3 through 5 are primarily concerned with presenting the doctrinal framework of this voluntarism. These chapters are presented in order to examine both the "divine initiative" (which involved election, predestination, effectual calling and justification) and the "human response" (incorporating repentance, faith and righteousness). The final chapters, 6 and 7, offer the implications of the doctrinal assumptions and so detail the practical elements of mid-seventeenth century puritan voluntarism as suggested by Baxter and Owen. These chapters investigate the importance of the will in the Christian's life as he encountered the call to holiness, the struggle with indwelling sin, the question of assurance and the desire for the grace of perseverance.

This thesis aims to explore mid-seventeenth century puritan theology and practice with the goal of understanding the internalisation of doctrine within

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<sup>184</sup> I am in particular agreement with the conclusions reached by William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin. A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp.233-34.

puritan life. In short, through the works of Richard Baxter and John Owen, we are looking at the puritan self to see how the godly person understood his life in Christ. It is argued that voluntarism was a principal dimension of mid-seventeenth century English puritanism. A broad definition of voluntarism is given so as to appreciate the importance of willingness in the Christian life. In so doing this thesis will contribute to a better theological understanding of late English puritanism. In the end it presents, as seen in the work of Richard Baxter and John Owen, a theological study of one aspect of puritan theology and practice: the importance of the human will in the Christian life.

## Chapter Two

DOCTRINES OF THE HUMAN WILL: IMPORTANT PRECEDENTSIntroduction

In 1643 John Owen produced his first major work, *Θεομαχία Αυτεξουσιαστικη* or a *Display of Arminianism, being a discovery of the Old Pelagian Idol, Freewill, with the new Goddess Contingency.*<sup>1</sup> Owen claimed that Arminianism was a threat because it challenged God's omnipotent and exclusive will. It could only follow, argued Owen, that Arminianism would elevate human sufficiency and exalt the freedom of man's will. He called Arminianism "a discovery of the old pelagian idol" because he believed it was the appearance of an age old "idol", namely "freewill". What is pertinent to this chapter is that in his debate with the Arminians he drew upon a tradition going back to Augustine of Hippo.

Accordingly, this chapter will go back to earlier writers and present a survey of what may well be called the doctrine of the human will. In order to understand Owen and Baxter when they described the role of the human will and the way in which men and women responded to the divine initiative (the working definition of voluntarism), it is necessary to recognize the

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<sup>1</sup> *Θεομαχία Αυτεξουσιαστικη* or a *Display of Arminianism* (1643) Goold ed., X. All subsequent references taken from this edition.

contributions and influences of earlier writers. The primary suggestion is that while Baxter and Owen infrequently quoted from any one source, their understanding of voluntarism and the role of the human will was very much the result of these earlier writers; there was a background, or to use another analogy, a backdrop to their voluntarism.

The survey begins with Augustine, considered perhaps the father of both Scholasticism and Reformed theology, and moves on to Aquinas who attempted to hold on to Augustinianism and to Aristotelian metaphysics. The counter-reaction to Aquinas' Aristotelianism in Duns Scotus and William Ockham will be considered. In Scotus and Ockham a voluntarism developed, but it was not entirely similar to Augustine's. Thomas Bradwardine will be shown to represent an Augustinianism of the fourteenth century. Out of this medieval context Luther will then be considered; particular attention will be given to his debate with Erasmus. Focus will sharpen upon Calvin, both a loyal follower of Augustine and the forerunner of certain mid-seventeenth century puritan emphases. However, the theory that later so called "Calvinists" departed from Calvin's teaching on justification and grace will be questioned: there were important differences, but there was also a degree of continuity. Certainly, Baxter and Owen were recipients of a tradition much earlier than Calvin's theology. Thus, it has to be stressed that while Baxter and Owen had their own contribution to make to the discussion of the human will, they were

also inheritors of traditions which more than anything established the "framework" or "agenda" for their voluntarism.

Instead of presenting the material strictly chronologically the discussion will fall into three sections. First, (1.1) considers the nature and operation of the divine will as seen in the contributions of major theologians from Augustine to Calvin. It is impossible to discuss human choice without referring to the divine will: human choice, as those considered in this survey understood it, related to God's will. Logically, therefore, it is essential to examine what was meant by God's immutable will. Did the will of God qualify human freedom of choice? Likewise, how did human responsibility and accountability fit in with an immutable and even predetermined will of God? As explained shortly, the question of the will's choice was actually more a question of relative or proportional freedom.

Equally, there arises the issue of the relationship between God's foreknowledge and his predetermination. With the question of divine predetermination develops the complicated issue of necessity. This term, associated more with Scholasticism, can be generally defined as: (1) something which exists as it only could exist, its opposite is impossible (eg. God), *necessitas absoluta*; (2) something which exists only as a result of a previous act, or acts, which too could have been different (eg. human actions among society), *necessitas consequentiae*; and (3) something which exists because

an external agent has coerced or imposed his will onto another to produce an act or acts (eg. a parent's command to a child), *necessitas coactionis*.<sup>2</sup> As will be shown, debate occurred on the question of whether God's will involved a necessity of compulsion (3) or that God merely foreknew the result of human choice (2). Following along this line was the issue of determinism, especially relevant to Augustine's response to Pelagius and Erasmus' criticism of Luther. Here developed the question of contingency, namely actions which resulted not by any necessity but by the free operation of human choice, thought and performance.<sup>3</sup> This was precisely the crux of the controversy, for it raised the question of whether God's will was in some way dependent, or even conditioned, by the secondary agency of men and women. The heart of the matter, therefore, in (2.1) is: what is the relationship between God's will and the role of secondary agents?

Secondly, in (2.2) man's will and the nature of his volitional actions are set in the proper context. Nearly all the theologians with whom this survey is concerned accepted the nature of man as described by Plato and especially Aristotle: man was both body and soul; the will was within the soul; it responded to the exercise of understanding by means of reason; the will

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1985), pp.199-200.

<sup>3</sup> Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, p.81.

chose according to the directions of understanding.<sup>4</sup> For most of the individuals considered, understanding the nature of the human will was not entirely a philosophical or metaphysical task. There was an experiential or moral aspect which needs to be appreciated. Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin suggested in one way or another that the activity of the will was at the very centre of Christian piety. A number of questions logically follow. To what degree has fallen man's will and understanding been affected by sin? Was the will merely subject to the failure of understanding or was it itself affected by sin?

Finally, (2.3), the question of how the interaction of the divine and human will is examined. In Augustine and Aquinas the nature and operation of grace emerged as the central issue. A notable change, however, occurred during the medieval period as increasingly the issue of merit, *meritum*, was debated. By *meritum* medieval writers basically meant the value of a human action done obediently by grace.<sup>5</sup> The question of merit lay at the centre of medieval theology's doctrine of justification, grace and sanctification. To these medieval ideas of merit some of the early Reformers responded. Luther did not simply reject the medieval scholastic view of merit; he attempted to replace the

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<sup>4</sup> For Plato and Aristotle see David Knowles, *The Evolution of Medieval Thought*, Vintage Books (New York: Random House, 1962), pp.3-15; J.B. Korlec, "Free Will and free choice" in *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy. From the Rediscovery of Aristotle to the Disintegration of Scholasticism 1100-1600* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.629 writes that Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* heavily inspired medieval teaching on free choice.

<sup>5</sup> Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, p.190.

ideas of *meritum* with an emphasis upon what he believed was the Pauline concept of righteousness. The later Continental and English Reformers also dealt with the question of merit and how the divine will and the human will related. Since this work ultimately suggests that voluntarism shaped the nature of mid-seventeenth century piety and practice, understanding the framework Baxter, Owen and others inherited is important: not only for understanding their doctrine of the human will but for better appreciating the inner dynamic of late puritanism.

### 2.1 The Nature and Operation of the Divine Will

The thought<sup>of</sup> Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is central to an understanding of the development of the doctrine of the human will. Apart from the biblical writers, Augustine was the chief writer on whom most mid-seventeenth century puritans depended. This is not to suggest that prior to Augustine the question of human liberty and choice was ignored. Nevertheless, Augustine's response to both Manichaeism and Pelagianism directed Western theology into patterns and expressions of such importance that he cannot be avoided in any analysis of doctrinal development. Augustine so shaped the understanding of the role of the will that, in one way or another, subsequent writers considered Augustine the main teacher on the role of the will.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Alister McGrath comments that, "All medieval theology is "Augustinian", to a greater or lesser extent." Certainly a great deal of qualification is required here. See Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of Christian Doctrine of Justification*, Volume I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.24. and Etienne Gilson, *The Christian*

It is well beyond the purpose of this thesis to present anything more than a general survey of Augustine's work on the subject of the human will; and in this section the primary concern is with his teaching on the nature of God's will. His understanding of this, as in many other areas of his theology, developed over time. Yet how and to what extent his view of God's sovereignty changed is open to question. Etienne Gilson has claimed that Augustine's ideas were not expressed in the same way before and after Pelagius.<sup>7</sup> According to Alister McGrath Augustine changed his mind around 396 or 397: prior to this he actually accepted a free will; subsequent to 397 his view on justification and free will changed to that which he expressed in his better known works.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, Gerald Bonner has proposed that in all probability Augustine was more or less as consistent in his later writings (ie. after Pelagius) with his earlier writings (ie. when he responded to Simplicianus in c.396).<sup>9</sup> It is not necessary to determine here which position is correct, but it should be noted that Augustine's thought did develop and that Pelagianism was not the sole determining influence upon

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*Philosophy of Saint Augustine*. 2nd edition. (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1961), p.ix.

<sup>7</sup> Gilson, *Philosophy of St. Augustine*, p.158.

<sup>8</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp.24-25.

<sup>9</sup> Gerald Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny: Studies on the thought of Augustine of Hippo*. Collected Studies Series, CS 255. (London: Variorum Reprints, 1987), p.xii.

him.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout many of his works Augustine was concerned with the problem of evil; and, apart from the issue of predestination, this was the context of his teaching on the divine will as well as the issue of human free will. Augustine's treatment of evil and the will of God reveals his understanding of the relation between God's will and human actions. A number of observations stand out.

First, in the *Confessions* (c.397-401) Augustine argued that God's will was immutable and sovereign.

For even as you totally are, so do you alone totally know, for you immutably are, and you know immutably, and you will immutably. Your essence knows and wills immutably, and your knowledge is and wills immutably, and your will is and knows immutably. Nor does it seem just before you that in exactly the same way as Light unchangeable knows itself, so should it be known by the mutable being enlightened by it.<sup>11</sup>

In *Enchiridion* (c.421), where arguably his theology is fully matured, a further thought is found.<sup>12</sup> Here he balanced the sovereign will of God with the justice of God; in particular he had in mind the question of election and predestination. He suggested that while God's will was sovereign and immutable, one must not assign any culpability to the divine will: God was not

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<sup>10</sup> For Pelagius and Pelagianism see G.R. Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, pp.118-49; McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp.71-72 and Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought. St. Augustine to Ockham* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1957), pp.52-54.

<sup>11</sup> Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Translated, with an Introduction and notes, by John K. Ryan. Image Books. (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1960), Book 13. Ch.16.19, p.347. All subsequent references taken from this edition unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>12</sup> Bonner identifies *Enchiridion* as Augustine's most systematic exposition of his beliefs. Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny*. Study II, p.270.

the cause of evil.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, there was a relationship between God's will and the evil activities of humanity:

in a strange and ineffable fashion even that which is done against his will is not done without his will. For it would not be done without his allowing it - and surely his permission is not unwilling but willing - nor would he who is good allow the evil to be done, unless in his omnipotence<sup>14</sup> he could bring good even out of evil.

The second emphasis of Augustine to highlight here balances his insistence upon a sovereign divine will: he stressed human secondary agency. In his *City of God* (c.413-426 ?) he responded to the Greek and Roman idea of fate; he asserted that fate was better understood as the will of God. As Augustine presented his correction of Greek and Roman understanding of causality he specifically mentioned that God both foreknew and allowed the actions of secondary agency. In fact it was through this secondary action that events occurred; Augustine apparently thought this was self-evident.<sup>15</sup> In this context, however, it is possible to discern a measure of determinism.

there is no need that I should labor and strive with them in a merely verbal controversy, since they attribute the so-called order and connection of causes to the will and power of God most high, who is most rightly and most truly believed to know all things before they come to pass, and to leave nothing

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<sup>13</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion* 8.23, in Albert C. Outler, trans., *Augustine: Confessions and Enchiridion*. Library of Christian Classics, Volume 7. (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1955), pp.353-54. All subsequent references taken from this edition unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>14</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 26.100, p.399.

<sup>15</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Translated by Marcus Dods. The Modern Library edition. (New York: Random House, Inc., 1950), Book V.9, pp.154-55. All references taken from this edition.

unordained; from whom <sup>are</sup> all powers, although the wills of all are not from Him. Now, that is chiefly the will of God most high, whose power extends itself irresistibly through all things which they call fate ...<sup>16</sup>

The issue, however, involved the question of necessity. Augustine insisted that while God's will was infallible, humanity was not under a harsh necessity.

For if that is to be called our necessity which is not in our power, but even though we be unwilling effects what it can effect - as, for instance, the necessity of death - it is manifest that our wills by which we live uprightly or wickedly are not under such a necessity; for we do many things which, if we were not willing, we should not do. This is primarily true of the act of willing itself - for if we will, it is; if we will not, it is not - for we<sup>17</sup> should not will if we were unwilling.

Augustine clearly denied that God's will and decree forced by necessity human action and choice. He was equally insistent, however, that while free from a constraining necessity, humanity was in no way free from the sovereign will of God. A delicate balance existed, claimed Augustine. Man was free only in so far as he was free from a constraining or compelling necessity. "So also, when we say that it is necessary that, when we will, we will by free choice, in so saying we both affirm what is true beyond doubt, and do not still subject our wills thereby to a necessity which destroys liberty." He went on to argue:

Therefore we are by no means compelled, either, retaining the prescience of God, to take away the freedom of the will, or, retaining the freedom of the will,

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<sup>16</sup> Augustine, *The City of God* Book V.8, p.151.

<sup>17</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book V.10, p.156.

to deny that He is prescient of future things, which is impious. But we embrace both. We faithfully and sincerely confess both. The former, that we may believe well; the latter, that we may live well.<sup>18</sup>

While more of Augustine's thought will be presented later in this chapter, here the immediate intention is to accent Augustine's insistence that God was ultimately the sovereign initiator. His will was immutable and infallible. Paradoxically, Augustine accepted that God foreknew and actually willed a freedom for secondary agents. There was no compelling or coercing necessity. Augustine's understanding of the divine will accepted this paradoxical tension. Subsequent theologians, however, did not follow his reasoning so easily. While it is true that the Second Council of Orange (529) fully embraced Augustine's arguments, nevertheless, Alister McGrath claims that the canons of Orange II were not widely known in the medieval period. Furthermore, argues McGrath, many of Pelagius' ideas were erroneously ascribed to Jerome.<sup>19</sup> McGrath's views are consistent with the earlier study by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, S.J. He considered Anselm and Peter Lombard important writers who moved away from Augustine. Anselm's theological speculation led him to attempt to define the precise nature of liberty; so his methodology took him further away from Augustine's paradox to "construct a mode of conception that would

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<sup>18</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book V.10, p.157.

<sup>19</sup> McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp.74-75.

lend coherence to the mystery." <sup>20</sup> Gordon Leff, in an earlier study, also suggested the importance of Anselm: "Anselm differed from St. Augustine in going further along the same path and in drawing conclusions for which St. Augustine had not looked. His striking novelty came from applying dialectic to Augustinian premises." <sup>21</sup> Peter Lombard (c.1095-1169) produced his *Book of Sentences (Libri Quatuor Sententiarum)* (1157-1158). This highly systematic work became the catalyst for all subsequent medieval theology (including Luther's). In this work Lombard gave greater emphasis to reason and so shifted the methodology of theology away from Augustine. <sup>22</sup>

This movement away from Augustine, however, cannot be identified without also recognizing the contribution of St. Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) defined the nature and operation of God's will, *voluntas*, not only in the Augustinian tradition but fruitfully combined Aristotelian metaphysics and logic. <sup>23</sup>

Aquinas' three more significant works are: *Commentary on the Sentences* (1253-57), *Summa contra Gentiles*

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<sup>20</sup> Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom. Operative Grace in the thought of St. Thomas Aquinas*, ed. by J. Patout Burns, S.J. (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1971), p.6.

<sup>21</sup> Leff, *Medieval Thought*, p.99.

<sup>22</sup> See Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, pp. 9-11 and Leff, *Medieval Thought*, pp.129-30.

<sup>23</sup> This introduces the importance of Aristotle in Western theology. According to David Knowles, there was a rediscovery of Aristotle which began in the twelfth century due to translations of his work. Knowles, *Evolution of Medieval Thought*, p.189. For Aristotle's influence upon the West also see, Bernard G. Dod, "Aristotles Latinus" in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, pp.45-79 and Leff, *Medieval Thought*, pp.171-73. Aristotelian logic was the dominant pattern in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: particularly with an emphasis upon tracing the connection between primary cause and secondary causes, and in so doing gave greater weight to reason and less to faith. See the article by Alan Donagan, "Thomas Aquinas on human action" in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, p.642.

(1261-64) and *Summa Theologica (I and II)* (1266-71) and (III) (1272, but incomplete at the time of his death). He argued that God foreknew all, and this foreknowledge involved an immutable divine will. Yet in so willing God did not nullify all contingent actions; hence Aquinas allowed for the necessity of consequence. He stressed the validity of contingents not to suggest that there were unexpected or unconsidered events but that contingents existed only because God willingly permitted them.<sup>24</sup> Harry J. McSorley has suggested that Aquinas stressed contingency over against absolute necessity because he wished to argue for the existence of a relative free choice in man.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, in so arguing for contingency, Aquinas was not suggesting that God's will was dependent or conditioned by secondary agents. McSorley adds that in the Thomistic scheme God did not dismiss contingency or consequence, because it was precisely through contingency and *necessitas consequentiae* that God's will was immutably and infallibly accomplished.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to note that Aquinas stressed the relative or proportional freedom which God gave to secondary causes or agents. Aquinas firmly held that God was the prime mover, but in so moving other objects and beings, God established a degree of intrinsic freedom within the nature of the secondary agent. In

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<sup>24</sup> See Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, p.103.

<sup>25</sup> Harry J. McSorley, C.S.P., *Luther: Right or Wrong? An Ecumenical-Theological study of Luther's major work, 'The Bondage of the Will'*, (New York and Minneapolis: Newman Press and Augsburg Publishing House, 1969), pp.148-49.

<sup>26</sup> McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong*, p.157.

one sense, while God was truly the prime mover and agent, that which God moved was not only "moved upon" but it had the free agency or natural ability to act.

Freedom does not require that a thing is its own free cause, just as in order to be the cause of something else a thing does not have to be the first cause. God is the first cause on which both natural and free agents depend. And just as his initiative does not prevent natural causes from being natural, so it does not prevent voluntary action from being voluntary but rather makes it precisely this. For God works in each according to its nature.<sup>27</sup>

The key concept for Aquinas, and one which will recur in mid-seventeenth century puritan writing as exemplified in Baxter and Owen, is that quoted above: "For God works in each according to its nature", *operatur enim in unoquoque secundum ejus proprietatem*. This is how he accepted contingency and rejected an absolute necessity and determinism. There existed a divine will: immutable, infallible and even irresistible, but which worked not by absolute necessity or compulsion. Luther, as we shall see, could not accept this concept: he asked in effect, how could there be an infallible will and yet exist truly free and natural contingencies?<sup>28</sup>

For Aquinas, however, there apparently was no irreconcilable paradox. He was only emphasizing the *proprietas* functioning of contingents, namely they work according to their nature and God works in them

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<sup>27</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a83.1., Blackfriars edition, (London:Blackfriars, 1970), p.239. All subsequent references taken from this edition unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>28</sup> See below pp.93-95.

according to their nature. In this way, so Aquinas suggested, the possibility of voluntary actions truly existed. For example, when discussing predestination Aquinas maintained that,

because God knows and wills that someone will attain such a goal, predestination is certain. But because God wills that he be directed to such a goal according to free will, this certitude does not impose necessity on the one predestined.<sup>29</sup>

In some ways later medieval theology was a counter-reaction to Aquinas. Gordon Leff has argued that Aquinas was the last medieval writer to hold a balance between faith and reason.<sup>30</sup> Increasingly there developed a philosophical scepticism: philosophical ideals, or models, were considered impossible to prove; only that which was observable mattered. Both Duns Scotus (1266-1308) and William of Ockham (c.1280-c.1349) represent later traditions which differed from Aquinas. Duns questioned whether philosophy could lead to a knowledge of God.<sup>31</sup> Duns' principal argument, however, was that God's will (*voluntas*) had a greater determination than his intellect. This was a different way of explaining the activities and sovereignty of God. Duns' intention was to stress human liberty and agency over against necessity; by stressing God's will Duns attempted to "free" God from laws of nature: God was free to suspend the laws of nature if he so chose.

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<sup>29</sup> Aquinas, *Quodl.*, XI.q.3a.un., quoted in McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong*, pp.160-61.

<sup>30</sup> Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians. A study of his 'De causa Dei' and its opponents* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957), pp.3-4.

<sup>31</sup> Leff, *Medieval Thought*, p.272.

In this way, he claimed, humans were given freedom. <sup>32</sup>

William of Ockham went further. Ockham is credited with the rise of medieval Nominalism: this term (not altogether helpful) is a phrase which describes broadly the scepticism mentioned above. According to Leff, "he limited knowledge in such a way that every thing outside man's practical experience was beyond its reach. Revealed truth and all that was extra-sensory were, accordingly, not amenable to reason." <sup>33</sup> Unlike Aquinas he argued that God willed and worked according to his *potentia absoluta* (the absolute and omnipotent power of God) and that this power was rationally distinct from his *potentia dei ordinata* (God's power by which he relates to creation, or his ordinary power). In other words, Ockham drew a distinction, which Aquinas did not, between God's will and how God accomplished that will. Leff has written: "For Ockham, then, God's omnipotence represents God's power to act freely and contingently but always justly in relation to everything else, since as God himself acting there cannot be any divergence between essence and omnipotence." <sup>34</sup> There is the implication within Ockham's thought that contingencies existed only because God allowed them, *potentia dei ordinata*, rather than because of any intrinsic property, as Aquinas had argued. When such issues as grace and justification

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<sup>32</sup> See J.B. Korlec, "Free will and free choice" in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, p.639.

<sup>33</sup> Leff, *Bradwardine and the Pelagians*, pp.7-8.

<sup>34</sup> Leff, *William of Ockham. The metamorphosis of scholastic discourse* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975), p.467.

are considered within his thought, contingencies had a reality only because God committed himself to reciprocate to contingencies, namely man's volitional responses and activities. Ockham's views, however, were eventually condemned at Avignon in 1326: the principal criticism was that his views on grace and free will were Pelagian. His understanding of grace and free will will be presented below, but at this point it is crucial to appreciate Ockham's views on the will of God.

Thomas Bradwardine (c.1290-1349) represents an Augustinianism in sharp contrast to both Scotus and Ockham. Bradwardine's *De causa Dei* (c.1325-44?) was a response to Ockham. With a particular dependence upon Augustine, Bradwardine insisted that God's will was irresistible and sovereign.<sup>35</sup> Like Ockham, he was concerned to demonstrate that God's will was free from any internal constraint or compulsion. In contrast, however, Bradwardine rejected the notion that God's will was equated with God's *potentia ordinata*; this, he claimed, only led to an exalted view of secondary agency and human merit. More has to be said about Bradwardine, and this is done below; the issue here is that he was an outspoken critic of Ockham at a time when Ockham's views were labelled Pelagian. Bradwardine's primary concern was to counter any exalted view of human liberty and capability: he thought that Ockham's writings were of this sort.

In this context the views of Martin Luther (1483-

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<sup>35</sup> Leff, *Bradwardine against the Pelagians*, p.35.

1546) can be given. Gerhard Ebeling has written: "no other thinker has spoken in such compelling terms of the freedom of man on the one hand, and with such terrifying force of the bondage of man on the other, as Luther."<sup>36</sup> The influence which medieval theology had upon Luther is now seen to have been powerful. Whereas, Harry J. McSorley questioned whether Nominalist teaching was so dominant as to have been much of an influence upon Luther, this view has come under question.<sup>37</sup> Heiko Oberman and Steven Ozment both argue that Luther's early thinking, up to 1520, was influenced in many ways by Ockham.<sup>38</sup> Alister McGrath has argued that Luther's theology prior to 1517-19 was typically medieval.<sup>39</sup> He points out that Luther approved of Ockham and even called him *Magister meus*.<sup>40</sup> According to McGrath, the early Luther (that is prior to 1519) must be read as one very much in the *via moderna* of Scotus and Ockham: his views on grace and justification were in keeping with this line of thought. The real break came in 1518 with Luther's *theologica crucis* which arose chiefly regarding the

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<sup>36</sup> Gerhard Ebeling, *Luther. An introduction to his thought*. trans. by R.A. Wilson (London: Collins, 1970), p.211.

<sup>37</sup> McSorley, pp.214-15.

<sup>38</sup> Oberman, "Facientibus Quod in se est Deus non Denegat Gratiam: Robert Holcot O.P. and the beginnings of Luther's theology", in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. by Steven Ozment, (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p.129 ff; Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p.244.

<sup>39</sup> McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, p.25. Actually McGrath's thesis is not altogether new: B.A. Gerrish made a similar interpretation in *Grace and Reason. A study in the theology of Luther*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), pp.54-56, and p.114 ff.

<sup>40</sup> McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, p.36.

question of the righteousness of God.<sup>41</sup>

The evidence would suggest that prior to 1519-20 Luther's thought conformed to Ockham's view. Luther's notes on Peter Lombard's *Sentences* (*Libri Quatuor Sententiarum* 1157-1158) displayed a dependence upon the earlier interpretations of Ockham and Biel. Nevertheless, it could be argued that in this work Luther was hesitant to define necessity beyond the point of making a distinction between absolute and conditional necessity: in this sense he was following the example of Aquinas. Yet as early as 1515, however, a change was apparent. In his marginal notes to Biel's *Collectorium* he shifted away from scholastic and Nominalist thinking, particularly on the issues of free will and necessity. Not only did he give clear reference in these notes to *servum arbitrium*, he insisted upon a necessity of immutability: events happened without the least possibility of occurring otherwise, and had nothing to do with choice. Luther elaborated this point later in 1516 in his lectures on Romans.<sup>42</sup> According to McSorley, by 1516 Luther had made an either/or distinction: either one accepted absolute necessity or accepted conditional necessity: both cannot exist.<sup>43</sup> More recently, Marilyn J. Harran has argued that by 1513-1516, with the publication of *Dictata Super Psalterium* and *Lectures on Romans*, Luther was quite clearly opposed to the idea of human merit in

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<sup>41</sup> McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*, pp.36 and 92.

<sup>42</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*. LW, vol 25, pp.162-63.

<sup>43</sup> McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong*, p.230.

conversion. She suggests that by this period Luther gave far more emphasis to the divine activity than to human participation.<sup>44</sup>

If the general observations made above about Aquinas, Ockham and Bradwardine are recalled, then the significance of Luther's position is all the more striking. The issue for Luther by 1516 was this: could there be contingency within divine providence? It seems that Luther had concluded that while there was no determinism, nevertheless contingency and divine providence were contradictory terms.

While it may be invidious to jump ahead to 1525, greater attention must be given to Luther's debate with Erasmus.<sup>45</sup> Erasmus (c.1466-1536): this gifted and significant man is even today enigmatic. What did he really think about human choice? Does *De Libero Arbitrio* (1524) represent his full view?<sup>46</sup> In *De Libero Arbitrio* he did not support his argument for free choice by appealing to Thomistic terms or employing the scholastic distinction between *potentia*

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<sup>44</sup> Marilyn J. Harran, "The Concept of *Conversio* in the Early Exegetical Writings of Martin Luther", *ARG*, 72 (1981), pp.13-31. See also p.26. This interpretation is consistent with the evidence: see *Lectures on Romans*, *LW*, vol 25, pp.204-05, 211 and 286.

<sup>45</sup> For a review of Luther's relationship with Erasmus see Gordon Rupp, *The Righteousness of God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1953), pp.259-85.

<sup>46</sup> Most recently Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, "Erasmus and the 'Modernist' Question: Was He a Semi-Pelagian?", *ARG*, 75 (1984), pp.59-77, has suggested that Erasmus' definition of freedom in *De Libero Arbitrio* needs to be greatly qualified. She claims that it rhetorically was not a definition, "he meant it as such a focal point for the comparison he was about to undertake. It was a guide-star or a topographical map for exploring the texts to be interpreted. It was not a definition, however." p.69. In fact, she posits that Erasmus was very Augustinian, pp.74-75.

*absoluta* and *potentia ordinata*.<sup>47</sup> He was far more inclined to move the discussion of free choice away from the speculative realm of metaphysics. In fact, Erasmus, curiously enough, wished that the whole question of free choice receive less strident attention than Luther was giving it. In sharp contrast, Luther argued,

Here, then, is something fundamentally necessary and salutary for a Christian, to know that God foreknows nothing contingently, but that he foresees and purposes and does all things by his immutable, eternal, and infallible will.<sup>48</sup>

Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* is a work which must be central to any discussion about the doctrine of the will. It has been argued that it is "the greatest piece of theological writing that ever came from Luther's pen."<sup>49</sup> Apparently, Luther considered his children's Catechism and *De Servo Arbitrio* the only two works worth preservation.<sup>50</sup> In this work he argued the impossibility of any contingency vis-a-vis God's will; the two were diametrically opposed. Whereas Erasmus essentially followed scholastic thinking when he accepted the existence of contingency, Luther

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<sup>47</sup> In fact he labels as "superfluous and hidden" such terms as: contingency, the accomplishment of the will, passive or active will, necessity and voluntarism. Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, trans. by Philip Watson, in *The Library of Christian Classics*, Volume XVII, (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1969), p.39. All subsequent references from *De Libero Arbitrio* and Luther's *De Servo Arbitrio* are taken from this edition.

<sup>48</sup> Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p.118.

<sup>49</sup> From the Introduction to J.I. Packer and O.R. Johnston trans., *Martin Luther on the Bondage of the Human Will* (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1957), p.40.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

rejected these. Erasmus preferred to reject absolute necessity in favour of conditional and contingent necessity.<sup>51</sup> Luther, to put his views baldly, argued that God's will came about just as God wanted but without force or coercion. This was at the heart of Erasmus' disagreement with Luther.

Luther would not accept the co-existence of human free choice within a sovereign divine providence. Accordingly, in *De Servo Arbitrio* he rejected contingency, for if accepted, contingency would threaten the very nature and function of God's will.

Thus God's foreknowledge and omnipotence are diametrically opposed to our free choice, for either God can be mistaken in foreknowing and also err in action (which is impossible) or we must act and be acted upon in accordance with his foreknowledge and activity.<sup>52</sup>

Luther's thought may be taken one step further in its logic. In the quotation above he suggested that there was either free choice (but this would mean that God's will was conditional) or that God's will was supremely immutable. In *De Servo Arbitrio* he gave considerable attention to the immutability of God's will. From all appearances he urged immutability over against contingency because he denied the possibility of any agent having the potential to do that which could be otherwise. Accept this, implied Luther, and God's will was dependent upon the activity and choice of man. Yet it might well be asked of Luther, if

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<sup>51</sup> Philip S. Watson, "The Lutheran Riposte" in *Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation*, trans. by Philip Watson, in the Library of Christian Classics, Volume XVII, (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969), pp.20-21.

<sup>52</sup> Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p. 244.

contingency is not allowed, then is man's will passive to a determinism of God?

Luther's answer, at least as evidenced in *De Servo Arbitrio*, was a tentative denial of determinism. He insisted that, however much the human will was passive to God, there was no sense of coercion; there was only an immutable necessity: God's will must necessarily be accomplished in the final analysis. Consider his view of Judas' betrayal of Jesus:

let us have two sorts of necessity, one of force with reference to the work, the other of infallibility with reference to the time; and let anyone who listens to us understand that we are speaking of -the latter, not of the former; that is to say, we are not discussing whether Judas became a traitor involuntarily or voluntarily, but whether at a time preordained by God it was bound infallibly to happen that Judas by an act of his will should betray Christ.<sup>53</sup>

Luther never denied that willingness or choice was important. What was far more important for him was the independence of God's will from contingency. In one sense Luther may be frustrating to the modern reader: he did not explain how God accomplished his purpose so that his will did not in itself become a force of compulsion *de facto*.

The importance of Luther, therefore, for this survey is that he represents the way in which a change in perspective had occurred since Augustine. In a sense it had begun with Thomas Bradwardine, yet Luther's thought, by 1525, marks a developmental milestone: subsequent discussion on the nature of the divine and

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<sup>53</sup> Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p.246.

human will related more to the question of predestination than to either Aristotelian/Thomistic metaphysics or the Nominalist distinctions of the powers of God. Thus the doctrines of predestination and of God's will, as understood by Reformers like Luther and Calvin, influenced later explanations of the human will. By suggesting the importance of predestination this is not to imply that it was the *classicus locus* of subsequent Reformed theology; this would be too simple an interpretation. No one illustrates this aspect of Reformed theology better perhaps than John Calvin.<sup>54</sup> Calvin was both a conservator of Augustinianism and an innovator in his own right. While detailed study of Calvin is presented in subsequent chapters, some general observations are in order here; only in later chapters will any comparisons be made between Calvin and later English puritans. Attention will now focus upon the 1559 *Institutes* and some of his *Commentaries*.

To a certain extent Calvin agreed with Aquinas, namely that secondary agents possessed a property peculiar to their being and through which God acted as prime mover.

And concerning inanimate objects we ought to hold that, although each one

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<sup>54</sup> In the study which follows, Wendel's reminder that in the 1536 version of the *Institutes* predestination was not the chief doctrine is readily acknowledged. By the publication of the 1537 French edition, however, it appears that predestination was more central to his theology. In the 1559 Latin edition, so Wendel insists, Calvin revised his plan and placed the discussion of predestination within the section on soteriology. Wendel argues that Calvin did this in order to stress the fact that predestination is always in Christ and not solely in relation to the decree of God. This interpretation seems correct and indeed Calvin's christology, by 1559, actually governed his understanding of predestination. See Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, translated from the earlier French edition by Philip Mairet (London: Collins, 1965), pp.265-68. See also the "Introduction" to L.C.C. edition of the *Institutes*, p.xxxvii.

has by nature been endowed with its own property, yet it does not exercise its own power except in so far as it is directed by God's ever-present hand. These are, thus, nothing but instruments to which God continually imparts as much effectiveness as he wills, and according to his own purposes bends and turns<sup>55</sup> them to either one action or another.

While Calvin was only discussing inanimate objects here, note the similarity to Aquinas: secondary agents existed and possessed a distinct capacity for movement. Yet also note the fundamental departure from Aquinas: the capacity for movement was not totally free but was itself determined by the will of God. God was more than the first mover letting things move as they will. Even in their own agency they were "instruments". Caution must be exercised admittedly, for Calvin's use of Aristotelian vocabulary may not necessarily mean that Calvin was explaining causality in the same way as his predecessors, or for that matter disagreeing with them. Still, two important implications can be put forward.

First, like Augustine, Calvin accepted a degree of contingency. He suggested in the *Institutes* that there was an ordering of all events based upon God's providential will. The paradox, however, was that Calvin rejected absolute contingency, while he allowed a degree of relative or subordinate contingency. He pointed out that human perception was fallible and finite: accordingly men and women saw events occurring in such a way that they thought accident and chance

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<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* I.xvi.2. 05, III, p.189: sunt igitur nihil aliud instrumenta quibus Deus assidue instillat quantam vult efficaciam, et pro suo arbitrio ad hanc vel illam actionem flectit ac convertit.

were true components of reality.<sup>56</sup> Here was where Calvin differed from Luther. Whereas Luther seemed to reject any notion of relative conditionality, Calvin was not as negative. While he preferred to look beyond the appearances of contingency and see the influence of God, still contingencies may occur: not absolutely, but conditionally. In other words, he argued that men and women acted as they chose and wished, either in compliance or disobedience; but these actions were actually never totally (ie. absolutely) free from God's influence.

but what for us seems a contingency, faith recognizes to have been a secret impulse from God ... But what God has determined must necessarily so take place, even though it is neither unconditionally, nor<sup>57</sup> of its own peculiar nature necessary.

Calvin was able to accept a distinction between absolute and relative necessity, provided certain qualifications were accepted. God both foreknew and willed that which occurred. In the occurrence of certain events, secondary agents were allowed, and willed, to act according to the nature which God had given them. This has a familiar ring to Aquinas' notion, mentioned above, of *operatur enim in unoquoque secundum ejus proprietatem*. It was quite possible, Calvin allowed, that what an agent did or chose could be otherwise. Calvin used the example of Christ's bones (John 19.33,36). It was absolutely necessary

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<sup>56</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* I.xvi.9.

<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* I.xvi.9. OS, III, p.201: ...sed quae nobis videtur contingentia, secretum Dei impulsu fuisse agnoscat fides... Interea quod statuit Deus, sic necesse est evenire ut tamen neque praecise neque suapte natura necessarium sit.

that as a human being Jesus should have had fragile bones; yet in God's infallible will it was conditionally or relatively necessary that Jesus' bones be unbroken. Yet, Jesus' bones could have been broken just as any other human's. <sup>58</sup>

The second implication to which attention must be drawn is his suggestion that in the nature and operation of the divine will there was both a hidden and revealed will. Luther touched upon this in his debate with Erasmus. <sup>59</sup> Calvin went further than Luther. He claimed that God's revealed will in scripture involves imperatives, commands, intentions and expectations which comprise what men know of God's will but which may not necessarily comprise God's hidden will. This was not, however, to suggest that there was a duality. <sup>60</sup>

He referred to this distinction between a revealed will and a hidden will because he was concerned with the question of sin and evil, again in agreement with Augustine. How, asked Calvin, could God's immutable will not only permit but actually predetermine that which openly appeared contrary to God's revealed will in scripture? One of the ways Calvin resolved this was by comparing the intention or motivation of God with the intention of Satan. Calvin suggested that at times God could appear to be the author of evil, not just by

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<sup>58</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* I.xvi.9.

<sup>59</sup> Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p.209.

<sup>60</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* I.xviii.3.

permission but by his will.<sup>61</sup> The point, however, was that God's motivation or purpose was still consistent with his blamelessness and righteousness.

How may we attribute this same work to God, to Satan, and to man as author, without either excusing Satan as associated with God, or making God the author of evil? Easily, if we consider first the end, and then the manner of acting ... Therefore we see no inconsistency in assigning the same deed to God, Satan, and man; but let the distinction in purpose and manner cause God's righteousness to shine forth blameless there, while the wickedness of Satan and of man betrays itself by its own disgrace.<sup>62</sup>

Calvin drew further implications from this notion of God's will hidden and revealed as it related particularly to predestination and election.<sup>63</sup>

Suffice it to say for now that Calvin did not remove human culpability and responsibility; justice was not abrogated. Calvin, having Augustine's *Enchiridion* in mind, argued:

so that in a wonderful and ineffable manner nothing is done without God's will, not even that which is against his will. For it would not be done if he did not permit it; yet he does not unwillingly permit it, but willingly; nor would he being good, allow evil to be done, unless being also almighty, he could make good even out of evil.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> On Romans 1.24 Calvin writes, "It is certain indeed that He not only permits men to fall into sin, by allowing them to do so, and by conniving at their fall into sin, but that He also ordains it by His just judgment, so that they are forcibly led into such mad folly not only by their own evil yearnings but by the Devil as well." He goes on, however, and insists, "God, however, is not on this account cruel, nor are we innocent, since Paul clearly shows that we are delivered up into His power only if we deserve such punishment." See also Calvin's interpretation of Romans 9.19-21.

<sup>62</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.iv.2. OS, III, p.202.

<sup>63</sup> See especially Calvin, *Instit.*, III.xxiv.8-10,15-17.

<sup>64</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* I.xvii.3. OS, III, p.225: ut miro et infallibi modo non fiat praeter eius voluntatem quod etiam contra eius fit voluntatem: quia non fieret si non sineret: nec utique nolens sinit, sed volens: nec sineret bonus fieri male, nisi omnipotens

What is seen, therefore, in a review of thought on the nature and operation of the divine will from Augustine to Calvin is both continuity and a degree of discontinuity. The infallibility of the divine will was always recognized. How the will of God was accomplished vis-a-vis secondary agency was explained differently. Whereas Augustine allowed for the paradox of contingency without stressing a determinism, by the time Luther responded to medieval views of merit this paradox was resolved by insisting on an either/or choice. For the most part, Calvin did not depend upon Luther so much as Augustine. This is important in understanding Baxter and Owen; for, as will be shown in subsequent chapters, both are more inclined to allow for relative secondary agency and contingency.

## 2.2 The Human will and the Nature of Volitional Acts

Much of what has been considered in the previous section sheds light on what will now be presented. In this section the central issue is the degree of freedom which the human will possesses: if God's will was infallible, sovereign and immutable, what then of human action and *freedom*?

At the outset it is important to appreciate that few Reformed theologians thought the human will was free or neutral. Most recognized the effects of sin not only upon the will but also upon reason, conscience and the

affections. From Augustine to the Reformers it was axiomatic that man was in a state of non posse non peccare. The questions which developed had more to do with the extent of sin's corruption.

Two ways of approaching the issue will be woven together in the discussion that follows. The first is to consider the relationship between grace and nature. The second is to examine precisely what was meant by human volitional acts, specifically whether man was voluntarily capable of choosing both good and bad, or whether man can only chose that which was bad.

Augustine is often considered the doctor of grace. B.B. Warfield suggested, arguably in an exaggerated fashion, that "the great contribution which Augustine has made to the world's life and thought is embodied in the theology of grace, which he has presented with remarkable clearness and force, vitally in his "Confessions", and thetically in his anti-Pelagian treatises."<sup>65</sup> Augustine responded both to Manichaeian determinism, which tended to play down human choice and grace, and to Pelagianism, which stressed the liberty of human choice and the ~~radical~~<sup>qualified</sup> necessity of grace. In the context of these two heresies his doctrine of grace developed. G.R. Evans has written, "the more he thought about it the clearer it seemed to him that grace was the key to a vast complex about the working of human free will, God's foreknowledge, and

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<sup>65</sup> B.B. Warfield, *Calvin and Augustine*, p.320. Cf. Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, pp.28 ff who rightly points out that Augustine's doctrine of grace is only part of the larger issue of man's election and justification.

predestination." <sup>66</sup>

Augustine never considered grace to be opposed to nature. Pertinent to this study is his claim that human nature had suffered a severe debilitation as a result of the fall of Adam. He stressed the unity of humanity in Adam's fall and in Christ's redemption. <sup>67</sup> Augustine's writings about the fall of Adam, in many ways reveal his teaching on nature. In *City of God*, for example, a work written in the context of Pelagianism, Augustine referred to the original state of uprightness and subsequent fall of mankind in Adam.

For God, the author of natures, not of vices, created man upright; but man, being of his own will corrupted, and justly condemned, begot corrupted and condemned children. For we all were in that one man, since we all were that one man who fell into sin by the woman, who was made from him before the sin. <sup>68</sup>

Augustine argued that nature was affected and suffered from the negative loss of original rectitude and righteousness. Humanity in particular suffered a loss primarily due to the willful disobedience of Adam. Whatever else may be said about the fall, for Augustine it was chiefly a matter of the will. This theme runs through both his early and later works. <sup>69</sup> The only

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<sup>66</sup> Evans, *Augustine on Evil*, p.126.

<sup>67</sup> See Gerald Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny*, Study III, p.502 who is quite correct when he contends: "No one is likely to dispute the harshness of the Augustinian doctrine of original sin; but it must be recognised that it was from the notion of the coinherence of fallen humanity in Adam that Augustine derived his vision of the coinherence of redeemed humanity in the Body of Christ."

<sup>68</sup> Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIII.14, p.422.

<sup>69</sup> Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Q.24. Translated by David L. Mosher in *The Fathers of the Church*, Gen. ed., Hermigild Dressler O.F.M., Volume 70. (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), p.51; *Confessions*, Book.9.Ch.1.1, p.205; *Enchiridion*, 8.23, pp.353-54; *Rebuke and Grace* 17 in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*. ed. Marcus Dods, 15 Vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1872-1876), Vol 15, Vol III of

solution for this problem was God's grace. In this sense, then, the first observation to be made is that Augustine denied that nature and grace were opposed; strictly speaking grace radically renovated and healed nature.

The real issue, however, is how Augustine balanced the necessity and operation of grace with the freedom of human choice. In the previous section it was argued that Augustine wanted to hold on to both truths, however much a paradox. Gilson has commented, "among the problems raised by the Augustinian doctrine of grace, that considered most formidable is the problem of the reconciliation of grace with free choice."<sup>70</sup>

Essentially, grace, while the only hope for humanity's renovation, never coerced or constrained a person. Instead, claimed Augustine, grace actually liberated the will out of its bondage:

But, after the Fall, God's mercy was even more abundant, for then the will itself had to be freed from the bondage in which sin and death are the masters. There is no way at all by which it can be freed by itself, but only through God's grace, which is made effectual in the faith of Christ.<sup>71</sup>

In *Grace and Free Will* (426/427) he wrote:

But the grace of God is evermore good; and by its means it comes to pass that a man is under the influence of a good will, though he was previously possessed by an evil one. By the same grace it also comes to pass that the very will, which has now begun to be good, is enlarged, and grows so great as to be able to fulfil whatever divine

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"Anti-Pelagian Writings", trans. Peter Holmes and Robert E. Wallis, p.86.

<sup>70</sup> Gilson, *Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, p.157.

<sup>71</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 28.106, pp.403-404.

commandments it may wish, when it has  
once firmly and completely formed its  
desires.<sup>72</sup>

Thus a general statement can be made on the relationship of grace and nature for Augustine. He argued that apart from the renovating or healing work of grace upon nature there was no hope. Humanity's fundamental flaw was a will which chose in opposition to God. Out of his grace God turned and healed the will so that its freedom was re-directed back towards God. The will chose: hence Augustine advocated a free will, but its freedom only resulted from the initiating grace which came from God's loving election in Christ. In the final section of this chapter (2.3) a closer examination will be made of how, once renovated by grace, the human will coordinated with God's will and commands.

Aquinas suggested that the relationship between grace and nature was hierarchial. Grace was transcendent over nature; but the transcendence of grace did not preclude the infusion of grace into nature. In other words, grace and nature were not so opposed as to preclude nature being redeemed. His understanding of the nature of grace and nature is evident when he considered the state of fallen humanity. Aquinas used Aristotle's metaphysics of "accidents" and "substance" to describe reality.<sup>73</sup> Man in nature was substantially distinct from grace.

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<sup>72</sup> Augustine, *Grace and Free Will* 31 [XV] in *The Works of Aurelius Augustine, Bishop of Hippo*, ed. Marcus Dods, Vol.15, Vol.III of "Anti-Pelagian Writings", trans. Peter Holmes and Robert E. Willis, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1876), p.46.

<sup>73</sup> Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p.33.

Man's substance, or that which constituted his essence, was reason. Due to the fall, however, reason was weakened or *status naturae corruptae*; the will, however, was even more damaged. This point should not be passed over lightly. Man needed grace argued Aquinas. Only by grace could man's condition be healed and corrected.

But in the state of spoiled nature man falls short even of that which he is capable of according to his nature, such that he cannot fulfil the whole of this kind of good by his natural endowments.<sup>74</sup>

The significant point, according to Steven Ozment, is the way in which Aquinas viewed the operation of grace in nature. Grace did not change man's substance but man's accidents.<sup>75</sup> In this way Aquinas argued for a co-existence between grace and nature. In man grace was really present. Similarly, man's substance, reason, remained intact. Furthermore those aspects natural to man remained; once corrupted by sin, but capable of being healed through grace. This is the point relevant for understanding the status of the human will after the fall: grace could heal and correct its natural operation; there was no need for a "recreated will". As will be shown below, Calvin disagreed with Aquinas on this: he contended that it was not a matter merely of repairing or correcting man's will; man needed an entirely new nature and will.<sup>76</sup>

Nevertheless, for Aquinas there was, to use a later

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<sup>74</sup> Aquinas, *Summa lae*, 109.2, p.75.

<sup>75</sup> Ozment, *Age of Reform*, p.33.

<sup>76</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.iii.6 and II.iii.8.

expression, a dialectic between nature and infused grace. Nature was corrupt, spoiled, and frequently, when humanity was considered, unreasonable. Nevertheless, man's essence was not totally devoid of God's image. This implied that man's rationality still existed and that man was capable of choosing the means to obtain that which lead to a desired goal.<sup>77</sup> Aquinas was not necessarily voluntaristic for he defined the choice of the will as a rational appetite: thus the will was dependent upon the intellect.<sup>78</sup> Still, that men and women often chose improperly, which was one of the effects of sin, did not dismiss the actual operation of the will. In fact, claimed Aquinas, sin was precisely the consequence of abusing free will. He recognized this proclivity of the will; his Augustinianism prevented him from suggesting that the will was neutral.<sup>79</sup> Like Augustine, Aquinas' main insistence was that the human will was free in that it was not under any coercion.<sup>80</sup> For that matter, McSorley has suggested that Aquinas followed Augustine more closely than did Luther, for Aquinas was willing to see a distinction between the existence of free choice and the power of the will to accomplish its actual choice. Aquinas readily acknowledged that the will was *liberum*

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<sup>77</sup> See Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, p.95 and Alan Donagan, "Thomas Aquinas on human action" in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, pp.644-45.

<sup>78</sup> See Alan Donagan, "Thomas Aquinas on human action" in *Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*, p.644.

<sup>79</sup> McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong*, p.146.

<sup>80</sup> See Lonergan, *Grace and Freedom*, p.97.

arbitrium captivatum et infirmitas arbitri liberi.<sup>81</sup>

Heiko Oberman has suggested that no medieval theologian ever really departed from the Augustinian and Thomistic insistence upon the need for grace.<sup>82</sup>

McSorley, however, has argued differently. He questions whether Biel's views, for example, are close to Aquinas'.<sup>83</sup> While certainly it is difficult to present a definitive Nominalist view of grace and nature, nevertheless, some general observations may be made.

To begin with, Nominalist theology recognized that nature was affected by sin and irrationality: the severity was debatable. On the whole, however, most Nominalists did not go so far as Aquinas had done earlier and suggest a distinction between grace and nature.<sup>84</sup> According to Gordon Leff, Duns Scotus, while he accepted the need for supernatural habits for meritorious actions, nevertheless added, "that God could dispense with such forms if he willed. All that God has ordained He could as well achieve by other means."<sup>85</sup> Ockham, for one, suggested that nature was able to reach God's demands for love and obedience independent of grace. He meant that grace need not be infused into nature: instead God has prescribed ways by

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<sup>81</sup> McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong*, p.110.

<sup>82</sup> Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation, The shape of Late Medieval Thought illustrated by key documents*. (New York: Holt Reinhart and Winston, 1966), p.127.

<sup>83</sup> McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong*, p.208.

<sup>84</sup> For helpful comments on this, see Paul Vignaux "On Luther and Ockham", translated by Janet Coleman in, Oberman, *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, pp.107-17.

<sup>85</sup> Leff, *Medieval Theology*, p.271.

which men and women can be met with his mercy and forgiveness. He was critical of the idea of the need for an infused spiritual habit.<sup>86</sup> According to Ockham, sin had not extinguished nature's ability to respond to the loving overtures of God. Sin had only resulted in nature's loss of its original righteousness. This had particular implications regarding the human will. Most important was the Nominalist implication that the will was free enough to choose naturally what was good and right. From this position certain late medieval theologians proposed the notion that God would not deny grace to those who do what is in them: *facientibus quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam*. How were such conclusions reached? Two issues stand out.

First, as Oberman points out, in the Nominalist view, man before the fall of Adam was in a state of *puris naturalibus*. In this state man was capable of making a knowledgeable choice between good and bad.<sup>87</sup> As a result of Adam's rebellion, when his lower powers rebelled against his higher powers, as Biel expressed it, man's discernment became prone to sin and weakness. This implied, so it was argued, that the will was weakened in its ability to choose properly. To quote Biel, the will was in a condition: "*propter haec voluntas mutabilis est et instabilis et ex peccati fomite infirma et vulnerata.*"<sup>88</sup> Second, the state of fallen man was considered somewhat differently

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<sup>86</sup> Leff, *William of Ockham*, p.470.

<sup>87</sup> Oberman, *Harvest*, p.48.

<sup>88</sup> Biel, *II Sentences*, d 28, q 1, art 3, dub 2, as in Oberman, *Harvest*, p.49.

than Augustine. While Biel, for example, agreed that man was debilitated and suffered as a result of concupiscence, there still was an inextinguishable spark of goodness in man's reason and will - *syntersis rationis et voluntatis*. The implication was that man's will was nevertheless free and could be changed by naturally choosing what was good and right.<sup>89</sup> It explained how there still existed within humanity an irrepressible desire for truth and goodness. As Oberman has suggested, Biel taught that man, even if lacking the infused grace of *fides formata*, could still intellectually assent to the truths of the Christian faith, *fides informis*, and by his will repent of his sins so as to be in a condition to receive illumination by the Spirit and receive the grace of justification.<sup>90</sup> Such was the basis for the Nominalist notion that as long as man did what God required from him (by both assenting to the truth and trusting in faith) God would not fail to respond in mercy and grace: *facere quod in se est*.

Thomas Bradwardine in *De causa Dei* attacked Ockham's alleged Pelagianism. Bradwardine criticized the idea of any human merit. There was a radical and even harsh distinction between grace and nature. Fallen human nature needed created grace: a supernatural gift unmerited.<sup>91</sup> Bradwardine challenged the Ockhamist view

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<sup>89</sup> Oberman makes this point in *Harvest*, p.129. See also Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p.242.

<sup>90</sup> Oberman, *Harvest*, pp.131 and 132.

<sup>91</sup> Leff, *Bradwardine Against the Pelagians*, p.68.

of both grace and nature. This led him, claims Leff, to a rather unfavorable view of humanity.<sup>92</sup>

It was precisely the Scholastic and Nominalist view of the human condition and the will to which Luther responded. Whereas Biel saw the corruption of nature as a serious sickness, yet one naturally curable, Luther saw nature thoroughly corrupted and the will ontologically powerless to do anything other than evil. In this sense Luther was dependent upon Augustine. Luther's argument, however, developed gradually: during the period 1509-1516, from his comments on Lombard's *Sentences* to his own *Lectures on Romans*.<sup>93</sup> Steven Ozment has argued that two of Luther's early sermons of 1510-12 contain the view that fallen man's will was not totally devoid of a positive capability to choose good. This idea was not to minimize his teaching on the poverty of the will, but to show that there still existed a longing for God.<sup>94</sup>

By 1516, in *Disputation Theses for Bernhardi*, Luther had argued that man was culpable for sin; but sin, even slavery to sin, was the result of *serva voluntas*. Luther departed from Aquinas, maintaining that before regeneration man was free only to sin. In his *Lectures on Romans* (1516) he described original sin as:

not only a lack of a certain quality in the will, nor even only a lack in the mind or of power in the memory, but particularly it is a total lack of uprightness and of the power of all the

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<sup>92</sup> Leff, *op.cit.*, p.71.

<sup>93</sup> Oberman, "Facientibus Quod..." in Ozment, *Reformation in Medieval Perspective.*, pp.119-41. See also McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong* pp.219-29.

<sup>94</sup> Ozment, *Homo Spiritualis*, pp.139-40.

faculties both of body and of the whole inner and outer man. On top of all this, it is a propensity toward evil. It is a nausea toward the good, a loathing of light and wisdom, and a delight in error and darkness, a flight from an abomination<sup>95</sup> of all good works, a pursuit of evil...

This development in his position is further evident in the *Heidelberg Debate* (1518), in which he insisted that free choice after sin was an empty word.<sup>96</sup> By 1519 and the *Leipzig Debate*, Luther went so far as to suggest that there was no natural freedom whatsoever.<sup>97</sup>

It is fascinating, therefore, to discover that in 1525 he wrote to Erasmus and stated that Erasmus alone, in his *De Libero Arbitrio* of 1524, recognized what Luther considered to be the real issue and essence of his complaint against Rome: namely the issue of the human will.<sup>98</sup> McSorley has written:

Luther's doctrine of the unfree will is essential to his justification teaching and, as we shall see, to his concept of faith. To affirm one is to affirm the other. And to reject the doctrine of the unfree will in whole or in part is to alter not only Luther's teaching on justification, but<sup>99</sup> his entire theological structure.

This is evident in the debate between Luther and Erasmus. An overall assessment of their debate reveals that Erasmus understood Luther's notion of *servum arbitrium*. Accordingly Erasmus, in his attempt to

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<sup>95</sup> Luther, *Lectures on Romans*, LW, vol 25, p.299.

<sup>96</sup> Luther, *Heidelberg Debate*, LW, vol 31, p.40.

<sup>97</sup> Luther, *Leipzig Debate*, LW, vol 31, p.317.

<sup>98</sup> Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p.333.

<sup>99</sup> McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong*, p.12.

challenge Luther's apparent determinism, moved the question away from such ideas of necessity and towards the question of divine justice and human accountability. If this were not so, claimed Erasmus, then scriptural imperatives, promises of reward and the call to repent were meaningless.<sup>100</sup> Accountability presupposed human ability to co-operate with grace.<sup>101</sup>

Luther's response is intriguing, both in its content and the way in which he actually moved further from Augustine. Luther maintained that imperatives, commands and promises are given in scripture not to show humanity of what it was capable but to show the profound need for grace. Furthermore, imperatives in scripture are precisely that: in the imperative mood, not in the indicative.<sup>102</sup> Consequently Luther asked how one could suggest a free choice and at the same time insist that the will cannot choose good unless aided by grace? "Yet if you add this mournful rider, that apart from the grace of God it is ineffective, you at once rob it of all its power. What is ineffective power but simply no power at all?"<sup>103</sup> His point was made manifestly clear: "Therefore, to say that free choice exists and has indeed some power, but that it is an ineffectual power, is what the Sophists call

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<sup>100</sup> Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, p.75.

<sup>101</sup> Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, p.96.

<sup>102</sup> Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, pp.185-87, 190, 196 and 209.

<sup>103</sup> Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p.141.

oppositum in adjecto." 104

*De Libero Servo* and *De Servo Arbitrio* are important works in the history of the development of the doctrine of the human will. Both are concerned with the issues which were raised particularly in the medieval period. Yet both Erasmus and Luther demonstrated a departure from Scholastic and Nominalist methodology. Erasmus, perhaps due to his humanism, was sceptical of philosophical argument and tried to frame his argument upon linguistics, biblical interpretation and the rational demands of justice. There was a distinct absence of the philosophical distinctions between God's absolute and ordained power. This is not to infer that Erasmus' conclusions were significantly different from Biel's or Holcot's, but his methodology was different. Luther renewed Augustine's emphases, but also went further. It is arguable, however, that Luther's arguments, in the final analysis, did not have a direct influence upon Baxter and Owen. They were aware of a much broader Reformed tradition which involved some of the metaphysical distinctions which Luther had dismissed.

To appreciate this Reformed tradition it is necessary to examine the contribution made by John Calvin. Calvin maintained that nature was God's good creation. To be sure, since the fall of Adam nature shared in the effects of sin. Nevertheless, within

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104 Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p.141.

nature grace had a very active role.<sup>105</sup> H. Rolston III has presented a valuable interpretation of Calvin's theology of nature: for Calvin "the will and purpose of God was incorporated or instituted into the universe at creation. All things are ordered according to the movement of God's grace in creation and purpose in redemption."<sup>106</sup> Thus creation was still good, despite the effects of man's fall: it was originally created good. God had not abandoned nature and creation: grace was active and present within nature; natural laws existed, which served to render man inexcusable but still pointed to God's commitment to nature.<sup>107</sup> When Calvin discussed grace and nature, however, his chief concern was to address the issue of human nature: specifically, how grace affected human nature in regeneration. Three general observations arise.

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<sup>105</sup> An important issue of Calvin's theology is raised here, concerning Calvin and natural theology. See Gerald J. Postema, "Calvin's Alleged Rejection of Natural Theology", *SJT*, Vol 24, 1971. In this article Postema deals with the knowledge of God in Calvin's theology. He suggests that both Aquinas and Calvin recognized natural experience as the meeting ground of man and God. Where they differed, however, was in the quality of knowledge which man possesses from nature. Calvin stressed the idea of commitment, Aquinas suggested the idea of recognition or attestation. This is a helpful article but for two of the writer's assumptions. First, while Postema is correct about Aquinas and even Ockham's epistemology (pp.424,425), by his own nebulous definition, it is difficult to conclude that Aquinas and Ockham were natural theologians. (Cf. Oberman, *Harvest*, pp.40-41.) Second, Postema wishes to address certain modern interpreters of Calvin, who he thinks are suggesting a divorce between reason and faith. This concern leads Postema to interpret Calvin's references to *notitia* and *cognitio* as a qualified acceptance of natural theology. Yet this may well be reading into Calvin an argument which never really existed for him. Even Postema hints that Calvin never suggested that man can come to true knowledge of God apart from illumination by the Spirit, the influence of the Word and by incorporation into Christ. Therefore, Calvin's explanation of faith, particularly the awareness of God's favour to his people, seriously limits any natural knowledge one may obtain - even this knowledge is an implanted knowledge, and thus the work of grace.

<sup>106</sup> H. Rolston III, "Responsible Man in Reformed Theology: Calvin versus the Westminster Confession", *SJT*, Vol 23, 1970, p.137.

<sup>107</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.ii.22.

First, according to Calvin, man had degenerated from his original condition.<sup>108</sup> He stressed that the sinfulness of man was not through nature itself: it was entirely man's own doing in Adam.

Adam, by sinning, not only took upon himself misfortune and ruin but also plunged our nature into like destruction. This was not due to the guilt of himself alone, which would not pertain to us at all, but was because he infected all his posterity with that corruption into which he had fallen.<sup>109</sup>

Because of Adam the human race not only bore Adam's guilt; each individual possessed Adam's character. In this way human nature was an infected nature, devoid not only of original righteousness but with a continuously manifest degree of rebellion and hostility towards God.<sup>110</sup> In Calvin's opinion human nature was a deranged nature.

For our nature is not only destitute and empty of good, but so fertile and fruitful of every evil that it cannot be idle. Those who have said that original sin is "concupiscence" have used an appropriate word, if only it be added - something that most will by no means concede - that whatever is in man, from the understanding to the will, from the soul even to the flesh, has been defiled and crammed with this concupiscence. Or to put it more briefly, the whole of man is of himself nothing but concupiscence.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Calvin, *Instit.*, II.i.10.

<sup>109</sup> Calvin, *Instit.*, II.i.6. *OS*, III, p.235.

<sup>110</sup> Calvin, *Instit.*, II.i.6; II.i.8.

<sup>111</sup> Calvin, *Instit.*, II.i.8. *OS*, III, p.238: Non enim natura nostra boni tantum inops et vacua est: sed malorum omnium adeo fertilis et ferax, ut otiosa esse non possit. Qui dixerunt esse concupiscentiam, non nimis alieno verbo usi sunt, si modo adderetur (quod minime conceditur a plerisque) quicquid in homine est, ab intellectu ad voluntatem, ab anima ad carnem usque, hac concupiscentia inquinatum refertumque esse; aut, ut brevis absolvatur, totum hominem non aliud ex seipso esse quam concupiscentiam.

Second, despite this sinful condition, there remained within nature and within humanity a divine witness or remnant of man's original condition. Note how this sounds familiar to Aquinas and even the Nominalist understanding. Man, according to Calvin, still possessed innately a natural knowledge of God. Calvin did not suggest what might be identified as a natural theology, for the knowledge to which Calvin referred is an implanted knowledge by God himself.<sup>112</sup>

What is important is that it was precisely this vestige by which man became inexcusable; for despite its presence within man, man turned away from its witness.<sup>113</sup> Calvin argued essentially that the human race, while in every area deprived and depraved, still bore the *Imago Dei*.<sup>114</sup> He claimed that man still possessed a continued operation of conscience and accordingly this points to the importance of accountability. Likewise, human reason was not entirely wiped out, but "partly weakened and partly corrupted, so that its misshapen ruins appear."<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Calvin, *Instit.*, I.iii.1; see also his *Comm.* on Acts 17.27, pp.118-19. Nevertheless, Calvin recognized that within nature there were clear evidences of revelation, yet with qualification. In his exposition of Romans 1.20 (1st edition Latin, 1540) Calvin made the following point. "We must, therefore, make this distinction, that the manifestation of God by which He makes His glory known among His creatures is sufficiently clear as far as its own light is concerned. It is, however, inadequate on account of our blindness. But we are not so blind that we can plead ignorance without being convicted of perversity. We form a conception of divinity, and then we conclude that we are under the necessity of worshipping such a Being, whatever His character may be. Our judgment, however, fails before it discovers the nature or character of God." Calvin, *Comm.* on Romans 1.20, pp.31-32.

<sup>113</sup> Calvin, *Instit.*, I.iv.1.

<sup>114</sup> The interpretation of Calvin's use of *Imago Dei* is open to various explanations. See Thomas F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1952). A more recent study has been offered by Mary Potter Engel, *John Calvin's Perspectival Anthropology* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), especially pp.37-73.

<sup>115</sup> Calvin, *Instit.*, II.ii.12.

Third, Calvin maintained that because man's conscience and reason were not destroyed by the fall neither was man's will. Nevertheless, the will's operation bore all the evidence of rebellion.<sup>116</sup>

Calvin wanted to emphasize that while sin had vitiated man's conscience and reason, and thereby the will, humanity still had the ability of perception and the ability to choose. Calvin consistently argued that while humanity only groped in a blind way for that which was righteous, often falling further into rebellion, the intellectual and moral capability still existed. The will, therefore, had a capacity for choosing; the will was not neutral but could choose.

From these three general observations about Calvin's teaching on grace and nature we can next consider how Calvin understood the nature of man's volitional acts. Like Luther, Calvin found the expression "free will" problematic.<sup>117</sup> He argued that originally Adam was free to choose, for Adam originally was endowed with right reason, discernment and choice. His will was, "completely amenable to the guidance of reason."<sup>118</sup> This was man in his integrity. But to what extent was his will truly free? Calvin's answered that before the fall Adam's will was free but in an insecure position.

But it was because his will was capable of being bent to one side or the other, and was not given the constancy to persevere, that he fell so easily. Yet his choice of good and evil was free,

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<sup>116</sup> Calvin, *Instit.*, II.ii.12.

<sup>117</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.ii.8: "it will, on the contrary, be a great boon for the church if it be abolished."

<sup>118</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* ii.xv.8.

and not that alone, but the highest rectitude was in his mind and will, and all the organic parts were rightly composed to obedience, until in destroying himself he corrupted his own blessings.

The important phrase is: "not given the constancy to persevere..." (nec data erat ad perseverandum constatia...). This was one of the key aspects of what Calvin called the renovated, or new will, which <sup>was</sup> given to the elect. Calvin did not explain why Adam was denied this ability to persevere, except that the answer was in God's hidden plan. The human race lacked, according to Calvin, the ability to discern always what was good and right and then to persevere in choosing what was righteous. Only those regenerate possessed this ability, because they were given a new nature.<sup>120</sup> Therefore, Calvin's understanding of the freedom of the will was similar to Augustine's: prior to regeneration a man only chose to do what was sinful, but freely for there was no coercion. "Man will then be spoken of as having this sort of free decision, not because he has free choice equally of good and evil, but because he acts wickedly by will, not by compulsion."<sup>121</sup>

Following Augustine, Calvin understood freedom in a limited sense. Freedom did not imply the ability to

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<sup>119</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* I.xv.8. OS, III, p.186: sed quia in untranque partem flexibilis erat eius voluntas, nec data erat ad perseverandum constantia, ideo tam facile prolapsus est. Libera tamen fuit electio boni et mali: neque id modo, sed in mente et voluntate summa rectitudo, et omnes organicae partes rite in obsequiam compositae, donec seipsum perdendo, bona sua corrumpit.

<sup>120</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* I.xv.8; see also II.iii.9; and II.iii.11.

<sup>121</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.ii.7.

move towards that which was beneficial and truly just; rather freedom explained the independent nature of human volitional acts. In one sense Calvin was merely suggesting that the will functioned in direct relation to its own warped character. Similar to Aquinas' notion of the will acting according to its nature, Calvin argued that the will was neither forced or coerced into choosing, but did so "freely". Yet Calvin had this clear point: the human will, until grace transformed the will, freely chose only to sin. There was a necessity, argued Calvin: humans willfully sinned. The paradox, however, was that humanity was not compelled to sin, but did so freely. The sum of the matter for Calvin is that humanity's choice was consistent with its character. As all in Adam have sinned, and are therefore ontologically bent towards choosing sin, so in the new Adam, Jesus Christ, redeemed humanity was given a new ontology and a new inclination of the will towards what was holy. For Calvin, it was not a matter of what man performed meritoriously; it was not a matter of infused grace with which man cooperated; but a matter of man made new, with a new will consistent to this nature.

### 2.3 The interrelation between the divine will and human will

In this section we come to the heart of the matter: how God's will and the human will interrelate. Augustine is first examined and three main observations

about his understanding of the interrelation between the divine will and the human will are presented.

First, fundamental to Augustine's theology was the importance of the human will and its role in the human response to the grace of God. In 2.1 it was shown how Augustine stressed the sovereignty of God's will; yet, however much a paradox, God's immutable will accommodated the contingent actions of the human will. In 2.2 we saw how for Augustine grace was the only hope for the renovation and liberation of the human will's bondage to sin. These central suppositions reveal that in Augustine's theology the role of the human will was at the centre of the life of faith. Gilson has concluded that for Augustine,

every movement of the soul is directed either towards a good to be acquired or retained, or away from an evil to be avoided or removed; but the soul's free movement to acquire or to retain a thing is the will itself. Every movement of the soul, therefore, depends on the will.<sup>122</sup>

This implies that in Augustine's theology the will actually chose as it so decided; as mentioned earlier, there was no coercion or compulsion placed upon the will. The soul was self-moving.

One is aware that the soul moves of itself when one is aware of the will within oneself. For if we will, no one else wills for us. And this movement of the soul is spontaneous, for this has been granted to the soul by God.<sup>123</sup>

The problem, according to Augustine, was that humanity in Adam wilfully chose that which was bad and

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<sup>122</sup> Gilson, *Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, p.133.

<sup>123</sup> Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Q.8, p.40.

opposed to God. Human perversity involved the will, claimed Augustine. In *Enchiridion* he wrote, "The cause of evil is the defection of the will of a being who is mutably good from the Good which is immutable. This happened first in the case of the angels and, afterward, that of man."<sup>124</sup> Nevertheless, Augustine insisted that the fall of Adam, and his subsequent posterity, neither compromised God's will nor humanity's ability to will.

But since he did foreknow that man would make bad use of his free will - that is, that he would sin - God prearranged his own purpose so that he could do good to man, even in man's doing evil, and so that the good will of the Omnipotent should be nullified by the bad will of man, but<sup>125</sup> should nonetheless be fulfilled.

Adam could have chosen not to sin and so arrived at the "fullness of blessing", but he chose freely to sin; God neither forced nor constrained Adam to sin.<sup>126</sup>

Practically, therefore, all humanity shared in this fallen state, and experienced what Augustine identified within himself as a battle of "two wills".

For this very thing did I sigh, bound as I was, not by another's irons but by my own iron will. The enemy had control of my will, and out of it he fashioned a chain and fettered me with it. For in truth lust is made out of a perverse will, and when lust is served, it becomes habit, and when habit is not resisted, it becomes necessity. By such links, joined one to another, as it were - for this reason I have called it a chain - a harsh bondage held me fast. A new will, which had begun within me, to wish freely to worship and find joy in

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<sup>124</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 8.23, pp.353-54.

<sup>125</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 28.104, p.402.

<sup>126</sup> Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace*, 28,p.97; 32,p.101; and 37,p.106.

you, O God, the sole sure delight, was not yet able to overcome that prior will, grown strong with age. Thus did my two wills, the one old, the other new, the first carnal, and the second spiritual, contend with one another, and by their conflict they laid waste my soul.<sup>127</sup>

The solution to this human dilemma, according to Augustine, was found not with man or human efforts but with the grace of God. God graciously turned and renovated the will of his elect. Apart from this work of God there was no hope for humanity.<sup>128</sup>

The second observation made here about Augustine is that he firmly denied the notion that there was any human merit involved in faith. To be sure, he argued, faith involved the response of the will, but in this choosing there was no merit whatsoever. This point correlates to Augustine's understanding of election and predestination. In one of his early works he wrote,

Therefore, before merit, the calling determines the will. For this reason, even if someone called takes credit for coming, he cannot take the credit for being called. And as for him who is called and does not come, just as his calling was not a deserved reward, so his neglecting to come when called lays the foundation for a deserved punishment.<sup>129</sup>

Good works had little to do with the change of the will; neither was it merely a matter of choosing to obey God once informed of the gospel: "Could he do this by the determination of his free will? Of course not!

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<sup>127</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*. Book 8.Ch.5.10, pp.188-89.

<sup>128</sup> Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, Q.68.5, p.164; *Confessions*. Book 13.Ch.1.1, p.335; *Enchiridion*, 9.31, p.357; *Grace and Free Will*, 29.,p.43 and 43., p.62.

<sup>129</sup> Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, .68.5, pp.164-65.

For it was in the evil use of his free will that man destroyed himself and his will at the same time."<sup>130</sup>

This leads to the third and final observation about Augustine's understanding of the human will. In essence, he argued that grace moved the human will. In this way he suggested God's sovereign electing mercy in Christ rescued the enslaved will. Still, the importance of a willing response to Christ was fundamental. "By the same token, the mercy of God is not sufficient by itself unless there is also the will of man."<sup>131</sup> There was, according to Augustine's theology, an inter-play between grace and the human will: not that of equal partners, for grace was always superior, but of primary and secondary partners:

it is given of grace, not of debt; and by so much the more is given through Jesus Christ our Lord to those to whom it has pleased God to give it, that not only we have that help without which we cannot continue even if we will, but, moreover, we have so great and such a help as [to cause us] to will.<sup>132</sup>

Thus the interrelation between God's will and the human will, according to Augustine, was one in which the human will was freed by God's will and grace in Christ to choose what was good. Willingness was an important aspect of the life of faith. Gilson has commented that for Augustine willingness involved free choice.<sup>133</sup> Liberty or freedom of the will, however, was qualified.

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<sup>130</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 9.20, p.256; see also *Rebuke and Grace* 31, pp.99-100.

<sup>131</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion* 9.22, p.258.

<sup>132</sup> Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace* 32, p.101.

<sup>133</sup> Gilson, *Philosophy of Saint Augustine*, p.157.

The will only had the ability to choose the gospel as the result of God's saving influence. Gerald Bonner observed: "It is true that Augustine, to the end, paradoxically defended human freedom in the interest of moral responsibility; but, from the individual's point of view, that freedom, in the face of Divine Omnipotence which elects some to salvation and leaves the rest to reprobation, can at best be only a very limited and circumscribed endowment."<sup>134</sup> This important paradox lay at the centre of Augustine's understanding of the interrelation of the divine will and the human will; to go one step further, it illuminates Augustinian voluntarism. As Augustine put it, "The freedom of the will is defended in accordance with the grace of God, not in opposition to it; because the human will does not attain grace by freedom, but rather attains freedom by grace, and a delightful constancy, and an insuperable fortitude that it may persevere."<sup>135</sup>

For Thomas Aquinas the interrelation between God's will and man's will had everything to do with the nature and work of grace. As with Augustine, three points are outstanding in Aquinas' theology of grace and the human will.

First, the movement of the will towards that which was good and just was solely the result of grace.

Man's turning to God does indeed take place by his free decision; and in this sense man is enjoined to turn himself to God. But the free decision can only be

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<sup>134</sup> Bonner, *God's Decree and Man's Destiny*, pp.xi-xii.

<sup>135</sup> Augustine, *Rebuke and Grace* 17, p.86.

turned to God when God turns it to  
himself...<sup>136</sup>

However much he gave priority to the intellect and reason, Aquinas did not deny the movement of the will; to will was part of the order of salvation. Yet Aquinas insisted that grace alone moved the will towards God. On his own man could not turn to God, for apart from the influence of grace man chose primarily that which was evil. Man needed, claimed Aquinas, the medicine of grace.<sup>137</sup>

Second, Aquinas maintained that there was no way man prepared himself for this infusion of grace: "And so it is clear that man cannot prepare himself to receive the light of grace except by the gratuitous assistance of God moving him within."<sup>138</sup> Nevertheless, there was a preparation for salvation; but this was done by God himself, "*est ex auxilio Dei moventis animam ad bonum.*"<sup>139</sup> We shall see shortly that for the medieval Scholastics the question of merit was central to their understanding of the *ordo salutis*; Aquinas, however, argued that man did not merit grace, *meritum de congruo*. Humanity performed acts of repentance, sorrow and obedience (*meritum de condigno*) but these acts were only the consequence of God moving the will in the first place. Accordingly, the interaction between grace and the human will in no way involved any degree

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<sup>136</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* 1a2ae.109.6, p.91.

<sup>137</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* 1a2ae.109.2, p.75.

<sup>138</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, 1a2ae.109.6, p.91.

<sup>139</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* 1a2ae.112.2, p.149.

of obligation on God's part except in the sense that whatever God willed was moved to its necessary end.

Since our actions have a meritorious character only on the presupposition of a divine ordination, it does not follow that God becomes simply obliged by debt to us but to himself, in the sense that an obligation of debt holds that his ordination should be fulfilled.<sup>140</sup>

How did Aquinas explain this movement? He referred to an "interior" and an "exterior" activity on the part of the will. The interior activity occurred as a result of the infusion of grace. This infusion in turn produced an exterior activity, namely the will's choosing to repent of sin and to love God. This exterior activity was distinct from the initial, interior activity, but was no less dependent upon grace. "And since for this act too God helps us, both by confirming the will within so that it might achieve its act and by providing the means of action without, grace is called cooperative in respect of this act."<sup>141</sup>

Aquinas was thus able to hold in tension both the need for grace and the relative necessity of human choice. He did so to the extent that he saw a qualified degree of cooperation between the divine will and the human will. But whereas Aquinas was careful to avoid isolating one component of the antinomy from the other, it can be argued that those who followed him were not. Later medieval theologians moved away from Aquinas' thought.

According to Steven Ozment, the overall opinion of

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<sup>140</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* 1a2ae.114.1, p.203; see also 1a2ae.111.1, p.127.

<sup>141</sup> Aquinas, *Summa* 1a2ae.111.2, p.131.

medieval theologians was that opposites did not attract: God and man were not reconciled until man was healed and transformed.<sup>142</sup> Because the Trinity was bound together by love God could only be reconciled to those who were loveable. Salvation was understood to be more a matter of like attracting like. It was not that grace was unnecessary. What mattered, however, was the role of grace as initiator and the role which man himself played as a willing mover, or to use the expression of the period, *homo viator*. Stated simply, man as *homo viator* was one in whom grace had initiated a change in heart which in turn resulted in human acts of love, *charitas*, to which God had committed to reward.<sup>143</sup> Grace was infused into man, but then man performed works of love or works in a state of grace: accordingly man could be loveable.<sup>144</sup>

To be sure, the fundamental question, "how can God and man be reconciled?", was never ignored during the medieval period. Yet two fundamentally different strains of thought existed which attempted to resolve this dilemma. One was committed to a revived Augustinian predestinarianism. The other placed greater emphasis upon man's natural abilities to produce works of love, once infused with and transformed by grace.

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<sup>142</sup> Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p.242.

<sup>143</sup> Ozment, "Homo Viator: Luther and Late Medieval Theology", in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, pp.275-87.

<sup>144</sup> Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p.242 claims that this notion of "likeness" became the cornerstone of medieval theology. This is true, but in a qualified sense: how "likeness" was produced was never explained univocally during the period between Aquinas and Luther.

Among those who stressed predestination, two names stand out: Duns Scotus and Bradwardine. Duns criticized Aquinas' idea of cooperation between the divine will and the human will. While he argued that faith was fundamentally a matter of the human will and not logical proofs, he insisted that the divine will must be primary in the definition of a Christian. In other words, an individual was only a Christian because God first willed it, specifically in predestination. There was no inherent human merit, claimed Duns, by which God must accept an individual. He argued "*nihil creatum formaliter est a Deo acceptandum.*"<sup>145</sup> Thomas Bradwardine was concerned with what he saw as a growing semi-Pelagian influence.<sup>146</sup> He insisted that works of merit were the particular result of grace and of grace alone. Following Augustine, Bradwardine strove to maintain the free nature of God's infused grace.

Grace is given to you, it is not a payment. For this reason it is called grace, because it is freely given. With preceding merits you cannot buy what you have already received as a gift. Therefore the sinner has received first grace in order that his sins might be forgiven.<sup>147</sup>

Yet there were others for whom the issue of predestination was not an entirely sufficient explanation. Ockham attempted to divorce Christianity from Aristotelian influences and gave greater emphasis

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<sup>145</sup> Quoted in Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p.242. A slightly different emphasis is found in Heiko Oberman's claim that Scotus did advocate a notion of works of merit. Oberman suggests, however, that what protected Scotus from a "semi-Pelagianism" was his strong predestinarianism. Oberman, *Forerunners*, p.130.

<sup>146</sup> Leff, *Bradwardine Against the Pelagians*, pp.13-15.

<sup>147</sup> Quoted in Oberman, *Forerunners*, p.156.

to the natural faculties of man. According to Ockham, man was capable of doing his best so as to merit, *de congruo*, God's grace. While it is true that Ockham argued that God was never indebted to man, nevertheless he accepted that man's will possessed the capability of choosing good, *ex puris naturalibus*.

Robert Holcot (c.1290-1349) and Gabriel Biel (1420-1495) were two theologians indebted to Ockham, but followers who made certain modifications. Holcot argued that man could not earn eternal life by his won merits, *ex condigno*, only in a partial way, *meritum de congruo*. Even so he maintained that man's works had merit only because God had contracted, "that he who does good works in a state of grace shall receive eternal life."<sup>148</sup> There was a value to works because they were the very acts to which God has contracted himself. Still, wrote Holcot, "our Lord becomes a debtor because of His own promise, not because of what we do."<sup>149</sup>

Biel's emphasis had more to do with the role of grace as an initiator of good works. Man had a natural love for God, "*viatoris voluntas humana ex suis naturalibus potest diligere Deum super omnia.*"<sup>150</sup> He qualified this by insisting on the role of grace as an initiator.

The grace of which we speak is a gift of

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<sup>148</sup> Holcot, *Lectures on the Wisdom of Solomon*, Chp.III, Lecture 25 as in Oberman, *Forerunners*, p.143.

<sup>149</sup> Holcot, *op.cit.* as in Oberman, *Forerunners*, p.144.

<sup>150</sup> Biel, *Secundum Opiniones Scoti*, Ockham quoted in P. Vignaux, "On Luther and Ockham", trans. by Janet Coleman, in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, ed. by Steven E. Ozment (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971), p.109.

God supernaturally infused into the soul. It makes the soul acceptable to God and sets it on the path to deeds of meritorious love. <sup>151</sup>

Grace was a supernatural gift. Man accepted this infused grace and there was a subsequent transformation of his nature; and this merited eternal life. <sup>152</sup> Yet after this acceptance of grace the viator sustained his relationship through works *meritum de condigno* and by the practical exercise of *charitas*.

Grace is nothing other than infused love (charity), because the same effects are attributed to both. For love (charity) is that which prompts us to love God above everything else, which makes us beloved to God, without which no one is beatified. <sup>153</sup>

When we move on to Luther, one of the more apparent aspects of his theology was his rejection of the idea that God and man were reconciled by the merits of human actions. Luther suggested that it was unlikeness which was the uniting principle of religion: "to be conformed with God meant to agree with his judgement that all men are sinful and still believe his promise to save them nonetheless." <sup>154</sup> As we have already noted, Luther's theology developed gradually. It may be suggested that Luther in his *Dictata Super Psalterium* (1513-1516) retained both the initiatory role of grace and *meritum de congruo*. <sup>155</sup> On the other hand, Marilyn J. Harran

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<sup>151</sup> Biel, *The Circumcision of the Lord* quoted in Oberman, *Forerunners*, p.168.

<sup>152</sup> See Oberman's definition of terms in, *Harvest*, p.459.

<sup>153</sup> Biel, *The Circumcision of the Lord* quoted in Oberman, *Forerunners*, p.170.

<sup>154</sup> Ozment, *The Age of Reform*, p.243.

<sup>155</sup> McSorley, *Luther: Right or Wrong*, p.222.

has argued that in his *Dictata* Luther had already questioned man's ability to earn righteousness before God. She maintains that by the time of his *Lectures on Romans* his rejection of merit was more apparent: "Although some ambiguity remains, Luther claims more consistently in *Romans* than in the *Dictata* that preparation for *conversio* is itself God's." <sup>156</sup> By 1517 in his *Disputatio Contra Scholasticam Theologiam* he had clearly broken away from his Scholastic and Nominalist heritage. In this work he specifically attacked Ockham's views on justifying grace; he was far more reliant upon Augustine. "It is false to state that the will is free to choose between either of two opposites. Indeed, the inclination is not free, but captive." <sup>157</sup> Paul Vignaux points out how Luther, rejecting *meritum de congruo*, argued instead that "Non potest Deus acceptare hominem sine gratia Dei iustificante." <sup>158</sup>

By 1525 Luther denounced Erasmus for suggesting that man had a preparatory role and capability; he rejected any possibility of preparation for salvation. <sup>159</sup>

Luther argued that both scripturally and experientially the notion of merit, preparation and free choice robbed the gospel of its most precious promise: the sole

<sup>156</sup> Marilyn J. Harran, "The Concept of *Conversio* in the Early Exegetical Writings of Martin Luther", *ARG*, 72, 1981, p.26.

<sup>157</sup> Luther, *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, *LW*, vol 31, p.9. Ebeling wrote that, "Luther made clear, in the most extreme terms, that there was no room here for a human will that still remained neutral." Ebeling, *Luther*, p.222.

<sup>158</sup> P. Vignaux, "On Luther and Ockham", trans. by Janet Coleman in *The Reformation in Medieval Perspective*, edited by Steven E. Ozment, p.108. See Luther, *Disputation Against Scholastic Theology*, *LW*, vol 31, #56, p.13.

<sup>159</sup> Erasmus, *De Libero Arbitrio*, p.37 and Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p.213.

sufficiency and satisfaction of Christ. "If we believe that Christ has redeemed men by his blood, we are bound to confess that the whole man was lost; otherwise, we should make Christ either superfluous or the redeemer of only the lowest part of man, which would be blasphemy and sacrilege." <sup>160</sup>

Luther's view of course had an influence upon subsequent Reformers: they concluded that he had maintained a view of the relationship between the will of God and the will of man fundamental to the doctrine of justification. By 1530 the Augsburg Confession, as a representation of "Lutheran" thought, rejected any suggestion of *meritum de congruo* and preparation:

quod homines non possint justificari ...  
coram Deo propriis viribus, meritis aut  
operibus, sed gratis justificentur  
propter christum per fidem ... hanc  
fidem imputat Deus pro iusticia coram  
ipso. <sup>161</sup>

Furthermore, whereas Luther was not as positive concerning matters *inferioribus*, as the Augsburg Confession put it, the Confession's verdict on free choice is clearly from Luther:

Sed non habet vim sine Spiritu Sancto  
efficiendae iusticiae Dei seu iusticiae  
spiritualis ... tamen interiores motus  
non potest efficere, ut timorem Dei,  
fiduciam erga, <sup>162</sup> Deum, castitatem,  
patientiam etc.

Philip Melancthon (1497-1560), the principal

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<sup>160</sup> Luther, *De Servo Arbitrio*, p.333.

<sup>161</sup> The Augsburg Confession, Article IV, "De Justificatione" in *The Creeds of the Evangelical Protestant Churches*, ed. by Philip Schaff (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1877), p.10.

<sup>162</sup> The Augsburg Confession, Article XVIII, "De Libero Arbitrio" in Schaff, *Creeds*, pp.18-19,

architect of the Confession, followed his teacher's leading as early as 1521: in *Loci Communes Theologici* he argued that men were incapable of controlling their affections, *affectus* - which can be translated as attitude or disposition. Man's disposition overruled all desires and resolutions, clearly indicating that the will had little control or power: "internal affections (*affectus*) are not in our power, for by experience and habit we find that the will (*voluntas*) cannot in itself control love, hate or similar affections, but affection is overcome by affection."<sup>163</sup> Melanchthon pointed to human impotency vis-a-vis the affections and concluded that all humanity could really do was sin and wrong doing. From this line of thought, he wrote disparagingly of human merit and cooperation:

Now, as for those things which the Sophists hand out about the merit of congruence, namely, that by moral works which we do in the strength of our own nature, it is congruence (for thus they speak) that we merit grace, you yourself, dear reader, understand that these are false blasphemies dishonoring the grace of God. Further, since the power of human nature cannot without the inspiration of the Holy Spirit cannot do anything but sin, what shall<sup>164</sup> we deserve for our efforts but wrath.

Melanchthon, like Luther, stressed *sola fides*. In no way did he deny human responsibility and accountability, but what concerned him the most was striking at the roots of *meritum de congruo* and *facere*

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<sup>163</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologici* in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, ed. by William Pauck in The Library of Christian Classics edition, Vol. XIX (London: Collins, 1965), p.27. All subsequent references taken from this edition.

<sup>164</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologici*, p.43.

quod in se est. Melanchthon argued that such concepts exalted works and gave rise to a false understanding of righteousness. In his opinion works done by the natural capabilities only possessed an "external agreement with righteousness", they lacked the true righteousness. "Those who try to keep the law by their natural powers or free will (*arbitrium*) simulate only the external works: they do not give expression to those attitudes (*affectus*) which the law demands."<sup>165</sup>

Finally, what was Calvin's teaching on the interrelation between the divine will and the human will? For the sake of clarity, three associated points will be examined. All deal with his understanding of the way in which a person was made new in Christ.

First, it is important to consider how the will of God was seen by Calvin to be the sole source of a believer's regeneration. As Calvin expressed it, there was no other cause "outside his will."<sup>166</sup> Regeneration originated within God's will for the elect; even reprobation was established by the divine will. The implication is that Calvin, while accepting a relative necessity of secondary agents, gave greater importance to an immutable divine will. Accordingly, he rejected the idea that God's will was only the consequence of his permission; such would be changing relative necessity to a *necessitas consequentis*. Stated simply, Calvin rejected the contention that God's will and decree were only the result of what he foresaw

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<sup>165</sup> Melanchthon, *Loci Communes Theologici*, p. 117.

<sup>166</sup> Calvin, *Instit* III.xxiii.2.

happening. Rather, God's ordination was the chief cause.<sup>167</sup>

Calvin, therefore, disallowed any idea of preparation for faith; he called the idea mere babble.<sup>168</sup> This is not to say that he rejected the opinion that there was a preparation of faith: he agreed that the Spirit, the Word and the law prepared an individual, but always within the economy of God's grace. Similarly he did not totally deny implicit faith, namely the beginnings of faith which then through obedience and love matured into faith with assurance.<sup>169</sup> What he denied was the idea that through human cooperation and works of merit man prepared himself for faith. Human cooperation and merit contradicted election, as Calvin understood election in the 1559 Institutes.<sup>170</sup> In another work, his commentary on Ephesians (1548, revised 1551 and again 1556), he wrote,

Ought we not then to be silent about free-will, and good intentions, and fancied preparations, and merits, and satisfactions? There is none of these which does not claim a share of praise in the salvation of men; so that the praise of grace would not, as Paul shows, remain undiminished. When, on the part of man, the act of receiving salvation is made to consist in faith alone, all other means, on which men are accustomed to rely, are discarded. Faith, then, brings a man empty to God, that he may be filled with the blessings

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<sup>167</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.xxiii.8.

<sup>168</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.ii.27. OS, III, p.271: Facessat igitur quicquid de praeparatione multi nugati sunt.

<sup>169</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.5. OS, IV, p.12: Vocare etiam fidem implicatam licet quae tamen proprie nihil aliud est quam fidei praeparatio.

<sup>170</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.xxiv.3.

of Christ. <sup>171</sup>

In his commentary on Philippians (1548, revised in 1551 and 1556) Calvin addressed the question, to what extent did the human will cooperate with God's will?

For we acknowledge that we have a will from nature; but as it is evil through the corruption of sin, it begins to be good only when it has been reformed by God. Nor do we say that a man does anything good without willing it, but only when his inclination is ruled by the Spirit of God. Hence, in so far as concerns this part, we see that the whole is ascribed to God, and that what the Sophists teach us is frivolous, that grace is offered to us and placed, as it were, in our midst, that we may embrace it if we choose. For if God did not work in us efficaciously, He could not be said to produce in us a good will.<sup>172</sup>

We can sum up this first point by stating that for Calvin it was only God's benevolence by which man was made regenerate. By the will of God alone the elect, through grace, came to faith in Christ and were made new. Yet we can take it further by considering, secondly, how one actually came to faith.

Secondly, therefore, it is necessary to look at the will's participation in the process of regeneration. For Calvin, the will's denial of sin followed by its choosing good could only be accomplished by grace. Repentance was most assuredly involved in regeneration, but as it was a movement of the will (and understanding) which only God began, even repentance was a gift from God. As Calvin defined it, repentance was: "the true turning of our life to God, a turning

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<sup>171</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* on Ephes 2.8, p.144.

<sup>172</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* on Phil 2.13, p.254.

that arises from a pure and earnest fear of him; and it consists in the mortification of our flesh and of the old man, and in the vivification of the Spirit."<sup>173</sup>

Taken out of context, this definition might imply some degree of human effort; seen in the fuller dimensions of regeneration it becomes more apparent that repentance was never separated from faith and assurance. To Calvin, repentance too was the consequence of God's activity. Strictly speaking, repentance warranted no merit. According to Calvin one never repented in order to believe, one believed and so repented. It was always grace which initiated belief and, therefore, grace which brought about repentance.<sup>174</sup>

The means by which grace worked repentance and renovation, however, was supremely through the Holy Spirit. We shall see that Baxter and Owen gave considerable attention to the work of the Holy Spirit, attention which we shall suggest came from the influence not only of Calvin, but also from Augustine. Nevertheless, Calvin's understanding of the Spirit is highly significant for our study of voluntarism: he, more clearly than any of the other Reformers, explained regeneration through the Spirit in such a way as to allow for relative necessity. In the first instance, Calvin argued that the regenerate individual is united with Christ by the Holy Spirit.<sup>175</sup> Through the Spirit's work the righteousness and merits of Christ

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<sup>173</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.iii.5.

<sup>174</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.iii.2.

<sup>175</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.i.1.

are imputed, thereby establishing the individual in righteousness. Furthermore, by the Spirit one is illuminated and possesses the knowledge and certainty of faith.<sup>176</sup> Most relevant to the will, however, was Calvin's contention that only by the Spirit was the will made new, restored and renovated:

When the Lord establishes his kingdom in them, he restrains their will by his Spirit that it may not according to its natural inclination be dragged to and fro by wandering lusts. That the will may be disposed to holiness and righteousness, He bends, shapes, forms and directs it to the rule of his righteousness. That it may not totter and fall, he sustains and strengthens it by the power of his Spirit.<sup>177</sup>

The renewal of the will, or heart as Calvin elsewhere called it, was a work which involved not merely a repair of the will but a transformation of the will. The infirmity of man's will was such that grace did not add to man's will but radically changed it. What specifically happened to the will? Calvin used various terms: the will's effacement (*voluntatem aboleri*), a correction of the will (*corrigat*), a substitution of one will for another (*a seipso bonam submittat*), and the extinguishing of the old will (*vel potius aboleat*).<sup>178</sup> In other contexts, however, he suggested that the will was a new creation just as the whole of man was made new in Jesus Christ. In this sense, there was a restoration: fallen man was

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<sup>176</sup> See the notable definition of faith given by Calvin in *Instit.* III.ii.7.

<sup>177</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.v.14. *DS*, III, p.314: the verbs Calvin used here are *flectit*, *componit*, *format* and *dirigit*.

<sup>178</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.iii.6; II.iii.7; and II.iii.8

restored; yet for Calvin Jesus, the second Adam, not only restored humanity but created a new humanity, with a new nature.

In addition, it should be noted that in regeneration the will, claimed Calvin, was never moved passively. It was not moved as a stone; it voluntarily moved. In this respect we can detect his Augustinianism.

Nothing now prevents us from saying that we ourselves are fitly doing what God's Spirit is doing in us, even if our will contributes nothing of itself distinct from grace ... yet because we are by nature endowed with will, we are with good reason said to do those things the praise for which God rightly claims for himself; first, because whatever God out of his lovingkindness does in us is ours, provided that we understand that it is not of our doing; secondly, because ours is the mind, ours the will, ours the striving, which he directs toward the good. <sup>179</sup>

This leads to the third and concluding observation about Calvin's teaching on the interrelationship between God's will and the human will. It follows logically from the points already made: that Calvin insisted that it was God's will which was the sole source of regeneration; and that the will chose in regeneration as it was moved by grace and changed by the Holy Spirit.

Calvin insisted that once regeneration occurred, although it had continuous and progressive implications, namely sanctification, man was still dependent upon grace. For Calvin it was not a matter of man continuing what God had begun. God continued to move a believer by grace and the Spirit into the life

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<sup>179</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.v.15.

of holiness. Significantly, the will was active, but active still because of grace, not just out of human effort.

What remains now for free-will, if all the good works which proceed from us have been received from the Spirit of God? Let godly readers weigh carefully the apostle's words. He does not say that we are assisted by God. He does not say that the will is prepared, and has then to proceed in its own strength. He does not say that the power of choosing aright is bestowed upon us, and that we have afterwards to make our own choice. This is what those who weaken God's grace (so far as they can) are accustomed to babble... He means to prove that man does not in any way procure salvation for himself, but obtains it freely from God. The proof is that man is nothing but by divine grace.<sup>180</sup>

The fundamental aspect of what might be called Calvin's voluntarism is this: the will's choosing to respond to the divine initiative. The importance of willingness in the life of faith, according to Calvin, was great. Despite the problems of indwelling sin and even the struggle with doubts, the believer was led by the Spirit in a life of faith which involved the will's choosing.<sup>181</sup> The will was not passive, nor was it forced. In the sense that the life of faith necessitated a renewed mind as well as the will, it would be wrong to suggest that Calvin gave prominence to the will. Nevertheless, the life of faith for Calvin, like Augustine, was expressed in voluntaristic tones: tones suggesting the importance of human

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<sup>180</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* on Ephes 2.10, pp. 145-46.

<sup>181</sup> See Calvin, *Comm.* on Romans 7.21-23, pp.152-53; also *Comm.* on Galatians 5.17-25, pp.102-107 for his comments on fighting sin. Calvin did recognize the problems of doubting, see *Instit.* III.ii.17, p.562.

willingness and choosing to do what God commands. That grace was given and that the Holy Spirit operated to produce this willingness did not, in Calvin's opinion, minimize the importance of human agency and choice.

### Conclusion

This chapter has presented a survey of the doctrine of the human will from Augustine to Calvin, in order to provide a background for the writings of Baxter and Owen. The historical precedents outlined here formed a background or agenda for the context in which Baxter and Owen wrote and preached. This chapter has shown how both the nature of the will and the way in which the will was said to be "free" changed and developed from Augustine to Calvin. It was argued that from Augustine on freedom of the will meant that man was capable, even after the fall, of choice. Yet, this choice was not understood to imply a neutral will: sin had so radically altered both the righteousness and inclinations of man that the will chose sinfully. The only hope for the human will according to the Augustinian tradition was through grace. Augustine had pointed to humanity's fundamental need for grace; during the medieval period his view of grace was displaced with another, *via moderna*. Eventually critics of this thought, notably Bradwardine and above all, Luther, forced the issue back along the lines of Augustine. Calvin, however, was enigmatic: he was

thoroughly Augustinian, yet compared to Luther he gave slightly more potential to human nature. What is clear is that Calvin interpreted the nature of the Christian life in a voluntaristic way: to be sure, the will was not dominant, yet the importance of a willingness is clear.

Thus, in order to understand mid-seventeenth century teaching on voluntarism it is essential to go back to Augustine. Equally, however, it must be appreciated that Baxter and Owen were not only echoing Augustine, or for that matter Calvin: they were not only recipients of a tradition, a tradition that moves from Augustine to Calvin and beyond; but also participants in seventeenth century debate. Yet only after examining historical antecedents, as this chapter has done, will the vocabulary and the issues important in the time of Baxter and Owen make sense.

Chapter Three  
THE DIVINE INITIATIVE

Introduction

The last chapter showed that from Augustine to Calvin it was assumed that no discussion of the human will made sense apart from a consideration of the divine will. Richard Baxter and John Owen argued similarly, for they were indebted to the antecedents outlined in the last chapter. For Baxter and Owen "freedom of the will" was a problematic expression until *freedom* was defined. They contended that freedom was a relative word: in relation to the activity or influence of one agent over against the activity of another agent. Accordingly, a study of voluntarism, which by logic raises the question of "free will", involves asking, freedom in relation to whom and what? Baxter and Owen's answer was God and his will. Their voluntarism supposed that the human will was subordinate to the will of God. Yet they also insisted that this sovereign will invited a response from men and women: by the preaching of the gospel men and women were called to change their ways, to embrace the promises of God and to exercise obedience. God issued his invitation to humanity in a way which presumed a divine will in relation to a human will. The paradox was constant: a sovereign God still never forced a human being into unwilling compliance.

To appreciate their understanding of God's will, or the divine initiative (as per the definition of voluntarism offered in ~~the~~ chapter 1), it must be recognized that they wrote in a theological context post Calvin. Mention has already been made of this context, with particular attention to Arminianism and Antinomianism.<sup>1</sup> Of equal importance to this study is covenant theology. While the origins and characteristics of covenant theology have created a mine-field for modern scholarship, it is unavoidable for this present study; in many ways the covenant of grace was the arena for voluntarism. William K.B. Stoever was correct when he wrote: "In formal Puritan divinity the covenant locus is the medium by which the doctrines of God and man are related in the "application of redemption" to particular individuals, and it forms the context for considering the specific "means" by which individual regeneration is accomplished and revealed."<sup>2</sup> The covenant of grace, according to Baxter and Owen, was the context for the divine/human encounter. Moreover, the covenant of grace, and covenant theology, enabled divines like Baxter and Owen to address the antinomy of divine sovereignty and human responsibility. John Von Rohr has observed: "[covenant theology] served as a comprehensive connective bringing into interrelationship the dualities, and even antinomies, which followed Puritan stress upon both the evangel and

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 1, pp.48-51 and 56-58.

<sup>2</sup> Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*, p.10.

election."<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, therefore, sixteenth and seventeenth century covenant theology is introduced (3.1) as the arena or, to use Stoeber's phrase, locus, of the divine initiative. Here several issues have to be considered: how and by whom covenant theology developed; the major aspects of covenant theology; how covenant theology related to soteriology and Christology; and of paramount importance to the relationship between Calvin and later Calvinists, Calvin's view on the covenant. Second, (3.2), what Baxter and Owen meant by the sovereignty of the divine will is presented. This is done because, while both Baxter and Owen referred to a covenant of grace which involved a human response, they insisted that the divine initiative was infallible and not dependent upon human contingency. The problematic and differing conclusions which they reached on this issue are directly relevant to interpreting their voluntarism. Third, (3.3), it will be shown that both Baxter and Owen employed terms from covenant theology, but due to varying views on the meaning of condition (3.3.1) and the death and satisfaction of Christ (3.3.2) they arrived at two distinct opinions of the covenant of grace and, thus, the divine initiative.

While the content of this chapter is predominately doctrinal, it should not displace the overall goal: to highlight that for Baxter and Owen the will of God was the initiating cause by which a person entered the

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<sup>3</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, pp. 9-10.

covenant of grace and into a relationship with Him. Thus, the doctrinal framework expressed in this chapter in every way shaped Baxter and Owen's practical theology (detailed in chapters 5-7). When they considered the divine initiative they appreciated particular practical implications and did not divorce questions of morality, responsibility and spirituality from the question of God's will.

### 3.1 Covenant theology and the locus of the divine initiative

In this section particular attention will be given to the nature of covenant theology. As explained in ~~the~~ chapter 1, mid-seventeenth century puritan covenant theology was not uniform or necessarily consistent. In large measure this had to do with the fact that covenant theology developed in a number of different contexts: in Germany, Switzerland, the Netherlands and England.

To facilitate an interpretation of Baxter and Owen's understanding of the covenant of grace, it is prudent to begin (3.1.1) with a broad picture of the major themes of covenant theology and some its early proponents. This will involve greater attention to certain theological issues than what was given in the Introduction. Special consideration will be given to Calvin (3.1.2) in order to compare and contrast (in 3.1.3) important English theologians such as William Perkins and William Ames and the general teaching of the Westminster Assembly. Having done so we are better

prepared to move on to Baxter and Owen in 3.2 and 3.3.

### 3.1.1 Major themes of covenant theology and its early proponents

Covenant theology was an important aspect of sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed theology; how important, however, is questioned by modern scholars.<sup>4</sup> The crucial question has to do with the relationship between Calvin and covenant theology. Was covenant theology an aberration or merely a logical extension of Calvin's theology? The seminal work of Perry Miller, in particular, drew a distinction between Calvin's theology and later Calvinism, significantly because of the latter's covenant theology. In *The New England Mind* Miller offered that covenant theology was a response to Arminianism and Antinomianism, but especially it was an attempt to go beyond Calvin and bring a knowledge of God's ways into line with the existential needs of men and women.<sup>5</sup> Referring to New England puritans who embraced covenant theology, Miller declared that "their imposition of the covenant doctrine upon the system of Calvin produced at last in the New England theology an altogether different

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Peter Toon, *Hyper-Calvinism*, pp.20-28; Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Anyraut Heresy*, p.141; Mark W. Karlberg, "The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics", unpublished Ph.D thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary (1980), p.54; John W. Beardslee, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.20; Holmes Rolston III, "Responsible Man in Reformed Theology: Calvin versus the Westminster Confession", *SJT*, 23, 1970, pp. 129-56; and Lyle D. Bierma, "Federal Theology in the Sixteenth Century: Two Traditions?", *WJT*, 45 (1983), pp.304-21 for a survey of recent secondary scholarship. Perhaps the most significant recent work on covenant theology is John Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*.

<sup>5</sup> Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1939 and 1954).

philosophy from any propounded in Geneva." <sup>6</sup> In another important work, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity", he presented his controversial thesis on Calvin and later covenant theology:

For all ordinary purposes He (ie. God) has transformed Himself in the covenant into a God vastly different from the inscrutable Divinity of pure Calvinism. He has become a God chained - by His own consent, it is true, but nevertheless a God restricted and circumscribed - a God who can be counted upon, a God who can be lived with.

Miller's argument has not yet fully been dismissed, even though he has received considerable criticism. Everett H. Emerson has accepted that covenant theology particularly flourished in the seventeenth century. Like Miller, he has viewed it as a reaction against both Reformed scholasticism and Arminian teaching on predestination. Furthermore, Emerson has agreed that "by using the covenant idea, theologians shifted emphasis from the eternal decrees of God, central High Calvinist teachings, to God's relationships with man, without abandoning predestination." Nevertheless, claimed Emerson, Miller was wrong to make such a sharp distinction between Calvin and later covenant theology. Calvin may not have been a covenant theologian, but there are hints in his writings which suggest a closer correlation between Calvin and later Calvinists than

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<sup>6</sup> Miller, *The New England Mind*, p.367.

<sup>7</sup> Miller, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity", in *Errand into the Wilderness*, (New York: Harper and Row, 1956 and 1964), p.63.

Miller believed.<sup>8</sup> Jens G. Møller has sharply criticized Miller's thesis, declaring it to be the result of a tendency "to neglect both theology and history".<sup>9</sup> Møller has argued for a continuity between Calvin and later covenant theologians. In similar fashion, Brian Armstrong has also maintained that covenant theology was not incompatible with orthodox Calvinism.<sup>10</sup> Charles L. Cohen makes no mention of Calvin's relation to covenant theology, but has assumed that later covenant theologians were following Calvin's lead.<sup>11</sup> Dewey Wallace has seen no central importance to covenant theology; it did not compromise a doctrine of predestination by grace.<sup>12</sup> Michael McGiffert has maintained that English covenant theology had its origins in some of Calvin's teaching on the covenant of grace and the sovereignty of grace; in this way he challenged Miller's theory that the covenant was a means of reducing the harshness of divine sovereignty.<sup>13</sup> The significant work by William K.B. Stoever, while reluctant to draw any sharp parallels between Calvin

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<sup>8</sup> Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology", *CH*, 25, 1956, pp.136-42; Peter Toon argues along the same line, *Hyper Calvinism*, pp.20-22; Rolston, *op.cit.*, p.137, considers Calvin not technically a covenant theologian.

<sup>9</sup> Jens G. Møller, "The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology", *JEH* 14 (1963), p.46.

<sup>10</sup> Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Anabaptist Heresy*, p.141.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, *God's Caress*, pp.47-72.

<sup>12</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, Appendix, pp.197-98.

<sup>13</sup> Michael McGiffert, "American Puritan Studies in the 1960s." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series 27 (1970), pp. 36-67. See also his more recent study, "Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism." *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982): 463-505.

and later English covenant theologians, has struck at the central weakness of Miller's thesis: Stoever rightly argues that divine sovereignty and human responsibility, which covenant theology embraced, were not mutually exclusive truths.<sup>14</sup> John Von Rohr's work on covenant theology in the seventeenth century continues this present line of thought; he is in close agreement with McGiffert and Stoever. He has argued:

So the Calvinist heritage of sovereign grace was not compromised through the urging of human participation and agency, nor was that human responsibility rendered insignificant by the proclamation of God's predestinating power. Both can be seen as incorporated into the totality of God's gracious covenanting with humanity -- so felt these Puritan divines -- for that covenant is both conditional and absolute.<sup>15</sup>

While this chapter intends to show that Baxter and Owen represent a wider diversity of opinion in the mid-seventeenth century than perhaps Von Rohr has suggested, we concur with the above mentioned criticisms of Miller. It is not, however, possible to agree with Dewey Wallace's conclusion that covenant theology was an insignificant element in seventeenth century predestinarian theology.<sup>16</sup>

Covenant theology has a bearing not only on the interpretation of sixteenth and seventeenth century puritanism, but also how Calvin's theology of predestination and grace is to be understood. Calvin's

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<sup>14</sup> Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*, p.14.

<sup>15</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p.30.

<sup>16</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, Appendix, p.197.

ideas on the covenant will be examined shortly, but before this it will be helpful to present a survey of the important themes of covenant, or federal, theology.

Sixteenth and seventeenth century covenant theology stated that God makes a covenant (*foedus, pactus, contractus* - relating to *berith* and *δὲαθηκη*) with his people. Johannes Wollebius (1586-1629), one of the prominent Continental covenant theologians, explained: "God's covenant with man is twofold, a covenant of works and one of grace: the first before the fall, and the second after it." <sup>17</sup> In one sense the covenants which God made were like human contracts: promises were made by both parties in return for the performance of particular conditions. To quote William Ames (1576-1633), an important developer of English covenant theology, "This covenant is, as it were, a kind of transaction of God with the creature whereby God commands, promises, threatens, fulfills; and the creature binds itself in obedience to God so demanding." <sup>18</sup> God's covenants with man, however, were not made between equals and hence the similarity falls short; still the idea of mutual obligation and

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<sup>17</sup> Wollebius, *Compendium Theologiae Christianae*, Ch. VIII (1), translated by Beardslee, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.64. This work was very prominent in Reformed circles, see Beardslee's Introduction, p.11.

<sup>18</sup> Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, Ch. X,9 in John Dykstra Eusden, *The Marrow of Theology*. Translated from the Latin *Medulla Theologica*, 3rd edition, 1629. (Durham: The Labyrinth Press, 1983) p.111. All subsequent references taken from this edition.

the presence of conditions remained.<sup>19</sup> As seen in the earlier quote from Wollebius, some covenant theologians referred to two covenants which God made with mankind: the covenant of works (or innocency or nature) and the covenant of grace.<sup>20</sup> As to which one was made first, there was no clear agreement.

The covenant of works, so it was argued, was made by God with Adam (Genesis 2.15-17). This was referred to as the covenant of innocency or the covenant of nature.<sup>21</sup> In this covenant the blessings of fellowship, intimacy and fruitfulness were given to Adam solely on the condition that Adam obey God's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge. This covenant had nothing to do with grace as such; it was more based on law and morality.<sup>22</sup> With the rebellion and fall of Adam the covenant of works was transgressed. Mankind fell under the curse and condemnation of this covenant's justice. What made matters worse was that men and women continued to try to relate to God on the basis of their obedience; but an obedience tainted with moral failure, hence deserving condemnation.

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<sup>19</sup> See Francis Lyall, "Of Metaphors and Analogies: Legal Language and Covenant Theology", *SJT*, 32, 1979, pp.1-17. Lyall is a lawyer and offers no historical or theological assistance yet he is helpful in explaining, from a legal perspective, the nature of "bilateral" and "unilateral" voluntary contracts.

<sup>20</sup> I emphasise "with mankind" because it was also suggested by some covenant theologians that there was a covenant made between the Father and the Son to establish the means by which the as of yet uncreated elect would be saved. See Ames, *Narrow of Theology*, Ch. XIX, 4-6, in Eusden, p.132 and Ch.XXIV, 3-5 in Eusden, p.149. See also Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. by George T. Thomson (London: Allen and Unwin, 1950), pp.376-83.

<sup>21</sup> Hepppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.283-84.

<sup>22</sup> Jens Møller, *op.cit.*, p.47.

With the fall, however, it was also revealed that another covenant existed: the covenant of grace. In one sense, this covenant stood in contrast to the law-demands of the covenant of works. In another sense, the covenant of grace was an addition to the first covenant in that Christ came to satisfy the demands of the covenant of works and by his satisfaction the covenant of grace was established. The chief element of the new covenant of grace, or testament as it was also called, was the covenant mediator: Jesus Christ. Upon his merit and satisfaction God was pleased to establish the covenant of grace.<sup>23</sup> Accordingly, William Ames described the covenant of grace as "a covenant of reconciliation between enemies."<sup>24</sup> Or as Johannes Cocceius (1603-69), one of Ames's students at Franeker, put it, "The first effect of the testament is ... tolerance."<sup>25</sup>

Repeatedly this covenant was the tenor of God's relationship with his people in salvation history. The covenant was renewed, or furthered, with Noah (Genesis 6.18 and 9.8 ff), Abraham (Genesis 15-17), Israel at Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19-20) and finally brought to fulfillment in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. Wollebius taught that the covenant of grace was expressed in three forms, "the first for the period

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<sup>23</sup> Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp.316 and 385.

<sup>24</sup> Ames, *Narrow of Theology*, Ch. XXIV, 13, in Eusden, p.151.

<sup>25</sup> Cocceius, *Summa Theologiae* (1699), XL,3, quoted in Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.372. His other important work appeared in 1648, *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei*. For a helpful summary of Cocceius see Charles S. McCoy, "Johannes Cocceius: Federal Theologian," *SJT* 16, 1963, pp.352-70.

from Adam to Abraham, the second for that from Abraham to Moses, and the third for that from Moses to Christ." <sup>26</sup>

Within this general framework, there were a number of vital issues which covenant theology developed. According to covenant theologians the covenant of grace entered in even at the fall itself, in that God did not carry out the full penalty of death; he promised that the seed of the woman would crush the serpent (Genesis 3.15). Furthermore, the covenant of grace was not based on the previous covenant condition: in other words it was not perfection which was required, but faith and repentance. Referring to the saints' perseverance, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), an important Heidelberg divine, wrote: "When as He judgeth according to the Gospel, that is not according to the covenant of workes, as our obedience, which should satisfie the law, but according to the covenant of faith, or the righteousness applied unto us by faith..." <sup>27</sup> Ursinus' argument illustrates, however, one of the problems which arose in later covenant theology: was faith something which man offered back to God *quid pro quo*? Additionally, was this condition of faith possible for all, or only for the elect who would possess this faith through predestination ? <sup>28</sup> Another problem is

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<sup>26</sup> Wolllebius, *Compedium*, Chap. XXI, (1), prop. XI, in Beardslee, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.118. Yet the issue of the Mosaic law and its relationship to the covenant of grace was frequently a topic for disagreement.

<sup>27</sup> Ursinus, *The Summe of Christian Religion* 94, quoted by Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, p.39.

<sup>28</sup> Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.385 ff suggests that early covenant theologians argued that the covenant of grace was unconditional. We will see below that by the time of Baxter the issue of conditions raised considerable controversy.

revealed in the thought of Wollebius: "The giving of the covenant of grace is the act by which God promises himself as a father in Christ to the elect, if they live in filial obedience."<sup>29</sup> Many recognised the importance of holy living as a true fruit of faith. Faith without sanctification was unthinkable.<sup>30</sup> But did this imply an over-emphasis upon human works of "filial obedience" rather than on the appropriation of the finished work of Christ? Finally, covenant theologians differed over the question of whether or not Christ procured the condition for the elect. Such are the principal themes and issues of covenant theology.

It has already been shown that modern scholars differ about the significance of covenant theology. Nevertheless, it is important to ask how it developed and what theologians shaped covenant theology. Peter Toon has suggested that the idea of a covenant of works began in the application of the Scholastic doctrine of *lex naturae*: societies were based on contracts, namely between God and King, King and people and people and people. Toon referred to Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563) who, in his *Loci Communes Theologiae Sacrae* (1560), wrote about a general covenant with all men and a specific covenant with Abraham and his seed. This of course was an idea with biblical warrant. The implication, however, was that medieval legal

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<sup>29</sup> Wollebius, *Compedium*, Chap. XXI, (1) in Beardslee, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.117.

<sup>30</sup> John von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," *CH* (34), 1965, p.196.

terminology *pactus* and *foedus* could be used to illustrate God's relationship with his people. Toon has argued that covenant theologians like Musculus in some ways strained the meaning of the Hebrew, *berith* and the Greek, *διαθήκη*.<sup>31</sup>

A number of other scholars, however, suggest that covenant theology began earlier in the sixteenth century. Jens G. Møller has claimed that the Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) in *Annotationes in Genesin* provided the first significant discussion of the covenant in ways which led to subsequent covenant theology. According to Møller it was in Zwingli that the moral emphasis was stressed: "*Pactum dei cum homine est, ut ipse sit deus noster; nos integre ad voluntatem eius ambulemus! Qui in hoc sunt pacto, populus sunt dei.*"<sup>32</sup> Norman Pettit has recognised this moral emphasis (*nos integre ad voluntatem eius ambulemus*) and has argued that it was later picked up by Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575). According to Pettit, it was Bullinger who furthered the movement towards a theology of the covenant.<sup>33</sup> John Von Rohr has agreed with this observation of Bullinger claiming that, "whereas Zwingli emphasized somewhat more the gift of the character of the covenant and its blessings, Bullinger stressed strongly the covenant's bilateral nature and

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<sup>31</sup> Toon, *Hyper-Calvinism*, p.21; cf. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism* p.39, n.2; Trinterud, "The origins of Puritanism", *CH* 20, 1951, pp.41-42.

<sup>32</sup> Zwingli, *Annotationes in Genesin* (c. xvii) in *Opera*, ed. Schuler and Schulthess, 1835, p.71 as quoted in Møller, *op.cit.*, p.47. Other scholars point to Zwingli as well: cf. Emerson, *op.cit.* p.136 and M. Osterhaven, "Calvin on the Covenant", in *Readings in Calvin's Theology*, ed. by Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), p.89.

<sup>33</sup> Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, pp.38 ff.

the fullness of responsible human participation." <sup>34</sup> As mentioned in the Introduction to this study, R.T. Kendall has argued that covenant theology owed its development to the departure of Beza's theology from Calvin's. Most scholars, however, agree that the notable Heidelberg divines, Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83) and Caspar Olevianus (1535-87), expressed the clearest form of covenant theology: stressing the distinction between the "covenant of works" and the "covenant of grace". <sup>35</sup> By 1563 the Heidelberg Confession stressed a clear distinction between the two covenants. Covenant theology, particularly in the seventeenth century, was furthered by the importance of such Dutch writers as Cocceius, Francis Burmann (1628-79) and Herman Witsius (1636-1708).

English writers also shaped the pattern of covenant theology. Whether or not William Tyndale (c.1494-1536) was a covenant theologian is very much open to debate, but in his work there exists evidence of central elements of covenant theology. Møller, for one, insists that Tyndale's strong insistence upon personal holiness led to a high view of the law, even as a condition for the promise of the New Testament. <sup>36</sup> Michael McGiffert has also highlighted Tyndale's

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<sup>34</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, Appendix, p.193.

<sup>35</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, Appendix, p.196; Trinterud, *op.cit.*, p.48; Emerson, *op.cit.*, p.136; Toon, *Hyper-Calvinism*, p.21; Osterhaven, *op.cit.*, p.89; but cf. Ian Breward, *The Works of William Perkins*, ed. by Ian Breward. The Courtenay Library of Reformation Classics. Vol. 3. (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970) p.90, who plays down the covenant theology of the Heidelberg group stressing that their theology of the covenant was used more "to clarify the nature of grace and moral obligation."

<sup>36</sup> Møller, *op.cit.*, pp.50-54; Trinterud, *op.cit.*, pp.43-44.

influence: particularly with his emphasis upon covenant conditionality. As for the further development of English covenant theology, Dudley Fenner (1558-1587), whose works include *A briefe treatise upon the first table of the lawe* (1588) and *Sacra Theologia* (1585), played a prominent role. Additionally reference needs to be made to Robert Rollock (1555-1599), principal of the University of Edinburgh, who wrote the significant work entitled, *Tractatus de Vocatione Efficari* (1597).<sup>37</sup> Peter Bulkeley (1583-1659), produced *The Gospel-Covenant; or The Covenant of Grace Opened* (1646). In this work he stressed the overwhelming superiority of the covenant of grace over against the covenant of works.<sup>38</sup> Bulkeley was also quite clear about the conditionality of the covenant of grace: the covenant promises were only for those who repented and believed; and while he gave more attention to Christology this emphasis of Bulkeley became a recurring theme in English covenant theology.<sup>39</sup> Yet by far the most influential English theologians were William Perkins (1558-1602) and one of his students, William Ames (1576-1633): to these two divines we shall return in 3.1.3, but before this attention must be given to Calvin.

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<sup>37</sup> cf. Miller, *The New England Mind*, Appendix, for a list of other significant works from English writers.

<sup>38</sup> See Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*, p.95.

<sup>39</sup> See Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*, p.98.

### 3.1.2 John Calvin and the covenant

It will be recalled that reference was made earlier to the relationship between Calvin and later covenant theologians: some scholars have argued that Calvin was definitely not a covenant theologian, others have pointed to a close affinity between Calvin and later writers. What is clear is that Calvin's position on the covenant is problematic; nevertheless, the following points can be suggested.

First, Calvin did not refer to a covenant of works as distinct from a covenant of grace. When Calvin mentioned God's covenant he had in mind one covenant.<sup>40</sup>

Calvin's understanding of Adam's short-lived innocency was not expressed in what would later be covenant language. He recognised the imposition of a duty, but his emphasis is not the same as that of later covenant theology. Calvin stressed the command as a test (*obedientiae examen*) rather than as a condition.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> The following passages from the 1559 *Institutes* illustrate his use: (a) II.viii.21 "solemn covenant of the church" - *solemni Ecclesiae foedere*, OS III, p.362; (b) II.xi.4 "covenant of the law" and "covenant of the gospel" - *Foedus Legale, foedere Evangelico*, OS III, p.427; (c) II.xi.11 "covenant of his grace" - *foedus gratiae*, OS III, p.433; (d) III.vii.5 "covenants of his mercy" - (e) other examples include: III.xxi.5-7 in the context of election; IV.xiv.6; IV.xv.22; IV.xvi.5,6,14; IV.xvii.20 all dealing with sacraments. In this sense I cannot agree with Emerson when he writes: "The covenant is not a basic element for his system...", p.136. While Emerson raises the question regarding the elements of Calvin's system (a question which Bouwsma, *John Calvin*, p.5 insists must be suspended), the argument here is that the covenant was a vital aspect of Calvin's biblical exegesis.

<sup>41</sup> Calvin, OS, III, p.231.

A law is imposed upon him in token of his subjection; for it would have made no difference to God, if he had eaten indiscriminately of any fruit he pleased. Therefore, the prohibition of one tree was a test of obedience. And in this mode, God designed that the whole human race should be accustomed from the beginning to reverence his Deity; as doubtless, it was necessary that man, adorned and enriched with so many excellent gifts, should be held under restraint, lest he should break forth into licentiousness.<sup>42</sup>

Similarly Calvin's exegesis of Genesis 3.15 reveals his reluctance to equate the seed of the woman automatically with Christ. As mentioned above, this was a notable feature of later covenant theology.<sup>43</sup> Calvin, however, interpreted the seed as a collective whole of the victory of humanity over Satan. He accepted that this victory was fully established in the corporate body of Christ, but the point is he did not employ covenant language in his exegesis.<sup>44</sup>

Secondly, however, where Calvin referred to God's covenant it is possible to identify themes which later covenant theologians would employ. Thus, it is not entirely justifiable to draw a sharp contrast between Calvin and covenant theology. For example, commenting upon Genesis 12-17 he referred to the mutuality of God's agreement with Abraham: "Here the extraordinary kindness of God manifests itself, in that he familiarly makes a covenant with Abram, as men are wont to do with

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<sup>42</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on Genesis* 2.16 (Banner of Truth edition, 1975), pp.125-26. All subsequent references taken from this edition.; cf. Calvin, *Instit.* II.i.4.

<sup>43</sup> See above, p.155.

<sup>44</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* Genesis 3.15, pp.170-71; cf. *Comm.* Romans 16.20, p.325:

their companions and equals."<sup>45</sup> Furthermore, Calvin did point to a human activity or condition which God required: the call to uprightness.<sup>46</sup>

The foundation, indeed, of the divine calling, is a gratuitous promise; but it follows immediately after, that they whom he has chosen as a peculiar people to himself, should devote themselves to the righteousness of God. For on this condition, he adopts children as his own, that he may, in return, obtain<sup>47</sup> the place and the honour of a Father.

The third aspect about Calvin's theology of the covenant is that the one covenant is another way of expressing the gospel. He made this important point in two significant ways in Book II of the 1559 Institutes: first, in his discussion of the law and, secondly, in his comparison of the Old Testament with the New Testament. He began with a discussion of the law in order to show both the progressive nature of revelation and that the New Testament (however superior) was never to be considered apart from the Old Testament. These two themes -- the law and the contrast between the Old and New Testaments -- are now taken each in turn.

When Calvin referred to the law he, at times, meant all of Moses's teaching; both the ceremonial and the moral instructions. Of course, Calvin was more often than not primarily interested in the moral law; but both the ceremonial and the moral complemented the

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<sup>45</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* Genesis 12.3, p.347.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Møller, *op.cit.*, p.49. See also Bierma, *op.cit.* pp.304-309 and pp. 313-14 for a discussion of the unilateral or bilateral aspect of the covenant.

<sup>47</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* Genesis 17.1, p.444; cf. *Instit.* III.xvii.5 in his discussion of good works. See 6.1 of this thesis for a discussion of Calvin's view of holiness in the Christian life.

covenant promise made to Abraham. In this way Calvin claimed that the law was not opposed to the covenant of grace: "And Moses was not made a lawgiver to wipe out the blessing promised to the race of Abraham. Rather, we see him repeatedly reminding the Jews of that freely given covenant made with their fathers of which they were the heirs. It was as if he were sent to renew it." <sup>48</sup>

From this thought Calvin proceeded to discuss the positive role of the law, including the third use of the law - to assist New Testament believers in discovering the will of God so as to grow in obedience and holiness. <sup>49</sup> In this manner Calvin also stressed the moral importance of the law. It was not, of course, that the law acted as a "rigorous enforcement officer" (*rigidi exactoris vicem*) pressing believers to a legal perfection. Instead "the law points out the goal toward which throughout life we are to strive." (*sed in hac ad quam nos adhortatur perfectione, metam demonstrat ad quam nobis tota vita contendere*). <sup>50</sup> Accordingly, Calvin suggested that it was wrong to oppose completely the law with the gospel: they were

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<sup>48</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.vii.1; *OS* III, p.326 Neque enim datus est Moses legislator qui benedictionem generi Abrahæ promissam aboleret: imo videmus ut passim revocet in memoriam Iudæis gratuitum illud foedus cum patribus eorum percussum, cuius haeredes erant: acsi ad illud renovandum missus foret.

<sup>49</sup> See *Instit.* II.viii.1 where Calvin refers to the insufficiency of natural law to bring men a knowledge of God's values. For his emphasis on obedience, one not out of fear but holiness, see *Instit.* II.vii.14,15 and II.viii. 1-59.

<sup>50</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.vii.13; *OS* III, p.339.

components of the one covenant.<sup>51</sup> Needless to say, the supremacy of Christ's personal work over against the law was Calvin's chief emphasis; he insisted on the priority of the New Testament. Yet he suggested that,

the gospel did not so supplant the entire law as to bring forward a different way of salvation. Rather, it confirmed and satisfied whatever the law had promised, and gave substance to the shadows... From this we infer that, where the whole law is concerned, the gospel differs from it only in clarity of manifestation. Still, because of the inestimable abundance of grace laid open for us in Christ, it is said with good reason that through his advent God's Heavenly Kingdom was erected upon earth.<sup>52</sup>

It was only after Calvin demonstrated the law's positive quality with reference to the gospel that he compared the Old Testament with the New Testament. In this comparison, however, he proceeded to show how all of salvation history was one covenant. "The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation."<sup>53</sup> Calvin pointed to the important differences between the Old Testament and the New

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<sup>51</sup> See Møller, *op.cit.*, p.50 who suggests the opposite and in fact argues that "Calvin's covenant theology is primarily a theology of the Covenant of Grace which is opposed to the "damnationis ministerium" of the Law. It is on this point that Calvin makes his most important contribution to the covenant theology." I think that here, and again on pp.63-64, Møller is minimising the third use of the Law.

<sup>52</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.ix.4; *OS* III, pp.401-02: Sed non ita successit Evangelium toti Legi, ut diversum rationem salutis afferret: quin potius ut sanciret ratumque esse probaret quicquid illa promiserat, et corpus umbris adiungeret... Unde colligimus, ubi de tota Lege ab ea differe: caeterum propter inaestimabilem gratiae affluentiam, quae nobis fuit in Christo exposita, non abs re eius adventu dicitur erectum fuisse in terris caeleste Dei regnum.

<sup>53</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.x.2; *OS* III, p.404: Patrum omnium foedus adeo substantia et re ipsa nihil a nostro differet, ut unum prorsus atque idem sit: administrato tamen variat.; cf. *Instit.* II.x.4.

Testament not only to demonstrate the superiority of the New but to show how the Old was fulfilled by the New.<sup>54</sup> Referring to the Old Testament ceremonies, Calvin's notion of covenant unity was apparent.

Or, if you prefer, understand it thus: the Old Testament of the Lord was that covenant wrapped up in the shadowy and ineffectual observance of ceremonies and delivered to the Jews; it was temporary because it remained, as it were, in suspense until it might rest upon a firm and substantial confirmation. It became new and eternal only after it was consecrated<sup>55</sup> and established by the blood of Christ.

Calvin's understanding of the covenant, then, included the following aspects. God's people, his elect, came into one covenant: begun with Adam, through Abraham and the Patriarchs, through the renewal with Moses, through the Davidic promise and finally completed in the supreme person and work of Jesus Christ. Calvin was not willing to speak of two radically distinct covenants. Above all God's covenant was a covenant of grace and mercy, freely given.<sup>56</sup> This did not imply that the law was insignificant or nullified with the coming of Christ. It must be noted that while Calvin never denied the condition of faith and repentance, nevertheless, the certainty of the covenant rested with God's sovereign and merciful

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<sup>54</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.xi.1-14.

<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* II.xi.4; *OS*, III, p.427: Quod si malis, ita accipe: vetus fuisse Domini Testamentum, quod umbratili et inefficaci ceremoniarum observatione involutum tradebatur; ideoque temporarium confirmatione subniteretur. Tum vero demum novum aeternumque factum fuisse, postquam Christi sanguine consecratum stabilitumque fuit.

<sup>56</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.xxi.5.

election in Christ the covenant mediator.<sup>57</sup> He alone assured that those with whom He covenanted endured and persevered to the end. These themes of Calvin's views of the covenant were not totally dismissed in mid-seventeenth century puritan theology. To draw a sharp distinction between Calvin and later Calvinists on the issue of covenant theology cannot be entirely allowed without significant qualification.

### 3.1.3 Later Calvinists and covenant theology

In this subsection certain Reformed divines who followed Calvin will be examined. The selection that has been made needs justification, for there were other important covenant theologians whose work will not be mentioned here. Those who will be considered are: William Perkins (1558-1602), an important English theologian whose influence was profound and extensive; William Ames (1576-1633), one of Perkins's students, later professor at Franeker, with considerable influence on Continental and New England theology, and who expressed a clear voluntarist theology; and finally the teaching contained in the Westminster Confession and Catechisms which reflected a consensus of mid-seventeenth century non-conformist theology of the covenant.

New ground will be broken in the attention drawn to a number of themes which have not so far received adequate notice. Two themes in particular are sharply

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<sup>57</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.xxi.6. In this context he referred to Ishmael's and Essau's failure to obey the condition of covenant faithfulness.

relevant to the debate between Baxter and Owen: first, the importance of the covenant condition, and, secondly, the righteousness of this condition. These are fundamental issues for a study of mid-seventeenth century puritan voluntarism. They are important because this thesis is concerned with willingness in the puritan life of faith. An individual responded to God's gracious initiative not only with the intellect but with an actual choice. Did God, however, regard this choice as a condition to be performed before the covenant blessings were conferred? Or was the will's choosing a necessary, but consequential, action as a result of grace? Inasmuch as the covenant of grace was the *locus* of voluntarism, the condition of faith was central. But what was meant by faith? Was it thought of as seated primarily in the intellect or in the will? Likewise, did faith - if a condition - possess its own appropriate righteousness or was it solely instrumental? These were questions implicit in mid-seventeenth covenant theology and Baxter and Owen's treatment of the covenant of grace. In this sense, the new ground that is to be broken is the relationship between covenant language and voluntarism. We begin with William Perkins.

Perkins's use of covenant language and covenant theology suggests that he accepted covenant theology but with some of his own emendations. Ian Breward has contended that "Even though Perkins made it more central to his thought than his English predecessors, it was not the organising principle of his thought and

underwent considerable further development in the writings of puritans like John Preston and Peter Bulkeley, or Perkins' disciple William Ames."<sup>58</sup> While Breward is correct, it is possible to stress more strongly the prominence of covenant theology in Perkins. This is not to suggest, however, that Perkins was a covenant theologian in the strictest sense like Bulkley or Ames.

It is true that when Perkins mentioned the covenant of works he was hesitant to refer to a covenant made by God with Adam before the fall. In Chapter XXXI of *A Golden Chain* he mentioned the covenant of works, but Chapters IX and XXX made it clear that he identified this covenant with the moral law and the Decalogue. When he considered Adam's innocence he did not employ the term covenant of works.<sup>59</sup> His treatment of Adam's innocence in *A Golden Chain* agreed with Calvin's. Where he departed from Calvin was in the distinction between the moral law and the covenant of grace. The Mosaic law, with its moral emphasis, constituted "an abridgement of the whole law and covenant of works." The Decalogue revealed a conditional covenant: the condition of the covenant being perfect obedience.<sup>60</sup>

Like Calvin, however, Perkins was far more concerned with the covenant of grace; and it is arguable that it

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<sup>58</sup> Breward, *Perkins*, pp.90-91; cf. Müller, *op.cit*, pp.58 ff.

<sup>59</sup> Perkins, *A Golden Chain* IX, in Breward, *Perkins*, pp.187-88.

<sup>60</sup> Perkins, *A Golden Chain* XIX, in Breward, *Perkins* p.211; cf. Perkins, *Foundation of Christian Religion*, the fourth principle expounded, in Breward, *Perkins*, p.156. Perkins addresses the role of the law in preparation. In this sense it is the covenant of works which is instrumental in preparation. For preparation see chapter 5.4 of this thesis.

was his Christology which shaped his view of the covenant of grace. He defined the covenant of grace in the following manner:

The covenant of grace is that whereby God freely promising Christ and of his benefits, exacts again of man that he would by faith receive Christ and repent of his sins. This covenant is also named a testament; for it hath partly the nature and properties of a testament or will. For it is confirmed by the death of the testator.<sup>61</sup>

He discussed covenant theology not only with reference to God's decrees of election and predestination, but in the context of his teaching on the election, nature, office and humility of Christ. To be sure, covenant theology served to explain the outward means of executing the decree of election. Still, his Christology was central to his explanation of the eternal decrees of God.<sup>62</sup> For Perkins the condition of faith and repentance was demanded, yet the fulfillment of this condition originated in the believer's election in Christ. Thus, even the condition of the covenant was given in and by grace. In *A Reformed Catholic* (1597), where Perkins explained his differences with the Church of Rome, he commented on conditions as follows:

In the covenant of grace two things must be considered: the substance thereof and the condition. The substance of the covenant is that righteousness and life everlasting is given to God's church and people by Christ. The condition is that we for our parts are by faith to receive the foresaid benefits and this condition

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<sup>61</sup> Perkins, *A Golden Chain* XXXI, in Breward, *Perkins* p.213.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Breward, *Perkins*, p.91; In this sense, however, we must disagree with Jens Møller, p.59.

is by grace as well as the substance.<sup>63</sup>

Perkins, however, did not minimize the necessity of voluntarism: the predestined had to choose to receive by faith that which God offers in the gospel.

And this giving on God's part (ie. the giving of Christ within the Word preached) cannot be effectual without receiving on our parts: and therefore faith must needs be an instrument or hand to receive that which God giveth, that we may find comfort by his giving.<sup>64</sup>

Perkins's importance can be summarized in the following fashion. In Perkins it is possible to see how covenant language - of both English and Continental covenant theology - was used to explain soteriology. It provided a point of reference. The covenant of grace was very much the arena for the divine/human encounter. In this covenant theology Perkins never once reduced the centrality of predestination and election. He accepted covenant theology, however, but controlled its ramifications. His Christology enabled him to argue that the believer's election in Christ met the covenant condition.<sup>65</sup> Equally, he insisted upon the logical necessity of human choice, or the condition

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<sup>63</sup> Perkins, *A Reformed Catholic* in Brevard, *Perkins*, p.537.

<sup>64</sup> Perkins, *A Reformed Catholic*, in Brevard, *Perkins*, p.538.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Richard A. Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology", *WTJ* 42 (1980), pp.310-11. Muller fails to consider the importance of condition and thus claims that Perkins referred to both a *foedus diplueron* and *foedus monoplueron* so that conversion was the "nexus" where both a two-party covenant, *diplueron*, and a single-party covenant, *monoplueron*, meet. Additionally, argues Muller, it was Perkins's *diplueric* concept which gave rise to his voluntaristic casuistry. Muller is certainly correct to note in Chapter XIX of *A Golden Chain* both a *monoplueron* and *diplueron* covenant. Nevertheless, it is apparent that while Perkins accepted the necessity of the condition of faith he viewed the covenant of grace as one in which man did not give anything back to God in response to grace; the covenant of grace in this sense is not *diplueric*. Muller's otherwise helpful comments on Perkins demonstrates the importance of studying what Reformed divines wrote about covenant conditions.

of faith and repentance. The condition of the covenant involved the will, but the performance of the condition was by grace and on its own possessed no righteousness. Faith was both a condition and an instrument: it met the covenant demand to receive the alien righteousness of the covenant mediator, Christ. It can be argued, therefore, that Perkins's covenant theology facilitated his explanation of soteriology; additionally, however, it helped to explain how divine sovereignty and human voluntarism could co-exist. It will be seen later on how influential this idea was in seventeenth century puritan thought.

Of course, Perkins's influence was not the only one. William Ames (1576-1633) also furthered the development of covenant theology. Ames influenced later covenant theologians, notably Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669), a student of Ames's at Franeker, and John Cotton (1584-1652), the prominent New England divine. Ames's two major works on the covenant were, of first importance, *Medulla Theologica* (Amsterdam, 1623 and later) translated as *Marrow of Theology* (London, 1638 and later), and *De Conscientia...* (Amsterdam, 1630) translated as *Conscience with the Power and Cases thereof* (London, 1639). In a study of voluntarism Ames's covenant theology is relevant for a number of reasons. First, covenant theology was so central to his theology that it actually led him to his definition of the church as the community of the covenant of grace. The local congregation was a gathering of the visible saints who covenanted together, either explicitly or

implicitly, to live out their membership in the covenant of grace.<sup>66</sup>

Secondly, unlike his mentor Perkins, Ames insisted that the covenant of grace was unconditional.<sup>67</sup>

Writing on "The Application of Christ" Ames offered:

Yet because it is a free gift and confirmed by the death of the giver, it is more properly called a testament, not a covenant, Hebrews 9:16. This sense is not found in a firm determination, which is not so properly called a testament as a covenant.<sup>68</sup>

He proceeded to contrast the Old Covenant with the New Covenant and maintained that the two differed,

in the action, for in the former there was an agreement of two parties, God and man, but in the new only God covenants. For man being dead in sin has no ability to make a spiritual covenant with God. But if two parties are necessary in the strict sense of a covenant, then God is a party assuming and constituting and man is a party assumed.<sup>69</sup>

Five paragraphs later, still contrasting the Old and New Covenants, Ames displayed his view on covenant condition:

[They differ] in the conditions, for the old required perfect obedience of works to be performed by man of his own strength prior to the carrying out of the promise, which would then be in the form of a reward. But the present covenant requires no properly called or prior condition, but only a following or intermediate condition (and that to be given by grace as a means to grace,)

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<sup>66</sup> For this meaning of *voluntarism* or *voluntaryism* see chapter 1, p.3.

<sup>67</sup> Miller, *Errand*, p.58 misses this point. Similarly, Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology," *WTJ*, 42 (1980), pp.310-11 suggests that both Perkins and Ames held to an unconditional covenant. But a sharper distinction between Perkins and Ames should be made. Ames was more insistent upon an unconditional covenant.

<sup>68</sup> Ames, *Marrow of Theology* I.xxiv.12 in Eusden, pp.150-51.

<sup>69</sup> Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* I.xxiv.14 in Eusden, p.151.

which is the proper nature of faith.<sup>70</sup>

Ames argued that the covenant of grace had no condition upon which God suspended the benefits of the covenant. His explanation was his Christology. In this respect he followed Calvin and Perkins by stressing the centrality of Jesus, the covenant surety, in the covenant of grace.<sup>71</sup> When Ames considered the sacraments of the church he argued, "The spiritual thing which is signified by the sacraments of the new covenant is the new covenant itself, or Christ himself with all the blessings which are prepared in him for the faithful."<sup>72</sup> In *Marrow of Theology* the application of the covenant comes under the heading of "The Application of Christ". Thus, Ames's covenant theology was subordinate to Christology. It will be shown that this relationship between Christology and the covenant of grace was a fundamental aspect of later puritan covenant theology. In particular, it was Owen's central argument when he discussed the covenant condition.

The immediate context in which Baxter and Owen wrote about the covenant developed from the influences of those considered above; this is not to argue that Calvin, Perkins and Ames were the sole contributors. As mentioned in the Introduction, the importance of John Cameron and Moses Amyraut in Baxter's theology of predestination and the nature of faith cannot be

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<sup>70</sup> Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* I.xxiv.19 in Eusden, p.151.

<sup>71</sup> Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, I.xxiv.4; xxv.27-29; xxvii.17.

<sup>72</sup> Ames, *The Marrow of Theology* I.xxxvi.23 in Eusden, p.198.

forgotten.<sup>73</sup> From Amyraut Baxter taught that the divine will was sovereign, but the covenant was also conditional: faith was required. This will be detailed in the next chapter, but is mentioned here to suggest that by the mid-seventeenth century the pertinent issues of covenant condition and the nature of covenant righteousness had changed the parameters of covenant theology.

This is revealed more closely when the theology of the Westminster Assembly is considered. Earlier it was stated that the *Westminster Confession of Faith* represented a general consensus of mid-seventeenth century puritan thought.<sup>74</sup> It is not actually until chapter VII that the *Confession* considers the covenant; and this is after its teaching on predestination and the fall of man. Strictly speaking, however, covenant theology was not the driving force of the Westminster Divines. True enough the *Confession* teaches that there was a covenant of works with Adam which required his perfect obedience, and even the moral law reflected this.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, in chapter XIX the *Confession* teaches that the moral law, while under the covenant of works, nonetheless has a positive role in the Christian's life.<sup>76</sup> This is also taught in the *Shorter*

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<sup>73</sup> See chapter 1, pp.51-54.

<sup>74</sup> See chapter 1, p.58.

<sup>75</sup> *Westminster Confession*, VII.ii in Schaff, *Creeds*, pp. 616-17.

<sup>76</sup> *Westminster Confession*, XIX.vi in Schaff, *Creeds*, pp.641-43.

Catechism.<sup>77</sup> Far more important, however, is the covenant of grace; yet it is noticeable that the Divines stressed the centrality of Christ rather than the covenant itself. Christology shaped the Divines' understanding of the covenant (in fact the words *foedus* and *testamenti* are used interchangeably): "This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in the Scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed."<sup>78</sup> The greater stress appears to be on the election of the saints in Christ from all eternity than on the universal covenant of grace.<sup>79</sup> Thus, the Westminster Assembly appears to have emphasized both the sovereignty of God's initiative and the equal importance of a person's faith, yet in such a way as to minimize the notion that the covenant was conditional. It is arguable, therefore, that by 1647 certain implications within covenant theology -- faith as a condition to be performed, the use of the law in leading a person to faith, and the issue of predestination -- resulted in modifications. In fact, it is possible to suggest that the Westminster theology was not altogether dissimilar from Calvin's at least as far as the covenant was concerned. These factors need to be considered when Baxter and Owen's theology of the

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<sup>77</sup> Westminster *Shorter Catechism*, Q. 16 in Schaff, *Creeds*, p.679.

<sup>78</sup> Westminster *Confession*, VII.iv in Schaff, *Creeds*, p.617.

<sup>79</sup> Westminster *Confession*, VIII.vi in Schaff, *Creeds*, p.621. See also III.iii-viii, pp.608-611, XI.iv, p.627, and XVII.ii, p.636.

covenant is interpreted in 3.2 and 3.3.

### 3.2 The Sovereign Divine Initiative

As inheritors of an enduring theological tradition beginning with Augustine and stretching to the Westminster Confession, Baxter and Owen argued that God's will was totally sovereign. It was free from external constraint, or in other words, nothing apart from God determined or influenced the divine will. There was no constraint to which God was subjected. John Owen, in *A Display of Arminianism* (1643), wrote, "all the decrees of God, as they are internal, so they are external, acts of his will, and therefore unchangeable and irrevocable; mutable decrees, and occasional resolutions, are most contrary to the pure nature of Almighty God."<sup>80</sup> Owen argued that if God's will was susceptible to change due to external influences (eg. human compliance or even disobedience) then God ceased to be God.<sup>81</sup> His concern was to dismiss any idea that God's will in salvation was dependent upon human consent or, stated negatively, resistance:

So that the purpose of God, and immutability of his counsel, Heb 6.16, have their certainty and firmness from eternity, and do not depend on the variable lubricity of mortal men, which we must needs grant, unless we intend to set up impotency against omnipotency, and arm the clay against the potter.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism* (1643), Good ed., X, p.14.

<sup>81</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, pp. 19-20.

<sup>82</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.20; see also p.37.

Baxter argued likewise: he was concerned to show that God's will was the sovereign initiative in the covenant of grace. In *The Saints Everlasting Rest* he identified the following relation between God's sovereign will and human activity:

Here is also supposed, a superior, moving cause, and an influence therefrom, else should we all stand still, and not move a step forward towards our rest; any more than the inferior wheels in the watch would stir, if you take away the spring, or first mover. This *primum movens* is God... If God moves us not, we cannot move: therefore, it is a most necessary part of our Christian wisdom, to keep our subordination to God, and dependence on him; to be still in the path where he walks, and in that way where his Spirit doth most usually move.<sup>83</sup>

Yet, how could a sovereign will accommodate human activity and freedom? What needs to be examined here is the manner by which Baxter and Owen described this coordination between divine sovereignty and human response, for at the heart of the issue a problem existed. How could God's will be what it was claimed to be and yet be in coordination with men? It seemed that either sovereignty must be a misnomer, or human activity must be swallowed up in sovereignty and hence utterly meaningless.

For Baxter and Owen the answer to this question had a great deal to do with "secondary agency" and "means". "Secondary agency", a Scholastic term, meant the ability of humans (for example) to act in ways according to their nature without being forced by God.

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<sup>83</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, (first published in 1650), Book III, Orme ed., Vol. 22, p.39.

For example, if a man dropped a stone into a pond his action was free and not coerced; he chose to drop the stone. "Means", again a Scholastic term, were instruments by which the agent performed a particular act; for example, preaching, the sacraments, prayer and the Bible were considered means of faith.<sup>84</sup> By and through them God called sinners to faith; by and through them, but with no inherent merit, believers grew in grace and faith. Nevertheless, while secondary agency and means were accepted concepts, the Westminster Confession taught, "God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure."<sup>85</sup> Owen expressed this in his work on the Holy Spirit, published in 1674.

there are distinct actings of the several persons [ie. the Trinity] ad extra, which are voluntary or effects of will and choice, and not neutral or necessary... Now these are free and voluntary acts, depending upon the sovereign will and counsel [and] pleasure of God, and might not have been without the least diminution of his eternal blessedness.<sup>86</sup>

This was not an attempt to qualify the sovereignty of the divine will, rather a way of explaining God's will in relation to the created reality beyond him, namely human activity.

Clearly, to state simply that God's will was free

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<sup>84</sup> For a more detailed consideration of means see 6.1.3, p.312.

<sup>85</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith, V.iii, in Schaff, *Creeds*, pp.612-13.

<sup>86</sup> Owen, *Ἐνέχυρατολογία; or a Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit* (1674), p.46; hereafter simply *Holy Spirit*. See also his earlier work, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu; or The death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1648), p.92; hereafter simply *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*.

and sovereign, however, was not to present the whole picture. A host of subsequent issues followed. Intriguingly, while Baxter and Owen both recognized the supremacy of God's will they differed over certain implications. Most relevant to this study is the question of futurity: namely, the way in which God's will related to future events.

Baxter insisted that the divine will was sovereign but this did not mean that God's will alone predetermined the eventual outcome. In *Catholick Theologie* (1675), Baxter maintained, "Prescience with predestination or decrees do not infer causally that necessity of the event as predetermining promotion doth... It is not therefore the predetermination of bare decree which lay those consequences on, but efficient predetermination."<sup>87</sup> In this work Baxter wanted to make a major assertion related to salvation: God's predestination of the elect did not exist as a decree, for this would minimize human agency and at the same time suggest that the cause of one's faith was an eternal decree rather than a personal response to grace and the gospel.<sup>88</sup> Baxter did not state it as simply, or as clearly, as this. Nevertheless, his point is discernable:

To say that a thing may be, or will be, which now is not, is to say that now it is nothing. Nothing is no effect, and henceforth hath no cause: Therefore things possible and future as such, have no cause.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (1675), I.i, p.46.

<sup>88</sup> Specific detail of his argument is presented in chapters 6 and 7 below.

<sup>89</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I.i, p.8.

He went on to explain,

Therefore also God is no cause of any eternal possibility or futurity therefore the possibility and futurity of things conceived as an effect hath no eternal cause: for there is nothing eternal but God.<sup>90</sup>

Stated baldly, Baxter was concerned that certain of his contemporaries were stressing God's eternal decrees too much and so falsely concluding that predetermination is equated with causality.<sup>91</sup> In *Catholick Theologie* he preferred to shift the argument to the nature of God's foreknowledge. Rather than arguing that God's sovereign will determined a future action (eg. the faith of an individual) Baxter suggested that God foreknew the truth of the certainty of the individual's faith. What was the point of this? Baxter shunned predeterminism because he insisted on contingency and conditionality. As will be shown below, contingency and conditionality were metaphysical terms which formed the basis of Baxter's voluntarism. For the moment, however, reference to *Catholick Theologie* illustrates the issue at hand:

But if you might suppose God to have eternal propositions, therein their being is considerable before their verity; and their verity hath its cause. But that cause is nothing but what is in God himself, which is either his decree of what he will cause, or his foreknowledge of what will be caused by a sinning creature: And neither of them as a cause of the truth of the proposition, causeth that the thing will be: nor yet is any other existent cause

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<sup>90</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I.i, p.9.

<sup>91</sup> In *Catholick Theologie*, I.i Section V, "Futurity and its pretended causes", Baxter principally attacks William Twisse's work, *De Scientia Media*. For William Twisse (1578-1646) see DNB., vol 57, pp.397-99.

supposed; but only that God knowing that he will make the free agent, knoweth also that this agent will freely sin. In all which the futurity is nothing, nor is any existent cause of it necessary, but only the truth of the proposition would result from the infinite perfection of God's knowledge.<sup>92</sup>

A better understanding of Baxter's argument can be gained when it is contrasted with Owen's. Owen maintained that what God willed from eternity indeed determined futurity. Owen too appreciated secondary agency but in most of his writings in which he referred to the will of God the emphasis was on the absolute certainty of God's will: a certainty not at all because of mere foreknowledge regarding human agency, but a foreknowledge of that which he decreed. Owen wrote, "whence, it hath hitherto been concluded, that whatever God doth in time bring to pass, that he decreed from all eternity so to do: all his works were from the beginning known unto him."<sup>93</sup> Owen insisted that this certainty was the basis of the believer's confidence and assurance:

It is no small comfort to be assured that we do, nor can, suffer nothing, but what his hand and counsel guides unto us: what is open, and naked before his eyes, and whose end and issue he knoweth long before: which is a strong motive to patience, a sure anchor<sup>94</sup> of hope, a firm ground of consolation.

Owen was not as reluctant as Baxter to suggest a predeterminism. For Owen it was God's immutable

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<sup>92</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I.i, p.10.

<sup>93</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, pp.91-20.

<sup>94</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.29. The issue of assurance is examined in detail in chapter 7.

character which defined God's will and thus guaranteed the certainty of his will for the future. "His purposes and his works comprise all his actings. As the Lord hath purposed so he hath done."<sup>95</sup>

In conclusion, the aspects of Baxter and Owen's understanding of the divine initiative introduced in this section (3.2) are worth reiterating. Baxter and Owen accepted the premise that in order to consider the freedom of humanity in choosing and acting it was essential to begin with a consideration of the divine will. God's will was the point of reference. Man's will chose in relation to God's will, either in obedience or disobedience. Yet what was meant by God's will? First, the divine will was immutable and free from external force or influence. God chose according to the simplicity of his will; in this sense he was the prime mover of all things and events. Still, as noted, such a claim did not lead Baxter or Owen to minimize the activity of human choice and activity (referred to as human secondary agency). Man's choosing and acting were subordinate to God's will; but God accomplished his will in and through the activity of men and women. This final assertion was the basis for the coordination between the divine will and human choosing and activity. Having highlighted this basis their use of covenant theology and its language, examined next, makes more sense.

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<sup>95</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655), Goold ed., XII, p.109.

### 3.3 Baxter and Owen and the covenant of grace

Both Baxter and Owen employed terms and concepts from covenant theology as it had developed throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century<sup>ies</sup>. They recognised a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. Both argued, in effect, that the covenant of grace was God's saving initiative to humanity. Men and women were invited by God to enter into this covenant through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. What was quite important, however, was that Baxter and Owen disagreed on some of the more fundamental aspects of covenant theology. Two aspects are outstanding. First, they differed over the meaning of condition. Baxter argued that the condition of faith was an appropriate and suitable demand on God's part before a person enter the covenant of grace. Owen countered that Baxter's view only gave rise to self-dependence which diminished the satisfaction of Christ and God's sovereign election. Second, at the very heart of their disagreement was their contrasting views on the satisfaction and merits of Christ as covenant inaugurator. There was a profound inter-relationship between Christology and the covenant of grace: Baxter argued that Christ died universally and so established the condition that whosoever believed was brought into the covenant; Owen argued that Christ only died for the elect, satisfying the demands of God, and by his imputed righteousness a believer is accepted into the covenant of grace. These two aspects of their differing covenant theologies will

serve as the basis of this section: the meaning of condition (3.3.1) and the death and satisfaction of Christ (3.3.2). By looking at both as components of their understanding of the covenant of grace their presentation of the divine initiative is made clear.

### 3.3.1 The meaning of condition

In his first and controversial work, *Aphorismes of Justification*, Baxter argued that the covenant of grace was a conditional covenant: God suspended the covenant promises and blessings on the condition of faith. Whereas the covenant of works required perfect obedience to the law of God, the covenant of grace required faith, "he that believeth, shall be saved; and he that believeth not shall be damned."<sup>96</sup> Gone was the demand for perfect obedience: Christ satisfied this demand. Men and women were to believe and trust in Christ. In 1658 he declared in his evangelistic work, *A Call to the Unconverted*, "the Lord Jesus hath made you a deed of gift of himself, and eternal life with him, on the condition you will but accept it and return. He hath on this reasonable condition offered you the free pardon of all your sins...".<sup>97</sup> For Baxter the new covenant was a covenant of undeserved mercy and grace extended to all but with the provision that there be faith and repentance. It was on the condition of faith that God had suspended the covenant promises and

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<sup>96</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification* (1649), Appendix, p.45. The extent of this controversy was earlier described in the Introduction, pp.32-34.

<sup>97</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted* (1658), p.206.

blessings of forgiveness, justification and peace.

What did Baxter mean by "condition" ? In *Aphorismes* and in his later defense of this work, Baxter maintained that conditions were central to any covenant, legal contract or binding agreement.<sup>98</sup> By strict definition there were two important types of conditions. "Antecedent" conditions were what one party promised to perform in order to receive the bestowal of the other party's benefits. "Consequent" conditions were those demanded for the continuance of the benefits. A condition of either sort was not a cause or meritorious in itself. Unlike a law, which was prescribed and enforced, a condition was largely dependent upon the willingness of the lesser party. In this sense the gospel commanded all to repent and believe, but "As it is a Law, it is by Christ prescribed, and flatly enjoyned; and either obedience, or the penalty shall be exacted. As it is a Covenant, it is only tendered [and] not enforced...".<sup>99</sup>

Baxter was sharply criticised for his use of condition; this criticism began with those who challenged his *Aphorismes of Justification* and involved not only John Owen but others. Richard Vines (1600? - 1656), a prominent member of the Westminster Assembly and one of the two to whom Baxter had dedicated *Aphorismes*, wrote to Baxter regarding *Aphorismes* that,

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<sup>98</sup> See for example the following later works: *Rich. Baxter's Apology* (1654), sig A2, p.4 and pp.26 ff; *True Christianity* (1655), p.133; *Of Justification* (1658), p.7; *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (1676), pp.57-63, 97-98, and 116-18; and *An End of Doctrinal Controversies* (1691), p.217.

<sup>99</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p.76.

"Therein I doe finde that your searchings inquiry into truth about the vulgar way makes you lesse understood or misunderstood of men that will take no paines to study ye same..."<sup>100</sup> One of Vines's concerns was Baxter's use of condition. In another letter Vines explained to Baxter:

You use the word, condition, and have a great fancy to it, but it is a very blind: if not carefully and so large in some especially in the vulgar dialect. That it combines almost any thinge under it and therefore you that deny faith to be cause or instrument and say it is a condition might distinguish well for *causa est cuius ubi vos est* and such is *conditio*...

It is significant that Baxter appealed to legal definitions of condition in order to clarify his use of the term. This was not explicitly clear in *Aphorismes* but in the 1658 publication, *Of Justification*, Baxter quoted from the writings of Accursus (1151-1229), Barthole (1313-1356), DuPrat (1520-1569?) and Cujacius (1520-1590).<sup>102</sup> From these legal writers Baxter suggested that a condition had more to do with the idea of suspension: the actions of one party were merely suspended until the other party performed the necessary condition. Many years later Baxter summed up this thought in the following way: "so the performance of a

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<sup>100</sup> Letter from Vines to Baxter dated July 1, 1650. Dr. Williams's Library, London. Baxter MS 59 *Correspondence* 5.15. For Vines (1600? -1656) see *DNB*, vol 58, pp.369-71

<sup>101</sup> Letter from Vines to Baxter dated July 3, 1651. Dr. Williams's Library, London. Baxter MS 59 *Correspondence* 5.17(18).

<sup>102</sup> Baxter, *Of Justification*, p.73. For Accursus and DuPrat see *Biographie Universelle (Michaud), Ancience et Moderne, Nouvelle Edition* (Paris: Chez Madame C. Desplaces, no date), Vol. 1, p.110 and Vol.12, p.47; for Barthole and Cujacius see *A Dictionary of Universal Biography* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1916,1976), p.42 and p.143.

condition as such, is no efficient of the gift, but a removing of the suspending impediment." <sup>103</sup>

Anthony Burgess, rector of Sutton Coldfield, another member of the Westminster Assembly and the other person to whom Baxter dedicated *Aphorismes*, also challenged Baxter's use of the word condition. <sup>104</sup> In 1654 Burgess referred to the issue of covenant conditions and it is difficult to think that he did not have Baxter's view in mind.

Now this is an execrable error, to hold Christ died only to make a way for reconciliation, which reconciliation is wholly suspended upon a man's faith, and that faith comes partly from a man's will, and partly from grace, not being the fruit of Christ's death, as well as remission of sins it self. But we say a far different thing, Christ satisfied Gods wrath, so that God becomes reconciled, and gives pardon, but in the method and way he hath appointed, which is faith, and this faith God will certainly work in his due time, that so there may be <sup>105</sup> an instrument to receive this pardon.

Burgess did not dismiss conditions entirely. He argued that Christ died for the elect who would possess saving faith. This faith was necessary as it was an

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<sup>103</sup> Baxter, *An End of Doctrinal Controversies* (1691), p.275.

<sup>104</sup> Baxter wrote in *Reliquiae Baxterianae* l.i. ¶156, p.107 that he received only a few letters from Burgess regarding *Aphorismes*. These are included in Baxter's 1658 *Of Justification* and in this work he entitled Treatise II: "Whether any works be any conditions of it? Containing a necessary Defense of ancient verity, against the unnecessary opposition of a very learned, Reverend, and dearly Beloved brother, in his Treatise of Imputation of Righteousness, and his Lectures on John 17." Burgess did publish a work entitled, *CXLV Expository Sermons upon the whole 17th Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John: or, Christ's Prayer before his Passion explicated and both practically and polemically improved* (London:1656). The other work to which Baxter may have referred is Burgess's, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted & Vindicated... or a Treatise of the Natural Righteousness of God, and Imputed Righteousness of Christ* (London:1654). For Burgess see *D.N.B.*, vol 7, p.308.

<sup>105</sup> Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification asserted and Vindicated from the errors of Papists, Arminians, Socinians & more especially Antinomians* (London:1654), p.208.

instrument of salvation. Burgess denied, however, that faith was an antecedent condition: Christ died for the ungodly while they were indeed so. In contrast to Baxter he preferred to call conditions "consequent" or concomitant, which has been explained earlier as those acts required so as to continue the benefits of the contract or covenant.<sup>106</sup> He rejected the notion that conditions suspend; if they could, he argued, then it would have to be apart from grace, and this would be Arminianism. Burgess chose to suggest that faith was the condition of the new covenant, but it was "a qualification wrought by the Spirit of Christ, whereby we are enabled to receive those benefits, which come by his death."<sup>107</sup>

It is not evident that Burgess totally understood Baxter: Baxter never denied the very real necessity of grace to move the will to faith and to sustain the believer in the life of faith. Baxter made this point in *Aphorismes*, and nowhere more clearly than in the Appendix.

For in the absolute covenant he doth not promise to make us Believe and Repent against our wills: Much less, that He or Christ, shall Repent and Believe for us; and so free us from the duty: But that he will give us new and soft hearts, that we may do it willingly: which that we may do, he commandeth and perswadeth us to do it in the conditional covenant: not bidding us do it without his help; but directing us to the Father to draw us to the Son; and to the Son, as without whom we can do nothing; and to the Spirit, as the sanctifier of our

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<sup>106</sup> See above, p.185.

<sup>107</sup> Burgess, *True Doctrine of Justification*, p.211.

hearts, and exciter of our Graces. <sup>108</sup>

Baxter insisted in *Aphorismes* and elsewhere that the performance of the condition was not in any sense the cause of the subsequent benefits. <sup>109</sup> When it came to the covenant of grace, he argued, the condition of faith was not the cause of justification, it was rather that in the covenant of grace justification in Christ and through Christ's righteousness was suspended until one actually believed in Christ. <sup>110</sup>

To illustrate his point about the condition of faith and the new covenant Baxter gave an analogy in *Aphorismes*. Suppose a tenant fell into considerable debt to his landlord. The tenant was accordingly evicted and imprisoned. The landlord, however, presented a new agreement and asked his own son to pay the tenant's outstanding rent. By so paying this debt the son enabled the tenant to return to his former rented residence. The son, however, asked for one condition: the payment of one peppercorn per year. This payment would suitably acquit all previous debts and rents. Should the tenant fail to pay the peppercorn then the old lease would be reintroduced and the tenant would face the charge of nonpayment. <sup>111</sup>

All of this was to illustrate:

the value of Christ's satisfaction is imputed to us, instead of the value of a perfect obedience of our own performing, and the value of Faith is not so imputed: But because

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<sup>108</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes* Appendix, p.46.

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, p.44 and p.80.

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Baxter, *Of Justification*, p.75.

<sup>111</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp.127-28.

there must be some personal performance of homage, therefore the personal Performance of Faith shall be imputed to us for a sufficient personal payment, as if we had paid the full rent, because Christ, whom we believe in, hath paid it, and he will take this for satisfactory homage. So it is in point of personal performance, and not of value that Faith is imputed.<sup>112</sup>

Yet it was not just to legal definitions that Baxter appealed to explain his use of conditions. He also referred to the moral aspect of faith itself. Baxter gave special weight to the condition of faith because he called faith a "moral" or "dispositive" condition. By "moral" he meant that faith, produced by grace, possessed a moral quality suitable to the covenant: faith involved the human soul's repentance from sin, choice of Christ, love of God and love for God's ways. The meaning of "dispositive" condition: it pointed to a state of character on the part of the believer. Baxter was much clearer in later works in his use of these two ideas, but even this meaning of condition was not entirely different than that suggested in *Aphorismes*: neither a moral condition nor "dispositive" condition were meritorious but merely those which were appropriate and suitable to the covenant blessings.<sup>113</sup>

John Owen rejected Baxter's use of condition. In a work specifically directed at Baxter, he attacked the way in which Baxter used the term:

their conditional satisfaction, or their suspending the fruits of the death of Christ upon conditions, as though the Lord should give him to die for us, upon

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<sup>112</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p.129.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. Baxter, *Of Justification* (1658), p.34, 73 and 77; *Catholick Theologie* (1675) I.ii, p.44; and *An End of Doctrinal Controversies* (1691), p.242.

condition of such and such things, is a vain figment, contrary to the Scriptures, inconsistent in itself, and destructive of the true value and virtue of the death of Christ...<sup>114</sup>

He admitted that there was a matter of time between the death of Christ and the actual moment of justifying faith which one exercises, but "Things have their certain futurity, not instant actual existence, from the eternal purpose of God concerning them."<sup>115</sup> Even with this in mind, however, it did not imply that the purpose of God in Christ's death was suspended upon a condition. Rather, Owen argued, Christ's death accomplished its purpose with respect to the elect absolutely. He explained it thus:

Lawyers tell us, that all stipulations about things future, are either sub conditione or sub termino. Stipulations or engagements upon condition that are properly so, do suppose him that makes the engagement to be altogether uncertain of the event thereof. Stipulations sub termino are absolute, to make out the things engaged about at such a season. Upon the very instant of such a stipulation as this an obligation follows as to the thing, though no action be allowed to him to whom it is made, until the term and time appointed.<sup>116</sup>

In an earlier work on the atonement he had argued with regard to the covenant of grace that through the death of Christ God effectually brought about the faith

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<sup>114</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ. The price he paid, and the purchase he made: or, the Satisfaction and merit of the death of Christ cleared; the universality of redemption thereby oppunged; and the doctrine concerning these things, formerly delivered in a treatise against universal redemption, vindicated, from the exceptions and objections of Mr. R.B. Goold ed., X, p.450.* All subsequent references taken from this edition.

<sup>115</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.456.

<sup>116</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.465.

of his elect. In other words, in the covenant of works God commanded perfect obedience but in the covenant of grace God himself promised that the elect would be given the faith which the covenant demands. His point was that no one could ever, on their own, repent and believe; only God could bring about this. Baxter, as mentioned before, argued this just as strongly, but Owen went further and insisted that even the faith required was given absolutely through the death of Christ. It was this absolute provision which Owen argued made the covenant of grace superior to the first covenant.<sup>117</sup> Owen's intent was not to split hairs in debate with Baxter but to argue that Christ's death procured the justification of an individual, even though there was a delay in time before the particular individual enjoyed the benefit of this pardon.<sup>118</sup> The delay, though, was not as Baxter argued: namely, on the basis of suspension. The actual procurement of Christ's saving merit rested with the sovereign liberty of God. Because Owen limited the atoning death of Christ for the elect alone he stated that since Christ died for the elect they would enter into the covenant of grace by faith.<sup>119</sup> They became members of the covenant, however, not conditionally (for this implied uncertainty in Owen's opinion) but absolutely (even though this implied a time delay). Furthermore, Owen argued that Christ procured the faith of the elect

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<sup>117</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, pp.103-04.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p. 97.

<sup>119</sup> See Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, pp.467-68.

through his death.

### 3.3.2 The death and satisfaction of Christ

It is evident from the subsection above that the nature of the covenant and the covenant condition involved at its centre Christology: specifically the death and satisfaction of Christ. In 1655 Baxter wrote,

Christ's death hath taken away the curse of that covenant, not absolutely from any man, but conditionally, which becomes absolute when the condition is performed. The Elect themselves are not by nature under the covenant of Grace, but remaine under the curse of the first covenant till they come into Christ.<sup>120</sup>

In this subsection it is necessary to examine in greater detail Baxter and Owen's understanding of Christ and the covenant. Baxter, on one hand, feared that Antinomianism suggested a justification before faith: in other words, because Christ died for the elect they were justified at that moment, even before they actually exercised faith. He was equally concerned to respond to those like Owen, who emphasized imputed righteousness and vicarious atonement. Interestingly, Baxter stated in *Aphorismes* that at one point he did accept the idea of vicarious atonement due to the influence of William Twisse (1578? -1646) and William Pemble (1592-1623).<sup>121</sup> In his theological development, however, he moved from such a view to

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<sup>120</sup> Baxter, *True Christianity* (1655), p.133. Cf. Baxter, *Richard Baxter's Catholick Theologie* (1675) I.ii, p.53 and *Universal Redemption* (1694), ed. Joseph Reade and Matthew Sylvester, pp.39-40.

<sup>121</sup> For Twisse see *DNB*, vol 52, p.397; for Pemble see *DNB*, vol 44, p.283.

embrace the theory suggested by Amyraut.<sup>122</sup> Baxter argued that while it was certain that the elect would come to faith and justification, nevertheless, Christ's death did not absolutely procure the justification of any one individual until he or she believed. Christ's death established a conditional covenant for the whole human race. If Christ died absolutely for the elect then what need would they have to repent and believe: they would have no guilt. So he wrote in *Aphorismes*, "I undertake to manifest to you, that this Doctrine of Christ's immediate Actual delivering us from guilt, wrath, and condemnation is the very pillar and foundation of the whole frame and fabrick of Antinomianism."<sup>123</sup> According to Owen, however, Christ died absolutely and exclusively for the elect and his death procured the faith of the elect which they would in time exercise.

Christ hath purchased remission of sins, and eternal life for us, to be enjoyed on our believing, upon the condition of faith; but faith it self which is the condition of them, on whose performance they are bestowed, that he hath procured for us absolutely, on no condition at all...<sup>124</sup>

The contrast is important. Baxter held that Christ died with universal effect, that is, a universal covenant. Owen, however, argued that Christ died particularly for the elect and so established an unconditional covenant for them. Thus both Baxter and Owen explained the

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<sup>122</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, Appendix, p.164. For Amyraut see chapter 1, pp.51-54.

<sup>123</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, Appendix, p.164.

<sup>124</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, p.88.

covenant of grace on the basis of their interpretation of Christ's satisfaction, substitution and righteousness. In what way and on what basis did they form their understanding of the death and satisfaction of Christ?

As noted in the previous subsection, Baxter argued that the condition of the first covenant was perfect obedience to God.<sup>125</sup> This covenant had a penalty: death. Baxter insisted in *Aphorismes*, however, that in actuality this penalty of death was never carried out by God; instead, through grace, there was a relative relaxation of the penalty. Adam's death was not instant or hopeless. Adam's penalty did bear resemblance to the God's threat in the first covenant, but it was not the identical penalty. Man could not have endured the identical penalty, claimed Baxter.<sup>126</sup> Much later, in 1674, he was clearer. He argued that Christ was never hated by God, deprived of the Spirit, never under the rule of Satan, never accused by his conscience, never despaired of salvation or sent to Hell for eternity: this is what the original penalty implied.<sup>127</sup>

To use Baxter's expression, Christ's satisfaction of the old covenant was a sacrifice *tantundem*, of "like" kind, *vis-a-vis* the penalty threatened to Adam. Christ did not pay a sacrifice *idem*, or identical.

Christ did suffer a paine and misery of the same sort, and of equal weight with

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<sup>125</sup> See above, p.184.

<sup>126</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes* p.18.

<sup>127</sup> Baxter, *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (1674), Part I, pp.53-54.

that threatened; but yet because it was not in all respects the same, it was rather satisfaction than the payment of the proper debt, being such a payment as God might have chosen to accept.<sup>128</sup>

The important idea here is "rather satisfaction than the payment of the proper debt." By this Baxter meant that God chose Christ's death, while not identical to the penalty threatened under the first covenant, as the satisfaction for His justice.<sup>129</sup> In *Methodus Theologiae Christianae* (1681), a Latin treatise which he considered complementary to his earlier *Catholick Theologiae* (1675), he wrote:

Christi igitur, non fuit omnio legis illius poenalis impleto seu executio; sed causa ne executione impleretur. Per ejus poenas igitur, non idem fertur aut Solvitur, quod a nobis peccatoribus debitum erat; Quia debita fuit juxta Legis sensum, ipsius delinquentis poena. Sed aequivalens<sup>130</sup> datur aut tantundem, loco ejusdem.

Furthermore, as the Son of God, Christ was raised to life and established the righteousness of the new covenant. In this sense Christ offered the acceptable sacrifice but not the identical. In so satisfying the law-giver there were suitable grounds for establishing the covenant of grace.<sup>131</sup>

In short, this was Baxter's way of refuting the notion of vicarious substitution: the idea that Christ

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<sup>128</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes* p.35; cf. also Baxter to George Lawson, August 5, 1651. Dr. Williams's Library, London. Baxter MS 59 *Correspondence*, 6.197, f 64. For Lawson (d. 1678) see *DNB*, vol 32, p.289.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Baxter, *Of Justification* (1658), pp. 382-83 and Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, p.40.

<sup>130</sup> Baxter, *Methodus Theologiae Christianae* (1681), III, p.45.

<sup>131</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes* p.90.

died in the place of sinners, and bore their due penalty. His fear was that such an idea would excuse men and women from their own personal guilt and responsibility to the Law. In other words, he was afraid of extreme Antinomianism - but also of the implications of ideas of divines like John Owen. In 1648 Owen had suggested "that considering that relaxation of the Law which, by the supreme power of the Law-giver was effected, as to the persons suffering the punishment required, such actual satisfaction is made thereto, that it can lay no more to their charge for whom Christ died than if they had really fulfilled in the way of obedience whatsoever it did require." <sup>132</sup>

In Baxter's view Owen actually denied the guilt and need for repentance, implying a justification from eternity. Responding once again to Owen he wrote, "We did neither Really, nor in God's Account, dye with Christ when he dyed, nor in him satisfie God's Justice, nor fulfil the Law through Christ." <sup>133</sup> Accordingly Baxter, while adamant that Christ alone provides the satisfaction for the sins of the world, consistently argued, as he wrote years later in 1691, "The person of our Mediator was neither in the sense of the Law, or in God's account, properly the person of the sinner; Christ and we are distinct persons." <sup>134</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, p.146.

<sup>133</sup> Baxter, *Confession* (1655), p.229; cf. Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, pp.38-39.

<sup>134</sup> Baxter, *An End of Doctrinal Controversies* (1691), p.260.

When Baxter explained how Christ died for sinners he meant that Christ died voluntarily so as to be a mediator and satisfy God's justice for human disobedience vis-a-vis the covenant of works and the law; provided that the condition of receiving Christ was met then one could say that Christ died *loco nostro*.<sup>135</sup> What Baxter refused to accept, however, was that Christ died particularly and singularly for any one person; he did not die, strictly speaking, for a specific person.<sup>136</sup> This would have been to satisfy *idem* one's guilt under the covenant of works. A number of the ideas already outlined can be detected in the following quote from his work on justification.

But that Christ in dying did strictly represent the person of the sinner, so as either naturally, or morally in Law sense we may be said to have satisfied then, in or by him, as the Law calls that the action of the Principal, which is done per Delegatum, Desputatum, Vicarium etc. This is the soul of Antinomianism, and directly and unavoidably introduceth Justificat[ion] before Faith, or before we are born, the non-necessity of any other Justification, but in foro conscientiae; it certainly overthrows any pardon of sin at all, and so all Petition for Pardon...<sup>137</sup>

In his Appendix to *Aphorismes* Baxter challenged Owen's ideas on Christ's satisfaction of the old covenant and the conditionality of the new covenant. Baxter's interpretation of Owen in *Aphorismes* suggests

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. Baxter, *Of Justification*, pp.382-83.

<sup>136</sup> Baxter, *An End of Doctrinal Controversies*, p.158.

<sup>137</sup> Baxter, *Of Justification*, p.383; cf. Baxter, *An End of Doctrinal Controversies*, p.158 and p.262.

he grasped Owen's argument, and was critical of it. Owen, however, was quick to accuse him of missing the essentials. He replied to Baxter and claimed that they differed not only about the nature of Christ's death -- whether it was *ejusdem* or *tantundem* -- but over the "immediate fruit, or effects of the death of Christ, the state of the elect redeemed ones before actual believing, the nature of redemption, reconciliation, the differing of persons in God's eternal purposes." <sup>138</sup>

As Owen wrote in 1648 so he urged against Baxter in 1650. "I affirm that he paid *idem*, that is, the same thing that was in the obligation; and not *tantundem*, something equivalent thereunto, in another kind." <sup>139</sup>

It will be recalled from above that Baxter had suggested in *Aphorismes* that there was a relaxation of the penalty of the first covenant and this enabled Christ's substitution and satisfaction. Baxter, to repeat, insisted that Christ's death did not free one absolutely from the curse of the law. <sup>140</sup> In contrast to Baxter, Owen insisted that there was no mention in Scripture of the penalty of the old covenant being relaxed.

I assert a relaxation of the law, which might be done, and yet the penalty itself in reference to its constitution be established. In those places, then, In the day Thou eatest, etc. There is death and the curse appointed for the penalty, and the person offending appointed for the sufferer. That the law is relaxed, in the latter I grant. That

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<sup>138</sup> Owen, *Of The Death of Christ*, p.436.

<sup>139</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.438.

<sup>140</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, Appendix pp.152-54; cf. Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, pp.38-39.

the former was executed on Christ I  
 prove.<sup>141</sup>

Owen's "proof" came in a very detailed argument. In summary, he cited examples within Scripture which referred to a translation of the subject for punishment without speaking of a different punishment: Romans 8.32, for example. In this way, argued Owen, the punishment due to men and women was fully contained in the law but undergone by Christ (Galatians 3.13). How could one be sure of this? He suggested that the punishment was a full condemnation of sin; God did this in Christ (Romans 8.30) and the condemning of sin was the infliction of the penalty. Christ underwent actual death (cf. Genesis 2.17 and Hebrews 2.14). According to Owen this death indicated that the sacrifice of Christ was *idem* and for the sins of the elect. Owen recognised that Christ did not endure eternal death because of the dignity of his person; yet the obligation that death occur under the first covenant was met fully by Christ. His substitution was not just an acceptable sacrifice, it was in strict terms a full satisfaction. "There is a sameness in Christ's sufferings with that in the obligation in respect of essence, and equivalency in respect of attendencies."<sup>142</sup> In this way Owen challenged Baxter's suggestion, mentioned earlier, that the death of Christ was more to do with the satisfaction of the law-giver than actual

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<sup>141</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.443.

<sup>142</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.448.

guilt under the law.<sup>143</sup>

Moreover, Owen urged Baxter to consider the "end" of Christ's death: in other words, the reason for Christ's death. Owen held that the end of the death of Christ was not merely to relax the law and to establish a conditional covenant, but to bring the elect into justification, pardon and sanctification. In his work on the atonement Owen had referred to the death of Christ as a "means" to an end: that is to say, the death of Christ was the instrument by which God's eternal purpose for his elect were established.<sup>144</sup>

Throughout most of his doctrinal works Owen insisted that Christ's death and oblation had to have accomplished God's intention, for Christ could not have died in vain. The end of Christ's death, then, was salvation for the elect.<sup>145</sup> It was the elect alone

for whom Christ died and interceded; Owen held the two together.<sup>146</sup> As he put it in 1648: "The summe of all is: 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."<sup>147</sup>

The death and intercession of Christ could not be said to have been in vain or merely to establish a

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<sup>143</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.455; cf. Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p.90.

<sup>144</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesus*, pp.27-28.

<sup>145</sup> Owen, *Display of Arminianism*, p.90.

<sup>146</sup> Owen, *Display of Arminianism*, p.90; Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, pp.22-23,29,32-33.

<sup>147</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, p.3.

conditional covenant of pardon; it had a specific and absolute end:

To save sinners; not open a door for them to come in, if they will or can; not to make a way passable, that they may be saved; not to purchase reconciliation and pardon of his Father, which perhaps they shall never enjoy; but actually to save them from all their guilt and power of sinne, and from the wrath of God for sinne, which if he doth not accomplish, he fails of the end of his coming; and if that ought not to be affirmed, surely he came for no more than towards whom that effect is procured.<sup>148</sup>

Baxter did not accept this line of argument and it was one of his constant concerns, not only in *Aphorismes* but in other later works. Baxter argued that the "end" of Christ's death (Owen's argument above) had more to do with satisfying God the law-giver than freeing men and women from their guilt under the first covenant.<sup>149</sup> Baxter accepted that faith was a fruit of Christ's death but not with the same stress as Owen. For example, in one of his last doctrinal works, he wrote,

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<sup>148</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, p.61; cf. pp.61-64.

<sup>149</sup> Baxter, *Of Justification* p.264.

Faith is a fruit of the Death of Christ, (and so is all the good which we do enjoy): But not directly as it is satisfaction to Justice; but only Remotely, as it proceedeth from that jus Domini which Christ hath received, to send the Spirit in what measure and to whom he will, and to succeed it accordingly...<sup>150</sup>

It was not only an idea which Baxter expressed in his late works: in his earlier *Confession* (1655) he had written,

Upon the satisfaction of Christ God was pleased to offer a new covenant of grace; but the satisfaction of Christ did not in itself procure an individual's justification. So that God as the offended Legislator of the first Law, upon satisfaction made, was reconciled, as far as the Intention of the Satisfier and satisfied did require; that is, so far as to Permit all into the Redeemers hands, and give him Power, Right and Commission to grant pardon by a new Law, which should not be as the old which was fitted to man in perfection, but a law of Grace, fitted to man in sin and misery, giving him a Saviour and salvation on condition of mere Acceptance. (Purposing to cause his chosen infallibly to accept him).<sup>151</sup>

Yet it should be noted that in this quotation Baxter did not minimise election and predestination: "purposing to cause his chosen infallibly to accept him." Baxter declared he was no Arminian.<sup>152</sup> His explanation was that the elect were sure to receive

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<sup>150</sup> Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, p.42; cf. the comments in his earlier work, *Catholick Theologie*, I.i, p.41 and I.iii, p.57 where he denied the absolute promise of faith to any person, only the promissory prediction that God will draw some to Christ and they shall believe and live.

<sup>151</sup> Baxter, *Confession*, p.248; cf. Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, p.34; cf. Baxter, *And End of Doctrinal Controversies*, pp.161-62.

<sup>152</sup> See Baxter, *Confession*, Preface, sig Av.

grace and thereby come to saving faith.<sup>153</sup> In one way, he argued, Christ died for the elect in so far as he died for all men.<sup>154</sup> The elect, however, by God's secret will, were caused *de eventu* the grace which would lead them to faith. In his response in his *Apology to William Eyre* he went so far as to insist "It was the intent and absolute will, yea and undertaking of Christ dying, to cause all the Elect of God infallibly to perform this condition."<sup>155</sup> At this point it might be tempting to conclude that he agreed with Owen. Yet Baxter, as noted earlier, argued that Christ died for all men, *loco omnium aequaliter* yet "effectively" only for the elect. In his opinion Christ died for all men but not with the intention to produce equal benefit, *in omnium bonum aequaliter*.<sup>156</sup> In short, what Baxter suggested was that Christ died for all humanity so as to relax the law and to establish a conditional covenant; but in God's decrees his death and offering of himself are only effectual for the elect because only they would be given the grace to fulfil the covenant condition.<sup>157</sup> What we see then is that Baxter advocated a universal atonement and so a universal covenant of grace, but a limited

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<sup>153</sup> See Baxter to Lawson, August 5, 1651. Dr. Williams's Library, London. MS 59 *Correspondence* 6. 197, f 60.

<sup>154</sup> Baxter, *Confession*, Preface, sig A.

<sup>155</sup> Baxter, *Apology IV*, p.26. For Eyre see *Calamy Revised*, p.187.

<sup>156</sup> See especially Baxter, *Universal Redemption*, pp.23 and 63; cf. Baxter, *An End of Doctrinal Controversies*, p.160.

<sup>157</sup> Baxter, *An End of Doctrinal Controversies*, p.158.

provision of grace. His view of election was subordinate to the establishment of the covenant of grace.

Owen suggested a markedly different view; and this shaped his understanding of the divine initiative. He argued that Christ's death was not universal. His defense of this position had not so much to do with the sufficiency of Christ's death (for he did suggest that Christ's death was sufficient for the sins of the whole world) as it did with the end of his death. According to Owen, Christ's death was not to provide a potential, or conditional, covenant but to bring the elect to salvation. Through his death the elect were absolutely pardoned and reconciled.<sup>158</sup> Owen agreed with Baxter on one point though: an individual was not regenerate and pardoned until he or she believed and repented. In this sense Owen was denying a justification from eternity (which Baxter accused him of doing), for he agreed that even the elect were very much under the wrath and judgment of God for sin until they were converted.<sup>159</sup> Nevertheless, their faith and trust ~~was~~ <sup>were</sup> established not merely by the decree of election but through the death of Christ. By his death Christ actually procured the fruit of his death.<sup>160</sup> The end, or fruit, of his death was the fulfillment of God's purposes for the saints. Owen agreed that there

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<sup>158</sup> Owen, *Display of Arminianism*, pp.89-91; Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, p.223 but misnumbered p.233.

<sup>159</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, pp.466-67.

<sup>160</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, pp.87,101-112 and 163; Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.469.

was an important distinction between the time of Christ's death and the time when one actually believed. As explained earlier, this time-delay, however, was not proof of a conditional covenant. <sup>161</sup> Owen responded to Baxter and insisted,

Hence it is that the discharge of the debtor, doth not immediately follow the payment of the debt by Christ; not because that payment is refusable, but because in that very covenant and compact, from whence it is that the death of Christ is a payment, God reserveth to himself this right and liberty, to discharge the debtor, when and how he pleaseth. I mean as to times and seasons; for otherwise the means of actual freedom is procured by that payment, though not considered merely as a payment, which denotes only satisfaction,<sup>162</sup> but as it had adjoined merit also.

Owen is not always crystal clear to read, and the above quotation is a good example. His point, however, was that he and Baxter disagreed over the effects of the death of Christ and the covenant of grace. <sup>163</sup>

### Conclusion

Covenant theology held a central position in seventeenth century puritan theology. As argued in this chapter, interpreting this covenant theology is not entirely a clear cut matter; there were various emphases and differences. Baxter and Owen's

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<sup>161</sup> See above, p.191.

<sup>162</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, pp.613-14.

<sup>163</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.479 where he states this explicitly and criticises Baxter's dependence upon Amyraut.

understanding of the covenant deserves consideration for the ways in which they used covenant motifs to explain the divine initiative. The fundamental difference between Baxter and Owen was whether the divine initiative was conditional or absolute. John Von Rohr has written:

It is not, however, as though it were either conditional or absolute. Puritan theology rejected at this point the "either/or" and affirmed a "both/and", with the connecting link found in the fulfillment of the conditions themselves. The distinctive feature of the covenant as absolute is that it becomes God's means of bringing to completion the covenant as conditional. For God's chosen there is the divinely covenanted commitment that the conditions will be fulfilled by God's own doing, and this commitment is without conditions."<sup>164</sup>

Von Rohr has rightly identified a paradox within puritan covenant theology, yet it is argued here that such an interpretation minimizes the differences between puritan divines like Baxter and Owen. Baxter, while insisting that God's will was sovereign, claimed that the covenant was conditional. Owen disagreed: the covenant was unconditional because of the death of Christ.

A further concluding thought has to be presented. When Baxter and Owen's use of covenant theology is examined, it is difficult to ignore their respective Christologies. This implies that by the mid-seventeenth century covenant theology had evolved with differing emphases than what had been expressed by earlier covenant theologians. We would argue that due to the

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<sup>164</sup> Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, p.81.

challenges of Arminianism, which questioned a limited covenant of grace, and Antinomianism, which refuted the idea that there was any condition, there resulted the modifications seen in both Baxter and Owen.

Finally, this chapter has illustrated only one half of the divine/human encounter: the divine initiative. As stated at the beginning of the chapter, this shaped and qualified Baxter and Owen's understanding of freedom and human choice. Consideration of the human response is given in the next chapter, following on from the study of the divine initiative given here, leading to a clearer view of voluntarism.

Chapter Four  
THE HUMAN RESPONSE

Introduction

God offered humanity pardon, mercy and new life in the gospel, or covenant of grace. The covenant of grace originated in his sovereign initiative; but there was a counterpoint: human response. While only grace could rescue humanity from the effects of the fall, nevertheless, man was called to repent from sin and believe in the gospel promises. As shown in the previous chapters, such assumptions were made, to varying degrees, by Augustine, Aquinas, Nominalist divines, Luther, Calvin, Perkins, Ames and later English Calvinists. Covenant theology too addressed both the divine initiative and the human response. Likewise, Baxter and Owen wrote about the human response. In fact, the human response was for them the central concern: they wrote as pastors concerned to evangelize, to encourage believers and to promote holiness and godliness. Baxter and Owen strove to specify the human response to the divine initiative.

They did not, however, agree on all aspects of this human response. As presented in chapter 3, Baxter claimed that God established in Christ a conditional covenant: available to all who would repent and believe; faith, thus, was the covenant condition.

Owen, on the other hand, while equally insistent upon the necessity of faith, denied that God's covenant was conditional; by the death and satisfaction of Christ for the elect the faith of the elect was procured. The human response, according to Owen, was not a faith which fulfilled the covenant condition but a faith which accepted Christ in all his covenant righteousness.

Still, both Baxter and Owen acknowledged the profound necessity of a human response. Here, then, is the foundation of their voluntarism. In this chapter attention will be given to their opinions about the human response to the divine initiative. First, (4.1), the nature of the human response will be considered; it will be shown that the nature of this response, according to both Baxter and Owen, ultimately involved the prominence, but not dominance, of the human will. Second, (4.2), the question of the ability of man to make such a response will be studied; and here the question of "free will" will be raised. Finally, (4.3), it will be shown why they thought a willing response was essential. All three sections will argue that while Baxter and Owen arrived at their voluntarism in different ways, they both called Christians to a life of faith in which their willingness to engage in the covenant, to repent of their sins and to live in obedience was fundamental.

#### 4.1 The nature of the human response

According to Baxter and Owen the human response to the covenant of grace involved two inter-related truths. First, God's sovereign will in no way nullified the secondary agency of humanity. God did not force or coerce man into faith and repentance. In chapter 2 it was argued that this was axiomatic among those who followed Augustine. Augustine had declared:

Therefore we are by no means compelled, either, retaining the prescience of God, to take away the freedom of the will, or, retaining the freedom of the will, to deny that He is prescient of future things, which is impious. But we embrace both. We faithfully and sincerely confess both. The former, that we may believe well; the latter, that we may live well.

The second truth argued by Augustine and readily acknowledged by Baxter and Owen was that the ability to choose was part of the dignity with which humanity was bestowed.<sup>2</sup> This meant that God's commands in the gospel for repentance and faith were appropriate to humanity's nature. While Baxter and Owen insisted that only grace and the Holy Spirit could facilitate an individual's faith and repentance, nevertheless, faith and repentance were suitable to the human intellect, will and affections. Mid-seventeenth century puritans like Baxter and Owen argued that the ability to choose constituted man's "moral" character. By "moral" they meant the aspect of humanity which chose to avoid what

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine, *City of God*, Book V.10, p.157.

<sup>2</sup> See above, 2.2, where this aspect of human nature is presented in Augustine, Aquinas, Luther and Calvin.

was evil in favour of that which was good; the intellect discerned between good and evil, but it was the will which then directed the affections and intellect according to its choice. To be sure, the function of all his faculties (reason, will and affections) reflected the *Imago Dei*. Still, if man was not able to will then he would cease to be man. These two truths, then, were the key elements in Baxter and Owen's explanation of the human response to the divine initiative; both served to accent the appropriate character and quality of faith. For it was faith, in a word, which constituted the human response to the divine initiative. Accordingly, this section will consider first, (4.1.1), how Baxter, Owen and a number of their contemporaries acknowledged that human choice was compatible with a sovereign will; second, (4.1.2), how they argued that choice reflected the moral quality of the *Imago Dei*; and, finally, (4.1.3), how they defined faith.

#### 4.1.1 Human choice and Divine sovereignty

God's will was not any less sovereign or immutable because He accommodated secondary agency or contingency.<sup>3</sup> It was through a mysterious dialectic of contingent actions by humans and divine sovereignty that God accomplished his will. The Westminster *Confession of Faith* explained this dialectic in the following way:

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<sup>3</sup> See above 2.1 where the antecedents of this view are considered.

God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.<sup>4</sup>

The Westminster divines appreciated the logic of their argument and wasted no effort in their denial of rigid predeterminism. While Owen rejected Baxter's idea of condition, he still argued that:

God carries on the growth of corn by a way of natural and necessary causes, but this activity of rational agents is by such ways and means, as may entirely preserve their liberty; that is, preserving them in their being, and leaving them to be such agents. As then God causeth the corn to grow by the shining of the sun, and the falling of his rain, so he causeth believers to persevere in obedience, by exhortations, promises and threatenings, and such ways and means, as<sup>5</sup> are suited to such agents as they are.

Baxter too appreciated the mysterious balance between the supremacy of God's will and human secondary agency. He argued that God's will never forced mankind into disobedience: sinners willingly disobeyed God. It may be incomprehensible why God allowed men and women such an ability, but such was the case. God was no less sovereign, rather humanity was endowed with a unique freedom and responsibility:

The case lyeth thus: God antecedently to his laws, framed nature, that is, the being and natural order of all the world; and so he became the head or root of nature; the first cause, who by his wise decree, was to concur to the end with that natural frame, and to continue

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<sup>4</sup> Westminster Confession of Faith III.i in Schaff, *Creeeds*, p.608.

<sup>5</sup> Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints Perseverance* (1654), Goold ed., XI, p.437.

to things their proper forms and motions: and man is one of his creatures, having a nature of his own, to which God as the God of nature doth antecedently concur. By this natural concurrence of God, the fornicator, the murderer, the thief etc. are naturally able to do those acts: but being free agents that can do otherwise, God maketh them a law to restrain and regulate them. And when they break this law, they resist that gracious concurrence, which suitable to the organical cause, God conjoyneth with the means. But they do this by their natural power and activity; not used as God requireth them, but turned against his own law.<sup>6</sup>

It must be appreciated, however, that when mid-seventeenth century puritan writers like Baxter and Owen argued for the liberty of secondary agency they were quick to insist that God's will was never dependent upon human action. The Westminster *Confession of Faith*, as an example of general consensus, declared, "In his sight all things are open and manifest; his knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent upon the creature; so as nothing is to him contingent or uncertain."<sup>7</sup> There was, however, a paradox: divine sovereignty and human choice. Baxter wrote, "Here is supposed an internal principle of life in the person. God moves not man like a stone, but enduing him first with life, not to enable him to move without God, but thereby to qualify him to move himself, in subordination to God the first mover."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (1675) I.iii, p.22.

<sup>7</sup> Westminster *Confession of Faith* II.ii in Schaff, *Creeeds*, p.607. See also Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.i, p.55; Baxter, *An End to Doctrinal Controversies* (1691), p.31; and Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.28.

<sup>8</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650), Part III, Orme ed., Vol 22, p.39. In a marginal note he wrote, "I speak not here de gratia operante but gratia operata; not of the cause but the effect."

In essence, God's will could not exclude human contingency and agency without making accountability meaningless. "Notwithstanding any predetermination or operation of God", wrote Owen, "the wills of men are at as perfect liberty as a cause in dependence of another, is capable of."<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Choice as a reflection of Imago Dei

Mention has already been made of the dignity which God gave to humanity: they were rational creatures capable of choice. Baxter and Owen accepted an anthropology which stated that man, while fallen and in sin, still retained vestiges of the *Imago Dei*. Man's intellect, will and affections reflected, albeit in a diminished way, the original character of man. Baxter wrote, "for there is a twofold image of God in man; the one is natural, and that is, our reason and free-will, and this is not lost. The other is qualitative and ethical, and this is our holiness, and this is lost, and by grace restored...".<sup>10</sup> In this anthropology the will played an important role, yet always in relation to the understanding and affections. It was the will, however, which revealed the moral dimension of man. Certainly the intellect and the affections were indications of the *Imago Dei*, yet in a singular way it was the will which reflected the uniqueness of man in the created order. The will, according to Owen

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<sup>9</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655), Goold ed., XII, p.131.

<sup>10</sup> Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted*, Preface; see also Baxter, *Methodus Theologiae*, I, p.156. See Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.75.

and Baxter, defined human moral accountability and responsibility: that which distinguished man from the other animals. In essence it was the will which shaped man as a free and self-determining creature. To be sure, it was maintained, human rationality also defined the uniqueness of man in the created order. Yet, while puritan preachers addressed the intellect, they were principally concerned with the moral dimension of man: attributable to his will, not the intellect alone. Owen never minimized the importance of faith as involving reason; yet, as he explained to a group gathered for a monthly lecture in April, 1676, after the assent of the understanding there was a demand for a life of the will.

if you will abide with Christ there must be an acting of your will in it also, and that is in great diligence which Christ doth require in all the instances of it. This is a great way of abiding with Christ, when we labour to have our wills in a readiness unto all the instances of obedience, that Christ requireth at our hands. <sup>11</sup>

Baxter and Owen never defined faith as mere knowledge. They argued that faith involved both intellect and the will. They were not alone. The Westminster Assembly's *Larger Catechism* stressed both assent (ie. the intellect) to the truth and promise of the gospel and "receiving and resting upon Christ." <sup>12</sup> Baxter wrote: "faith which is in Scripture is made the

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<sup>11</sup> Asty, *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen D.D.*, (London:1721) Discourse VI, p.552.

<sup>12</sup> Westminster Assembly, *The Larger Catechism* Q.72 as in T.F. Torrance, *School of Faith: The Catechisms of the Reformed Church* (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1959), p.198.

condition of pardon and salvation, doth essentially involve the acts of every faculty, even assent, consent and affiance...".<sup>13</sup> In fact, where knowledge was great true faith was not necessarily alive. "The soundness of knowledge and belief is not best discerned in the intellectual acts themselves," wrote Baxter, "but in their powerful, free and pleasant efficacy, upon our choice and practice."<sup>14</sup> What mattered, according to Owen, was believing in and with the "heart". In his *Greater Catechism* he wrote that justifying faith was, "A gracious resting upon the free promises of God, in Jesus Christ for mercy, with a firm persuasion of heart, that God is a reconciled Father unto us in the Son of his love ...". In a footnote to this answer he declared, "Faith is in the understanding, in respect of its being and subsistence, in the will and heart, in respect of its effectual working."<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere he expressed his idea with more homely tones than usual:

And he that hath much knowledge but little love, will find that he labours in the fire, for the increase of the one or other. When in the diligent use of means, our wills and affections do adhere and cleave with delight unto the things wherein we are instructed, then we are in our right course; then if the holy gales of the Spirit of God do breath on us, are we in a blessed tendency towards perfection, 2 Thess

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<sup>13</sup> Baxter, *An End to Doctrinal Controversies* (1691), p.226. Baxter stated this elsewhere: cf. *Aphorismes of Justification* (1649), p.264; *Of Saving Faith* (1658), pp.74-75; *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians* (1669), p.6; and *Universal Redemption* (1694), p.11 and p.375.

<sup>14</sup> Baxter, *The Divine Life* (1664), p.188.

<sup>15</sup> Owen, *The Greater Catechism*, p.486.

2.10. <sup>16</sup>

Here emerges one of the central concerns of a study of voluntarism: the relationship between the intellect and the will. Chapter 1 discussed how R.T. Kendall has argued that later Calvinists departed from Calvin in as much as they placed faith more in the activity of the will than the intellect.<sup>17</sup> Charles Cohen has suggested that, in effect, the will was seen as the chief faculty only because later Calvinists recognized that it was the "heart" which needed to be renovated by the Spirit.<sup>18</sup>

On the other hand, both Stoever and Von Rohr have stressed that there was actually a closer correlation between the intellect and the will.<sup>19</sup> They have argued that the majority view was one which suggested that the will followed the intellect; but the will's choice was the crucial act in the human response.

What, then, should be made of Baxter and Owen's views? They assumed that there was a united relationship between the will and intellect. Both were equally and corporately affected by sin. "We are not only blind in our understanding", wrote Owen, "but captives also to sin in our wills."<sup>20</sup> It was within this unity that God worked simultaneously upon the

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<sup>16</sup> Owen, *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. Four volumes (1668-1694), vol 3 (1680), p.7.

<sup>17</sup> See above, chapter 1, pp.4 ff.

<sup>18</sup> Cohen, *God's Caress*, pp.96-98.

<sup>19</sup> Stoever, *Faire and Easie Way*, pp.61-62 and 106-107; Von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, pp.68-72.

<sup>20</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.127.

intellect and the will. Furthermore, it was never denied that the intellect had a crucial influence upon the will. Without a doubt the will related to the understanding. Nevertheless, the will received a particular emphasis which the understanding did not. Owen explained in his work on the Holy Spirit:

Now the will is the ruling, governing faculty of the soul, and the mind is the guiding and leading. Whilst this abides unchanged, unrenewed, the power and reign of sin continues in the soul; though not undisturbed, yet unruined.<sup>21</sup>

In a practical work entitled, *The Divine Life*, Baxter explained how the will was responsible when the gospel was rejected:

Walking with God doth greatly help us against the deceitful and erroneous disposition of our own hearts. The will hath a very great power upon the understanding; and therefore ungodly, fleshly men will very hardly receive any truth which crosseth the carnal interest or disposition and will hardly let go any error that feedeth them because their corrupted wills are a bias to their understandings and make them desperately partial in all their reading and hearing, and hypocritical in their prayers and inquiries after truth. Interest and corruption locketh up their hearts from their observation.<sup>22</sup>

Baxter and Owen appreciated that every faculty was affected by sin, but the chief flaw in man was his moral impotency, or the perversion of his will. Baxter and Owen frequently suggested that intellect could not alone lead the fallen will. The will's perversity was in a way more damaging than that of the intellect's.

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<sup>21</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.199.

<sup>22</sup> Baxter, *The Divine Life*, Section II, Orme ed., Vol. 13, p.257.

With a marginal reference to William Ames's *Medulla Theologica*, Baxter argued in one of his books on justification:

And indeed he that observeth but how the Scripture throughout doth hang mans salvation or damnation on his will mainly, (so far as it may be said to depend on our own acts), rather than on any acts of the understanding (but only as they refer and lead those of the will) might well wonder, that if justifying faith, the great needful act, should be only intellectual, and not chiefly in or by the will, as well as the rest.<sup>23</sup>

Likewise, he wrote, "Moral power and impotency are primarily such in the will (the first seat of morality) and derivatively or secondarily in the intellect and executive power."<sup>24</sup> The role of the will in choosing the truth, Baxter argued in *Methodus Theologiae*, was interrelated to the intellect; but the choice of what was "good" was the will's unique action: "Quatenus ad Verum, principium motus est a Intellectu; Quatenus ad Bonum principium motus est a Voluntate."<sup>25</sup> In another work he proclaimed, "sin hath debilitated man's very natural vivacity and activity to things spiritual, and also darkened and undisposed his understanding to them; but especially disaffected him, and perverted his will, with an indisposition, averseness and enmity to God."<sup>26</sup> Owen stated that however central the intellect, nevertheless, "the will of sinning may be restrained

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<sup>23</sup> Baxter, *Of Justification* (1658), p.356.

<sup>24</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* (1675), I.iii, p.44.

<sup>25</sup> Baxter, *Methodus Theologiae*, I, p.200.

<sup>26</sup> Baxter, *An End to Doctrinal Controversies* (1691), p.91.

upon a thousand considerations, which light and convictions will administer, but it is not taken away."<sup>27</sup>

Puritans other than Baxter and Owen gave attention to the will because, in their opinion, the will was the principal faculty of morality. Earlier, Richard Sibbes, whose work had a great influence upon Baxter, wrote, "Not that judgement alone will work a change, there must be grace to alter the bent and sway of the will before it will yield to be wrought upon by the understanding."<sup>28</sup> Giles Firmin, who frequently communicated with Baxter on liturgical and theological matters, maintained that "when the Spirit of God doth thus savingly illuminate the understanding, he doth at the same time savingly work upon the will."<sup>29</sup> William Allen, for whom Baxter had regard and wrote a commendatory preface, explained that even though the intellect was the superior faculty, nevertheless the will very often negatively influenced the understanding. By this Allen meant it particularly directed the intellect to dismiss the importance of making a heart-felt response: making faith to be nothing more than an intellectual assent to the truths

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<sup>27</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.199.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reede and Smoaking Flax* (1630, 3rd edition 1631) p.273. All subsequent references taken from 3rd edition. For Sibbes see *DNB*, vol 52, p.182.

<sup>29</sup> Giles Firmin, *Real Christian; or a Treatise of Effectual Calling* (1670), p.34. Firmin (1614-1697) was influenced by the preaching of John Rogers at Dedham, Essex. Firmin attended Emmanuel College, Cambridge. In 1632 he went to Boston and was there ordained deacon and worked along with John Cotton. In 1647 he returned to England, a year later becoming vicar of Shalford, Essex. He frequently corresponded with Richard Baxter on such matters as Separatists, church polity and ministerial practice. In 1657 patterned an Essex version of Baxter's Worcestershire model. In 1662 he was ejected from Shalford and then practiced medicine. See *DNB*, Vol. 19, pp.45-46.

of the gospel.<sup>30</sup> A contemporary of Baxter and friend of Owen, John Bunyan, in his *Holy War*, created the character Mr. Willbewill who is the chief culprit in Mansoul's acquiescence to Diabolus.<sup>31</sup> Thomas Goodwin, a member of the Westminster Assembly and with whom Owen shared an important preaching ministry at Oxford in the late 1650s, wrote: "The more knowledge a man sinneth against, the more the will of the sinner is discovered to be for sin, as sin... the highest degree of sinning is expressed to us by sinning willingly, and this after knowledge, Heb.10."<sup>32</sup>

The conclusion, therefore, which can be reached about the will's relation to the intellect is fourfold. First, mid-seventeenth century puritan divines did not deny the essential unity of the faculties. In this sense a study which isolates the will stretches the reality of the context. Second, this unity not to the contrary, it was assumed that the real battle was in

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<sup>30</sup> William Allen, *A Discourse of the Nature, Ends and Difference of the Two Covenants* (1673), pp.166-99. I have been unable to find biographical information about this William Allen in either *Calamy Revised* or *DNB*. There is a William Allen listed in Richard L. Greaves and Robert Zaller eds., *Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century* (Brighton: The Harvester Press Limited, 1982), vol I, p.11; I am not convinced, however, that the Allen listed in this dictionary, a radical Baptist, is the same Allen with whom we are immediately concerned. Subsequently, I am informed by Dr. Neil Keeble that this is the William Allen.

<sup>31</sup> John Bunyan, *Holy War* (1682), p.27. For John Bunyan (1628-1688) see *DNB*, Vol.7, pp.275-84 and Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan*. Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology. (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1969.).

<sup>32</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *Aggravation of Sinne* (1643), p.42. Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680) was a graduate from Christ's College, Cambridge. He was a hearer of Richard Sibbes and John Preston. Goodwin himself became a lecturer at Holy Trinity Church, Cambridge in 1628 and then in 1632 was appointed vicar. In 1634 he resigned to become an Independent and surrendered his living to Sibbes. During the Laudian period he was pastor of an English congregation in Arnheim in the Netherlands. In 1643 he was appointed to the Westminster Assembly, and was one of the "dissenting brethren". He was close friends with John Cotton. In 1650 he was appointed president of Magdalene College, Oxford and here came into contact with Stephen Charnock, Theophilus Gale and John Howe (1630-1705). Goodwin was asked to attend the Savoy Conference in 1661 and here worked with John Owen to develop a confession of faith. See *DNB*, Vol.22, pp.148-50.

the human will. "The crossness of thy will to the will of God", wrote Baxter, "is the sum of all the impiety and evil of the soul; and the subjection and conformity of thy will to his, is the heart of the new creature, and of thy rectitude and sanctification."<sup>33</sup> Third, the role of the will was germane to the issue of human accountability. Accountability, so these writers argued, was not based so much upon human intellect and affections, but on choice. Owen explained that no one was "sent to hell" by God against his or her will, for human guilt was always chiefly the consequence of free volition.<sup>34</sup> In other words, that which distinguished humanity from the rest of creation, the will, was the very faculty which principally lead to enmity between man and God. "So every one in his own person who believes not does by a voluntary act of his will reject the Gospel, and that on such corrupt principles as none can deny to be his sin."<sup>35</sup> Finally, as will be argued in chapter 5, the importance of the will implied that the will received prominent attention in preaching and pastoral care. Baxter explained, "You are never truly changed till your hearts be changed; and the heart is not changed till the will or love be changed."<sup>36</sup> For those unconverted and those already in Christ the

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<sup>33</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, ~~Works, Second Volume, Vol. 22~~, <sup>Orme ed. vol. 2</sup> p.57. Cf. Owen, *Holy Spirit*, pp.225-26 and John Bunyan, *Holy War*, pp.25-26.

<sup>34</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.245.

<sup>35</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, vol.2 (1674), p.121.

<sup>36</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, Orme ed., vol.2, p.55 The role of the preacher is examined more closely in chapter 5.2 in which the will and the "effectual call" is considered.

message was clear: the will mattered.

#### 4.1.3 Faith: the response defined

Baxter and Owen stated that within the gospel there was a necessity for a human response which involved the whole of man: intellect, will and affections; this response was faith. Man was not merely to assent to the gospel but to embrace it and respond to its summons. There must be a moral aspect to the human response. He had to demonstrate an attitude or disposition appropriate for those who knew they were sinners but who placed their confidence and hope in the merit of Christ Jesus. Baxter likened the covenant of grace to marriage; and faith tied "the marriage knot".<sup>37</sup> Owen also insisted upon faith as a heart response:

The nature of justifying faith, with respect unto that exercise of it whereby we are justified, consisteth in the heart's approbation of the way of justification and salvation of sinners, by Jesus Christ, proposed in the gospel, as proceeding from grace, wisdom, and love of God, with its acquiescency therein, as unto its own concernment.<sup>38</sup>

In his third volume on the Epistle to the Hebrews, commenting on Hebrews 6.10 Owen declared, "He is a most vain man who thinks otherwise, who hopes for any benefit by that faith which doth not work by love."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p.264.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *Doctrine of Justification* (1677), Goold ed., V, p.93.

<sup>39</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, vol 3 (1680), p.97.

According to Baxter it was this aspect of faith which replaced the demand for perfect obedience in the covenant of works; making faith, in his opinion, an easier condition. Owen affirmed how much greater the covenant of grace was, it was a covenant of free mercy, but lest anyone think that faith and love were easy he wrote:

Faith and love are generally looked on as easie and common things; but it is by them who have it not. As they are the only springs of all obedience towards God, and usefulness toward men, so they meet with the greatest oppositions from within and from without.<sup>40</sup>

Where Baxter and Owen differed on the nature of faith was over the issue of faith as a covenant condition. Baxter, as noted above, argued that faith was the condition of the covenant. In the covenant of grace God had committed himself to pardon on the condition of faith, nevertheless faith "is not active in the justifying of a sinner, but is a mere condition or moral disposition, which is necessary to him that will be in the nearest capacity to be justified by God."<sup>41</sup> Owen denied this; he argued that while faith was necessary as the human response, Christ's death procured even this faith for the elect.

For a close of all, that which in this cause we affirm may be summed up in this: Christ did not die for any upon condition if they do believe, but he died for all God's elect, that they should believe, and believing have eternal life; faith itself is among the principal effects and fruits of the death of Christ... Salvation indeed is bestowed conditionally, but faith which

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<sup>40</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, vol.3, p.108. Here too the context is Hebrews 6.10.

<sup>41</sup> Baxter, *Of Justification*, p.7. See also especially p.264.

is the<sup>42</sup> condition is absolutely procured.

As explained in the Introduction, one of Baxter's concerns was Antinomianism.<sup>43</sup> Since his days in the Army he had thought Antinomianism undermined the gospel. He accused Antinomians of stressing the death of Christ to the exclusion of the need for personal faith and repentance. An over emphasis of the death of Christ, claimed Baxter, led to an over emphasis of Christ's imputed righteousness. In Baxter's opinion, this denied in effect the necessity of the human response. As was explained in chapter 3, Baxter claimed that the covenant of grace was a conditional covenant and so was universal: open to all who would believe and repent; faith led them into the covenant. In this respect, Baxter criticized Owen's understanding not only of the death of Christ but his understanding of faith: as mentioned earlier, this was his primary criticism of Owen in the Appendix of *Aphorismes of Justification*.<sup>44</sup>

It is important to appreciate the fullness of Baxter's definition of faith. Only Christ satisfied the law and established the covenant. Furthermore, it was the Spirit which moved a man to faith and so satisfied the condition.<sup>45</sup> Yet faith, produced by grace, was the "appropriate" response. As outlined

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<sup>42</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu* (1648), pp.101-102 (but misnumbered 112); see also p. 127.

<sup>43</sup> See above chapter 1, pp.48-51.

<sup>44</sup> See above pp.198-99.

<sup>45</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I. p.45.

above, by appropriate he meant that faith involved all the human faculties which performed according to their natures: faith never involved that which was beyond the created capability of man.<sup>46</sup> It was not a question of ability, but suitability. In 4.1.4 it will be argued that Baxter did not minimize man's radical need for grace to produce faith; but, because he held that faith was something appropriate even to fallen man, faith was that upon which God suspended the covenant of grace. Faith was also the condition of the covenant because it was "desireable", for it involved a moral quality.<sup>47</sup> When man, by grace, exercised faith he was choosing good rather than evil. Again, this was why Baxter called the condition of faith a moral or "dispositive" condition.<sup>48</sup> Faith in this sense involved a repentance, a sorrow for sin, a desire to please God and a deep heart-felt love for Christ and his saints. Furthermore, faith moved the sinner from a trust in personal righteousness, which would expect a reward out of debt, to a reliance upon the merit and righteousness of Christ Jesus as he was held out in the covenant of grace.

Baxter, however, caused considerable controversy when he also defined faith as a condition which possessed an inherent righteousness. Baxter claimed that faith was not merely an instrument to receive Christ's imputed righteousness. As he expressed it in

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<sup>46</sup> See above, p.211.

<sup>47</sup> See Baxter, *Methodus Theologiae*, III, p.80.

<sup>48</sup> See above, pp.211-12.

*Aphorismes of Justification:*

The fulfilling of the conditions of each Covenant is our Righteousness, in reference to that Covenant: But faith is the fulfilling of the conditions of the New Covenant, therefore it is our Righteousness in relation to that Covenant.<sup>49</sup>

The important phrase is "in relation to that Covenant". The new covenant was based on the supreme righteousness of Christ and it was within the covenant of grace that one was pardoned freely and undeservedly. Nevertheless, God bestowed this pardon on the condition of faith. Faith was suitable and appropriate, and so was itself covenant righteousness.

He never maketh a relative change, where he doth not also make a real. God's decrees gives no man a legal title to the benefit decreed him, seeing purpose and promise are so different: A legal title we must have, before we can be justified; and there must be somewhat in our selves to prove that title, or else all men should have equal right.<sup>50</sup>

God commanded faith and by grace brought it about in his elect. With faith one was found "right" vis-a-vis the covenant of grace. Baxter wrote: "And salvation will be adjudged us as we are found to have been personally righteous or unrighteous, in respect to the terms of the Law of Grace...".<sup>51</sup> When one, through grace and the Spirit, believed in Christ and took him as Lord one possessed not merely an imputed righteousness but a personal righteousness, or what Baxter called in *Aphorismes* and elsewhere "evangelical

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<sup>49</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p.126; cf. Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I.ii. p.82.

<sup>50</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes* p.95.

<sup>51</sup> Baxter, *An Appeal to the Light*, (1674), p.3.

righteousness".<sup>52</sup> In claiming this Baxter never suggested that the righteousness of faith was anything but subordinate to the righteousness of Christ.<sup>53</sup> To recall the analogy of the peppercorn, faith (like the single peppercorn paid to the son by the tenant) is not that which frees the guilty party but is the personal homage or "personal performance required".<sup>54</sup> In one of his last doctrinal works Baxter's long-held view was evident:

no one till he is a Believer is related as a Member of a perfectly Righteous Saviour; and that is done no sooner (in time) than he hath the Inherent Righteousness of his personal faith and federal consent; and that obligeth him to further active righteousness of a holy life, and all these three conjunct (though not co-ordinate) make up the total Righteousness of a Saint, viz. 1. our Relation to Christ in Union as to a perfectly Righteous Head, who fulfilled all righteousness for us to merit our Justification (which is called Christ's Righteousness Imputed to us, as being thus far reputed ours). 2. And our penitent believing consent to his Covenant, which is the condition of the foresaid Relation to Christ. 3. And our after sanctification and obedience to Christ's Law.<sup>55</sup>

Owen attacked Baxter's understanding of the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ, and so

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<sup>52</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp.107-08 and p.125; Baxter, *Of Justification*, pp.269-271; and Baxter, *Treatise of Conversion*, Orme ed., vol. 7, p.318.

<sup>53</sup> He was quite clear especially in *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Orme ed., Vol. 22, pp.43-44.

<sup>54</sup> See above, p.189 and Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp.127-29.

<sup>55</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, p.78.

challenged his views on the nature of faith.<sup>56</sup> In *Of the Death of Christ, the price He paid, and the purchase He made* (1650) Owen's principal criticism of Baxter concerned the death of Christ and the covenant condition: "I know not any man that hath run out into more wide mistakes about the immediate effects of the death of Christ, than Mr. Baxter, who pretends to so much accurateness in this particular."<sup>57</sup> His view was expressed throughout this work consistently referring to faith as the fruit of Christ's death:

What spiritual blessings soever are bestowed on any soul, I mean peculiarly distinguishing mercies and graces, they are all bestowed and collated for Christ's sake; that is, they are purchased by his merit, and<sup>58</sup> procured by his intercession thereupon.

Owen disavowed that he was minimizing the importance of personal faith: "for pactional (sic) justification, evangelical justification, whereby a sinner is completely justified, that it should precede believing, I have not only not asserted but positively denied, and disproved by many arguments...".<sup>59</sup>

In 1655 he responded again to Baxter, to his *Confession of his Faith* (1655), and implied that Baxter's notion of the righteousness of faith was close to Socinianism. It will be recalled that Socinianism

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<sup>56</sup> See above, p.199 where mention was made about Owen's criticism of Baxter's views on the death and satisfaction of Christ.

<sup>57</sup> Owen, *Death of Christ*, Gould ed., X, p.473. It is particularly chapter XIII where Owen addressed Baxter's ideas about covenant suspension and faith as the satisfying covenant condition. The earlier chapters deal with justification before faith.

<sup>58</sup> Owen, *Death of Christ*, p.469. See also p.450.

<sup>59</sup> Owen, *Death of Christ*, p.449.

denied the full satisfaction of Christ.<sup>60</sup> Owen responded to the Socinian teaching in *Vindicae Evangelicae*. In this work he criticized John Biddle (1615-1662), who had previously denied that the death of Christ propitiated a divine wrath.<sup>61</sup> In his refutation of Biddle, Owen picked up his earlier debate with ~~Owen~~<sup>Baxter</sup> about the causality of the death of Christ. At least as he recorded it in *Reliquiae*, Baxter was most displeased by this attack by Owen.<sup>62</sup>

Owen differed from Baxter also when he described faith as an instrument. This is hardly surprising, given Owen's views outlined immediately above: faith laid hold of Christ and his righteousness; it had no inherent righteousness. Commenting on faith as a condition Owen wrote in *Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ* (1677):

And there is an obvious sense wherein faith may be called the condition of our justification. For no more may be intended thereby, but that it is the duty on our part which God requireth, that we may be justified. And this the whole Scripture beareth witness unto. Yet this hindereth not, but that as unto its use, it may be the instrument whereby we apprehend or receive Christ and his righteousness. But to assert it the condition of the new covenant, so as from a preconceived signification of that word, to give it another use in justification, exclusive of that pleaded for, as the instrumental cause thereof, is not easily admitted; because it supposeth an alteration in the substance

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<sup>60</sup> See above, chapter 1, p.58.

<sup>61</sup> For Biddle see *DNB.*, vol 5, pp.13-14.

<sup>62</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i 1163, p.111.

of the doctrine itself.<sup>63</sup>

In his exposition of Hebrews 6 he insisted that, "when we say, we are justified by faith only, we do not say that faith is our righteousness, but as it apprehends the righteousness of Christ, as he is the end of the Law for righteousness unto them that do believe. And this is the use that God hath designed faith unto, and which in its own nature it is suited for."<sup>64</sup>

How, then, did Owen understand faith? As mentioned in this section, faith was an instrument which received Christ's imputed righteousness merited by his death on the cross. The faith of a man was a necessary response which he had to make personally; yet its importance was subordinate to the satisfaction and merits inextricably associated with the death of Christ. In *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu* (1648) Owen had detailed the nature of faith; there were five essential aspects:

The first thing which the Gospel enjoyneth sinners, and which it persuades and commands them to believe is, that salvation is not to be had in themselves, inasmuch as all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, nor by the works of the Law, by which no flesh living can be justified... [second] that there is salvation to be had in the promised seed in him who was before ordained to be a Captain of salvation to them that do believe... [third] that Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified by the Jews, was the Saviour, promised before: and that there is no name under heaven given whereby they may be saved besides his... [fourth] the Gospel requires a resting upon this Christ so discovered and believed on to be the promised Redeemer, as an all sufficient Saviour, with whom is plenteous redemption, and who is able to

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<sup>63</sup> Owen, *Doctrine of Justification*, p.113.

<sup>64</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, vol 3, p.98.

save the utmost them that come to God by him, and to bear the burden of all weary labouring souls that come by faith to him; in which proposal there is a certain infallible truth, grounded upon the superabundant sufficiency of the oblation of Christ in itself, for whosoever (fewer or more) it be intended... [fifth] these things being firmly seated in the soul and not before we are every one called in particular to believe the efficacy of the redemption that is in the blood of Jesus towards our own souls in particular: which every one may assuredly do in whom the free grace of God hath wrought the former acts of faith...<sup>65</sup>

Owen was not alone in his attack on Baxter and wrote a preface for another opponent of Baxter, William Eyre.<sup>66</sup> Eyre responded to *Aphorismes* in his challenge to Benjamin Woodbridge (1622-1682) who had earlier preached a sermon on justification which echoed many of Baxter's opinions.<sup>67</sup> In a later publication of the sermon Woodbridge criticized Owen and his views: "In like manner we are not first justified, and then believe on Christ that hath justified us; but we believe in Christ that we may be justified."<sup>68</sup> Woodbridge was concerned to refute the notion of justification from eternity (a view which both he and Baxter thought Owen implied, but which Owen denied) by insisting upon the necessity of faith as a condition of the covenant. Justification from eternity could imply, Woodbridge argued, a denial of personal guilt and

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<sup>65</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, pp.193-94.

<sup>66</sup> Eyre, *Vindiciae Justificationis Gratuitas* (1653). For Eyre see *Calamy Revised*, p.187.

<sup>67</sup> For Woodbridge see *DNB.*, vol 62, pp.385-86.

<sup>68</sup> Woodbridge, *Justification by Faith* (1653), p.16.

accountability; faith was a condition for it involved repentance. Eyre, however, entered the fray insisting that the idea of faith as a condition was erroneous; it implied that one believed first and then was reconciled to God, "for the condition must be performed, before the benefit which is promised thereupon, can be received." Eyre refuted such an explanation and claimed that "men are not believers before they are justified; the Scripture witnesseth, that the subject of justification is a sinner, or ungodly person, Rom. 4.5 and 5.8,10."<sup>69</sup> He insisted that faith was a "receptive instrument": it received Christ's righteousness. Faith was not righteous in itself nor did it procure justification. "It is called an instrumental cause of our justification, taking Justification passively, not actively; or in reference to that passive application, whereby a man applies the righteousness of Christ to himself, but not to that active application, whereby God applyeth it to a man, which is only in the mind of God."<sup>70</sup> Eyre's criticism of Baxter and Woodbridge was echoed by Thomas Blake (1597-1657) in his *Vindicae Foederis* (1653).<sup>71</sup> Blake also disputed Baxter's views on the righteousness of faith. He argued that men had to possess a righteousness "extrinsical" to themselves: the need was for an alien righteousness, namely Christ's. While

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<sup>69</sup> Eyre, *Vindicae Justificationis Gratuitas*, p.3.

<sup>70</sup> Eyre, *Vindicae Justificationis Gratuitas*, pp.30-31; cf. his comments on pp.42,49,88 and 121.

<sup>71</sup> For Blake see *DNB.*, vol 5, pp.179-80.

Blake had little problem with the notion of faith as a condition, nevertheless he disagreed with Baxter about the righteousness of faith. It was through the instrumentality of faith that one received the imputed righteousness of Christ. Faith did not possess any inherent righteousness, it was an instrument.<sup>72</sup> In 1654 Baxter responded to Eyre and Blake in his publication *Apology*.<sup>73</sup> In this work he repeatedly insisted that faith was not at all the cause of justification, for it was only a condition.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, as he explained to Eyre, "no man can perform this condition without God's special grace."<sup>75</sup> What Baxter again rejected, however, was the idea that faith was an instrument. Interestingly he turned his opponents' objections right around and argued that an instrument actually suggested that man justified himself. Baxter contended that if faith was an instrument then, by metaphysical definition, it was an "efficient cause" (what produced the motion or change); and if faith was an efficient cause then man's faith effectively justified him, not the merit of Christ.<sup>76</sup> But this was precisely what his critics accused him of suggesting by his insistence upon faith as a condition

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<sup>72</sup> Blake, *Vindicae Foederis* (1653), pp.72-76.

<sup>73</sup> Part I was his response to Blake and Part IV to Eyre.

<sup>74</sup> Baxter, *Apology*, I p.4, IV pp.9 and 20.

<sup>75</sup> Baxter, *Apology*, IV p.26.

<sup>76</sup> Baxter, *Apology*, I, p.20. Baxter here assumed a definition of *efficient causa* (efficient cause), an Aristotelian term used by medieval scholastics, Reformers and Protestant scholastics. See Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, p.61.

with inherent righteousness.<sup>77</sup>

Anthony Burgess also declared his opposition to the idea of faith's inherent righteousness. He argued that there was only the righteousness of Christ; were one to advocate an inherent righteousness of the believer then "here appeareth no lesse pride or arrogancy in this, then the opinion of the Papists, and in some respects it doth charge God worse...".<sup>78</sup> Baxter responded to Burgess's criticism in 1658 with *Of Justification, Treatise II*. Here he insisted "our faith and love and obedience, which are for the receiving and improving of him and his righteousness and so stand in full subordination to him, are not to be made co-partners of his office or honor."<sup>79</sup> Throughout his response his arguments conformed to the patterns already outlined.

This section, then, has shown the differing interpretations which Baxter and Owen gave to the nature of faith as the human response to the divine initiative. At the centre of the debate was the question of righteousness: more precisely, whose righteousness? Was it the righteousness of Christ which faith received? Or was it that faith satisfied a covenant righteousness? This difference of opinion had a further implications when both considered the ability of a person to respond to God's initiative.

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<sup>77</sup> Baxter, *Apology*, I, pp.20-26; cf. Baxter, *Of Justification* Treatise III, p.271.

<sup>78</sup> Burgess, *True Doctrine of Justification* II, p.17.

<sup>79</sup> Baxter, *Of Justification* II, p.76.

#### 4.2 The ability of man to respond

In *Catholick Theologie* (1675) Baxter wrote, "but all defining is vain, till the ambiguous word [freedom] be distinguished, and the sense accordingly variously stated."<sup>80</sup> It became clear in chapter 1 that "freedom of the will" was difficult to define succinctly. In this present section it must be noted that mid-seventeenth century puritan writers acknowledged a freedom of the will, but a particular degree of freedom. Their emphasis was that the will was free from compulsion or predetermined necessity (ie. the choice could absolutely be nothing else). The will, so the argument went, was a self-determining agent; yet the will was always fundamentally dependent upon God because the will was not morally capable of choosing the ways of God. It had not lost its natural ability to choose, rather it suffered from a moral debility which only God could correct. It was in this sense that Baxter and Owen qualified the meaning of freedom of the will.

Freedom was limited in the following way. While the will was never forced or compelled, it was only free to act according to its nature.<sup>81</sup> The problem with the human will was that it shared in the fallen state of humanity. Its nature was affected by enmity and resistance. The will was free in its fallen state to

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<sup>80</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.i, p.28 marginal note.

<sup>81</sup> This idea was similar to that of both Augustine and Aquinas as suggested earlier in 2.3.

the extent that it chose as a fallen will. Owen expressed it this way,

The will though in itself radically free, yet in respect of the term or object to which in this regard it should tend, is corrupted, enthralled, and under a miserable bondage; tied to such a necessity of sinning in general, that though unregenerate men are not restrained to this or that sin in particular, yet for the main they can do nothing but sin.<sup>82</sup>

It is appropriate here to question how Owen could refer to "bondage" and "necessity of sinning" and still suggest that the will was "radically free". He tried to maintain the paradox of the will's nature, but at times his logic proved problematic. Still, Owen attempted to hold together the will's self-determining ability with a rejection of both Pelagian implications and Arminian inferences. In Owen's view the will acted freely but its freedom was only as a sinful will. It was not forced by any external compulsion or even by God's predetermination. It did not even have to sin; it did so only because it was morally debilitated. Baxter expressed similarly:

Your will is naturally a free, that is self-determining faculty, but it is vitiously inclined, and backward to good, and therefore we see by sad experience that it hath not a virtuous moral freedom. But that is the wickedness of it, which deserveth the punishment.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.128. Note here how Owen avoided one meaning of necessity: it had to do with sin in general versus sinning in particular, namely that no particular action was by predetermined necessity. Were this quote taken in isolation Owen might appear to have suggested such a necessity which would exculpate humanity, but the material introduced throughout the rest of this section serves to elucidate his suggestion in this quotation.

<sup>83</sup> Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted* (1658), p.232.

What the will was not free to do was choose what was spiritually good and well pleasing to God. On one level the will still chose what it considered good, but this "good" was counterfeit compared to the goodness of God and the Gospel. On another level the will did not choose the goodness of God because its moral ability to do so was lost. The freedom of the unregenerate will, thus, was a particular freedom. Was this playing with words? Owen apparently thought not:

But you say, here I quite overthrow free-will which before I seemed to grant; to which I answer: that in regard of that object concerning which we now treat, a natural man hath no such thing as free-will at all, if you take it for a power of doing that which is good and well pleasing unto God in things spiritual, for an ability or preparing our hearts unto faith and calling upon God...<sup>84</sup>

The point is, many English Calvinists of this period qualified the idea of the freedom of the will. They were insistent, however, that even after the fall the will was free from constraint and compulsion. Were the will coerced it would cease to be a human will. The fallen will still possessed vestiges of the *Imago Dei*. As the Westminster Confession put it, "God hath endued the will of man with that natural liberty, that is neither forced nor by any absolute necessity of nature determined to good or evil."<sup>85</sup> Human beings were not

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<sup>84</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.128.

<sup>85</sup> The Westminster Confession of Faith IX.i, Schaff, *Creeds*, p.623. See Peter Toon, *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity* (London: the Olive Branch, 1967), p.23. Toon fails to see this, and so suggests that most "High-Calvinists" (his term) believed that God convinced the mind of His truth and "constrained the will to accept His offered grace." The argument presented here challenges Toon's view on this, though his comments are in general helpful.

forced into sin, even by their natures, so it was argued. Sin was voluntary; were it not then accountability was a misnomer.

Baxter and Owen understood the will as a "self-determining agent". This term defined the will as free to choose with a liberty of ~~indifference~~<sup>choice</sup>: in short, the will could equally choose what was truly good and what it erroneously determined as good. The significant implication of this idea was that the will chose the ways of God just as equally as it chose to sin. Baxter and Owen accepted that the will was naturally capable of choosing what it desired. Baxter insisted that the will had an appropriate function which no other faculty could perform. The will's activity involved both the capability of selection and then free choice.

From whence it is clear that the nature of man's will is such as that it is made to use a power which doth necessitate, or determine it self, or is determined necessarily, but freely: and that it is no deifying of the will, nor extolling it above its nature, to say that it can act or determine it self, without God's pre-determinating premotion; or by that same measure of help which at another time doth not determine it. Though its nature, and its act as such be of God, yet so is its liberty too; and therefore by the power and liberty given by God, the will can act or not act, or turn it self to this object or that, without more help than the said natural support and concurrence: And this power and liberty is its nature, and Gods image.<sup>86</sup>

This line of thought is complicated to say the least, but the argument can be drawn together into two overall points.

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<sup>86</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I.ii, p.28.

First, when Baxter and Owen referred to the self-determining of the will they did so to explain human accountability within a theological system which argued for God's sovereignty. As chapter 3 considered, the mid-seventeenth century puritan wanted to know: how could God be sovereign while men and women broke his revealed will? Either God caused sin or else his rule was in question. Baxter and Owen argued that neither was the case. God neither caused sin nor forfeited his sovereign will to the agency of men and women. Part of this explanation was the relative liberty of secondary agents, and this implied a self-determining of secondary agents. If there was no degree of self-activity involving choice, so their argument went, then secondary agency was an empty concept. The real problem was that men and women rebelled against God in their self-determining. As Baxter put it,

No man of brains denyeth that man hath a will that's naturally free; it's free from violence, and it's a self-determining principle. But it's not free from evil dispositions. It's habitually averse to God and holiness, and inclined to fleshly things. It's enslaved by a fleshly bias.<sup>87</sup>

The second point about the importance of the will's self-determination was that this concept explained how the human will responded to God's initiative without losing its own freedom. Owen made the following point,

He therefore offers no violence or compulsion unto the will. This that faculty is not naturally capable to give admission unto. If it be compelled it is destroyed. And the mention that is made in the Scripture of compelling (compel them to come in) respects the

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<sup>87</sup> Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted*, Preface.

certainty of the event, not<sup>88</sup> the manner of the operation on them.

Both Baxter and Owen attempted to balance the passivity of the will to God's grace and the importance of human choice. Grace could not be minimised, yet the will could not be nullified either. Self-determination, then, was seen as part of the explanation. In conversion, so it was suggested, God neither overthrew the will nor coerced the will; rather it was moved through its own self-determination. Owen wrote:

A self-sufficiency for operation, without the effectual motion of Almighty God, the first cause of all things, we can allow neither to men, nor angels, unless we intend to make them gods; and a power of doing good, equal unto that they have of doing evil, we must not grant to man by nature, unless we deny the fall of Adam, and fancy ourselves still in paradise ...<sup>89</sup>

Nevertheless, in the same context he explained,

we grant as large a freedom and dominion to our wills over their own acts, as a creature subject to the supreme rule of God's providence is capable of; endued we are with such a liberty of will, as is free from all outward compulsion and inward necessity, having an elective faculty of applying itself unto that which seems good unto it, in which it is a free choice, notwithstanding it is subservient to the decree of God ...<sup>90</sup>

Baxter and Owen did not consider the will free from God's initiative and primary influence. In this sense they rejected the idea of a "liberty of indifference". To them, the will was radically dependent upon God, for

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<sup>88</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.27; cf. *Display of Arminianism*, p.36.

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.119. See pp.119-120 where Owen attacks Arminians for this view. In his argument he frequently appeals to Article X of the 39 Articles.

<sup>90</sup> Owen, *Display of Arminianism*, p.119.

only God could liberate the will from its sinful self-determination.<sup>91</sup> No view of the freedom of the will was acceptable which divorced the will from a dependency upon God. In his work on the Holy Spirit Owen explained,

Suppose now, that God by his grace doth no more but aid, assist, and excite the will in its actings, that he doth not effectually work in all the gracious actings of our souls in all our duties; the proposition would hold on the other hand, not grace, but I, [1 Cor 15.10] seeing the principal relation of the effect is unto the next and immediate cause, and thence hath its denomination. And as he worketh them, to will in us, so also to do; that is, effectually to perform those duties whereunto the gracious actings of our wills are required.<sup>92</sup>

Owen reflected the opinion that the will was only free to choose the Gospel after God had first moved the will in its choice; the will was passive to God's influence then active in its choice. Such was the total and radical dependency of the will upon God. Nevertheless, no violence was done to the will; even though the acting of grace was antecedent to the will's action the will still acted and moved with its "own liberty in exercise". Owen argued, "There is therefore herein an inward almighty secret act of the power of the Holy Ghost, producing or effecting in us the will of conversion unto God, so acting our wills, as that they also act themselves, and that freely."<sup>93</sup> Owen attempted to balance the idea of the superior agency of

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<sup>91</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.284.

<sup>92</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.470.

<sup>93</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.272; cf. *Display of Arminianism*, p.133.

grace with the subordinate, yet free, agency of the will. He did not argue that the human will was independent from God; this was not the freedom of the will. Instead, the will was still "free" even when moved by sovereign grace and by the Spirit. The fact that grace moved the will in no way violated the will's agency or minimized the freedom of its choice, "it is no more necessary to the nature of a free cause, from whence a free action must proceed, that it be the first beginning of it, than it is necessary to the nature of a cause, that it be the first cause." <sup>94</sup>

Freedom of the will, then, was accepted by Baxter and Owen: provided that the word freedom was qualified. While the will was naturally capable of an important self-determination, it was equally seriously wounded and weakened by its sinfulness. Nevertheless, God did not convert an individual against his or her will. In this sense, so it was suggested, even conversion was not at the expense of the *qualified* freedom of the will. True, God influenced infallibly the choice of the elect, but no violence was done to the will. This paradox was recognised as tenuous, but strikingly the same overall argument was expressed by individuals who were not always in agreement on other issues.

#### 4.3 The importance of a willing response

Based on the observations in the previous sections two conclusions can now be put forward. First, the will was understood to be the central moral faculty,

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<sup>94</sup> Owen, *Display of Arminianism*, p.120.

and so the role of the will in the Christian life received prominent attention. Consequently, "willingness" was a notable feature of puritan practical divinity. Second, the importance of the will's role, and the significance of willingness, meant that puritan preachers frequently appealed not only to the intellects of their audience but to the "heart" or will. In no way is this to ignore the rationalistic emphasis of many preachers. But, many referred to the problem of unwillingness more than to the problem of misunderstanding. The gospel they preached presumed that the human problem was disobedience and stubbornness as well as ignorance. Here, then, we see the type of voluntarism which a number of important mid-seventeenth century puritans presented: the prominence, but not dominance, of the will's choice in response to the divine initiative; seen in the stress on "willingness".

This is evident, first of all, in the way in which believing and willingness were frequently used interchangeably. In *The Saints Everlasting Rest* Baxter declared:

So that if thou be willing to have Christ upon his own terms, that is, to save and rule Thee, then thou art a believer: thy willingness is thy faith; and if thou have faith, thou hast the surest of all evidences... But to him that is willing to have Christ for King and Saviour, I will not say, believing is easy: but it is <sup>95</sup> already performed; for this is believing.

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<sup>95</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.507.

Owen explained that a willingness was involved in faith, and not only at the beginning of one's Christian life but daily.

The accepting of Christ by the will, as its only husband, Lord and Saviour. This is called "receiving" of Christ, John 1.12; and it is not intended only for that solemn act whereby at first entrance we close with him, but also for the constant frame of the soul in abiding with him and owning of him as such.<sup>96</sup>

Secondly, the choice of the will was absolutely essential, as was the assent of the intellect, but the will's role received primary consideration. It was the will's closing or choosing which distinguished true saving faith from either temporary sorrow which arose out of guilt or a faith which was superficial. Baxter explained how central the will was in response to the gospel:

we cannot convert you against your will. There is no carrying mad men to Heaven in fetters. You may be condemned against your wills, because you sinned with your wills; but you cannot be saved against your wills. The wisdom of God hath thought meet to lay mens salvation or destruction exceeding much upon the choice of their own wills...<sup>97</sup>

In fact Baxter explained that one could obtain assurance of one's union with Christ by asking whether one was truly willing to receive Christ.

If you consent to the Gospel offer, and are but truly willing to be his, and that he be yours in that relation; faith is not only called a receiving of Christ, but it is oft expressed by this term of [willing] him. And therefore

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<sup>96</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, Gould ed., Banner of Truth reprint vol 2, p.58. All subsequent references taken from the Banner of Truth reprint.

<sup>97</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted* (1658), p.259; cf. Baxter, *Compassionate Counsel to All Young-men* (1681), p.79.

the promise<sup>98</sup> is to [whosoever will], Rev  
22.17 ...

It was not, however, that the gospel's success in spreading through the land was dependent upon the will of men and women.<sup>99</sup> Nevertheless, the reason why many failed to respond to what they heard from puritan pulpits was because, so the argument went (at least from the preachers!), their wills were contrary. Owen explained that while illumination and conviction tended to lead to the goal of regeneration, often this tendency was thwarted by the stubbornness of the will. Only by God's gracious intervention was the resistant will ameliorated.<sup>100</sup> Baxter, with rather more emphasis than others, insisted that the covenant of grace was only redemption in potentia until an individual personally believed and chose Christ.<sup>101</sup> Experientially, the problem of unbelief rested not so much with the inscrutability of election and predestination as much as it did with the hardened will. On one level, explained Baxter, sinners went to hell because they were unwilling to receive Christ, "not because God was cruel to you, but because you were cruel and unmerciful to yourselves. I tell you this will prove true at the last."<sup>102</sup> In *A Call to the*

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<sup>98</sup> Baxter, *Directions for Weak Christians* (1669), pp.6-7. The question of assurance is dealt with more fully in chapter 7.

<sup>99</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, Vol 2, p.190.

<sup>100</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.198; cf. Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted*, pp.230-31.

<sup>101</sup> Baxter, *Universal Redemption* (1694), p.41. His teaching on the covenant of grace was studied in chapter 3.

<sup>102</sup> Baxter, *A Treatise of Conversion*, Orme ed., vol 7, p.139.

*Unconverted*, he explained to his readers,

If your necessities did not require it, we would not gall your tender ears with truths that seem so harsh and grievous. Hell would not be so full, if people were but willing to know their case, and to hear and think of it. The reason why so few escape it, is because they strive not to enter in at the straight gate of conversion, and to go to the narrow way of holiness, while they have time: and they strive not, because they are not awakened to a lively feeling of the danger they are in; and they are not awakened because they are loth to think of it: and that is partly through foolish tenderness, and carnal self-love, and partly because they do not well believe the Word that threateneth it.

It was the preacher's task to be the chief means of God to awaken sinners to their danger, to challenge them to a reasonable consideration of the gospel, and furthermore to address the intellect in order to move the will. Preachers preached to effect a willingness; only grace and the Holy Spirit could produce this willingness, but the preacher could be a means in the process. Baxter confided to his readers in *A Call to the Unconverted*,

If you had a will that were freed from wicked inclinations, I had no need to write such books as this to persuade you to be willing in a case which your own salvation lieth on. To the grief of our souls, we perceive after all our preaching and persuasions that the ungodly have not this spiritual free will. But this is nothing, but your unwillingness it self, [and] inclinations to be willing, and

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103 Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted*, pp.22-23.

therefore the want of this is so far from excusing you, that the more you want it (that is, the more you are wilful in sin) the more you are and the [surer] will be your punishment.<sup>104</sup>

### Conclusion

We are now closer to a proper understanding of Baxter and Owen's voluntarism. In this chapter it was argued that the human response to the divine initiative was summed up in the meaning of faith. Faith, as it can be seen in the difference between Baxter and Owen, was defined with contrasting emphases and implications. The human response was, nevertheless, seen by Baxter and Owen as something more than an act of the intellect; the fundamental problem of men and women was a moral one. Only by an aided and renovated will could a person respond to the divine initiative. On the basis of this assumption puritan preaching, as seen in Baxter and Owen, called for a willingness. This willingness was not a contradiction to the predestinarianism of the mid-seventeenth century. What has been shown in chapters 3 and 4 is that voluntarism involved a paradoxical but essential interrelationship between a sovereign will and a human will. The next

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<sup>104</sup> Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted*, Preface.

chapter explores more fully the interrelationship: for the mid-seventeenth century puritan lived a faith in which the two appeared to him to be intertwined.

## Chapter Five

JUSTIFICATION: THE NEXUS OF THE DIVINE INITIATIVE AND  
THE HUMAN RESPONSEIntroduction

In the previous two chapters the two foci of voluntarism were presented: the divine initiative and the human encounter. Voluntarism encompassed both a sovereign immutable divine will and a human will which was free to choose according to its nature. Yet, a study of voluntarism cannot be restricted merely to defining these two aspects: it was the meeting of the two which was crucial. It will be recalled that the definition of voluntarism taken here is: the *prominence, but not dominance, of the will's response to God's sovereign initiatives in the divine/human encounter.*<sup>1</sup> The divine initiative was considered in chapter 3; an initiative expressed within the covenant of grace. The human response was detailed in chapter 4; a response summed up in the meaning of faith.

This chapter examines how these two met, or the divine/human encounter. It is argued that justification was the nexus of the divine initiative and the human response. There are several reasons for claiming this. First, Baxter and Owen did not argue that God merely presented a covenant of grace; he also called men and women into the covenant. In other

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 1.1, p.3.

words, they claimed that the covenant of grace was not offered by God with a neutral ambivalence; there was a divine wooing or persuading. Second, by the very manner in which this calling or wooing was given -- in the preaching of the gospel, the reading of the Bible, the use of the sacraments and the practice of prayer -- both the sovereign divine initiative and the human ability to choose interacted. Baxter defined justifying faith as, "a grace or habit infused into the soul, whereby we are enabled to believe, not only that the Messiah is offered to us, but also to take and receive Him as Lord and Saviour, that is, both to be saved by Him, and obey Him...".<sup>2</sup> In fact, the interaction of the two in a person's experience often made it difficult to discern which was more central. Third and lastly, when a person truly believed and repented of sin, according to Baxter and Owen, he was a converted and justified child of the covenant. They claimed that a justified person was not only the recipient of divine grace and mercy (ie. the divine initiative) but through the influence of grace and the Holy Spirit he had freely exercised a willing choice.

At the outset of this discussion of justification as the nexus of the divine initiative and the human response, it is important to recognize that both Baxter and Owen followed the Reformed pattern when they explained how a sinner progressed into justification; this process was called the *ordo salutis*. They recognised as the first step in the *ordo salutis* the

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<sup>2</sup> Baxter, *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (1676) To the Reader, sig A8v.

importance of election. The next step was the effectual call. Baxter and Owen stressed that it was the effectual call by which the Holy Spirit brought the elect into the covenant of grace. Following the effectual call came conviction. Conviction arose through a variety of means: preaching, exhortation and especially a harmony between the law and gospel. The sinner was confronted with his or her condition before a holy God. This confrontation resulted in the sinner's conscience made "sensible" and the sinner's affections disturbed. It will be argued that Baxter and Owen advocated a balance between the law and gospel. Furthermore, they saw the Holy Spirit as the principal cause in conviction, the law was just a secondary means. After conviction came an assent to the gospel: but this was not merely an intellectual conviction, for the definition of faith for both Baxter and Owen was more than an act of the intellect. Additionally, only after the Spirit created a new will could the sinner truly repent, be converted and then exercise justifying faith. It was by this faith that a person entered into the covenant of grace where he received as an adopted child the benefits of justification and remission of sin. Next, both Baxter and Owen insisted that sanctification and perseverance had to follow. Finally, glorification and the joys of heavenly "rest" was the goal of the saint's progress. Such, then, was the overall scheme of the *ordo salutis*.

In order to comprehend how justification was the meeting of these two aspects of voluntarism -- the divine initiative and the human response -- this chapter begins (5.1) with Baxter and Owen's views on election. In (5.2) what they wrote about the effectual call will be presented. Both taught that through "means" God issued the effectual call; means were the sacraments, prayer, the reading of the Scriptures and, supremely, the Word preached. In (5.3) attention will be given to their emphasis which both gave to the work of the Holy Spirit in fulfilling the effectual call which resulted in justification. The next section, (5.4) will examine the issue of preparation; considering here whether or not Baxter and Owen continued an emphasis which (as mentioned in the Introduction) Norman Pettit and R.T. Kendall have argued was a salient aspect of early seventeenth century puritanism.<sup>3</sup> Finally, (5.5), it will be important to examine Baxter and Owen's views on the irresistibility of God's calling. It will be recalled that this was touched upon briefly in 4.2, but here it is necessary to investigate the role of the will in relation to the use of the law, the preaching of the gospel and the secret work of the Holy Spirit.

### 5.1 The importance of election

Owen wrote that the call of God was inextricably associated with election. "Our effectual calling, is the first effect of our everlasting election - we have

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<sup>3</sup> See above p.5, n.6 and Pettit, *Heart Prepared*, pp.45-47.

no actual interest in, nor right unto, Christ, until we are thus called." <sup>4</sup> Baxter, on the other hand, never denied the centrality of election but questioned the primacy of election as a cause for an individual's faith. In 1655 one Samuel Whittell wrote to Baxter and asked whether election was the only cause of believing and whether anything else intervened. He responded stating that he was not sure whether personal election was a cause, at least it was not the sole cause. <sup>5</sup> Baxter differed from Owen because he viewed election of the individual as a specific event in time, and not merely on the basis of an eternal decree. He argued this due to his insistence upon the need for an actual response to the covenant and the condition of faith. <sup>6</sup> In reply to Christopher Cartwright he declared: "As God's decree is, that all the elect shall believe, and yet his Law doth most fitly require faith of them, as the condition of their justification and glory." <sup>7</sup> Baxter assumed election; what is significant, however, was the way in which he moderated election.

And, though I do believe that there is an absolute election of individual persons to faith and salvation, yet it is certain, that the words elect, and election, do often signify that which is in time, if not far more often than that which is from eternity : when God by his Spirit's effectual grace doth choose

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<sup>4</sup> Owen, *The Greater Catechism*, p.486, notes 2 and 3.

<sup>5</sup> Whittell to Baxter, dated March 5, 1654/5. Dr. Williams's Library, London. Baxter *MS Treatises*, 7, item 270 and Baxter's response dated March 9 of the same year, *Treatises* 7, item 272. I have been unable to ascertain the identity of Samuel Whittell.

<sup>6</sup> See above 3.3.1 - 3.3.2, pp.184-205.

<sup>7</sup> Baxter, *An Account of my Considerations of the friendly ... Chr. Cartwright* (1652) third item bound in *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (1676), p.63. For Cartwright see *DNB*, vol 9, p.220.

one, and pass by another, this is (executive) election, and these so actually chosen or taken out of the world to Christ, are elect : and this is the most usual sense of the word in Scripture, as I think.<sup>8</sup>

Baxter wanted to stress that election could never exclude the necessity of a personal response to the call of God. Election and the call were associated, but not in any way which would reduce the call to a mere pretension. In 1651 he wrote to George Lawson:

Doubtless this election is begun in our effectual vocation or conversion: for before we were actually children of wrath. And this may well be called [Election in Execution]; because it is the first special Effect of eternal election on the soul of the elect: and so the first discovery to us of that confirms election.

In opposition to Baxter, Owen placed election within the sovereign eternal purposes of God. According to Owen it was the immutable decree and secret purpose of God in election which resulted in the effectual call of the saints. "From the execution of these decrees flows that variety and difference we see in the dispensation of the means of grace, God sending the Gospel where he hath a remnant according to election."<sup>10</sup> Owen was emphatic about the immutability of the divine will and purpose in election. The decree of election was, he wrote : "The eternal, free and immutable purpose of God, whereby, in Jesus Christ, he chooseth unto himself, whom he pleaseth, out of whole mankind,

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<sup>8</sup> Baxter, *Rich: Baxter's Confession of his Faith* (1655), p.224.

<sup>9</sup> Baxter, Letter to Lawson, dated August 5, 1651. Dr. Williams's Library, London. Baxter, *MS Treatises* 6, item 197, p.59b. For Lawson see DNB, vol 32, p.289.

<sup>10</sup> Owen, *The Greater Catechism*, p.473, note 8.

determining to bestow upon them, for his sake, grace here, and everlasting happiness hereafter, for the praise of his glory, by the way of mercy." <sup>11</sup>

Owen insisted upon this view of election for a number of reasons. Of course, he wished to denounce any notion of merit attached to the human response to God's calling; he was always concerned to respond to what he thought were Arminian views on justification. <sup>12</sup> He also wanted his readers to know that election had been established from eternity by God, merited by the death of Christ, and effectually established by the Spirit. <sup>13</sup> The death of Christ was crucial; and here again the different views which Baxter and Owen had about the extent and effect of the cross of Christ must be recognised. This contrast between them reveals a tension within Reformed theology and especially among those who lived in the days after the Synod of Dort. <sup>14</sup> At one extreme was an explanation of election which stressed the absolute and immutable decrees of God. At the other were those who were inclined to stress election *de eventu*. In between were seventeenth century Reformed theologians who attempted to accommodate some elements of the two extreme positions. What may have happened, however, is in fact that which G.C. Berkouwer referred to when he wrote of the history of the doctrine of election.

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<sup>11</sup> Owen, *The Greater Catechism*, p. 473.

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 1, pp.48-51.

<sup>13</sup> See 3.3.2, pp.199-202.

<sup>14</sup> See the context outlined in 1.5.

The history of the doctrine shows that the danger of a deterministic interpretation of the word was often feared. But this fear often led to a tempering of the altogether merciful and sovereign superiority of the divine act of election, and to the establishing of the "counterpoise" - man's freedom to decide - which was to be a component factor in bringing about man's salvation.<sup>15</sup>

When Baxter and Owen are examined, then, it is evident that they wanted to show how election related to the human response to God's saving call. Baxter's stress on the condition of faith coincided with an understanding of election which, while it never diminished God's sovereignty, emphasized a close coordination between election and the actual response. For Baxter the issue had to do with the general or universal extent of the covenant of grace. Since common grace was given to all, election could not be the principal cause of the saints' faith. He acknowledged that Christ's merit was the meritorious cause, but there had to be lesser causes.

But the one thing I am to prove, is, that the Meritorious Cause is not the only cause and that Christ in his other actions is as truly the efficient cause, as in his meriting, and that all do sweetly and harmoniously concur to the entire effect; and that faith must have respect to the other causes of our Justification, and not alone to the Meritorious cause, and that we are justified by this entire work of Faith, and not only by that Act which respects the satisfaction of merit.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> G.C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprinted 1972), p.48. By far, however, the most important study of this doctrine appears in Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Geoffrey Bromiley translator (Edinburgh: T & T Clark) II.2. Also helpful, albeit too brief in sections, is Paul K. Jewett, *Election and Predestination* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp.5-21.

<sup>16</sup> Baxter, *Of Justification*, Treatise I, p.24.

In *Aphorismes of Justification* he had identified the various causes of justification: "the *causa sine qua non*, is both Christ's Satisfaction, and the faith of the Justified."<sup>17</sup> C.F. Allison has interpreted this controversial aspect of Baxter's teaching on justification and concluded: "according to Baxter, the imputation of our own faith is the formal cause of justification."<sup>18</sup> This interpretation is unwarranted: it comes from reading Baxter's implications rather than his precise declarations. In *Aphorismes* he argued that the "principal efficient cause" was God and the "instrumental cause" the promise or grant in the new covenant. In the same section he identified "procataretick" causes [i.e. those causes which precede, in the sense of preparation, the covenant]: the "meritorious cause" was the satisfaction of Christ; the "moral persuading cause" was the intercession of Christ and the supplication of the sinner; the "objective cause" was the necessity of the sinner; and the "occasion cause" was the opportunity and advantage for the glorifying of God's justice and mercy.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Baxter's understanding of justification rested primarily in his view of the nature of the covenant. "Common Redemption and the Decree of Common Grace," wrote Baxter, "both antecede that which is properly called Election, in order of Nature in esse objetivo; that is, God decreeth to give Faith and

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<sup>17</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p.213.

<sup>18</sup> C.F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism*, p.157.

<sup>19</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p.213.

Salvation to some of them that had common grace." <sup>20</sup>

In contrast, Owen, while equally concerned with the necessity of faith, offered his understanding of election in order to show with what absolute certainty the elect responded to the call of God. The coordination between election and the actual response occurred in God's secret predestinating will: which decreed for whom the Son would die and assured the effectual call of those chosen by God. Nonetheless, Owen recognised that election in itself was not part of God's revealed will.<sup>21</sup> Owen argued, therefore, that the gospel called for faith and repentance, not a knowledge of election.<sup>22</sup> In a work of 1655 he wrote, "the issue that lies before them who are commanded to draw nigh to God is, whether they will believe or no, God having given them eternal and unchangeable rules; 'He that believes shall be saved, and he that believes not, shall be damned ...'".<sup>23</sup> Still, it has to be appreciated that his definition of justifying faith depended upon Christ's merits for the elect, and only the elect had this faith: "The gracious free act of God, imputing the righteousness of Christ, to a believing sinner, and for that speaking peace unto his conscience, in the pardon of his sin, pronouncing him

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<sup>20</sup> Baxter, *An End of Doctrinal Controversies* (1691), p.161.

<sup>21</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.523.

<sup>22</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.524.

<sup>23</sup> Owen, *Vindicae Evangelicae: or the Mystery of the Gospel Vindicated* (1655), Goold ed., XII, p.553. All subsequent references taken from this edition.

to be just, and accepted before him."<sup>24</sup>

Again the marked difference between Owen and Baxter should be noted; while Owen agreed that the gospel could and should be preached to all, nevertheless, this did not imply a universalism or even antecedent common grace. It is worth quoting Owen at length :

We say, though God hath chosen some only to salvation by Christ, yet that the names of those same are not expressed in Scripture; the doing whereof would have been destructive to the main end of the word, the nature of faith, and all the ordinances of the gospel; yet God having declared that whosoever believeth shall be saved, there is sufficient ground for all and every man in the world, to whom the gospel is preached, to come to God by Christ, and other ground there is none, nor can be offered by the assertors of the pretended universality of God's love. Nor is this proposition, 'he that believes shall be saved', founded on the universality of love pleaded for, but the sufficiency of the means for the accomplishment of what is therein asserted: namely, the blood of Christ, who is believed on.<sup>25</sup>

Baxter's reaction to Owen's teaching on justification deserves further comment: for it shows Baxter's multiple meanings of the term justification. Essentially he accused Owen of suggesting that the moment of faith for a man was simply a justification in *foro conscientiae*. By this he meant that Owen was coming close to the Antinomian argument that a believer was merely appropriating the justification already procured for him when Christ died but which his guilty conscience needed to receive. In his *Confession* Baxter referred to Owen and argued: "The Justification by

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<sup>24</sup> Owen, *Greater Catechism*, Goold ed., I, p.487.

<sup>25</sup> Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, pp. 553-54.

Faith, so called in the Scriptures, is not the knowledge or feeling of Justification before given, or a Justification in and by our own consciences, or terminated in conscience, but is somewhat that goes before all such Justification as this is; and is indeed a Justification before God." <sup>26</sup> He attacked Owen on this point because he understood justification not only as the pardon of a man from his past sins and failures; Baxter also interpreted justification as a righteousness vis-a-vis the covenant demand for faith. This multiple meaning of justification cannot be emphasised enough. Baxter claimed that there was a continuous need for justification: there was forgiveness and reconciliation when believers came into the covenant, but on the day of judgment there will be a different aspect of justification. Stated baldly, the final judgment will not, maintained Baxter, be solely whether a man possessed the righteousness of Christ, but whether he was true to the covenant of grace. To quote Baxter at length:

But the turning point of the day is yet behind; 1. our allegation of Justification by Christ and the Covenant may be denied. It may be said by the Accuser, that the Covenant justifieth none but penitent Believers, and giveth plenary Right to Glory to none but Saints and persevering Conquerors, and that we are none such. Against this

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<sup>26</sup> Baxter, *Confession*, p.189. See especially pp.190-91 where Baxter accuses Owen of advocating such a position. See also Baxter's *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, p.38 where he explains the causality of Christ's death in relationship to God's eternal decree for an individual. In this passage Baxter insists that God merely foresaw, from eternity, the causality of Christ's death and obedience. His confusing point seems to be that to speak strictly of Christ's death as an existent cause from eternity is wrong: the actual moment of Christ's sufferings and obedience were at one specific time of history. The best interpretation of this thought lies with Baxter's understanding of the death of Christ as the means by which a new covenant and new relation to the law is established. See the argument offered in chapter 3.

accusation we must be justified or perish; else all the rest will be ineffectual. And here to say, that it is true, I died an impenitent Person, and Infidel, Hypocrite, or Ungodly, but Christ was a penitent believer for me, or sincere and holy for me, or that he died to pardon this, all this will be false and vain. Christ's Merits and Satisfaction is [sic] not the Righteousness it self which must justifie us against this Accusation; but our own personal Faith, Repentance, Sincere Holiness and Perseverance, purchased by Christ and wrought by the Spirit in us, but thence, our own acts. He that cannot truly say, The Accusation is false, I am a true Penitent, Sanctified persevering Believer must be condemned and perish. Thus faith and Repentance are our Righteousness by which we must thus far be justified. <sup>27</sup>

This could well substantiate C.F. Allison's interpretation, mentioned earlier, but Baxter was quick to point out in the same context that, "this is but a particular mediate subservient Righteousness, and part of our Justification, subordinate to Christ's Merits." <sup>28</sup>

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Owen answered Baxter's criticism in *Of the Death of Christ* (1650). In this work he denied that he advocated a justification in *foro conscientiae*. Nevertheless, he wrote, "I suggest also, whether absolution from the guilt of sin, and obligation unto death, though not as terminated in the conscience for complete justification, do not precede our actual believing." <sup>29</sup> This sounds suspiciously close to the criticism which Baxter made about Owen's views on

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<sup>27</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* II, p.71. See also Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Orme ed., vol 22, pp.91-92.

<sup>28</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* II, p.71.

<sup>29</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, Gould ed., X, p.470.

justification: there was a measure of justification, because of the decree of election, before the actual moment of faith. Owen claimed that in every sense, the elect, prior to faith, were under the wrath and condemnation of God.<sup>30</sup> There was, however, a modicum of contradiction in Owen's thought: on one hand, he insisted that the death of Christ merited *ipso facto* the justification of the elect, his death was a cause independent from the faith of the believer; on the other hand, Owen stressed the necessity of faith and repentance, for in the truest sense a person was not justified before personal faith. However, because he challenged the idea of suspension or conditionality, and emphasized the death of Christ to such an extent, Baxter assumed he was suggesting a justification from eternity.<sup>31</sup> Owen stated that in the strictest sense, yes, there was a justification from eternity but this was an incomplete justification. Until actual faith and repentance, what was lacking was: first, "that act of pardoning mercy terminated and completed in the conscience of the sinner"; second, "the heart isn't persuaded of the goodness and mercy of the promise"; and, lastly, "the soul hasn't rolled itself upon Christ, and received Christ."<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.468.

<sup>31</sup> Owen had written; "that our deliverance is to be referred to the death of Christ, according to its own causality; that is, as a cause meritorious. Now such causes do actually, and *ipso facto* produce all those effects, which immediately flow from them; not in an immediation of time but causality." *Of the Death of Christ*, p.450. Baxter seemingly missed this subtle qualification by Owen: easily done given the complexity of Owen's rhetoric.

<sup>32</sup> Owen, *Of the Death of Christ*, p.471.

Thus, the contrast between Baxter and Owen over the issue of election is important to an understanding of their views of justification. Both assumed election and predestination. Baxter gave greater stress, however, to the universal extent of the covenant; he was concerned to maintain the necessity of personal faith. Owen's views on election appear to have been based upon an emphasis on God's eternal decrees; yet this would be an inadequate interpretation. It was Owen's Christology which shaped his view of election; so too his Christology (ie. the death and merits of Christ) which determined his explanation of justification by faith.

## 5.2 The effectual call

Reference has already been made to the term, "effectual call", when examining Baxter and Owen's opinions on election. What did they mean by this? First, Owen and Baxter accepted a distinction between the external and the effectual call. Calvin had earlier referred to the "inner call", or simply to the "calling" and elsewhere to God's calling.<sup>33</sup> Perkins described an effectual call which was distinct from the call which reprobates received.<sup>34</sup> It was William Ames who distinguished between what he called the outward and the inward calling: the outward call was a promulgation of the gospel promises to all alike; the inner call was a kind of spiritual enlightenment which

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<sup>33</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* IV.i.2; III.vi.2; and III.xxii.4.

<sup>34</sup> Perkins, *A Golden Chain* XXXVI, p.225 and see also LIII, pp. 251-55.

only the elect received.<sup>35</sup> Later statements of doctrine took up this reference to the inward or effectual call of God.<sup>36</sup>

In his *Greater Catechism* of 1645 John Owen defined the call of God.

Q. What is our vocation, or this calling of God ?

A. The free, gracious act of Almighty God, whereby in Jesus Christ he calleth and translateth us from the state of nature, sin, wrath and corruption, into the state of grace, and union with Christ, by the mighty, effectual workings of his Spirit, in the preaching of the Word ...<sup>37</sup>

Baxter in, *A Call to the Unconverted* (1658), assumed that God issued an outward call to sinners. "He sendeth not you Prophets or Apostles, that receive their message by immediate Revelation; but yet he calleth you by his ordinary Ministers, who are commissioned by him to preach the same Gospel which Christ and his Apostles first delivered".<sup>38</sup> Through the Spirit and grace this outward call led to sincere faith and repentance.

Baxter and Owen were convinced about the importance and priority of preaching: it was for them the chief means of grace and so the primary way in which the effectual call was given. Through the preached word, they assumed that God addressed the minds and moved the wills of the congregation. By the means of preaching

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<sup>35</sup> Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, XXVI.10 and 13-14, p.158.

<sup>36</sup> Synod of Dort, headings 3 and 4, Schaff, *Creeds*, pp.589-90 and Westminster Confession, X.i and ii, Schaff, *Creeds*, pp. 624-625.

<sup>37</sup> Owen, *Greater Catechism*, p.486.

<sup>38</sup> Baxter, *A Call to the Unconverted*, Preface.

the elect were effectually called. Owen wrote, "For they [preachers] are used and employed in the work itself by the Spirit of God, and are by him made instrumental for the effecting of this new birth and life."<sup>39</sup> In *The Reformed Pastor* (1656), a work first prepared for fellow ministers of the Worcestershire Association, Baxter pressed the need for preaching and teaching the gospel to the unconverted:

The work of conversion is the first and great thing we must drive at; after this we must labour with all our might. Alas! the misery of the unconverted is so great, that it calleth loudest to us for compassion... O, therefore, brethren, whomsoever you neglect, neglect not the most miserable! Whatever you pass over, forget not poor souls that are under condemnation and curse of the law, and who may look every hour for the infernal execution, if a speedy change do not prevent it. O call after the impenitent, and ply this great work of converting<sup>40</sup> souls, whatever else you leave undone.

Both Baxter and Owen insisted that the preacher, after studying and applying the Word to himself, was to exposit the Scriptures in a clear and straight-forward way; he was the flock's pastor who must feed the sheep.

Baxter and Owen recognised that God called generally to all and specifically to his elect. Moreover, they both insisted that God's effectual call was as such due to the work of the Holy Spirit; it was the Spirit which enabled the man or woman to believe and repent. Commenting on Hebrews 3.1, Owen wrote in 1674:

These Hebrews came to be Holy Brethren

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<sup>39</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.188.

<sup>40</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, ed. by William Brown. Puritan Paperbacks. (Edinburgh/Carlisle: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974 and 1979), pp.94 and 96. For Worcestershire Association see above chapter 1, p.31, n.85.

children of God, united unto Christ, by their participation in an Heavenly calling. We are called out of darkness into his marvelous Light, 1 Pet 2.9. and this is not only with the outward Call of the Word, which many are made partakers of, who never attain the saving knowledge of Christ, Matth 20.16. but with that effectual call, which being granted in the pursuit of God's purpose of Election, Rom 8.28. is accompanied with the energetical quickening power of the Holy Ghost, Ephes 2.5. : giving Eyes to see, Ears to hear, and an Heart to obey the Word according unto the Promise of the Covenant; Jerem 32. 33,34. And thus no man can come to Christ<sup>41</sup> unless the Father draw him, John 6.44.

Baxter had a similar view. In his second publication, *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650), he wrote, "The chief distinction between those ineffectually called and those effectually called is that the latter receive the influence and illumination of the Spirit - to open their eyes to Scripture."<sup>42</sup> Human activity was recognised; and this indeed formed the rationale for the call of God to his people. Nevertheless, what could be easily forgotten was the importance of the Holy Spirit as the primary agent through whom the means of the call (preaching, reading Scripture, and the sacraments) had validity.

### 5.3 The work of the Holy Spirit

Attention to the role of the Holy Spirit is one of the chief characteristics of seventeenth century puritan theology. Geoffrey Nuttall has illustrated the

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<sup>41</sup> Owen, *Exercitations on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, 4 vols. (1668-1684), Vol 2, p.8.

<sup>42</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Orme ed., Vol 22, pp.176-77.

practical and experiential puritan understanding of the Holy Spirit. <sup>43</sup> This experiential emphasis upon the activity of the Spirit came not only from English puritanism's possible affinity with pietism as Stoeffler and Lang have suggested, but originated out of the earlier tradition of Calvin, Perkins and Ames. <sup>44</sup>

John Dykstra Eusden, in his introduction to Ames's *The Marrow of Theology*, has suggested:

For Calvin, most Reformed theologians, and the Puritans the work of the Holy Spirit was central; they were concerned especially with the present action of God in the lives of men; they were physicians of the soul analyzing symptoms of spiritual decay and prescribing ways in which religious experience and renewal could take place. Some of Calvin's most poetic language in the *Institutes* is found in the sections dealing with the Holy Spirit, described now as the water which washes clean and refreshes and now as the fire which purges and makes bright. <sup>45</sup>

Baxter and Owen's understanding of the Holy Spirit in the calling of the saints show similarities to earlier Reformers. Both insisted that the Spirit was the principal agent in the call of a believer to faith. It was the influence and illumination of the Spirit

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<sup>43</sup> Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1947) p.7 and passim. Also Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared*, pp. 9-10 and Charles L. Cohen, *God's Caress*, pp. 75 ff.

<sup>44</sup> Puritan theology and practice as an expression of pietism is considered briefly in chapter 1 of this thesis; the works concerned in the present argument are: F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leyden, 1965), especially Chapter 2, and August Lang, *Puritanismus und Pietismus* (Darmstadt: 1972), especially Chapters 3 and 4. For the significance of the Holy Spirit within Reformed theology see Alasdair Heron, *The Holy Spirit* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1983), pp. 102-110; B.B. Warfield, Introduction to Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, Reprinted (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. xxxiii; and Richard A. Gaffin, Jr., "The Holy Spirit", *WTJ*, Vol. 43, 1980/81, pp. 61-62.

<sup>45</sup> William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, translated from the Latin with an introduction by John Dykstra Eusden. Forward by Douglas Horton (Durham, North Carolina: The Labyrinth Press, 1983), p.36.

which brought about an individual's faith and repentance, or response to God's call. When discussing the *ordo salutis* Baxter referred to the "order of these workings of the Spirit".<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere he described conversion - which was the consequence of the effectual call - as the work of the Spirit.<sup>47</sup> Owen provided in 1674 one of the fuller works on the Holy Spirit. In this work he proposed, "For it is the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit, to make those things of the Father and Son effectual unto the souls of the Elect, to the praise of the Glory of the Grace of God."<sup>48</sup> Owen's treatise on the Holy Spirit was his comprehensive study, yet many of his ideas were suggested in some of his earlier works.<sup>49</sup> What made his 1674 work important was the way in which he offered a very detailed analysis of the Spirit's role in initiating the response to God's call. He emphasised that the Holy Spirit was not a "moral principal agent" - that is merely persuasive - but actually exercised a "physical immediate operation". Owen meant that the Spirit's influence actually was as a dynamic or power which worked upon, but never violated the will, in order to bring about faith and repentance. As shown in chapter 4, neither Owen nor Baxter suggested that the will was

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<sup>46</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Orme ed., Vol. 22, p.196.

<sup>47</sup> Baxter, *A Treatise of Conversion* (1657), Orme ed., vol 7. p.23.

<sup>48</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.155.

<sup>49</sup> See for example, Owen, *Saints Perseverance*, pp. 300-01; Owen, *Of Communion*, p.175.

coerced by the Spirit or grace.<sup>50</sup> For Owen it was an aided or healed will which responded to God's invitation; and only the Holy Spirit could aid and heal a sinner's will.

There is therefore necessary such a work of the Holy Spirit upon our wills, as may cure and take away the depravation of them before described, freeing us from the state of spiritual death, causing us to live unto God, determining them in and unto the acts of faith and obedience. And this he doth, whilst, and as he makes us new creatures, quickens us who were dead in trespasses and sins, gives us a new Heart, and puts a new Spirit within us, writes his law in our hearts, that we may do the mind of God, and walk in his ways; worketh in us to will and to do, making them who were unwilling and obstinate, to become willing and obedient and that freely and of choice.<sup>51</sup>

Owen and Baxter recognised, therefore, a particular effectual call of God. Furthermore, they both insisted that it was the Holy Spirit which caused the human response to the call of God, that is, faith and repentance. The Spirit employed the work of the preacher and the means of grace such as the Bible, prayer and evangelism to accomplish the effectual call. The specific ways in which the Spirit brought about the renewal of a person (or, as Baxter put it, how the new life "discovers itself") need to be considered next; specifically the question of preparation must be studied.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> See chapter 4, p.211.

<sup>51</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.284.

<sup>52</sup> Baxter, *Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.178.

#### 5.4 The question of preparation

Preparation for justification involved an attempt to explain how men and women were affected by the call of God, through its means, and then how they responded to this call. As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, preparation implied the use of the law to convict a person which in turn resulted in a self-involvement on the part of the individual.<sup>53</sup> The notion of some type of preparation existed within Reformed Theology.<sup>54</sup> Within sixteenth and seventeenth century Reformed theology there was a tension between the notion of God's supreme sovereignty in calling and justifying his people and the counterpoint call to, "Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed against me, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit ! Why will you die, O House of Israel ?" (Ezekiel 18.31). The coordination between human debility and human accountability was never free from misinterpretation. What occurred within Reformed theology, and English Reformed theology, as seen in the work of Perkins and Ames, was an attempt to express a balance between these two seemingly antithetical truths. By grace alone men and women were saved, yet they also had to respond to grace. For English puritans this was not only a theoretical problem but an experiential dilemma.

This dilemma was heightened by certain elements of thought within the mid-seventeenth century context. As

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<sup>53</sup> See chapter 1, pp.5 ff.

<sup>54</sup> H. Heppel, *Reformed Dogmatics*, p.513.

it was explained in the Introduction, the mid-seventeenth century context in which Baxter and Owen wrote was shaped by influences not experienced by earlier Elizabethan and Jacobean puritans. Among the more notable forces shaping the context were Arminianism and Antinomianism. Baxter and Owen wanted to avoid both; they saw these as extremes. Thus when Baxter and Owen referred to questions of preparation (ie. the role of the law, the process involved before justifying faith was exercised or the obtainment of assurance) they were either trying to avoid, on one hand, an Arminian modification of election, and predestination and, on the other hand, an Antinomian exaltation. When this aim is appreciated, their views on preparation become quite clear. Yet, it can also be shown that because of their differing views on the covenant of grace, the way in which they avoided the extremes of either Arminianism or Antinomianism led them to dissimilar understandings of preparation. Furthermore, when in this section Baxter and Owen are compared and contrasted not only with each other but with John Bunyan, offered here as an example of the multiple expressions of mid-seventeenth century puritan theology, the evidence suggests that middle and later seventeenth century preparationism *per se* cannot be uniformly classified.

Richard Baxter acknowledged that in the *ordo salutis* men and women when effectually called were passive. A person was convicted and made "sensible" by the Spirit. Yet once the will was made new the person had to cleave

willingly to God.<sup>55</sup> There had to be an "affectionate accepting".<sup>56</sup> After this a sinner delivered himself up to Christ. In this process it was accepted that men and women were required to perform some preparatory actions. Baxter, however, never made these actions conditions of the covenant. The only condition, as observed in chapter 4, was faith. Men and women were required to come and hear sermons, to open their minds to argument, and to be willing to consider the gospel. In his *Treatise of Conversion* Baxter explained what he meant:

But then, there are some actions of the unconverted, that are in order to their conversion, and these God accepteth not, so as to their persons, as of one reconciled to him in Christ, nor as he accepteth the works of his people, not so as to be engaged by promise for their reward. But yet he so far accepteth them, that they are ordinarily the way in which he will be found; and in which he will give them greater things. They are means of his appointing for the conversion of their souls, which he hath not appointed them to use in vain.<sup>57</sup>

Baxter's view on preparation related to his understanding of grace. In 1658 he wrote,

Though you cannot be converted without the special Grace of God, yet you must know that God giveth this Grace in the use of his holy means which he hath appointed to that end; and common grace may enable you to forbear your gross sinning (as to the outward act) and to use those means.<sup>58</sup>

It must be recalled that he argued that the covenant of

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<sup>55</sup> Baxter, *Saints Rest*, pp.178-82.

<sup>56</sup> Baxter, *Saints Rest*, p.193.

<sup>57</sup> Baxter, *A Treatise of Conversion*, Orme ed. Vol 7, p.175

<sup>58</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted*, Preface

grace was a universal covenant.<sup>59</sup> All humanity was offered "common grace". Common grace did not convert and regenerate, it only led to the work of "special grace": the grace which brought about true conversion and regeneration. Even special grace had two parts: first special renewing grace which was unconditional and prior to justification, and then the special grace of sanctification.<sup>60</sup> Men and women were not prepared initially by the law's bruising but by common grace. Baxter argued this way because of his view of the covenant: the law was appropriated into the gospel administration, it did not stand in isolation from grace.<sup>61</sup> This had everything to do with Christ as the new law-giver; the law came under Christ's covenant control and so the law was conditionally suspended. It was discharged in that men and women were no longer under its condemnation provided they had faith in Christ.<sup>62</sup> To be sure, the law softened hearts and provoked a "sensibility" to the evil of sin and the soul's misery; still, Baxter wrote in *The Saints Everlasting Rest* that this was accomplished by the law in coordination with the gospel.<sup>63</sup> But it was supremely the work of the Holy Spirit; thus while the

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<sup>59</sup> See above chapter 3.3, p.183.

<sup>60</sup> Baxter details this in *Catholick Theologie* I.iii. p.55 again in *And End to Doctrinal Controversies*, p.177. Elsewhere he called common grace "sufficient objective grace" and special grace "internal grace"; see *Confession*, Preface sig (a).

<sup>61</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, p.35.

<sup>62</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification*, p.82

<sup>63</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Orme ed. Vol 22, p.182

law disturbed and provoked the need for repentance, this repentance only occurred as a result of the Spirit having brought about the first act of special faith: "like a seed which exciteth the first act before a habit, though not ordinarily before some preparations." <sup>64</sup>

So when Baxter considered which came first, repentance or faith, he suggested:

When God moveth the soul to believe or repent, we must conceive that in the instant antecedent to the act, the soul receiveth some impress or impulse from the divine essence by <sup>65</sup>which it is disposed or moved to act.

Baxter also explained that preparation by common grace was only to prepare the way for special grace. Furthermore, such preparation need not always have occurred: there were exceptional cases of people brought to faith suddenly. In 1675 Baxter, seeing himself as a reconciler between Calvinist and Arminian, went so far as to suggest that,

The object of Gods will, to give special grace, which shall effectually cause men to repent and believe, is ordinarily a fore-seen disposed sinner prepared by his common grace; but sometimes an unprepared sinner, whom, of his free will, he will suddenly convert, as it pleaseth him freely to distribute his benefits (all being unworthy). <sup>66</sup>

One last consideration: Baxter never thought that the will was entirely passive to this preparation by

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<sup>64</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* II, p.46

<sup>65</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.iii, p.26 and I.ii, p.84 Baxter, *Christian Directory*, (1673), Urme ed., Vol 2, p.182.

<sup>66</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, II.,p.13. Baxter wrote similarly in *An End to Doctrinal Controversies*, p.320, but insisted that, "it is not to be taken for his ordinary way."

common grace.<sup>67</sup> He stressed the free and personal response of both the understanding and the will. "Hell would not be so full, if people were but willing to know their case, and to hear and think of it."<sup>68</sup>

Because of this assumption Baxter issued his exhortations to sinners. He told them to repent and receive the gospel promises.<sup>69</sup> Men and women were encouraged by Baxter to try and see if they were true believers. "Unless you take it for an indifferent thing, whether you live for ever in Heaven or Hell; its best for you to put the question close to your consciences betimes."<sup>70</sup> He maintained, however, that it was not wholly a case of mere willingness by which one received faith to believe; rather it was complying with common preparing grace. The individual was urged not to harden his heart, not to ignore means or help, and not to resist the promptings of the Spirit.

Refuse not Christ, and he will not refuse you: And when he is willing, if you be but willing, truly willing to be saved from sin and misery, and to have Christ, Grace, and Glory in the use of the means which God hath appointed you, neither Earth nor Hell can hinder your salvation ...<sup>71</sup>

Evidence of Baxter's voluntarism is evident as he explained how, by means of common grace, one was

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<sup>67</sup> Baxter, *Treatise on Conversion*, Orme ed., Vol 7, p.23

<sup>68</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted*, pp.22-23; see also Baxter, *Christian Directory*, Orme ed., Vol 2, pp.5-88.

<sup>69</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted*, pp. 63-64

<sup>70</sup> Baxter, *The Life of Faith As It Is* (1660) p.31. This sermon was earlier preached before Charles II on Hebrews 11.1.

<sup>71</sup> Baxter, *Compassionate Counsel*, p.79

willingly to exercise a desire for special grace.

And also I entreat you, that you will upon your knees beseech the Lord that he will open your eyes to understand the truth, and turn your hearts to the Love of God, and beg of him all that saving grace that you have so long neglected, and follow it on from day to day, till your hearts be changed.<sup>72</sup>

Baxter, then, accepted a preparation for faith. It is to be noted, however, that this preparation was a work of grace, begun by common grace and continued by special grace. Common grace employed the use of the law, but the law was never divorced from the wider context of the covenant of grace because Christ was the new law-giver. Baxter's preparation displayed a voluntaristic emphasis, but in comparison to the earlier preparationism of Perkins, for example, Baxter's was sharply different.<sup>73</sup> Principally his preparation was through common grace given to all in a universally extended covenant of grace.

John Bunyan, as an example of late puritan theology which was slightly different than either Baxter or Owen's, expressed an understanding of preparation in a slightly distinctive way. In *Some Gospel Truths Opened* (1656), Bunyan urged upon his readers a self-examination by means of the Word of God to see if "thou hast as yet any beginnings of desiring after religion". Bunyan did not explain clearly how these "beginnings" were brought about, whether by one's own

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<sup>72</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted*, Preface.

<sup>73</sup> See Perkins, *Golden Chain* XXXVI, p.228-229 in Breward, *Perkins*; and *The Foundation of Christian Religion Gathered into Six Principles*, "The fourth principle expounded", p. 156 in Breward, *Perkins*.

efforts or by grace. What he encouraged was a looking to the law or commandments of God so as to appreciate the enormity of personal sin. Bunyan referred to the work of the Holy Spirit in this process, but even here he suggested it was up to the individual to "beg of God to convince thee by his Holy Spirit, not only of sins against the Law, but also of that damning sin, the sin of unbelief."<sup>74</sup>

Two years later Bunyan wrote *A Few Sighs From Hell* (1658) and again urged his readers to plead for grace. He inferred that before actual conversion there must be a voluntary acknowledgement not only of one's sinfulness but of one's need for grace. He seems to have suggested that one should wait for grace. While Bunyan did not refer to this as a state of preparation, neither did he suggest this waiting or pleading period was anything other than prior to justification.<sup>75</sup>

Still clearer was Bunyan's account of Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). Christian meets Evangelist while under a siege of conviction: implying the initial work of the law. Equally important, Christian is informed that there must be a willingness to close with Christ or else all is lost.<sup>76</sup> A bit later, Christian is entertained at the home of Interpreter. Interpreter shows Christian a number of truths: one in particular is a picture of a man

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<sup>74</sup> Bunyan, *Some Gospel Truths Opened*, Offor ed., Volume 2, p.136.

<sup>75</sup> Bunyan, *A Few Sighs From Hell*, Offor ed., Volume 3, p.701

<sup>76</sup> Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) Spire Books (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell, 1975), p.14.

sweeping out a room. Interpreter explains that if the room is swept only with a broom (the law) than the dust (original sin) is never removed. Only when the water of the gospel is sprinkled is the dust removed.<sup>77</sup> Did Bunyan have in mind a preparation, involving bruising and waiting? Admittedly Interpreter shows Christian the vision of a fire burning against a wall despite the cold water poured upon it.<sup>78</sup> Interpreter explains that this is to show Christian the enduring work of grace in a person's life; but in the context it is hard to tell whether Christian is to understand this as an explanation of his own state, as one prior to true faith and regeneration, or as a lesson in general. What is clear is that only when Christian comes at last to the cross does his burden of sin roll away, and he is told of pardon, clothed with new garments and given the Roll with the seal on it.<sup>79</sup>

It is arguable, therefore, that Bunyan suggested a type of preparation. There was a primary and efficacious work of the law, yet never sufficient apart from the work of the Spirit of Christ. Bunyan's paradigms, Christian and Helpful suggest a gradual process rather than a sudden seizure.<sup>80</sup> What is most important for a study of voluntarism was Bunyan's

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<sup>77</sup> Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.31.

<sup>78</sup> Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.33. See Richard Greaves, "John Bunyan and Covenant thought in the Seventeenth Century", *CH*, 36, 1967, pp.154 ff. Greaves is quite correct in arguing that Bunyan saw the Law as a restatement of the covenant of works; yet one could not come to Christ through an obedience to the Law, for it was only a tutor to Christ.

<sup>79</sup> Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, p.39-40.

<sup>80</sup> Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress*, pp.76 ff.

insistence upon a willingness. It was not merely knowledge or conviction, there had to be a choosing of Christ and his benefits.

Looking at some of John Bunyan's work makes it all the more interesting to examine John Owen, for Bunyan and Owen knew each other and appreciated each other's work.<sup>81</sup> Yet, whereas Bunyan's preparation was explicit, Owen went in a dissimilar direction. According to Owen it was impossible for men and women to prepare themselves for justification. In his *Greater Catechism* (1645) he answered the question, "What do we ourselves perform in this work of our conversion?"

A. Nothing at all, being merely wrought upon, by the free grace and Spirit of God, when in ourselves we have no ability to any thing that is spiritually good...<sup>82</sup>

Owen's anthropology and doctrine of sin explained his rejection of preparation: "we being dead by nature in trespasses and sins, have no power to prepare ourselves for the receiving of God's grace; nor in the least measure to believe, and turn ourselves unto him."<sup>83</sup>

Owen never denied that ordinarily there were, what he called, "internal Spiritual Effects", which preceded

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<sup>81</sup> It is quite possible that Owen proved instrumental in the publication of the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Owen introduced his own publisher, Nathaniel Ponder, to Bunyan. (Roger Sharrock, *John Bunyan*. Papermac (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1968), p.69.) According to Peter Toon, Owen called upon Thomas Barlow, then Bishop of Lincoln, to help release Bunyan from his internment in Bedford Prison; Barlow was unable to assist. Owen is reported to have claimed before the King, "Could I possess the tinker's abilities for preaching, please your majesty, I would gladly relinquish all my learning." (Peter Toon, *God's Statesman*, pp. 161-62.).

<sup>82</sup> Owen, *The Greater Catechism*, p.486.

<sup>83</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.126.

regeneration: illumination, conviction and reformation.<sup>84</sup>

In this respect Owen retained the necessity of these steps in the *ordo salutis*. Owen accepted the use of the law to bring unregenerate men and women to justification, even in a preparatory fashion. "Let no man think to understand the gospel, who knoweth nothing of the law."<sup>85</sup> Owen followed Calvin's understanding of the use of the law: it was not meant to establish a righteousness but to lay "open unto us the utter disability of our nature", to charge "the wrath and curse of God, due to sin, upon the conscience", and to bring "the whole soul under bondage to sin, death, Satan, and hell, so making us long and seek for a Saviour."<sup>86</sup> Owen frequently insisted that even the elect fell under the full force of the law's condemnation until they were brought to faith.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, the conviction which came from the law was principally the work of the Spirit. Owen never separated the law from the Spirit; so even the law was subordinate to the merciful and gracious working of the Holy Spirit. Owen went even further. Repentance (true evangelical repentance) came through the law but fundamentally it was due to "Gospel Grace".<sup>88</sup> In this way he implied that repentance and faith were not

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<sup>84</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.193.

<sup>85</sup> Owen, *Doctrine of Justification* (1677), Goold ed., V, p.98.

<sup>86</sup> Owen, *Greater Catechism*, p.476 and also *Hebrews*, vol. 1, p.66.

<sup>87</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, p.179.

<sup>88</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, vol. 3., p.18.

sharply distinct because, "Repentance is either legal, servile, and terrifying, from the spirit of bondage; or evangelical, filial, and comforting, from the Spirit of free grace and liberty, which only is available." <sup>89</sup>

In this way he explained that preachers needed to be careful when using the law:

It is their [preachers] duty to plead with men about their sins, to lay load on particular sins, but always remember, that it is done with that which is the proper end of law and gospel: that is, that they make use of sin they speak against, to the discovery of the state and condition wherein the sinner is; otherwise, haply they may work men to formality and hypocrisy, but with little of the true end of preaching the gospel will be brought about. It will not avail to beat a man off from his drunkenness, into a sober formality. A skillful master of assemblies lays his axe at the root, drives at the heart. <sup>90</sup>

According to Owen, merely having illumination, conviction and reformation was not enough. In fact, Owen went so far as to suggest that while there are certain "previous and preparatory works, or workings in and upon the souls of men, that are antecedent and dispositive unto it", nevertheless, "regeneration doth not consist in them, nor can it be deduced out of them." <sup>91</sup>

Owen, like Bunyan and Baxter, insisted on a willingness. <sup>92</sup> Owen, however, more clearly than Baxter and Bunyan, argued that this willingness was not

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<sup>89</sup> Owen, *Greater Catechism*, pp.487-88.

<sup>90</sup> Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656), Goold ed., VI, pp. 38-39.

<sup>91</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.191.

<sup>92</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.198. See also *Doctrine of Justification*, pp.100-01.

synonymous with preparation or even the result of common grace, but was the fruit of the Spirit's work and the consequence of God's grace in the effectual call.<sup>93</sup> This had particular implications for the will's role in conversion.

Owen maintained that in conversion the will was initially passive. There was no co-operating action "to our turning". It was "not, I say, the cause of the work, but the subject wherein it is wrought, 'having only a passive capability for the receiving of that supernatural being, which is introduced by grace.'"<sup>94</sup> Owen was emphatic, "that in the order of nature, the Acting of Grace in the will in our conversion is antecedent unto its own acting."<sup>95</sup> Still, Owen never minimised the importance of the will in the stages prior to justification. His voluntarism was evident. In his exegesis of Hebrews 6.1 he wrote,

It is our turning unto God; our turning from him being the bent and inclination of our Wills and Affections unto sin. The change of the Will, or taking away the will of sinning is the principal part of repentance. It is with respect unto our wills that we are said to be dead in sin, and alienated from the life of God. And by this change of the will, do we become dead unto sin. Rom 6.2 that is, whatever remainder of lust or corruption there may be in us,<sup>96</sup> yet the will of sinning is taken away.

Owen similarly never denied the importance of external means as aids in leading sinners to

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<sup>93</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.185.

<sup>94</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.134.

<sup>95</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.272.

<sup>96</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, vol. 3., p.13.

justification. It was necessary to demonstrate "a diligent attention of mind to the means of grace to understand and receive the things revealed and declared as the mind and will of God."<sup>97</sup> It was through these means that God ordinarily saved sinners.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, even on this Owen wished to qualify:

In the most diligent use of outward means, men are not able of themselves to attain unto regeneration, or complete conversion to God, without an especial, effectual, internal work of the<sup>99</sup> Holy Spirit of grace on the whole soul.

If we look then at Baxter and Owen (with a contrast in Bunyan) it is evident that some of the themes of earlier preparationism continued into the mid-seventeenth century. They both recognised the experiential truth that a long process was involved. Second, they accepted the use of the law as a preparatory means; but Baxter did not go as far as did Owen and Bunyan. Finally, both Baxter and Owen acknowledged the importance of the appointed means by which God ordinarily prepared sinners. Owen, however, was hesitant to place a confidence either in common grace or in human willingness apart from the powerful dynamic of the Spirit's regenerating work.

### 5.5 The irresistibility of God's call

It has been argued so far in this chapter that justification encompassed the meeting of the divine

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<sup>97</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.193.

<sup>98</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.193.

<sup>99</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.193.

initiative and the human response. The nexus of these two was an encounter shaped by the election of the saints yet also the involvement of a preparatory use of the law. It is important to ask now whether these doctrinal assertions were consistent with puritan experience. In short, was it merely inevitable that the elect came to faith? How much did the human response matter to the justification of the saints? It is asserted in this section that the question of irresistibility warrants investigation in order to ascertain the vitality of voluntarism in justification. Puritan preachers saw that many in their congregation did not respond to the gospel, or if a few did only a handful seemed to progress in the Christian life.<sup>100</sup>

For the puritan pastor, the question was inescapable: are only a few to be saved? To be sure, the doctrine of reprobation was accepted. Nevertheless, this theory presented existential tensions. Not only was it difficult to discern the elect from the reprobate, but more often than not prior to their conversion even the saints experienced lives of sin and alienation from God. As men and women looked back at their experience many saw how they fought against God and lived in sin and rebellion: witness Nehemiah Wallington's paroxysms of guilt and remorse and Bunyan's testimony in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666).<sup>101</sup> Even those like Baxter, who were not clear as to the

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<sup>100</sup> Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (1673), Orme ed., Vol. 2, pp.91-93, expressed his frustration and alarm.

<sup>101</sup> For Nehemiah Wallington see Seaver, *Wallington's World*. This theme runs throughout the whole of Seaver's presentation.

particular moment when they first believed, could easily see how much they had resisted God's movements of grace.<sup>102</sup> The implication was practical: obviously even the elect resist God's call to an extent; did this, then, imply the necessity of human agency or a weakness in divine grace? A number of answers were given.

John Owen argued that the call of God was irresistible. He maintained this position because he saw the specific moment of justifying faith as proof of an antecedent decree of God (hidden to the believer but known to God). Because God's will and purpose in his decree of election was immutable and infallible, the faith of the elect was sure and infallible. Commenting on Romans 11.29 Owen wrote, "The gifts and calling of God', are said to be, 'without repentance': the gifts of his effectual calling (ἐν δὲ δούλῳ) shall never be repented of. They are from him, with whom there is no change."<sup>103</sup> Against the moderate Arminian, John Goodwin, who suggested that election and reprobation were not determined solely by God's decree but upon the subsequent faithfulness of the individual, Owen claimed that before actual faith God first moved with grace and mercy.<sup>104</sup> In his treatise on the Holy Spirit Owen insisted that the Spirit's work in the effectual call, "is always infallible, victorious, irresistible or always efficacious." He went on to argue, "Wherefore

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<sup>102</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I. pp.5-7.

<sup>103</sup> Owen, *Saints Perseverance*, p.122.

<sup>104</sup> Owen, *Saints Perseverance*, p.122. For John Goodwin see *DNB*, vol 22, 145.

in or towards whomsoever the Holy Spirit puts forth his power, or acts of his grace for their regeneration, it removes all obstacles, overcomes all oppositions, and infallibly produceth the effect intended." <sup>105</sup>

Nevertheless, Owen acknowledged that individuals indeed resisted the outward call of God. The external means of grace - preaching, the reading of Scripture, acts of obedience, exhortations, etc. - were resisted by the human will and understanding. Still, the inner movement of grace and the Holy Spirit were invincible. In his first publication (1643) Owen wrote:

The operation of grace is resisted by no hard heart, because it mollifies the heart itself. It doth not so much take away a power of resisting, as gives a will of obeying, whereby the powerful impotency of resistance is removed. <sup>106</sup>

Later in 1654 and again in 1674 Owen admitted that there was resistance to God's call by the elect but their resistance and reluctance were conquered by the inner power of the Holy Spirit which created a complying will where there was once a pugnacious will.<sup>107</sup>

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Baxter suggested that in a general sense the call of God could be resisted by the human will, even though the elect would not resist this forever. Unlike Owen, however, Baxter did not base his argument on the immutability of God's eternal decrees. He stressed that the question of irresistibility was irrelevant

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<sup>105</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.270.

<sup>106</sup> Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, p.134.

<sup>107</sup> Owen, *Saints Perseverance*, pp.174-175; see also *Holy Spirit*, p.271

because God's decree in eternity could only meet with human resistance by those who exist actually in time. This was a difficult philosophical and metaphysical argument. What he meant was that election had more to do with God's knowledge of a certain event rather than the decree of the event.

Baxter contended that it was conversion which was irresistible. On one occasion he wrote, "but eventually the Grace of the Spirit in conversion is insuperable: for God will overcome the resistance of his elect."<sup>108</sup>

Asked whether this conversion was infallible Baxter responded that it was, but only to the extent that it related to God's knowledge of the event, not in relation to God's will, purpose or resolution; this differed from Owen's view as detailed above. Baxter claimed that divine determination was an ambiguous term: again, how could God predetermine an individual to believe when the person did not exist from eternity but in time?<sup>109</sup> Nevertheless, even the inevitable certainty of the elect's faith never precluded resistance. In *Catholick Theologie* (1675) Baxter offered a detailed explanation of the resistance which the elect gave:

Mans sinful soul resisteth God's gracious operations, all these ways. 1. It is passively become undisposed to reception: And thus he is said to have a hard heart of stone, and a seared conscience, and to be dead and past feeling, Eph 4.18,19 and 2.1,2. 2. It doth not do what it can do morally to receive grace, that is, it doth not

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<sup>108</sup> Baxter, Letter to Samuel Whittell, March 9, 1654, Baxter *MS Treatises* 7, item 270, p.321.

<sup>109</sup> See above pp.254-55.

conari or suscitare it self to be willing of it. 3. Yea, it doth positively resist by action, and is unwilling of God's gracious operations: And this is twofold, 1. By willing the contrary, and prosecuting carnal interest, over-loving the pleasures of the flesh, and so turning away from the motions of grace, 2. And therefore by an enmity to that grace and work, which would convert him, and take him off his chosen Idols. <sup>110</sup>

It was this resistance, what Baxter frequently called unwillingness, which he strove to overcome in his role as a preacher and writer: "I beseech thee, I charge thee, to hear and obey the call of God, and resolvedly to turn, that thou may live." <sup>111</sup> Baxter stressed the urgent need for grace in order to repent and respond to God's call. Baxter referred to the debility of the human will with respect to the call of God. As he explained, only by "excitation, illumination and right Disposition" is one turned. Nevertheless, Baxter noted in 1691,

But as to the said right Disposition, or moral power, no one can truly repent and believe without that grace which must so dispose him: common grace must dispose him to a common faith, and special grace to a saving faith. <sup>112</sup>

Did both really differ so much? Certainly they arrived at their conclusions from different assumptions. Both held to a high doctrine of grace. Equally, they agreed that the elect were predestined to saving faith. Baxter and Owen appreciated, however,

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<sup>110</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, p.21.

<sup>111</sup> Baxter, *Call to the Unconverted*, Preface

<sup>112</sup> Baxter, *An End to Doctrinal Controversies*, p.177 also Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, p.13.

the necessity of human response. Yes, they both argued, there was a resistance of sorts: it was common experience among the converted to recall and regret the ways in which they resisted the saving overtures of mercy. But this experiential awareness was actually part of the paradox: ultimately the elect would be saved and come to faith; their resistance would change into compliance. Owen linked this inevitability with his Christology: by the death of Christ the elect were brought to saving faith. On the whole, Baxter also thought that there was a certain infallibility: how he arrived at this conclusion was not so much due to the decree of God in predestination as with the nature of grace. Was this a great difference of opinion? Fundamentally it was not, yet the way in which they arrived at their answers reflects, once again, their disparate views on the covenant and faith. What is striking, however, is that they both recognized the paramount importance of willingness: the reprobate were unwilling to repent, the faithful were ultimately willing.

### Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with the interaction of the divine initiative and the human response. It is possible to isolate these two in a doctrinal analysis, but this defies the reality of puritan theology and experience. The divine initiative and the human response were not mutually exclusive: there was an almost inscrutable meeting of the two. Baxter and Owen

at times wrote about the two in such a way as to suggest that one could be examined apart from the other, but their ultimate intention was to explain to their readers how they could make sense of their Christian experience. The mid-seventeenth century puritan looked intently at the *ordo salutis* to see if his experience of grace made sense. For the lack of a better expression, there was a sanctified self-suspicion: they were instructed by Baxter and Owen to rest not so much upon their own activity (essential yet frequently failing) but on Christ and the covenant promises. Baxter and Owen addressed the believers' concerns in such a way as to safeguard (they believed) the extremes of both Arminianism and Antinomianism. What has emerged in this chapter is how they both argued that the divine initiative was neither minimized nor thwarted by the human response. Equally, both underscored the importance of a willing response: the intellect was crucial, but the will was vital. On this assumption, what Baxter and Owen had to write about the practical issues of Christian living and the ultimate hope of assurance involved a voluntarism. How this voluntarism was exercised practically is the issue examined next.

## Chapter Six

VOLUNTARISM IN PRACTICE: A WILLINGNESS IN DUTIESIntroduction

The driving force of puritan spirituality involved an important "willingness". This meant an active self-involvement on the part of those following Jesus Christ, moved and influenced by grace and the Holy Spirit. The importance of voluntarism becomes all the more apparent in this chapter when the role of the will in the Christian life is investigated. For as stated in ~~the~~ chapter 1, puritan divinity was practical divinity.<sup>1</sup> There was a subjective or experiential element within puritan theology. This element was a counter-point to the objective realm of doctrinal truth. Peter Lake, in *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church*, has put it well.

Puritan practical divinity centred around the exploitation of the gap, the anxiety-filled rift, that separated those two levels. This was done by a subtle shift of perspective from the objective basis provided by the doctrine of predestination to the situation of the individual believer confronted by the knowledge that some men were elect and others reprobate and yet denied an answer to the key question of his own status relative to those two groups. The preacher thereupon confronted the believer with a description of the objective characteristics of a godly or elect person. But in the final analysis the individual's position depended on his own view of himself, on his own choice of whether fully to internalise and appropriate those qualities or not.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See above, p.69.

<sup>2</sup> Lake, *Moderate Puritans*, p.156.

It is to this internalisation or appropriation of the puritan godly self that this chapter turns. We will examine how Baxter and Owen viewed practical problems of the Christian life in a voluntaristic way. This can be seen in the way in which Baxter and Owen explained how God's grace related to the duties which the godly were expected to perform. Accordingly, this chapter will begin (6.1) with a study of the relationship between grace and duty. Four issues will be involved here: first, it will be necessary to consider (6.1.1) how Baxter and Owen viewed duties as dependent upon the influence of the Spirit; second, (6.1.2), how they argued that grace was improved as a person performed evangelical duties; third, (6.1.3), how duties involved the use of means; and, finally, (6.1.4), why, according to Baxter and Owen, duties were subordinate to a trust in Christ's merits. The chapter will then examine, (6.2), the fundamental duty of fighting sin and growing in holiness, for here the essential nature of voluntarism in practice can be seen. This will involve in (6.2.1) studying how Baxter and Owen explained the reality and problems of indwelling sin. The chapter will conclude in (6.2.2) with their teaching on the duty of mortification. It will be shown that mortification was seen as a duty dependent upon grace and the Holy Spirit; but it also necessitated a deliberate willingness. Thus in this chapter Baxter and Owen's voluntarism in practice will be presented. The doctrinal framework delineated in the previous four chapters has to be understood as the

practical implications are examined in this chapter.

### 6.1 Grace complemented by duty

In 1643 John Owen wrote, "holiness, whereof faith is the root, and obedience the body, is that whereunto, and not for which, we are elected."<sup>3</sup> The pursuit of holiness was a prominent aspect of puritan practical theology. The seriousness of the "godly" of both the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can be explained as a result of an interpretation of the Bible which stressed the necessity of obedience, godliness and faithfulness. This emphasis was in no way opposed to the doctrine of justification. Holiness was not meritorious on its own; still, it was appropriately necessary. Richard Baxter was not vitriolic when he asked in 1650,

Where is the man that is serious in his Christianity? Methinks men do everywhere make but a trifle of their eternal state. They look after it but a little upon the by; they do not make it the task and business of their lives.<sup>4</sup>

Owen agreed: the task and business of the saints were to evidence, "the other internal changes of the Mind, Will and Affections to be real and sincere."<sup>5</sup>

Baxter and Owen followed the axiom of earlier Reformers: sanctification was the goal of election and

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<sup>3</sup> Owen, *Display of Arminianism*, p.66.

<sup>4</sup> Baxter, *Saints Rest*, Orme ed., Vol 22, p.451.

<sup>5</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, Vol. 3, p.13.

God's intention and purpose in the daily provision of grace to his people. Sanctifying grace implied duty: for such the saints were intended. Calvin insisted that, "Christ cannot be known apart from the sanctification of his Spirit. It follows that faith can in no wise be separated from a devout disposition."<sup>6</sup> Commenting upon Romans 8.13 Calvin made the following distinction:

Let believers, therefore, learn to embrace Him, not only for justification, but also for sanctification, as He has been given to us for both these purposes, that they may not rend Him asunder by their own mutilated faith.<sup>7</sup>

Calvin maintained that repentance was a life-long process, involving mortification and vivification. Mortification was based in the death and burial of Christ, in which the believer denied himself and repented daily for his sins. Vivification came by the risen and triumphant Christ and his Holy Spirit which created the new nature within the believer. The process of mortification and vivification was lengthy, but one to which God was actively committed:

through continual and sometimes even slow advances God wipes out in his elect the corruptions of the flesh, cleanses them of guilt, consecrates them to himself as temples renewing all their minds to true purity that they may practice repentance throughout their lives and know that this warfare will end only at death.<sup>8</sup>

It was not that the saints were sinless or arrived at

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<sup>6</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.ii.8; *OS*, IV, p.18: fidem a pio affectu nullo modo esse distrahendam. See also *Comm.* on 1 Peter 1.15, p.245.

<sup>7</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* on Romans 8.13, p.167.

<sup>8</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.iii.8.

perfection; it was a life-long and often disturbed progression. Nevertheless, sin had lost its dominion. Through the merits of Christ's righteousness, death on the cross, resurrection from the dead and his Spirit, God worked in his people a new life.<sup>9</sup> Always it was God who initiated sanctification.<sup>10</sup> Still, believers were responsible for coordinate action, they were to live in a manner which corresponded to their calling:

we are adopted on the ground that He should in turn have us as His obedient children. Although obedience does not make us his children, since the gift of adoption is gratuitous, yet it distinguishes children from foreigners.<sup>11</sup>

When Calvin described the life of a Christian man he insisted that his life must manifest a "harmony and agreement between God's righteousness and their obedience, and thus to confirm the adoption that they have received as sons."<sup>12</sup> Holiness was to be the bond of the Christian's union with God because God could only associate with what was clean. Only Christ's death cleansed sinners and enabled them to be with the holy.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See Calvin, *Comm.* on Romans 6.4, p.123.

<sup>10</sup> See Calvin, *Comm.* on 1 Thessalonians 5.23, p.380.

<sup>11</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* on 1 Peter 1.14, p.244. Later in chapter 7 reference will be made to the issue of sanctification and assurance. At this point, however, note Calvin's suggestion that holy living "distinguishes" children from foreigners. Who is it that perceives this distinguishing? Consider what Calvin wrote when commenting on 2 Peter 1.10 (a *classicus locus* for the practical syllogism): "purity of life is rightly regarded as the illustration and evidence of election, whereby the faithful not only show to others that they are the sons of God, but also confirm themselves in this faith, but in such a way that they place their sure foundations elsewhere.", p.334. Here Calvin accepted some degree of self-evidence, but the qualifier was, "their sure foundations elsewhere". The sure foundation was Christ's accomplished work on the cross and his continuous intercession.

<sup>12</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.vi.1. See also *Comm.* on 1 Thess 4.3, pp. 358-59 and *Comm.* on Psalm 1.1,2 (Calvin Translation Society, Anderson edition, 1845), p.3.

<sup>13</sup> Calvin, *Comm.* on Hebrews 12.14, p.195.

Calvin called this not a doctrine of the tongue but of the heart. Every part of the saints' being must be involved in the call to holiness.<sup>14</sup>

For we have been adopted as sons by the Lord with this one condition: that our life express Christ, the bond of our adoption. Accordingly, unless we give and devote ourselves to righteousness, we not only revolt from our Creator with wicked perfidy, but also abjure our Savior himself.<sup>15</sup>

Much of what Calvin wrote about the grace of sanctification and duties was echoed by William Perkins. In 1557 Perkins insisted that the "beginnings of grace are counterfeit unless they increase... namely that they grow up and increase as a grain of mustard seed to a great tree and bear fruit answerably."<sup>16</sup> Perkins also explained that sanctification involved mortification and vivification. Mortification was the first part of sanctification "whereby the power of sin is abated and crucified in the faithful". Vivification was the second part "whereby an inherent holiness being begun is still augmented and enlarged".<sup>17</sup> Perkins argued that holiness was begun by God and continued by him; but man was obliged to live a life appropriate to God's grace. M.M. Knappen, in his edition of the diaries of two Elizabethan puritan divines, Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward, has suggested

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<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.vi.4; CR, XXX, p.504: Non enim linguae est doctrina, sed vitae; nec intellectu memoriaque duntaxat apprehenditur, ut reliquae disciplinae, sed tum recipitur denum ubi animam totam possidet, sedemque et receptaculum invenit in intimo cordis affectu.

<sup>15</sup> Calvin, *Instit.* III.vi.3.

<sup>16</sup> Perkins, *A Grain of Mustard Seed* in Breward, *Perkins*, pp.404-05

<sup>17</sup> Perkins, *A Golden Chain* in Breward, *Perkins*, pp.234-35.

that it was this ethical element which was the most striking part of puritan practice. He defined this as the strong pursuit of "godliness" through God-appointed means and duties. Richard Rogers recorded in his diary on November 29, 1587:

And this is mine hartly desire that I may make godliness, I meane one part or other of it, to be my delight through my whole life, as this month hath been a good beginning thereof, which in this time hath been no hard yoke to me, though at some times heretofore an estate most difficult to enter into. And this carefull observinge and watchinge over my heart in particulars I doe farre better like<sup>18</sup> of and goe forward in then heretofore.

Similarly Samuel Ward decried his laziness in his pursuit of godliness, specifically having failed in his duties: failure to prepare for Chapel, drowsiness in Sunday worship, inattentiveness to the sermon, weakness in prayer, failing to repeat the day's sermon at home, excessive eating and as negligence towards the poor.<sup>19</sup>

It is important, nonetheless, to make four important general observations about duties. First, the life of holiness and sanctification was seen by these puritans as a work of grace initiated by the Spirit. Richard Sibbes stressed that "Grace conquers us first, and we by it conquer all things else...".<sup>20</sup> Puritan practice accepted a coordination between grace

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<sup>18</sup> Knappen, *Two Puritan Diaries*, p.65. Richard Rogers (1550-1616), was a lecturer at Wethersfield, Essex. Published in 1592 an important work entitled, *Seven Treatises*. Samuel Ward (1577-1640) was one time "lecturer" at Haverhill, Suffolk and later at Ipswich.

<sup>19</sup> Knappen, *Two Puritan Diaries*, p.108.

<sup>20</sup> Sibbes, *Braised Reede*, p.300.

and duties and built upon this foundation. Secondly, the works of holiness were not seen as meritorious apart from the merit, person and ministry of Jesus Christ. Any stress on duty was not meant to be at the exclusion of Christ's work and a faith in him. Years later, but consistent nevertheless, William Allen, a close associate of Baxter, argued that duty was not opposed to justification by faith; works of evangelical obedience were inferior and subordinate to Christ: "So long as the stress which is laid on duty, terminates in Christ, in God's will and appointments in the new covenant, and is regulated by his word and promise, there is no danger of our over charging Duty."<sup>21</sup> Third, faith was presupposed in the specific duties. Duties apart from faith resulted in hypocrisy, faith apart from duties was insincerity. Finally, it was understood that the righteousness of sanctification was not merely imputed but also inherent. In short, grace was improved as it was used by the believer in holy works of evangelical obedience. To be sure, sin and failure caused an existential tension for the saints, hence the oft-repeated themes of warfare, conflict, and struggle. Still, it was assumed that godliness would be evidenced in particular actions, duties and works. To quote Richard Sibbes again, "The whole conversation of a Christian is nothing else but knowledge digested into will, affection and practice."<sup>22</sup> It was not just

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<sup>21</sup> William Allen, *A Discourse...Two Covenants*, (1673), Appendix, p.212 but misnumbered 312.

<sup>22</sup> Sibbes, *Bruised Reede*, p.265.

in particular duties but, as Thomas Goodwin, who was a close friend and colleague of Owen, wrote in 1641, in a "universal extent and latitude".<sup>23</sup>

The four general points introduced here need to be noted before examining Baxter and Owen. The Christian had been rescued by God for eternal life. In this life the Christian's life had to manifest holiness and for this holiness God provided sanctifying grace. As the next four subsections on Baxter and Owen's thought detail, while sanctification was seen as a work of grace, nevertheless certain duties were understood as coordinate corollaries.

#### 6.1.1 Duties always dependent upon grace

Baxter and Owen argued that a believer's holiness, however weak and faltering, was due to God's grace through the Spirit. Owen stressed that holiness only occurred by the work of God's Spirit. He referred specifically to Spirit-created 'habits'. A habit was,

A vertue, a power, a principle of Spiritual Life and Grace, wrought, created, infused into our Souls, and in-laid in all the Faculties of them, constantly abiding, and unchangeably residing in them, which is antecedent unto, and the next cause<sup>24</sup> of all Acts of true Holiness whatever.

In an earlier work he had insisted that the 'habit of grace' was infused in the believer and not merely

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Goodwin, *The Tryall of a Christians Growth*, (1641, another ed., 1643), p.78.

<sup>24</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.416; also see Owen, *Of Communion*, p.200.

acquired by the frequency of holy acts. "The root is made good, and then the fruit."<sup>25</sup> Habits of grace were the direct consequence of the sanctifying work of the Spirit. Owen was concerned to explain the centrality of the Spirit in sanctification. His chief aim was to be pastoral and practical.<sup>26</sup> Holiness was the result of the triune God's operations, but it was the special work of the Spirit.

There is not any Spiritual or Saving-Good from first to last communicated unto us, or that we are from and by the Grace of God made Partakers of, but it is revealed to us and bestowed on us by the Holy Ghost. He who hath not an immediate and especial Work of the Spirit of God upon him and towards him, did never receive any especial Love, Grace or Mercy from God. For how should he so do? Whatever God works in us, and upon us he doth it by his Spirit.<sup>27</sup>

It was the Spirit's work to create the necessary willingness in believers to do the works and duties of holy living. The drive in Owen's argument must be appreciated:

There is therefore necessary such a work of the Holy Spirit upon our Wills, as may cure and take away the Depravation of them before described, freeing us from the state of Spiritual Death, causing us to live unto God, determining them in and unto the Acts of Faith and Obedience. And this he doth, whilst, and as he makes us new creatures, quickens us who are dead in Trespasses and sins,

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<sup>25</sup> Owen, *Saints Perseverance*, p.97.

<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey Nuttall has written: "Neither Owen nor any of his fellow authors is concerned to deny or to controvert the classic expressions of the doctrine. Their concern is rather to draw out its implications for faith and practice. What is new, and what justifies Owen in his claim to be among the pioneers, is the place given in Puritan exposition to experience, and its acceptance as a primary authority...Their interest is primarily not dogmatic, at least not in any theoretic sense, it is experimental." *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, p.7.

<sup>27</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.11; see also Owen, *Holy Spirit*, pp.82,164 and 165.

gives us a new Heart, and puts a new Spirit within us, writes his Law in our Hearts, that we may do the Mind of God, and walk in his Wayes; worketh in us to will and to do, making them who were unwilling and obstinate, to become willing and obedient and that freely and of choice.<sup>28</sup>

Accordingly, claimed Owen, through infused spiritual habits believers were prompted into corresponding acts of holiness. They were not merely persuaded to holiness: God actually worked in them to will and to do.<sup>29</sup> To be sure, Owen never denied that Christians needed a fresh, daily, supply of actual grace, but his point was that holiness was always the consequence of antecedent work by the Spirit.<sup>30</sup>

Baxter also highlighted the work of the Spirit. In *Christian Directory* he presented a doctrine of the Spirit similar to Owen's.

The same Holy Spirit assisteth the sanctified, in the exercise of this grace, to the increase of it, by blessing and concurring with the means appointed by him to that end; and helpeth them to use those means, perform their duties, conquer temptations, oppositions, and difficulties, and so confirmeth and preserveth them to the end.<sup>31</sup>

Baxter described the Spirit's role in the Christian life as, "the Spring to all your spiritual motions; as the wind to your sails: you can do nothing without

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<sup>28</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.284.

<sup>29</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, pp.335, 411,517 and 520.

<sup>30</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.465.

<sup>31</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, Orme ed., vol 2, p.191.

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Interestingly, however, whereas Owen stressed quite clearly the antecedent efficacy of the Spirit in the performance of duties - of course, never denying the agency of human activity - Baxter hesitated to go so far. Instead he preferred to see an inextricable interconnection between the work of the Spirit in the duty and the means of that duty. "There is an admirable, unsearchable concurrence of the Spirit, and his appointed means, and the will of man in the procreation of the new creature, and in all exercises of grace...".<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, he went on to say,

The more to blame those foolish atheists, that think God or the Spirit is not the cause, if they can but find that reason and means are in the effect. Your reason, and conscience, and means would fall short of the effect, if the Spirit put not life into all.<sup>34</sup>

On the whole, it was not that this difference between Baxter and Owen was due to a major doctrinal disagreement; rather it was a matter of emphasis. Baxter stressed the importance and necessity of personal obedience in the Christian life. Owen, equally concerned to urge a life of holiness, referred to the promise of the Spirit's efficacious aid. Baxter was concerned to counter presumption, Owen to counter moralism.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, p.197.

<sup>33</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, p.193.

<sup>34</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, Orme ed., vol 2, p.198.

<sup>35</sup> See chapter 1, p.59 for the implications of moralism as an issue in seventeenth century puritan theology.

Three reasons explain this difference of emphasis, for Baxter did not minimize the importance of the Holy Spirit. First, as mentioned in chapter 1 of this thesis Baxter, was concerned with certain Antinomian influences, hence he emphasized the necessity of active participation in the use of means.<sup>36</sup> Second, Baxter also questioned whether habits of grace necessitated coordinating holy duties or acts. "And we hold that yet the habits of Grace do not necessitate this or that particular act of obedience or Love, but it is too possible to sin by omission or commission notwithstanding these habits."<sup>37</sup> Owen never denied sins of omission or commission; still, "an habitual Reserve for any thing that is sinfull or Morally evil, is eternally inconsistent with this Principle of Holiness."<sup>38</sup> Third, Baxter made the controversial claim that evangelical works of obedience were a coordinate, albeit subordinate, condition of the covenant of grace.<sup>39</sup> In a section of his *Aphorismes of Justification* (1649) he presented an exposition of James 2.20-26. Baxter denied that James was merely describing a "working faith", that is a faith which produced congruent works. He argued that this was to misinterpret James' intention.

For when the Apostle saith, that Faith did ἔργοις αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τῶν ἔργων, work in and with his works, it clearly aimeth at such a working in, and with, as maketh

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<sup>36</sup> See above pp.56-57 and p.62.

<sup>37</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, pt. II, p.81.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.426.

<sup>39</sup> See Baxter, *Aphorismes*, pp.235-36.

them conjunct in the work of  
justifying...<sup>40</sup>

This was not moralism *per se*, rather Baxter maintained, "the continuance and accomplishment of Justification is not without the joynt procurement of obedience."<sup>41</sup>

Baxter put it this way in *The Life of Faith*:

A Dead opinionative belief, may stand with a worldly fleshly life; but a working faith will make you strive, and make the things of God your businesse: and the labour and industry of your lives will shew, whether you soundly believe the things unseen.<sup>42</sup>

Despite this difference Baxter and Owen agreed on one point: there had to be a demonstrable and active growth in holiness. The Spirit prompted growth and advancement. Sluggishness and laziness were signs of trouble. How should the believer fight these problems? Mid-seventeenth century puritans referred to the use of God-appointed duties; duties were where one could find the means of grace, and grace was furthered as grace was employed.

#### 6.1.2 Grace improved as duties were performed

Both Baxter and Owen argued that there must be a forward movement in the Christian life. Grace was given for this purpose; the Spirit was bestowed in order to initiate and move men and women into further growth in the way of grace and sanctification. Nevertheless, the believer's personal endeavours must

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<sup>40</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, p.157.

<sup>41</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification*, Thesis 76, p. 302; also see Baxter, *Justification*, p.113 and Baxter, *How or Never*, p.131.

<sup>42</sup> Baxter, *The Life of Faith* (1660), p.34.

also occur. Diligence was expected, activity was assumed. What is important to note is the way in which Baxter and Owen explained this necessity and assumption. Commenting upon Hebrews 3.14, John Owen wrote:

It is true our Persistency in Christ, doth not as to the Issue and Event depend absolutely on our own diligence. The unalterableness of our union with Christ on the account of the faithfulness of the Covenant of Grace, is that which doth and shall eventually secure it. But yet our own diligent endeavour is such an indispensable means for that end, as that without it, it will not be brought about. For it is necessary to the continuance of our subsistency in Christ, both necessitate praecepti, as that which God hath Comanded us to make use of for that End; and necessitate medii, as it is in the Order and Relation of Spiritual things one to another, ordained of God to effect it. For our persistence in our Subsistence in Christ, is the emergency and effect<sup>43</sup> of our acting Grace unto that purpose.

Holy duty was prescribed because within the covenant of grace God had appointed duties and works which were coordinate and suitable. By suitable Baxter and Owen meant: a man prayed because through the covenant he was a child of God; he listened and studied the word of God because it was words for him; he fought with sin because sin was contrary to the character of God and the new character given to him by God.

The duties to which divines like Baxter and Owen frequently referred were numerous. Yet the chief duty of the Christian life was to watch and work upon one's heart. Within puritan rhetoric there was a strong call

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<sup>43</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, Volume 2, p.149.

for self-suspicion. Baxter urged his readers in *Saints Everlasting Rest*,

Let most of your daily work be upon your hearts: be still suspicious of them; understand their moral wickedness and deceitfulness, and trust them not too far. Practice that great duty of daily watching: pray earnestly that you be not led into temptation: Fear the beginnings and appearances of sin. Beware lest conscience lose its tenderness.<sup>44</sup>

Owen was equally insistent. "This doth he who hath communion with Christ: he watcheth diligently over his own heart, that nothing creep into its affections, to give it any peace or establishment before God, but Christ only."<sup>45</sup> This primary duty of 'watching' or 'crucifying' was never meant to be done in a spirit of fear. Believers were in the covenant of grace; there was to be a fear, but a filial fear which was the result of love and faith. John Bunyan wrote in *A Few Sighs From Hell* (1658), "and yet Christ hath justified thee freely by his grace, thou will serve him in holiness and righteousness all the days of thy life, yet not in a legal spirit, or in a covenant of works; but mine obedience, say thou, I will endeavour to have it free and cheerful, out of love to my Lord Jesus."<sup>46</sup> Commenting upon Hebrews 3.12-14, John Owen explained,

Fear is necessary in continual Exercise. Not a fear of Distrust or Diffidence, of anxious Scrupulosity, but of Care Duty and Diligence. Continually to fear Dangers in all things, brings an useless perplexing Scrupulosity, where mens Principle of duty is only an harassed

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<sup>44</sup> Baxter, *Saints Everlasting Rest*, Dedication, Orme ed., vol 22, p.13.

<sup>45</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, Banner of Truth reprint of Gould edition, Vol. 2, p. 148; cf. pp. 149-50.

<sup>46</sup> Bunyan, *A Few Sighs From Hell*, Offer ed., Vol. <sup>3</sup>11, p.724.

convinced conscience, and the Rule of it is the Doctrines and Traditions of men. But where the Principle of it is the Spirit of Grace, with all this fear there is Liberty; and where the Rule of it is the Word<sup>47</sup> there is Safety Peace and Stability.

In this daily watching and self-examination the basis was always faith in Christ, his work on the cross as the atoning and ransoming sacrifice and his Spirit. As the saints watched themselves it was always within the realm of the Covenant. The Father's mercy, love, grace and justice were to be considered. The Son's cross, intercession, care for sinners, and purity were to be prized.<sup>48</sup> Only in this context could the summons to particular duties - prayer, reading the Bible, listening to sermons, study, corporate fellowship, family instruction and devotion, redeeming the time, purifying one's thoughts, curbing the passions and considering the life to come - be considered.<sup>49</sup> One's security in Christ was not on the merit of these duties, but these duties were absolutely appropriate. As Baxter put it in 1669, "He that is resolved to bring us to Glory, is as much resolved to bring us to it by perseverance in Holiness and diligent obedience; for he never decreeth one without the other; and he will never save us by any other way."<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, Vol. 2, p.116.

<sup>48</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, pp.401-05.

<sup>49</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, p.272; Owen, *Hebrews*, Vol. 1, pp.156-60; Baxter, *Saints Rest*, Orme ed., vol 22, p.6; Baxter, *Last Work of a Believer*, To the Reader.

<sup>50</sup> Baxter, *Directions for Weak Christians* (1669) which was the second part of *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians to Grow up to a Confirmed State of Grace* (1669), p.90.

The argument in this present section so far can be summarised as follows. Both Baxter and Owen wished to avoid the excesses of Antinomianism and the problems of moralism. Accordingly, both maintained that grace was found and improved as grace was employed in the ways and duties which God's Word suggested. The issue was heightened by the pressures which many Calvinists of the period felt from Antinomianism. Divines like Baxter, and even Owen, tried to show how they could stress the role of grace while never doing so at the expense of personal holiness and diligence. These divines criticised what they saw as the dangerous implications of Antinomian doctrine and so attempted to show how grace and duty went hand in hand.

John Owen declared, "the due Assertion of Grace never was nor never can be an obstruction unto any Duty of Obedience."<sup>51</sup> On another occasion he wrote, "The doctrine of grace may be turned into wantonness; the principle cannot."<sup>52</sup> Owen was concerned to demonstrate that his high view of grace did not minimise the use of the means of grace. In *Saints Perseverance* he stressed that effectual grace preserved the saints *precisely in the use of these means.*<sup>53</sup> Fundamental to Baxter and Owen's explanation was the idea that grace was in no way opposed to duty. Owen wrote,

Our Duty and God's Grace are no where opposed in the matter of sanctification, yea the one doth absolutely suppose the other. Neither can we perform our Duty

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<sup>51</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.420.

<sup>52</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, p.31.

<sup>53</sup> Owen, *Saints Perseverance*, pp.172-73.

herein without the Grace of God; nor doth God give us this Grace unto any other End but <sup>54</sup>that we may rightly perform our Duty.

According to Baxter and Owen grace was free and undeserved; it defined the new covenant. By grace believers entered into the covenant and their faith in Christ was supported and preserved by grace and the Holy Spirit. Yet this grace was found ordinarily in the ways of obedience and in a willingness to follow God's commands. Writing on the fight with sin, for example, Owen wrote, "The more men exercise their grace in duties of obedience, the more it is strengthened and increased...". <sup>55</sup> He wrote in 1674 a further consideration:

For although there is no Grace, nor Degree of Grace or Holiness in Believers, but what is wrought in them by the Spirit of God; yet ordinarily and regularly the Increase and Growth of Grace, and their thriving in Holiness and Righteousness, depend upon the use and Improvement of Grace received, in a diligent Attendance unto all those Duties of Obedience which are required of us 2 Pet 1.5,6,7. <sup>56</sup>

By its very nature grace prompted and initiated an active life of obedience. In 1669 Baxter asked,

And why have we this life of Grace but to use it, and to live by it? Why came we into the Vineyard, but to work? And why came we into the Army of Christ but to fight? Why came we into the race but to run for the prize? or why turned we into the right way, but to travel into

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<sup>54</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit* p.336.

<sup>55</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, Goold ed., VI, p.170.

<sup>56</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.167. His emphasis.

it? <sup>57</sup>

Four years later Baxter wrote, "Habits are for use: grace is given you, not only that you may have it, but also that you may use it." <sup>58</sup>

Thus, as presented here, the life of faith, begun by faith, was meant to continue by grace through duties. Grace and duty were not mutually exclusive concepts. It was claimed by preachers that God had not left his people ignorant about these duties and how they were to be performed. In very practical ways the saints were instructed that grace improved as grace was employed particularly in the use of appointed means.

### 6.1.3 Duties often involved means

Means were ordinances or prescriptions in which and by which grace was given and used in the Christian life. Means were ordinarily instrumental causes, deriving value only as a consequence of their divine prescription. Prayer, attendance upon the Word, holy fellowship, fasting, meditation and certainly preaching: these were the important means. <sup>59</sup> Most mid-seventeenth century puritans understood the use of means in this way. Means were given by God and even prescribed by God in the covenant of grace. They were, in a way, covenant-aids. In themselves they were insignificant, although appropriate to a life of

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<sup>57</sup> Baxter, *Weak Christians*, p.90.

<sup>58</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, p.169.

<sup>59</sup> See Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, "media", pp.187-88.

fellowship with God. Used in a spirit of active faith, obedience and love, means facilitated growth in grace. They were not, however, to be exalted above faith; in a Fast Sermon before Parliament on 22 October, 1644, Richard Vines stressed how easily one could fall into the trap of over confidence in means, "To have means in our hands, and not use them, is secure unbeleefe, to use them and trust in them is proud unbeleefe...".<sup>60</sup> Yet, while faith was trust, as William Bridge wrote in 1671, dependence upon God very much involved the use of means:

and so we are to do what we can, although not what we should in the matter of our salvation; because by our endeavour, and using the means we shew our dependence upon God, and our obedience to him, because he hath commanded it...<sup>61</sup>

Baxter described the use of appointed means in the following way.

He can never expect to obtain the end, that will not be persuaded to use the means. Of your selves you can do nothing. God giveth his help, by the means which he hath appointed and fitted to your help.<sup>62</sup>

He went on in the same work to list the means he considered important: the Word of God, public worship, private prayer, confession of sin (even at times to another), familiar company with other devout Christians, a serious meditation on the life to come,

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<sup>60</sup> Richard Vines, "The posture of David's Spirit when he was in a doubtful condition", in Robin Jeffs, ed., *The English Revolution. I. Fast Sermons to Parliament* (London: Cornmarket Press Ltd., 1970), Volume 13, p.182.

<sup>61</sup> William Bridge, *The Freeness of Grace and Love of God to Believers*, (1671), p.64. For Bridge see *DNB*, vol 6, p.315 and *Calamy Revised*, p.74.

<sup>62</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, p.48.

and a prudent and faithful guide or counsellor for one's soul.<sup>63</sup> Elsewhere Baxter referred to the efficacy of good books, a sound catechism, and a sound ministry.<sup>64</sup> With these things in mind Baxter exhorted his readers to an active life with these means, for this was the normative Christian life.

Neglect not those means which the Spirit hath appointed you to use, for the receiving of its help, and which he useth in all his holy operations - If you will meet with him, attend him in his own way, and expect him not in by-ways where he useth not to go. Pray and meditate, and hear, and read, and do your best, and expect his blessing. Though your ploughing and sowing will not give you a plentiful harvest without the sun, and rain, and the blessing of God, yet these will not do neither, unless you plough and sow. God hath not appointed a course of means in nature or morality in vain, nor will he use to meet you in any other way.<sup>65</sup>

Similarly, Owen wrote in 1657,

The grace exhibited by Christ in his ordinances is refreshing, strengthening, comforting, and full of sweetness to the souls of the saints. Woe to such full souls as loathe these honey-combs.<sup>66</sup>

Nevertheless, in urging the use of grace and means in an active life of obedience, Owen and Baxter recognised that duties were imperfect and frequently hindered by sin. In chapter 7 the relationship between the issues of indwelling sin, perseverance and assurance will be examined; suffice it to say here that the struggle with sin disturbed the godly's duties.

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<sup>63</sup> Baxter, *Christian Directory*, pp.48-51.

<sup>64</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, p.150-52; p.99; p.113.

<sup>65</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, p.197.

<sup>66</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, p.44.

Laziness in duty, neglect of means and sins of omission: such were the manifestations of sin in believers. Puritan pastors responded with exhortation and encouragement. On the whole, asked Owen, the occasions of temptation notwithstanding, did believers see growth, increase and progress? Was their motivation for duty out of love and not merely fear, guilt or conscience? Were they growing in conformity to Christ?<sup>67</sup> Baxter pleaded in 1662,

Art thou in a declined lapsed state ?  
 decayed in grace ? Hast thou lost thy  
 first desires and love ? do thy first  
 works, and do them with thy might.  
 Delay not, but remember from whence thou  
 art fallen, and what thou hast lost by  
 it, and into how sad a case thy folly  
 and negligence hath brought thee...  
 Return while thou hast day, lest the  
 night surprise thee: Loyer and delay no  
 more; thou hast lost it already: thou  
 art far behind hand. Bestir thee  
 therefore with all thy might.<sup>68</sup>

Later in 1669 Baxter explained the character of the Christian, "He is very desirous to be assured that he is sincere; but he is more desirous to be so. And he knoweth that even assurance is got more by the exercise and increase of Grace than by bare enquiry whether we have it already...".<sup>69</sup>

The answer to the practical problem of weakness in duty and obedience began with at least a willingness to pick up what the Bible prescribed and preachers exhorted. But this only went so far; duties were in themselves neutral, it was supremely the efficacy of

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<sup>67</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, pp.443-44.

<sup>68</sup> Baxter, *Now or Never*, pp.39-40, cf. pp. 53-58, 149, 152-54.

<sup>69</sup> Baxter, *Character of a Confirmed Christian* (1669), p.82.

Christ and the aid of the Spirit which enabled the believer to live obediently. Duty had to be seen in this light, for duties were always subordinate to Christ.

#### 6.1.4 Duties always subordinate to Christ

This point can easily be missed, yet it was crucial to the argument of most mid-seventeenth century puritans in their attempt to avoid the problems of Antinomianism, on one hand, and a moralism, on the other. Christ and his righteousness, his sufficiency, his love and mercy: these formed the mainspring for the puritan life of duty. Faith issued forth works, but, because the works were imperfect or presumption came so easily, the works themselves forced one into a greater position of dependent faith.

Owen argued that holiness came through the immediate work of the Holy Spirit and the habitual principle of grace.<sup>70</sup> Yet the Spirit and grace were only given to the elect because and as a result of the death of Christ.<sup>71</sup> In this way, Owen suggested the duties of holiness were always, ultimately, subordinate to Christ. The believer must know this, meditate on this and live by this. "Nothing is Duty, nothing is Obedience in Believers, but what is Grace from Christ communicated unto them."<sup>72</sup>

As noted earlier in chapter 3, Baxter did not agree

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<sup>70</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, 338.

<sup>71</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum Sanguis Jesu*, p.121.

<sup>72</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.457.

with Owen that Christ died only for the elect; nevertheless, he too insisted that one's faith in Christ was the basis of holiness. Note the exhortation, with encouragement, that he issued in his preface to Benjamin Baxter's, *Non Conformity* (1670):

and how much the Life and Death of Christ were intended and fitted, to mortifie our earthly Minds and Affections, and to bring us to a holy contempt of the pleasures, and profits, and honours of the world; and that it is the office of our Faith, to be our victory over the World; and all this, in the imitation and strength of him, who hath heartened us to the war, with this Encouragement, Be of<sup>73</sup> good cheer, I have overcome the world.

For Baxter Christ was the covenant inaugurator and he was the fountain of all spiritual graces. Duties, therefore, must be based upon a faith and love towards the triune God. Still, as has been noted, faith must be active, and willingly so. A fine and delicate balance existed, a balance maintained as long as the believer abided in Christ.<sup>74</sup> Baxter explained this balance in his second publication, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*.

In a word, you must both use and trust duty in subordination to Christ, but neither use them nor trust them [sic] in co-ordination with him. So that this derogates nothing from Christ: for he hath done, and will do all his work perfectly, and enable his people to do theirs: yet he is not properly said to do it himself; he believes not, repents not, etc., but worketh these in them: that is, enableth and exciteth them to do it. No man must look for more from

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<sup>73</sup> Baxter, To the Reader. It is worth noting that Benjamin Baxter, no relation, dedicated this book to Mrs. Grace Allen, wife of William Allen, author of *A Discourse of the Nature, Ends, and Difference of the Two Covenants* (1673) for which Richard Baxter wrote a Preface.

<sup>74</sup> Baxter, *Weak Christian*, p.11.

duty than God hath laid upon it; and so much we may and must.<sup>75</sup>

Apart from a true and lively faith duties could lead to a life of improper zeal with a pretentious self-righteousness or even, at the other extreme, excessive guilt. A heartfelt trust and faith in Christ were the safeguards of puritan activity. John Bunyan wrote in 1656,

if thy obedience do not flow from this faith, which is the faith of God's elect, as I have proved at large, thy obedience, thy zeal, thy self-denial, thy holiness, righteousness; yea, all that thou canst do, is but sin in the sight of the great God of heaven and earth. Heb 11.6; Ro 14.23; For all true sanctification comes through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, by the operation of the Spirit of God. 1 Cor 6.11.<sup>76</sup>

The duties of the Christian life were to possess a distinct character. Ideally, gone was pretence, cold heartedness and pride; instead there was warmth and pure love. Duties were to flow out of the inner spiritual grace and habit and they were to be grounded and rooted in one's love for Christ. "Think it not enough to delight in duties", wrote Baxter, "if you delight not in God. Judge not of your duties by the bulk and number, but by the sweetness."<sup>77</sup>

The only way a believer could have this 'sweetness' was through a lively faith. Faith, however, suggested an active delighting in God, closing with him daily; and thus a voluntarism can be detected. It was not that

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<sup>75</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest* Orme ed., vol 22, p.34; see also Baxter, *Catholic Theologie*, p.186.

<sup>76</sup> Bunyan, *Some Gospel Truths Opened*, Offor, Volume 2, p.168.

<sup>77</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Orme ed., vol 22, p.13.

the will acted alone or even primarily, but that a willingness had to exist and concur with the operations of the other faculties. This voluntarism, or a willingness, can be seen in the exhortation to use the means of meditation or spiritual reflection.

Both Owen and Baxter frequently referred to the necessity of considering or meditating upon God in all his fullness. If the saint would only remind himself of God's character, mercy, love and power then duties would flow naturally and suitably. He must, however, be willing to do this. The saints were exhorted, therefore, to 'eye' God. Owen declared, "Would believers exercise themselves therein, they would find it a matter of no small spiritual improvement in their walking with God."<sup>78</sup> Owen went on to explain,

Our love unto God is a love of duty, the love of a child. His love descends upon us in bounty and fruitfulness; our love ascends unto him in duty and thankfulness... It is indeed made up of these four things: 1. Rest; 2. Delight; 3. Reverence; 4. Obedience. By these do we hold Communion with the Father in his love.<sup>79</sup>

Duty in the Christian life, then, arose out of love; anything else and the duty was suspicious. For this reason the man or woman of God watched his or her heart in order to guard the duty. Likewise, however, they watched their duty to discern their hearts. "For we may abound in outward Duties", wrote Owen, "and yet our Hearts be very much alienated from the Life of God."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, p.23.

<sup>79</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, pp.28-29.

<sup>80</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.464.

It was too easy for the Christian life to become a life of externals. To be sure the external duties were crucial and essential, but it was the inner spiritual reality and vitality which was the *sine qua non* of the life of obedience and action. We must not, however, make too sharp a distinction between these two. They were mutually dependent: grace came in order that duty might exist which would in turn prove and further God's work of grace. Nevertheless, if it was true and from a heart of faith, duty was always subordinate to Christ.

In this section, (6.1), then, it has been shown that Baxter and Owen called for a willingness in the practical issues of the Christian life. The doctrinal basis for this was that presented in chapters 3 and 4: the sovereignty of God did not nullify the importance of human secondary agency. The practical implication of this can be seen in the inter-relationship between grace and duty; there was a complementary inter-relationship. Yet, always the experienced reality for Baxter and Owen's readers was one which saw their failure to use means, their coldness and their tendency towards pride. This reality necessitated a life-long fight with sin: the fight now considered.

## 6.2 The struggle with sin

In Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* Prudence asks Christian about his experience of faith, and particularly whether any elements of his old life presently bother him. Christian admits,

Yes, but greatly against my will;  
especially my inward and carnal  
cogitations, with which all my

country-men, as well as my self, were delighted. But now all those things are my grief; and might I choose mine own things, I would choose never to think of those things more; but when I would be doing of that which is<sup>81</sup> best, that which is worst is with me.

Christian reflects what was axiomatic for mid-seventeenth century puritans: the believer still struggled with sin and corruption. Frequently the apostle's dilemma in Romans 7.15-24 was the paradigm for puritan experience. Sin was real and disturbing despite the best intentions of the saints to have it otherwise. Yet while the reality of this continued sinfulness was readily accepted, it was more importantly incumbent on the individual to fight this problem of sin. Accordingly, what this section will show is another aspect of voluntarism in practice. In the struggle with indwelling sin Baxter and Owen suggested an active and self-engaging response. The believer was expected and encouraged to choose willingly the right way - the way of Christ - by the use of God's aids, means and encouragements. Through this choice one particularly fought with temptations, mortified the flesh and pressed on upwards in the life of godliness. Here, then, was manifested one of the more complex aspects of puritan piety and practice. The godly self was involved in a battle with a dimension of itself. Grace was superior and primary, but there was a fundamental expectation of the self's participation. This was never easy, and always a life-long process. What is noteworthy is the great

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<sup>81</sup> Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, Spire Books edition, p.49, emphasis mine.

stress which was placed upon the role and agency of the will.

The human will principally engaged in the struggle with sin; to be sure, the Christian's appetites, reason, imagination and heart were involved against temptation and the pull of the "flesh". Still, responsibility was given to the will to counter the influence of sin: the will was the principal moral faculty. The will was indeed aided by a corrected understanding and affections, guided by the Spirit's influence, instructed by the Word and facilitated by the appropriate internal and external means. The fight with sin, however, was not won solely by a passive persuasion of Christ's victory over sin and death; there had to be an active choice: yield to sin or choose to accept God's way of renovation. More was involved here than a right understanding. Baxter wrote, "The crossness of thy will to the will of God, is the sum of all the impiety and evil of the soul; and the subjection and conformity of thy will to his, is the heart of the new creature, and of thy rectitude and sanctification."<sup>82</sup> The nature of voluntarism, for which this thesis has been arguing, was therefore, clearly demonstrated in the struggle with sin. Without any doubt, however, this voluntarism was subordinate to the elect's dependence upon grace and the gospel promises. Owen and Baxter rejected any implication of a self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, as this section considers the reality of the struggle with sin and the

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<sup>82</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, p.57.

duty of mortification, it will be evident that this struggle involved chiefly the human will. As Baxter put it in *Now or Never*,

This is your trial: your warfare, is the resisting of deceit, and of all that would tempt you to consent to the means of your own destruction: consent not, and you conquer: conquer, and you are crowned. The combat is all about your wills; yield, and you have lost the day.<sup>83</sup>

#### 6.2.1 The reality of the struggle

The saints hardly needed to walk long in the way of the Christian life before they discovered within themselves an inward proclivity towards disobedience, sloth, coldness and negligence in duties. Concupiscence was a recognised dilemma for every Christian; it was a reality which none could deny without falling into great peril: a peril which both Baxter and Owen considered to be Antinomianism. What made the issue of the struggle with sin important to puritan practice was the way in which this reality framed puritan self-awareness and consequent activity. At the centre of the saint's life was a crucial conflict. Curiously, however, this conflict, while difficult and problematic, was actually a sign of spiritual life and vibrancy. Puritan pastors, therefore, detailed this conflict not to impose a morbid introspection but to encourage their flock further in a life of actual freedom and integrity. Spiritual health actually prescribed conflict, and a

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<sup>83</sup> Baxter, *Now or Never* (1662), pp.47-48.

conflict within one's self. Owen wrote in 1668, "The man that understands the evil of his own heart, how vile it is, is the only useful, fruitful, and solidly believing and obedient person." <sup>84</sup>

There was no denying that sin still remained within the justified and regenerated people of God. Question 78 of the Westminster Larger Catechism (1648) asked, "Where does the imperfection of sanctification in believers come from?"

A. The imperfection of sanctification in believers arises from the remnants of sin abiding in every part of them, and the perpetual lustings of the flesh against the Spirit; by which they are often foiled with temptations, and fall into many sins, are hindered in all their spiritual services, and their best works are imperfect and defiled in the sight of God. <sup>85</sup>

This was no theoretical issue, it was a fundamental experiential problem; and so puritan pastors preached, taught, counselled and wrote about the nature of indwelling sin. What was it that caused this problem within the godly? How could a saint act in such a manner when he or she was a new person in Christ?

John Owen's most explicit answer came in 1668 in his work, *The Nature, Power, Deceit and Prevalency of Indwelling Sin*. Based on his exposition of Romans 7.15 ff, Owen explained that within even the godly there remained a "principle", or law, of sin. It was this law which led to coordinate acts of the "flesh". Owen explained that this was the law (*νόμος*) to which Paul refers in Romans 7.21.

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<sup>84</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, p.201.

<sup>85</sup> I.H. Torrance, *The School of Faith*, p.200.

And for this reason doth the apostle here call indwelling sin a law. It is a powerful and effectual indwelling principle, inclining and pressing unto actions agreeable and suitable unto its own nature.<sup>86</sup>

Owen's view was that in the saints the law of sin did not have dominion, for there dwelt within them the opposing law of holiness, the habit of grace. Nevertheless, while the law of sin had lost its dominion it still had a power, albeit weakened, which could prompt and affect.<sup>87</sup> The effects of this law of sin could not be underestimated:

This law of sin dwells in us, that is, it adheres as a depraved principle unto our minds in darkness and vanity; unto our affections in sensuality; unto our wills in a loathing of and aversion from, that which is good; and by some, more, or all, of these, is continually putting itself upon us, in inclinations, motions, or suggestions to evil, when we would be most gladly quit of it.<sup>88</sup>

It was the fool, suggested Owen, who ignored this power or law of sin. It was from this all invading power that "Eruptions into great, open, conscience-wasting, scandalous sins" came. Appropriately it was important to "Inquire then how it is with your souls."<sup>89</sup>

Baxter and Owen considered that the extent of indwelling sin was total or universal. Baxter explained that the seat of sin "is not this or that faculty that is the full and proper subject of sin, but

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<sup>86</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, p.158.

<sup>87</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, pp.163-64.

<sup>88</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, p.167.

<sup>89</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, p.169.

the man: the fullness of sin being made up of the vice of both faculties, understanding and will, conjunct."<sup>90</sup> Owen maintained that "It is not straitened in a corner of the soul; it is spread over the whole, all the faculties, affections, and the passions of it."<sup>91</sup> In a work on the mortification of sin Owen, referring to Romans 6.19, identified the law of sin as synonymous with the body (σαρκάς). Owen suggested, "the body here is the same with παλαιὸς ἄνθρωπος, and σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας, the 'old man' and the 'body of sin', Rom 6.6 or it may synecdochically express the whole person considered as corrupted, and the seat of lusts, and distempered affections."<sup>92</sup>

What Baxter and Owen wrote about the will and indwelling sin is relevant to a study of their voluntarism. In *Christian Directory* Baxter never denied sin's effect upon the understanding, yet sin's prominent impact was upon the will, for the voluntary nature of sin was central to the believer's dilemma. The saints actually complied, willingly, with the influences of sin. They knew what was right, for the Word told them this, but still the will chose; and from this radical debility of the will the intellect was often drawn away from the truth and the affections led astray. It was true, argued Baxter, that sin frequently began with the sensitive appetites, but sin was not sin "till it be positively or privately,

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<sup>90</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, p.235.

<sup>91</sup> Owen, *Saints Perseverance*, p.105.

<sup>92</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, pp.7-8.

immediately or mediately voluntary." The will was the first principle of men's actions 'quod exercitum'.<sup>93</sup>

Owen agreed. Sin drew off the mind from duty and entangled the affections; but sin's deceit did not conceive until the will consented. "Now the conception of sin, in order unto its perpetration, can be nothing but the consent of the will... there is nothing in the soul itself that remains to give check to it, when once the will hath given its consent."<sup>94</sup> There were times when the will fully and absolutely complied with the mind's deliberations. At other times sin occurred even with a secret "renitency and volition of the contrary". The example of Peter's denial of Jesus, reasoned Owen, involved his will; yet there was still a secret and opposing volition, a principle of love. It was this which made indwelling sin all the more a struggle.<sup>95</sup>

Indwelling sin, then, was seen by these puritans not as a residue sadly present within believers, but as an active dynamic: opposed by the Spirit, but still influential. As Owen put it:

It is always in continual work... So that sin is always acting, always conceiving, always seducing and tempting... There is not a day but sin foils, or is foiled; prevails or is prevailed on; and it will be so whilst we live in this world.<sup>96</sup>

The effects of the dynamic of remaining indwelling sin were numerous and dire. Baxter detailed the

<sup>93</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* pp.235-41.

<sup>94</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, p.251.


<sup>95</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, pp.251-60.

<sup>96</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, p.11.

effects of sin committed by "God's own children". The saints actually sin against their relationship with their Father, "which is more heinous than if a stranger did it". Additionally, indwelling sin resulted in the saints sinning against Christ, against the operations of the Spirit, against their pardon and justification and, in short, against the covenant of grace.<sup>97</sup> Owen described the effect of indwelling sin among believers as both actual sins and in "habitual declensions". By actual sins he suggested the specific moments of negligence in duty, when the deceitfulness of sin conceived progressively actual acts of wrong-doing. Individuals like Noah, Lot, Hezekiah and David experienced this problem.<sup>98</sup> Believers found within themselves "surprisals" or "eruptions" into actual sins, sins which in one sense were involuntary but which in fact pointed to the will's involvement in this struggle.<sup>99</sup>

Clearly the reality of such a problem had the potential to disturb and confound the faithful. However normative the struggle was, it raised the question, why did God allow this indwelling sin to remain? The common answer was that remaining sin was not victorious. God allowed its presence to reveal how utterly dependent men and women are upon Him. Richard Sibbes explained, "we carry about us a double principle, Grace and Nature. The end of it is

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<sup>97</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* pp.249-50. 

<sup>98</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, pp.279-81.

<sup>99</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, p.192.

especially to preserve us from those two dangerous Rockes our Natures are prone to dash upon, Securitie and Pride, and to force us to pitch our rest on Iustification, not sanctification, which besides imperfection hath some soyle."<sup>100</sup> Years later Thomas Goodwin in *Tryall of a Christian's Growth* offered his answer. Indwelling sin remained so that "God might thereby the more set forth and cleare unto us the truth of it to all our hearts." Also, "it serves exceedingly to illustrate the grace of perseverance, and the power of God therein; for unto the power of God is our perseverance wholly attributed." Thirdly, "it confuses the devil." Finally, explained Goodwin, the saints themselves were shown the necessity of humility and self-denial.<sup>101</sup> Owen, in *Indwelling Sin*, maintained that remaining sin showed the faithful two things, themselves and God's grace. Believers saw themselves and the original enmity they had towards God and they saw their "vileness". As a consequence of this the need for humility was evident. Moreover the saints were led to appreciate the love and mercy of God. They discovered that God delighted to be with the broken and contrite in heart, and, insisted Owen, this made believers less critical and harsh towards others.<sup>102</sup> Baxter offered comfort to believers who were depressed due to their sinful laziness: "This is your infirmity,

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<sup>100</sup> Sibbes, *Bruised Reede*, pp.55-56.

<sup>101</sup> Goodwin, *Tryall of a Christian's Growth* (another edition, 1643), Introduction, pp. 33-39.

<sup>102</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, pp.196-202.

and a sin to be lamented, but not a mark of death and gracelessness." He went on to suggest:

but bless God that you are offended with it, and would fain be delivered. This was Paul's evidence, Rom 7.24. You will have flesh, and flesh will plead for its interest, and will be striving against the Spirit; but bless God that you have also the Spirit to strive against the flesh. Be thankful that you have life to feel your sickness, though you languish under it, and cannot work as healthful men; and that you are in the way to Heaven, though you go not so fast as you should and want.<sup>103</sup>

The issue was: however serious and dangerous the reality of the struggle with sin, God had not abandoned his people to an unresolvable conflict. There was hope. True, there was a law of sin - all pervading and utterly deceitful - which caused even the greatest men and women to fall. Nevertheless, believers were redeemed people of God; they belonged to Him; they were his work of regeneration; they were recipients of his grace and Spirit; these truths were the basis for continuing in the life-long struggle. The rule of sin had been dethroned in the life of the saint. The usurper might still be active within the realm but the true King had gained his rightful throne.<sup>104</sup> Richard Sibbes claimed, "yet Gods children never sinne with full will, because there is a contrary Law of the minde, whereby the dominion of sinne is broken, which always hath some secret working against the Law of sin."<sup>105</sup> In 1657 Baxter claimed "But it is not every

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<sup>103</sup> Baxter, *How or Never*, p.151.

<sup>104</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.484 for this illustration.

<sup>105</sup> Sibbes, *Bruised Reede*, p.186.

act of a gross sinne that makes or proves a man to be unjustified." <sup>106</sup> In *Reliquiae* he wrote,

Therefore whenever a justified Person sinneth, the Temptation at that time prevaileth against the Spirit, and the Love of God! not to the Extinction of the Love of God, nor to the Destruction of the Habit, nor the setting up of the contrary Habit in predominacy; as setting up the habitual Love of any Sin above the habitual Love of God! The inclination of the Soul is still most to God: And he esteemeth him most, and preferreth him in the adherence of his will, in the main bent and course of Heart and Life; only he is overcome, and so far abateth the actual Love and obedience to God, as to commit this particular Act of sin, and remit or omit that Act of Love. <sup>107</sup>

The paradox was the hope. To feel a sense of struggle with sin, and the world, was not cause for despair, it was promising. It was only through the Spirit and the work of grace that one was sensitive to the struggle; unregenerate sinners were not bothered. For the godly, who often felt this struggle acutely, the promise was that God's grace, the crucified and yet risen work of Jesus and the operation of the Spirit, would create within the people of God a dominant will towards God, a heart of love, and a right understanding so as to bring them through the struggle. This did not minimize the seriousness of the believers' sins; their culpability was still real. Owen expressed it this way:

But, upon the Introduction of the New Principle of Grace and Holiness in our Sanctification, this Habit of sin is weakened, impaired, and so disenabled, as that it cannot nor shall encline unto

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<sup>106</sup> Baxter, *Richard Baxter's Account of his Present Thoughts Concerning the Controversies about the Perseverance of the Saints* (1657), p.13.

<sup>107</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae*, pp. 7-8.

sin with that constancy and Prevalency as formerly, nor press unto it ordinarily with the same urgency and violence. Hence in the Scripture it is said to be dethroned by Grace, so as that it shall not reign or Lord over us, by hurrying us into the pursuit of its uncontrollable inclinations...<sup>108</sup>

The argument of this subsection so far has been that the problem of sin was real for the faithful: both ontologically (the indwelling habit) and morally (they chose that which was wrong and broke God's standards). Sin would never disappear in their lives, but there was hope: God would not abandon them to this powerful sinfulness. By the Spirit and grace, through means and duties the saints were offered a hope.

Precisely because of this hope and promise there was a responsibility. The godly were expected to follow in the way of grace through the duties of grace. The principle duty relating to the struggle with sin was mortification. Their wills, understandings and affections were repaired for a reason: they were to wage war on the enemy within, the enticements from the world without and choose a life of love towards their Redeemer.

### 6.2.2 Mortification

Puritan pastors insisted that mortification, as part of sanctification, was associated with justification. In their view, the peace received in the gospel surrounded, supported and continued mortification. For mortification, as most seventeenth century puritans

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<sup>108</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.429.

knew it, was part of election and sanctification. The Westminster Larger Catechism taught that dying to sin only could occur through the infusion of "saving graces", "seeds of repentance unto life" and the "righteousness of Christ".<sup>109</sup> Mortification was simply a gospel duty, that is, only within the gospel did one find the grace and means for this duty. Mortification was never aided by the law alone. "The whole Effect of the Application of the Law in its power unto indwelling sin, is but to irritate, provoke, and increase its guilt."<sup>110</sup> The way to fight sin was to live closer to God. The more one contemplated his attributes, his mercy and his presence the greater the victory over temptations to sin. "Satan can never come in so ill a time with his temptations, and have so little hope to speed, as when the soul is contemplating the attributes of God, or taken up in prayer with him, or any way apprehensive of his presence."<sup>111</sup> What was needed was, "true evangelical mortification" argued Owen. Too many fell into the extreme of either a legal "rigid frame of Spirit" or else lived with "pretenses of liberty, grace, and I know not what."<sup>112</sup>

The individual's life in Christ began because of an overflowing grace, and only continued because of this grace. Solely by this grace could one begin to mortify, or put to death, indwelling sin: not that this

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<sup>109</sup> Questions 75,76 and 77. Torrance, *The School of Faith*, pp. 199-200.

<sup>110</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit*, p.486.

<sup>111</sup> Baxter, *Divine Life*, Orme ed., vol 13, p.260.

<sup>112</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, p.14.

was easy in this life. Complete victory over indwelling sin was not possible. Owen wrote that indwelling sin was, "an enmity that hath this from its nature, that it is incapable of cure or reconciliation. Destroyed it may be, it shall be, but cured it cannot be."<sup>113</sup> Baxter's *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience* (1653), displayed his pastoral concern for the weak and fearful who found the struggle with sin and the duty of mortification hard. Sins, weaknesses, doubts and struggles did indeed disturb God's people. Yet, this made it all the more imperative to mortify the flesh and its attraction to the world. The solution, however, began by appreciating God's grace in the gospel of his Son. Provided that one believed and then sincerely and willingly longed for Christ and the Spirit, one's growth in holiness was assured. Perfection was not the condition, rather sincerity and a willingness.<sup>114</sup> But Baxter also explained that, "A sanctified man cannot grieve or weep for sin when he will, or so much as he will."<sup>115</sup> Even if tears and sorrow were plentiful, as he warned his fellow preachers, "It is easier to chide at sin, then to overcome it".<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Owen, *Indwelling Sin*, p.177. See Owen, *Mortification*, p.25. See also Baxter, *The Crucifying of the World by the Cross of Christ* (1658), ed. by John Baillie (London: James Nisbet and Co., 1861), p.151. All subsequent references to *Crucifying of the World* taken from this edition.

<sup>114</sup> See Baxter, *Crucifying of the World*, p.118.

<sup>115</sup> Baxter, *Right Method*, Orme ed., vol 9, p.283.

<sup>116</sup> Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656) first edition, p.16.

Mortification, therefore, was the issue. "The vigour, and power, and comfort, of our spiritual life, depends on the mortification of the deeds of the flesh."<sup>117</sup> Mortification involved the killing of specific sins to be sure; yet, more importantly, mortification approached every aspect of sin's influence. It was not merely the outward act but the inner "lust" which had to be killed; and the application was universal, not just in one part of life but in the whole of the man. Baxter and Owen were not the only ones to express this. Thomas Goodwin insisted, "If thou hast prevailed against the outward act, rest not, but get the rising of the lust mortified, and that rowling of it in thy fancies; get thy heart deadened towards it also: and rest not there, but get to hate it, and the thought of it."<sup>118</sup>

This duty, however, had to be based upon the work of redemption and regeneration which God had accomplished. Mortification, in short, was principally based on God's work in the believer. "Neither are we so much to speak of it here", wrote Thomas Goodwin, "as it is a duty to be done by us, (though it be so) but as it is a work of God upon us, which he takes care to go through with, and perfect in all those who are faithful."<sup>119</sup> John Owen insisted that mortification "is a work that requires so many concurrent actings in it as no self-endeavour can reach unto, and is of that

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<sup>117</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, p.9.

<sup>118</sup> Goodwin, *Tryall*, Introduction, pp.41-42; cf. Owen, *Mortification*, pp.41-42.

<sup>119</sup> Goodwin, *Tryall*, p.84.

kind, that an Almighty energy is necessary for its accomplishment." <sup>120</sup> The source of this "Almighty energy", explained Owen, was the Spirit. It was the Spirit which Owen also called the "principal efficient cause" of mortification. <sup>121</sup> Referring to Romans 8.13 Owen suggested,

All other ways of mortification are vain, all helps leave us helpless, it must be done by the Spirit... Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world. <sup>122</sup>

Yet as mortification was established by the work of God in the covenant of grace it also was a necessary duty for those incorporated into the Covenant. Owen wrote in *Holy Spirit*: "the Work and Duty of Mortification consists in a constant taking part with Grace, in its Principal, Actings and Fruits, against the Principle Acts and Fruits of Sin." <sup>123</sup> As presented in chapter 4, Baxter stressed sincere obedience to the point of calling it an "evangelical righteousness", subordinate to Christ's but essential. <sup>124</sup> Mortification was an element of this sincere obedience and, thus, a subordinate part of the

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<sup>120</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, p.18.

<sup>121</sup> See Owen, *Mortification*, pp.19-20 for details of the Spirit's work.

<sup>122</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, p.7.

<sup>123</sup> Owen, *Holy Spirit* p.477. cf. Owen, *Mortification*, p.6, where Owen insists that this duty is only for believers, "ye to whom 'there is no condemnation' (Romans 8.1) ye that are 'not in the flesh, but in the Spirit' ver 5. who are 'quickened by the Spirit of Christ' ver 10,11." See also pp.33-38.

<sup>124</sup> Chapter 4, pp.228-29.

covenant condition. Owen, as mentioned in chapter 3, denied Baxter's emphasis on condition. Nevertheless, he suggested that mortification, while not an immediate cause of one's life in Christ, was not only a *causa sine qua non* "but as the thing that hath an effectual influence thereinto."<sup>125</sup>

It is here that a correlation between God's initiative and human co-agency can be detected. Owen, for example, explained that even though the Spirit was the principal efficient cause believers had to remember that the Spirit did his work in and through them.

The Holy Ghost works in us, and upon us, as we are fit to be wrought in, and upon; that is, so as to preserve our own liberty and free obedience. He works upon our understandings, wills, consciences and affections, agreeably to their own natures; he works in us, and with us, not against us, or without us; so that his assistance is an encouragement, as to the facilitating of the work, and no occasion of neglect, as to the work itself.<sup>126</sup>

Furthermore, a degree of voluntarism in practice is evident in this context. Baxter insisted that the will, like understanding and the affections, was renovated and healed so as to choose the appointed means to fight sin. The saints had to choose to use these means in the duty of mortification; they had to engage willingly in fasting, acts of humiliation and especially prayer with meditation. They had to choose to deny themselves and live crucified to the world and the world as crucified to them. Note the interconnection between

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<sup>125</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, p.22.

<sup>126</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, p. 20. Owen drew upon the following passages of Scripture: Phil 2.13; Is 26.12; 2 Thess 1.11; Col 2.12; Rom 8.26; Zech 12.10.

the provision of the Spirit, meditating upon Christ and the duty of mortification in Baxter's admonition.

To live after the flesh, is by loving the world, and enjoying it as our felicity; and to mortifie the deeds of it by the Spirit, is by withdrawing this fuel and food that doth maintain them, and by crucifying and killing the world as to such ends. Our work is to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof, Rom 13.14.<sup>127</sup>

Thomas Goodwin, however, offered this caveat: the willingness had to be rooted in faith and the means of God. "It is certaine", he explained, "that unless our thoughts work upon the means, as well as the means work upon us, and so do mingle themselves with those means; that unless faith and Christ's death be mingled in the heart, it purgeth not...".<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, the important aspect here was the will's vital role in mortification. Indwelling sin, to be sure, necessitated the activity of the whole of man and not merely any one faculty. Still, exhortation to mortification appealed to the mind in order to prompt the will. Baxter stated,

There is more Power in all of you than you use, or then you are well aware of. It wanteth but awakening to bring it into act. Do you find in your Repentings, that the change is more in your Wills then in your Power? and in the awakening of your Will and Reason into act, then in the addition of meer abilities?<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Baxter, *The Crucifying of the World*, pp.78-79.

<sup>128</sup> Goodwin, *Tryall*, p.95.

<sup>129</sup> Baxter, *Now or Never*, p.52.

The godly men and women of mid-seventeenth century puritan gatherings were exhorted to pray and seek for a willingness to obey, "an inclinable heart" as Baxter put it.<sup>130</sup> When they discovered their weaknesses and sins the solution was found in Christ. Moreover, while the believer was free from the need for a legal righteousness, he or she must find Christ in the way of evangelical obedience, "and so have a personal, evangelical righteousness, or never be saved by Christ's righteousness; therefore, say not it is not duty, but Christ; for it is Christ in a way of duty." Mortification was the spiritual duty of all; all must fight and resist indwelling sin and the allurements of the world.<sup>131</sup>

Voluntarism is seen more clearly when it was asked why believers found obedience so difficult. Baxter suggested that it was due to the will. In 1653 he wrote,

Understand what I told you before, that as the beginning of grace is in your understanding, so the heart and life of it is in your will; and the affections and passionate part are but the fruits and branches. If therefore your grace be weak, it is chiefly in an unwillingness to yield to Christ, and his Word and Spirit.<sup>132</sup>

Five years later Baxter referred to dying to sin and the influence of the world as a "moral death". Significantly he claimed, "a Moral death is principally in the Will it self, and nothing is more voluntary, and

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<sup>130</sup> Baxter, *Right Method*, p.134.

<sup>131</sup> Baxter, *Saint's Rest*, pp.43-44.

<sup>132</sup> Baxter, *Right Method*, p.134.

so it is the principal vertue or vice: To be dead in sin and to God is the summe of all Evil: And to be dead to sin and the world, in Christ, is the summe of Moral Good." <sup>133</sup>

Owen explained that believers had problems with mortification because they failed to look to Christ for "succour" and help in resisting temptation. <sup>134</sup> "Yea, but let me add, that never any soul did, or shall perish by the power of any lust, sin or corruption, who could raise his soul by faith to an expectation of relief from Jesus Christ." <sup>135</sup> In his work on the nature of temptation Owen claimed that it was negligence in duty and worship, failure to appreciate the nature of the temptation itself, and supremely a heartless appreciation for the love and mercy of God which contributed to the saints' problem. <sup>136</sup> They were to choose to engage in the fight.

Assuredly, men and women lacked the strength on their own to resist temptation and battle sin. <sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, Owen, like Baxter, urged the godly to "watch and pray". They were to keep their hearts tender to the love of God. <sup>138</sup>

A universal carefulness, and diligence,  
exercising itself in, and by all ways  
and means, prescribed by God, over our

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<sup>133</sup> Baxter, *The Crucifying of the World*, pp.102-03.

<sup>134</sup> Owen, *Hebrews*, Vol. 1, p.294.

<sup>135</sup> Owen, *Mortification*, p.82. Owen referred to Isaiah 55.1-3 and Rev 3.18.

<sup>136</sup> Owen, *Temptation*, Good ed., VI, pp. 121 and 140-41.

<sup>137</sup> Owen, *Temptation*, pp.92 and 124; cf. Owen, *Hebrews*, Vol. 1, p.293.

<sup>138</sup> Owen, *Temptation*, pp.133-37.

hearts and ways, the baits and methods of Satan, the occasions and advantages of sin in the world, that we be not entangled, is that which in this<sup>139</sup> word (eg. Mt.26.41) is pressed upon us.

This section has sought to show that within the Christian life, as Baxter and Owen saw it, the call to mortification implied a voluntarism in practice. It was certainly a gospel duty and could only be true if it was done in Christ and through the Spirit. Never would the saints be completely victorious until they were raised in Christ. Nevertheless, what counted was their willingness, or to put it another way, "the prevailing bent of their will".<sup>140</sup> The saints were exhorted on the basis of Scripture, to choose the way of Christ's holiness. This choice involved their wills. Mortification was hardly a passive persuasion of the mind, it was an activity of faith.

### Conclusion

As Baxter and Owen defined it, the life of faith was shaped by grace. God's grace supported and protected his people. The very nature of this grace, however, involved duties. In no way were these duties meritorious on their own; they were subordinate to Christ's righteousness. Practically, duties involved the use of gospel means: prayer, the sacraments, the Scriptures and attentiveness to sermons. The call to

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<sup>139</sup> Owen, *Temptation*, pp.100-01.

<sup>140</sup> Baxter, *Crucifying of the World*, p.153.

duties was profoundly associated with both the nature of grace and the continued reality of indwelling sin: grace, a gift from God, was given to produce the fruit of sanctification; real life, however, showed the faithful that their biggest problem was "within". The puritan self-identity was a complex mix of a radical dependency upon grace and an outward summons (that is, through preachers and writers) and inward nudges (that is, by means of guilt as well as joy) to an active life. Willingness was central to the practical dimension of mid-seventeenth century puritan life.

To appreciate the nature of this life of faith it must be remembered that the doctrines of a sovereign will and a human will (relatively free to choose according to its nature) were the underpinnings of the practical theology expressed by Baxter and Owen. Human willingness was subordinate to God's grace and covenant mercy. This subordination, however, in no way minimized the necessity of the human response. Such was the paradox of the doctrinal framework of Baxter and Owen's voluntarism. Experientially, voluntarism was problematic. The problem was the tendency for this voluntarism to fall not only into the trap of an external legalism, but more significantly into self-reliance. For the doubtful and weak, or for that matter any person who knew the problems of his own sincerity and willingness, despair could arise; assurance was needed along with the promise of perseverance. The doctrine of perseverance, then, was both a check to the voluntarism suggested in

mortification and a prelude to the whole question of assurance. It is to the doctrines of perseverance and assurance that we now turn in the final chapter.

## Chapter Seven

VOLUNTARISM IN PRACTICE:  
A WILLINGNESS IN PERSEVERANCE AND ASSURANCE

Introduction

Because mortification presented the reality of sin and human proclivity towards negligence and disobedience it was necessary for puritan pastors to raise the question and promise of perseverance and assurance. In this final chapter this vital hope is considered. As in the previous chapter, here too the experiential aspect of the puritan life and the theology of the will intersect. Perseverance and assurance were, of course, not isolated issues; they were associated with numerous other doctrines. The task of this chapter is to examine the issue of perseverance and assurance and see if the type of voluntarism considered throughout this thesis influenced the way in which mid-seventeenth century puritans gained solace in the Christian life.

To do so it is necessary to appreciate the historical development of the doctrines within Calvinism. As it was argued in the chapter 1.3, Calvin understood faith and assurance to be inextricably related. Nevertheless, he recognized that believers wrestled with doubt and insecurity: their sinfulness affected their security. In his opinion a believer was sure of perseverance and assurance because of the merits of Christ. It was argued, however, that Calvin

did not entirely dismiss self-reflection; he advised the faithful to look inward and see if the fruit of their union with Christ was evident. The issue for Calvin, however, was ultimately that one's faith in Christ, witnessed by the Spirit, was the basis for hope and security. Later Calvinists, particularly William Perkins, went further than Calvin: he appreciated that a person often waited a long time before the assurance of the objective truth of God's grace and pardon in Christ was subjectively appropriated; stated simply, Perkins claimed that faith and the assurance of faith were not as closely linked in one's experience as Calvin had argued. Accordingly, Perkins advocated the practical syllogism: but he considered this practical syllogism only as a complementary exercise to the superior work of the Spirit.

The argument put forward in chapter 1 was that there was a doctrinal development from Calvin to the Westminster Assembly. Yet it was also argued that there was a closer affinity between Calvin and later Calvinists than R.T. Kendall has assumed. True, compared to Calvin later Calvinists were more willing to employ the language of covenant theology; were more inclined to consider a preparation for faith; and were more accepting of the practical syllogism. Nevertheless, as Baxter and Owen are considered in this chapter it will be suggested that, despite the differences between Baxter and Owen, they developed arguments and applications about perseverance and assurance which were not altogether removed from

Calvin's. Their immediate historical context (notably influenced by Arminianism and Antinomianism) meant that there were differences between Calvin and them. Still, when their views on perseverance and assurance are examined a voluntarism in practice is seen; and this voluntarism bore striking similarities not only to Calvin's but to Augustine's voluntarism: the importance of "willingness".

The chapter begins (7.1) with an examination of the general issues involved in the question of perseverance. This will be valuable in the study of Owen's stress on the immutability of perseverance as a consequence of election (7.1.1) and Baxter's concern to counter what he saw as Antinomian presumption and so argued that perseverance was a subordinate part of the covenant condition (7.1.2). Yet, more needs to be considered here: specifically the question of assurance. For both Baxter and Owen recognized that an appeal to either the immutability of election or to the covenant condition would only cause further complications. Thus in the final section, (7.2), their views on assurance are presented. There it will be argued that an inherent logic connected the question of perseverance and the hope of assurance: the challenge to perseverance which came from indwelling sin was mollified by the evidence that the Spirit was producing (gradually) testifying fruit of sanctification. Voluntarism, or the necessity of a "willingness", was central to Baxter and Owen's answer to this fundamental problem of perseverance and assurance for the saints.

Thus, in these two inter-related struggles -- perseverance and assurance -- voluntarism is shown to have been the mainspring of the believer's daily experience. Only when the doctrinal presuppositions outlined in the earlier chapters are borne in mind will Baxter and Owen's practical divinity make sense: for the goal of their doctrinal writing was to aid believers in the life of faith.

### 7.1 Perseverance

Would the saints continue in their faith and life of obedience, or could they fall out of grace? These apparently were practical issues confronting puritan preachers, for they were frequent topics in sermons and in printed works. Curiously, however, M.M. Knappen, *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, has minimized the existential dilemma which the doctrine of election raised for the godly. Few puritans, claims Knappen, lived with too great a doubt.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Paul Seaver's study of Nehemiah Wallington seems more credible. Wallington struggled with assurance. He looked inward and saw his failures in the light of the gospel's standards; and while he knew the hope of pardon, the quest for assurance was frequently with trial and vicissitudes. Seaver has written, "In fact, one suspects that it was the introspection demanded by the examined life that made the struggle for assurance, rather than the debates over controverted doctrine, the

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<sup>1</sup> Knappen, *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, p. 22.

central concern of a generation of the godly." <sup>2</sup> It could be argued that the question of assurance raises one of the paradoxes of puritan piety. Often the saints lived with the hope of perseverance even if they were not personally assured. This was not illogical. One could live in faith and hope of persevering grace and yet not have absolute certainty that one would personally endure the deceitfulness of sin. The hope was still there, the promises of Scripture remained evident, but total assurance, however much desired, could actually lead to laxity. The evidence presented in this chapter from the writings of Baxter and Owen suggests that doubt was an issue not only related to the implications of a doctrine of election but to particular pastoral problems. It was argued by Baxter and Owen that there was a correlation between election, perseverance and assurance. They approached perseverance within a specific context: God was sovereign in election; he called his own according to his purpose; those whom he effectually called he gave the necessary grace in order that they would repent and believe; and by his covenant faithfulness his people persevered in their love and holiness. Still, there was controversy: how important was a person's self-involvement and willingness?

Before considering Baxter and Owen's answers to this question it is helpful to consider further the theological context in which they wrote. Dewey Wallace, in *Puritans and Predestination*, has presented

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<sup>2</sup> Seaver, *Wallington's World*, p.19.

a picture of puritan theology at odds with both Arminian and other moderate positions over the issue of perseverance. While in the early years of the English Reformation it was generally accepted that the saints did not fall completely away from grace, by the time of the Articles of Religion (1562) there was a tendency for some English Protestants to qualify their confidence.<sup>3</sup> Consequently puritans like John Downname became increasingly distressed with the weakening of this certainty.<sup>4</sup> At first some non-puritans joined in support of Downname; Wallace refers to Jewel, Sandys, Cooper and Woolton. The conflict of opinion came in the seventeenth century in the controversy surrounding Richard Montagu, a conformist from Essex made bishop of Chichester in 1628. Montagu was accused of denying, among other things, an unconditional election and the perseverance of the elect.<sup>5</sup> Nicholas Tyacke has pointed out that Montagu's *A New Gag for an Old Goose* (1624) was a "veritable bombshell".<sup>6</sup> Montagu's opinions drew sharp criticism from a large number of prominent puritans who thought Montagu personified the Arminian threat.<sup>7</sup> There developed a sharp conflict in

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<sup>3</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.52. It is worth noting that the XXXIX Articles have no section explicitly concerned with perseverance or assurance. Article XVII, "Of Predestination and election" contains one of the few implicit suggestions: "and at length by Gods mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity." (et demum ex Dei misericordia pertingunt ad sempiternam foelicitatem); see Schaff, *Creeds*, p.497.

<sup>4</sup> See Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.212, note 149 for a detailed list of other works which considered this issue of perseverance.

<sup>5</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.84.

<sup>6</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.75.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, pp.85-88.

the House of Commons led by John Pym.<sup>8</sup> The significance of the Montagu case is that it reveals the sharp divergence of opinion within seventeenth century English Protestantism over perseverance. The explanation for this lies partly in the growing influence of Arminian theology as a reaction against rigid Calvinism as evidenced by the opinions of Henry Hammond, Herbert Thorndike and Thomas Pierce, all of whom rejected the Synod of Dort's explanation of election and perseverance.<sup>9</sup> The Synod of Dort had argued that despite indwelling sin, God was faithful, "who having conferred grace, mercifully confirms and powerfully preserves them therein, even to the end".<sup>10</sup> God was actively committed to his people; it was not a question "in consequence of their own merits or strength, but of God's free mercy, that they do not fall away from faith or grace...".<sup>11</sup> Thus, by the mid-seventeenth century there was a sharp division within English protestantism regarding perseverance. On one level it involved the nature of predestination; and on the other level, precisely because of predestination, the difference of opinion involved human choice and

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<sup>8</sup> Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists*, p.75.

<sup>9</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, p.126. This theory was earlier presented by Nicholas Tyacke, "Puritanism, Arminianism and Counter-Revolution" in *The Origins of the English Civil War*, ed. by Conrad Russell (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp.119-43.

<sup>10</sup> Synod of Dort, V.iii. This English translation is provided by Schaff, *Creeds*, p.593. The Latin in the original is as follows: "Sed fidelis est Deus, qui ipsos in gratia semel collata misericorditer confirmat, et in eadem usque ad finem potenter conservat." Schaff, *Creeds*, p.571.

<sup>11</sup> Synod of Dort, V.viii, Schaff, *Creeds*, p.594. "Ita non suis meritis, aut viribus, sed ex gratuita Dei misericordia id obtinent, ut nec totaliter fide et gratia excidant, nec finaliter in lapsibus maneat aut pereant." Schaff, *Creeds*, p.572.

activity.

It is important to appreciate this historical context: by the time Baxter and Owen entered the scene perseverance was a controversial topic, and the lines were already drawn. If the ideas of the time were presented as a spectrum of opinion, at one end would be those Arminians, like Montagu, who insisted that justification was based on an individual's free compliance with the conditions of the covenant. This same group insisted that perseverance was not a guarantee but was itself a condition. Nearer to the centre would be "sectarian Arminians" (to use Dewey Wallace's expression) like John Goodwin, who were often sympathetic to puritan ecclesiology but disagreed with Calvinist teaching on perseverance. Goodwin argued among other things that it was possible for the saints to fall out of grace. He never sought to minimize, however, the work of grace and mercy.<sup>12</sup> He was quick to point out, nevertheless, that many professors did fall away; thus, any notion of the impossibility of the saints' apostasy was wrong. It may be improbable for the saints to fall away, but it was possible. Close to the centre of the spectrum were those like Baxter, who, while often coming near to views like Goodwin's, held to a non-Arminian position. Baxter suggested that the elect would persevere: not because the death of Christ procured this guarantee absolutely, but because the elect would fulfil this condition. Much of Baxter's explanation depended upon his understanding of

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<sup>12</sup> Wallace, *Puritans and Predestination*, pp. 130-131.

condition.<sup>13</sup> Beyond that, just on the other side of the centre, would be those who agreed with Owen. Owen recognised that the saints had seasons of sin and even backsliding, but they would ultimately persevere because they were elect and predestined. As their predestination was infallible and immutable so too was their perseverance. The death of Christ could not be in vain. Further on the other side, composing the other extreme of the spectrum, would be the views of Antinomian sects, who likewise denied the possibility of apostasy because of the eternal decrees of God and the internal work of the Spirit.

This was the spectrum of the debate on perseverance. In the first section of this chapter, however, while recognising the Arminian and Antinomian poles, we want to examine more closely Baxter and Owen's agreements and differences. Two issues are worth consideration. First, (7.1.1), Owen's insistence upon the immutability of perseverance because of election; and secondly, (7.1.2), Baxter's understanding of perseverance as a condition. In these subsections attention to the role of the human will and the importance of a willingness deserves attention.

#### 7.1.1 Owen's view of perseverance: the immutable consequence of election

Owen's important work on perseverance is entitled, *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance Explained and*

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter 3.3.1, pp.184-85 for his definition of *conditio*.

*Confirmed* (1654). It was dedicated to Oliver Cromwell and written in response to John Goodwin's, Ἀπολυτρωσις ἀπολυτρωσεως, or *Redemption Redeemed* (1651). John Goodwin (1594-1665), one time rector of East Rainham, Norfolk and later of St. Stephens, Coleman Street in London, was an advocate of "gathered" churches of believers and thus can be classified as a puritan according to the definition presented in chapter 1.2. On the other hand, Goodwin was opposed to Oliver Cromwell's National Church. He attracted severe criticism in response to his views on the atonement and God's decree of election: he was singular in that he accepted puritan views on the church yet agreed with Arminian interpretations of election and predestination. Owen accused Goodwin of attacking God's absolute and unconditional promises to preserve his own people. Owen insisted that because of God's character his work in salvation was infallible and certain.

The main foundation of that which we plead for, is, the eternal purpose of God, which his own nature requireth to be absolutely immutable and irreversible. The eternal act of the will of God designing some to salvation by Christ, infallibly to be obtained, "for the praise of the glory of his grace", is the bottom of the whole...<sup>14</sup>

In Owen's view, perseverance was predicated upon election and predestination in Christ; and it was based in the covenant with Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. The following illustrates the main points of his position:

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<sup>14</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, Gould ed., II, p.22, Preface to the Reader. All subsequent references taken from this edition.

[the basis for perseverance is] an everlasting covenant that shall not be broken, and hath therein given them innumerable promises that he will continue to be their God for ever, and preserve them to be, and in being, his people: to this end, because the principle of grace, and living to him, as in them inherent, is a thing in its own nature changeable and liable to failing, he doth, according to his promise, and for the accomplishment of his purpose, daily make out to them, by his Holy Spirit, from the great treasury and storehouse thereof, the Lord Jesus Christ, helps and supplies, increasing of faith, love and holiness, recovering them with all might according to his glorious power, unto all patience and long-suffering with joyfulness, so preserving them by his power through faith unto salvation.<sup>15</sup>

The complexity of Owen's argument demands clearer exposition. This can be done through detailed attention to three aspects of controversy between Owen and John Goodwin: first, their differing views on apostasy; second, their understanding of the nature of God's will for his people; and finally, their disagreement over the issue of perseverance as a covenant condition.

First, their attitudes towards apostasy: Goodwin argued that both Scripture and experience suggest the reality of apostasy - believers did fall away; Owen never denied that some professors did apostatize, but were they, asked Owen, truly faithful and of the elect? Owen maintained that while the saints at times yielded to indwelling sin and even had seasons of backsliding, nevertheless, they would persevere to the end. How was this? Perseverance was rooted in the work of grace.

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<sup>15</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.22-23.

The sin of believers was not like that of non-believers.<sup>16</sup> A believer was one who had received the converting work of God, which included an infused habit of grace. Accordingly, this work of God had to produce infallibly a new creation consistent with itself. God would not abandon his work of regeneration and sanctification. Sin would not triumph. Believers belonged to Christ and were children of the Father; though they sinned, and were accountable for this sin, they never ceased to be his children.<sup>17</sup> "Until he hath taken away his Spirit and grace, although they are rebellious children, yet they are his children still."<sup>18</sup>

But surely, asked Goodwin, Owen's view led to presumption and licentiousness? "It is... a promising unto men, and that with height of assurance, under what looseness or vile practices soever, exemption and freedom from punishment...".<sup>19</sup> Owen countered that perseverance was the opposite of licentiousness.<sup>20</sup> The doctrine of perseverance actually promoted diligence and obedience. Referring to 2 Tim 2.19 (But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal; "The Lord knows who are his...") Owen argued:

This then, beyond all colourable exception, is the intendment of the apostle in the words under consideration; though many professors fall away, yet you that are true

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<sup>16</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.85-86.

<sup>17</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.97-98.

<sup>18</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.98.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Owen, *Perseverance*, p.99.

<sup>20</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp. 101-102; cf. pp.261-262.

believers, be not shaken in your confidence, for God hath laid the foundation of all your preservation in his eternal purposes, whereby you are designed to life and salvation, and by the fruits whereof you are discriminated from the best of them, that fall away; only continue in the use of means, let every one of ye depart from iniquity, and keep up to that universal holiness, whereunto<sup>21</sup> also ye are appointed and chosen.

The point which Owen tried to make was that, whereas Goodwin suggested the possibility of the saints' apostasy, to Owen the doctrine of perseverance maintained its impossibility due to the infallibility of election, Christ's death for the elect and the sovereignty of the Spirit. Owen accused Goodwin of suggesting that perseverance was predicated upon the rational capability of man to maintain his own standing.<sup>22</sup> According to Owen this view of mankind was wrong, it failed to take seriously the effects of indwelling sin. The saints could decay in grace, and that was why they needed daily fresh supplies of continuing grace.<sup>23</sup> But if perseverance was dependent upon the aptitude and fortitude of the individual then,

In a word, that men are able to plant in themselves inclinations and dispositions to refrain all manner of sin destructive to the safety of their souls, fuller of energy, vigour, life, strength, power, than those that are in them, to avoid things apparently tending to the destruction of their natural lives, is an assertion as full of energy, strength, and vigour, life and poison, for the destruction and eversion of the

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<sup>21</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.182.

<sup>22</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.108.

<sup>23</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.112-13, 119.

grace of God in Christ, as any can be  
invented.<sup>24</sup>

The second aspect of the controversy between Owen and Goodwin had to do with the nature of God's will. As explained in chapter 3, Owen accepted the relative free agency of secondary agents: in this way the doctrine of perseverance never nullified human acts of disobedience, neither were the means of grace insignificant.<sup>25</sup> Fundamentally, however, the saints persevered because God willed it so. Owen appealed to a number of Biblical texts, principally Malachi 3.6, "For I the LORD do not change, therefore you, O Sons of Jacob are not consumed.", and Romans 11.29, "For the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable." In contrast, Goodwin argued that, "the gifts and calling of God may be said to be without repentance because let men continue the same persons which they were, when the donation or collation of any gift was first made by God unto them...".<sup>26</sup> Owen thought this was illogical: how could it be that men were promised perseverance as long as they remain faithful and obedient? Owen insisted that it was in election and predestination where the promise of perseverance could be found.<sup>27</sup> Despite the actual sins and weaknesses of God's people, ultimately God's will for his own people would triumph and the elect would never fall away irrevocably.

That which God affirms shall be

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<sup>24</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.113.

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 3, pp.177-78 and 181-82.

<sup>26</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.123.

<sup>27</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.150-51.

certainly and infallibly fulfilled upon the account of the immutability of his own nature, and he encourageth men to expect it, as certainly to be fulfilled, as he is unchangeable; that shall infallibly, notwithstanding all oppositions and difficulties, be wrought and perfected; now that such, and so surely bottomed, is the continuance of the love of God unto his saints, and so would he have them expect, etc...<sup>28</sup>

Goodwin did not go so far. He accepted the importance of predestination, but predestination had more to do with a relation between possibility and condition. Goodwin tended to favour "preapproves" or "approbation" when discussing predestination.<sup>29</sup> In other words, God foresaw those who would come to faith and endure in faith and on the basis of this foreknowledge willed the perseverance of the believer. According to Goodwin perseverance was a condition. Those who persevered were truly the elect; Goodwin had no problem with this, but that the elect were ipso facto guaranteed to persevere he would not maintain.

The third aspect of Owen and Goodwin's disagreement related precisely to this question of perseverance as a covenant condition. Owen claimed that Goodwin held to the notion that the love of God was conditional upon believing. Owen rejected this interpretation: to make any action or quality of man antecedent to God's love or grace was totally wrong and Pelagian.<sup>30</sup> Of course, agreed Owen, men and women were to employ God's appointed means but the means did not possess any

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<sup>28</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.130-31.

<sup>29</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, p.219.

<sup>30</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.155-56.

conditional merit. Means were only suitable and appropriate to the life of faith.<sup>31</sup> Owen argued that even in the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17.7) God promised himself unconditionally; the people's disobedience would not affect the covenant irreversibly.<sup>32</sup> If the covenant rested on the performance of conditions then the covenant of grace was nothing more than the covenant of works.<sup>33</sup> God was always the primary agent in the covenant of grace.<sup>34</sup> Even in the example of God's promises to the nation of Israel, Owen claimed, what mattered was not the condition of obedience expected from Israel but God's gracious faithfulness to the elect of Israel. Furthermore, even the gospel promises, despite the appearances of qualifications and conditions, were nevertheless absolute promises. "I say then, that even the conditional promises of God, are absolutely made good."<sup>35</sup> Obedience was not a condition for grace, this was crucial to Owen's argument. He reminded the reader that while there was an indissoluble union between sin and punishment, the same was not true between obedience and reward.<sup>36</sup> All gospel promises, moreover, were made to redeemed sinners, and only in

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<sup>31</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.172.

<sup>32</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.205 ff.

<sup>33</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.207-08.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Owen, *Perseverance*, p.270.

<sup>35</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.235; cf.pp. 228 and 233.

<sup>36</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.229.

Christ and through Christ were the benefits of Christ's promises obtained. Here Owen's Christocentrism was apparent.

Christ intercedes, that they may be preserved by the power of his Father, in and through the use of those means, which he graciously affords them, and the powerful presence of the Spirit of God with them therein; and that, not on any such absurd and foolish conditions, that they may be so preserved by his Father, provided they preserve themselves, and continuous believers, on condition that they continue to believe...<sup>37</sup>

The promises of the gospel flowed out of one's union with Christ. According to Owen, perseverance was not dependent upon the faithfulness and obedience of the saints, for this would be foolishly illogical. "Now what one drop of consolation can a poor, drooping, tempted soul, squeeze out of such promises, as depend wholly or solely upon anything within themselves...?"<sup>38</sup> Why would the saints need the promise of perseverance if they were already persevering?

The counsel of his heart (as to the fulfilling of it), doth not depend on any thing in us; what sin thou art overtaken withal, he will pardon; and will effectually supply thee with his Spirit, that thou shalt not fall into, or continue in such sins, as would cut off thy communion with him; and doth not this mix with the forementioned promises with faith, and so render it effectual to the carrying on of the work of<sup>39</sup> love and obedience, as was mentioned?

Owen's view of perseverance, then, may be summarized in the following way. The seemingly conditional

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<sup>37</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.378.

<sup>38</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.238-39; see also pp. 235-39.

<sup>39</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, p.405.

promises demanding perseverance were actually absolute promises. In Owen's opinion they were procured in and by Christ for the believer. It was not, however, that obedience was meaningless. The saints were commanded to persevere, but the potentiality and capability were found in one's union with Christ. Sin was never minimised, but the promise of perseverance was that God would enable the believer to triumph over the sin; sin's challenge would be defeated. God was committed to victory within the elects' lives.

#### 7.1.2 Baxter's view of perseverance: a covenant promise

Close attention has been given to Owen's disagreement with John Goodwin in order to see Owen's insistence upon the immutability of perseverance. Their dispute also helps to illumine Baxter's understanding of perseverance. In some ways Baxter came close to Goodwin's view; he too emphasised it as a condition. Yet, Baxter also agreed with Owen: the infallibility of election was an aspect of the saints' hope. Baxter's view, therefore, not only shows his independent thinking but it also demonstrates the diversity of opinion on perseverance which existed within mid-seventeenth century puritanism.

Interestingly, however, Baxter wrote that the doctrine of perseverance should not be a central issue for his contemporaries. In *Catholick Theologie* (1675), he stated that for the first one thousand years of church history Christians never claimed a certainty

of perseverance.<sup>40</sup> In an earlier work on perseverance Baxter wrote that the doctrine never played an important role in the early churches or in the creeds and confessions of the church.<sup>41</sup> He suggested that the issue became prominent because of the scholastic concern to explain probability and possibility in relationship to the will of God.<sup>42</sup> Baxter's argument was that the issue of perseverance was relatively new, and should not divide the church of his day.

Moreover, he maintained that knowledge of certain perseverance was not absolutely necessary in order to have peace of mind. He argued this solely on the basis of experience. The early church had no doctrine of perseverance and many seemed to have possessed a certain hope. Likewise, Augustine, Luther and the Arminians had no doctrine of assurance and, yet, they were not robbed of assurance.<sup>43</sup> The doctrine of perseverance, argued Baxter, presupposed that Christians were assured that they believed sincerely and would endure to the end in a life of faithful obedience. As a pastor Baxter recognised that few were assured of their own strength. If told to look at the fruit of sanctification most people would find little hope. "If a man be uncertain whether he be sanctified, truly himself he must needs be uncertain whether he

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<sup>40</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, II, pp.93-103.

<sup>41</sup> Baxter, *Richard Baxter's Account of his Present Thoughts concerning the Controversies about the Perseverance of the Saints* (1657), p.23.

<sup>42</sup> See chapter 2, pp.87-89.

<sup>43</sup> Baxter, *Perseverance of the Saints*, p.19.

shall persevere in that grace which he knoweth not that he hath; yea and in common grace it self." <sup>44</sup> In the final section of this chapter the question of assurance will be examined, but for the moment we are concerned with the promise of perseverance, and Baxter's conviction that certainty of perseverance was elusive in the common experience of God's people.

But too sad experience telleth us that there be but few, exceeding few of the godly among us that are certain of their sincerity, Justification, or Salvation: I have desired several Ministers that converse much with experienced Christians, and hear them open the state of their souls, to tell me how they find them in point of assurance? And divers of them of largest acquaintance tell me that they meet not with one that hath it; but that they all profess some doubting and uncertainty, and none that they ask will say, I am sure. <sup>45</sup>

Here Baxter had in mind the question of assurance; but the issue was, many of these doubting Christians wanted a hope of perseverance -- a hope of their final triumph over sin and weakness. <sup>46</sup>

But was it possible for the saints to fall away? This was the central question. To repeat, Arminians suggested that it was possible, albeit remote. Owen, on the other hand, said it was not possible. Baxter took a middle position. He too insisted on making a distinction between possibility and probability. It was possible for saints to fall away, but the

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<sup>44</sup> Baxter, *Perseverance of the Saints*, p.20.

<sup>45</sup> Baxter, *Perseverance of the Saints*, p.20.

<sup>46</sup> Baxter, *Perseverance of the Saints*, p.21.

probability was that they would not.<sup>47</sup> The possibility existed because even redeemed humanity was weak and prone to the effects of indwelling sin. This possibility, however, did not challenge the sovereignty of God's will. The possibility of apostasy was a statement about the human condition, not about the purposes of God. The warnings and exhortations in Scripture existed because of the possibility of apostasy not because of any probability. In effect they became effective aids or means to warn God's people and to turn them away from danger. The danger was very real and so concern was absolutely essential but the probability was that the elect, because they were predestined to faith and glory, would persevere.<sup>48</sup>

Note Baxter's appeal to the covenant of grace and especially to the influence of election:

As to the question therefore whether Justification be lossable, and pardon reversible, I answer, that the grant of them in the Covenant is unalterable; But mans will in itself is mutable, and if he should cease believing by Apostasy, and the condition fail, he would lose his Right, and be unjustified and unpardoned, without any change in God. But that a man doth not so de facto is to be ascribed to Election and Special Grace...<sup>49</sup>

Baxter stated that the reason why so many saints had fears and doubts about their own perseverance was because their knowledge of their perseverance was weak and imperfect. The knowledge of the impossibility or

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<sup>47</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* II, p.93.

<sup>48</sup> Baxter, *Catholic Theology*, II, p.96.

<sup>49</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie*, I.ii., p..

non futura of their apostasy was faulty according to Baxter. "If no grace be perfect in this life, then the assurance of our sincerity, Justification and Perseverance are not perfect in this life...".<sup>50</sup> But what about the evidence of so many individuals who, either in Scripture or in many a congregation, started off well in faith but then fell away from the faith? Baxter instructed his readers not to look at the apostates' experience, for their situation was not similar to that of the godly. This line of argument seemed to beg the issue, but to quote Baxter at length:

Why you know that God hath told you expressly in his Word, that he that repenteth and believeth shall be saved, and that loving him, and loving one another, and esteeming Christ and eternal life above this world, are the sure markes of Christ's Disciples. If you find these in your own souls, what need have you to doubt them because that others have been deceived? God hath made you more capable of knowing your own hearts than others; and accordingly hath made it your duty to search your own and not theirs...<sup>51</sup>

As noted above, Baxter referred to the influence of election and predestination, and in this way Baxter moved from Goodwin's position.<sup>52</sup> Like Owen, Baxter insisted that God was actively engaged in preserving his elect. He went so far as to suggest that perseverance promised that God brought about the actual persevering faith of the elect to specific individuals.

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<sup>50</sup> Baxter, *Perseverance of the Saints*, p.31.

<sup>51</sup> Baxter, *Perseverance of the Saints*, p.28.

<sup>52</sup> ~~Cross-reference~~ See above, p.358.

"To purpose believers to salvation, and not to purpose faith and perseverance absolutely to any particular persons, is to purpose salvation absolutely to none at all...".<sup>53</sup> While Baxter wrote this in 1650, in other later works he insisted that the condition of abiding faithfulness was still demanded. Baxter considered that he was consistent with the thinking of the Westminster Divines.<sup>54</sup> The Westminster Confession declared:

This perseverance of the saints depends, not upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable Love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace: from all which ariseth also the certainty and infallibility thereof.<sup>55</sup>

At first glance Baxter appears to have agreed with Westminster theology; even that when the godly fell into sin, and when God withdrew the immediacy of his affection, still God would not abandon them forever. Commenting upon John 16.32 he wrote,

Yet, note here, that it is but a partial, temporary forsaking that Christ permitteth; and not a total or final forsaking or apostasy. Though he will let them see that they are yet men, he will not leave them to be but as other men: nor will he quite cast them off, or suffer them to perish... The sincere may manifest their infirmity; but the hypocrites will manifest their

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<sup>53</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*,<sup>Orme ed., vol. 22</sup> 22, p. 29.

<sup>54</sup> Baxter, "An unsavoury volume to Mr. Jo. Crandon's Anatomized or a Nosegay of the choicest flowers in that Garden presented to Mr. Joseph Caryl" which is part IV in *Apology*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>55</sup> Westminster Confession XVII.ii, Schaff, *Creeds*, pp. 636-37.

hypocrisy.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, Baxter differed from Owen and from the Westminster Confession over the issue of perseverance as a condition. It is important to remember that Baxter's understanding of a condition in no way diminished the superiority of Christ's merit.<sup>57</sup> There was no causality or merit to a condition. He argued throughout most of his doctrinal writings that the diligent and obedient life (ie. perseverance) was the condition for the final rest of God's people. God had pledged himself to his people in the covenant; through faith in Christ the godly were justified but they must possess their own inherent righteousness. True, Christ accomplished this through fresh grace and through the Spirit, but the saints had to work and strive. Here we can see Baxter's middle position vis-a-vis Goodwin and Owen.

Though this perseverance be certain to true believers; yet it is made a condition of their salvation, yea, of their continued life and faithfulness, and the continuance of their justification, though not their first justification itself. But eternally blessed be that hand of love, which hath drawn the free promise, and subscribed and sealed to that which ascertains us, both of the grace which is the condition, and the kingdom on that condition offered.<sup>58</sup>

According to Baxter this condition was a helpful means: it prompted attentiveness and a dependency upon grace. He explained to Joseph Caryl in 1654, "I still

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<sup>56</sup> Baxter, *The Divine Life*, Orme ed., vol 13, pp.287-88.

<sup>57</sup> See chapter 3.3.1 - 3.3.2.

<sup>58</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, Orme ed., vol 22. p.196.

affirm that God will preserve us from turning unbelievers, notwithstanding the conditionality of this promise, yea by the means of this conditionality to excite us to vigilancy and care for perseverance."<sup>59</sup>

What was Baxter's point and why did he make it? Chiefly, he tried to resist the implications of Antinomian teaching on justification - at least as he understood their teaching. Rather than suggest that someone was justified before the actual moment of faith, or that at the death of Christ every sin of the elect was atoned, Baxter wished to comfort doubting believers by pointing to the sure promise of perseverance: God will see that his people will endure in obedience, notwithstanding occasional failings, to receive the final heavenly rest. Equally, he was concerned with pretension or laziness which could have arisen if a person failed to see the important demand for obedience to "evangelical" duties. The godly had to exercise a holy life, this was a gospel duty. To be sure, Christ enabled them to fulfil this condition - it was not up to their willingness and efforts alone - but they had to strive and press on to the goal of that heavenly rest.

Give not over watching till Satan give over tempting, and watching advantages against you. The promise is still but on condition, that you persevere and abide in Christ, and continue rooted and steadfast in the faith, and overcome and be faithful to the death.. If you have begun resolutely, proceed resolutely.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Baxter, *Apology*, Part IV, p.51. For Caryl see *DNB*, vol 9, p.253.

<sup>60</sup> Baxter, *Weak Christians*, p.90.

Baxter and Owen's understanding of perseverance reveals that in this area voluntarism was held in check. Perseverance was not dependent supremely upon one's willingness to strive. Baxter and Owen argued that if perseverance was dependent upon the will of man, then (as Baxter put it) "it were cold comfort to those that know what man's will is."<sup>61</sup> To be sure, voluntarist implications were evident as Baxter and Owen encouraged believers to walk faithfully and mortify the flesh, but when it came to the promise of perseverance God's will and purpose were judged superior. Where voluntarism was more influential in the Christian life was with the question of assurance, an issue associated with perseverance but which also stood in contradistinction. For the search for assurance raised the question whether a person looked to the gospel promises alone or into one's self to see if there was a sincere appropriation of those promises, evidence of renewal and a changed life. It is to the question of assurance - which involved grace and duty, mortification and perseverance, but still distinct - which we now turn.

## 7.2 The Hope of the Saints: Assurance

The voluntarism of mid-seventeenth century puritans like Baxter and Owen, as it related to assurance, was a refined and modified one in comparison to earlier

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<sup>61</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, pp.29-30.

puritan teaching. It is arguable that this second generation puritan theology tried to correct some of the implications of puritan teaching inherited from Perkins and Ames. There was not a return to Calvin's teaching *per se*, rather there was an attempt towards an equipoise, albeit fragile: election in Christ was the source of assurance, but also there was a necessary introspective task requiring a "willingness". Voluntarism, therefore, was not the basis for enjoying assurance, but it was nevertheless a subservient aspect of experiencing the comfort established by Christ.

Mid-seventeenth century English puritans appreciated that many believers experienced doubts and fears. Sinclair B. Ferguson has quite correctly written,

For it was not simply the doctrinal system that gave rise to the need to discuss assurance, but the analytical and applicatory preaching on the nature of Christian experience. The pulpit was the creator of anxious hearts, and therefore the pulpit had to bring them comfort and assurance.<sup>62</sup>

According to John Asty, a young Owen, apparently lacking assurance, visited Edmund Calamy's church, St. Mary's, Aldermanbury. Calamy was elsewhere that Sunday morning, but an unknown preacher preached on Matthew 8.26 in such a way that Owen's struggles with assurance ended.<sup>63</sup> Bunyan's testimony, as he recorded it in *Grace Abounding* is another illustration of a fairly

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<sup>62</sup> Ferguson, *John Owen*, pp.99-100. Emphasis his.

<sup>63</sup> Asty, *Collection of the Sermons of ... John Owen*, p.v. See also Toon, *God's Statesman*, pp. 12-13 and Ferguson, *John Owen*, p.2. For Calamy, the elder, see *DNB.*, vol 8, pp.227-30.

common experience.<sup>64</sup> Doubting was a frequent problem. Richard Baxter described a number of periods in his own Christian life. During one period he found comfort in Ezekiel Culverwell's, *Treatise of Faith*.<sup>65</sup> Reflecting on another period of doubt he explained that such a dark period of doubt and despair was because,

I could not distinctly trace the workings of the Spirit upon my heart in that method which Mr. Bolton, Mr. Hooker, Mr. Rogers, and other divines describe! Nor knew the time of my conversion, being wrought on by the forementioned degrees. But since then I understood that the soul is in too dark and passionate a plight at first, to be able to keep an exact account of the order of its own operations; and the preparatory grace being sometimes longer and sometimes shorter, and the first degree of special grace being usually very small, it is not possible that one of very many should be able to give any true account of the just time when special grace began, and advanced him above the state of preparation.<sup>66</sup>

In *An End to Doctrinal Controversies* Baxter insisted that a struggle with assurance was the prevailing experience of many.<sup>67</sup> Still, puritan pastors never glorified doubting, in fact they worked hard to comfort the doubting and the fearful among their flock.

It is precisely this pastoral emphasis, however, which suggests that most mid-seventeenth century puritans tended to separate faith from assurance. The

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<sup>64</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666). For other examples see William Bridge, *The Freeness of Grace* (1671), p.75; Giles Firmin, *The Real Christian* (1670), To the Reader, sig B 3v; See Cohen, *God's Caress*, p.110, who over emphasises the value of doubt when he writes, "doubt spurs the desire for assurance, which encourages deeds that increase faith, but assurance edges into presumption and inspires doubt."

<sup>65</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae* I.i.5 p.5.

<sup>66</sup> Baxter, *Reliquiae*, I.i.5 p.6.

<sup>67</sup> Baxter, *An End to Doctrinal Controversies*, pp.235-36.

Westminster Confession of Faith declared, "This infallible assurance doth not so belong to the essence of faith, but that a true believer may wait long, and conflict with many difficulties before he be partaker of it...".<sup>68</sup> Baxter went even further than the Westminster Divines,

Therefore justifying Faith is not assurance that we are justified; otherwise all should have assurance that have Faith; and justifying Faith, in order of Nature, goeth before Justification, but Assurance that we are justified, followeth it; we cannot be assured that we are justified,<sup>69</sup> but by being assured that we believe.

It was possible to possess justifying faith and yet still have to wait a long time and endure a season of struggle before coming to personal assurance. The Independent minister, and member of the Westminster Assembly, Thomas Goodwin explained, "That one who truly fears God, and is obedient to him, may be in a condition of darknesse, and have no light; and he may walk many days and years in that condition."<sup>70</sup>

The common explanation for this distinction between faith and assurance was inclined to stress experiential influences. Few writers referred to the inscrutable implications of election as the cause for fearful doubting. Instead, as Richard Sibbes earlier in the century had suggested, doubt of assurance occurred when believers allowed "feeling" to eclipse true

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<sup>68</sup> Westminster Confession XVIII.iii. Schaff, *Creeds*, pp.638-39.

<sup>69</sup> Baxter, *An End to Doctrinal Controversies*, p.280.

<sup>70</sup> Goodwin, *Childe of Light Walking in darknesse in Certaine Select Cases Resolved*, (another edition, 1647), p.4; cf. Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth* (1642), p.195; and Westminster Larger Catechism, Q.81 in Torrance, *School of Faith*, p.201.

knowledge of God's love. "Againe, one main ground is, False reasoning, and error in our discourse, as that we have no grace when we feele none: feeling is not alwaies a fit rule to judge our states by; that God hath rejected us, because we are crossed in outward things, when as this issues from Gods wisdome and love." <sup>71</sup> Similarly, while Thomas Goodwin thought that the saints' doubts derived chiefly from "something that is between God and them", more often than not weak believers doubted because they were afraid to see that Christ died for them personally. <sup>72</sup> Baxter, of course, frequently challenged those who urged Christians to think of Christ dying in substitution for them personally; instead he called doubters to look at the universally available covenant of grace. <sup>73</sup> Doubters had problems because they questioned the sincerity of their faith, but while their faith might be weak and vacillate God's covenant promises stood true. Justifying faith carried with it no assurance about one's own sincerity but about the hope of the covenant,

that Gods Promises and all his words are true, and that he will perform them; and that Christ is the Saviour of the World, and that the love of God is our End and Happiness, and that all this is offered to us in Christ, even pardon and Life, as well as others; which offer Faith accepteth truly; but the believer is oft uncertain of the sincerity of his own

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<sup>71</sup> Sibbes, *The Soules Conflict with it selfe...*, (1635, 4th edition, 1651) p.22.

<sup>72</sup> Goodwin, *Childe of Light* published in *Certaine Select Cases Resolved* (1645, another edition 1647), p.5; See also Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth* (1642), p.195.

<sup>73</sup> See chapter 3.3.

belief, and so of Salvation. <sup>74</sup>

There were other explanations. Giles Firmin argued that some of the implications contained in certain "preparationist writings" led to spiritual depression: specifically, stressing too much the work of the law. He criticised particularly Thomas Hooker, Thomas Shepherd, Daniel Rogers, William Perkins and John Rogers. <sup>75</sup> Not surprisingly John Saltmarsh, one of the prominent Antinomian writers of the period, suggested that many were affected by some preachers too strenuous in their preaching of the law. "There is nothing but the taking in of the Law, and Accusings, or condemnations of it, which can trouble the Peace and Quiet of any soul...". <sup>76</sup>

What was generally agreed was that the faithful would in time procure some degree of assurance. Their doubts and fears would not deter them from a life of hope. In fact, the hope of assurance was never hidden, for the basis of assurance was Jesus Christ himself, as revealed in the gospel and testified to by the Spirit.

This certainty is not a bare conjectural and probable persuasion, grounded upon a fallible hope; but an infallible assurance of faith, founded upon the divine truth of the promises of salvation, the inward evidence of those graces unto which these promises are made, the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits

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<sup>74</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, p.88.

<sup>75</sup> Firmin, *The Real Christian* (1670), To the Reader, sig B 3v. For Firmin see *DNB*, vol 19, p.45. For Hooker see *DNB*, vol 27, p.295; for Shephard, *DNB*, vol 52, p.50; for Daniel Rogers, *DNB*, vol 49, p.117; and for John Rogers, *DNB*, vol 49, p.129.

<sup>76</sup> Saltmarsh, *Free Graces; or, the Flowings of Christs Blood freely to Sinners* (1646, 10th edition, 1700), p.41.

that we are children of God: which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption.<sup>77</sup>

The hope of assurance required no "new revelation" nor inordinate exercise of faith, but was found in the wonders of the new covenant and available to every believer, though it might take long to emerge. The gospel was first and foremost a message of grace and mercy, assurance could be based on nothing else. Assurance, promised William Bridge, came "in a way of free grace and love too."<sup>78</sup>

The hope of assurance was, of course, associated with God's predestinating purpose and with election; yet assurance was not promised by puritan pastors in strict predestinarian language. Always the hope was expressed with a dominant Christocentrism. "O what a comfort is it to a poor Christian", wrote Baxter, "that in his greatest infirmities, and deepest sense of unworthiness, he hath the beloved of the Father to take his prayers and present them to God, and to plead his cause more effectually than he can do his own."<sup>79</sup>

Baxter appealed to Christ's glorious and sufficient work on the cross and his status as resurrected Lord and High Priest, all of which established the infallible assurance within the covenant of grace.<sup>80</sup>

In a work which he intended to be most pastoral and practical he wrote,

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<sup>77</sup> Westminster Confession XVIII.ii, Schaff, *Creeds*, p.638.

<sup>78</sup> Bridge, *The Freeness of Grace and Love of God to Believers*, p.81.

<sup>79</sup> Baxter, *Treatise of Conversion*, Orme ed., vol 7, p.207.

<sup>80</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, p.90.

Yea, he is engaged by Covenant to Receive us; when we gave up ourselves to him, he also became ours; and we did it on this condition, that he should receive and save us: And it was the condition of his own undertaking: He drew the covenant himself, and tendered it first to us, and assumed <sup>81</sup> his own conditions, as he imposed ours.

As could be expected, Owen's Christocentrism concentrated on the atonement: in the infallible atonement of Christ for elect sinners Christ established assurance for those for whom he died.

the main foundation of all the confidence and assurance whereof in this life, we may be partakers, (which amounts to joy unspeakable, and full of glory) ariseth from this strict connexion of the oblation and intercession of Jesus Christ, that by the one he hath procured all good things for us, and by the other he will procure them to be actually bestowed; whereby he doth never leave our sinnes but follows them into every court, until they be fully pardoned, and clearly expiated, Heb 9.26. he will never leave us until he hath saved, to the utter most, them that come unto God by him... <sup>82</sup>

But what of the practical syllogism or the reflex act? Did mid-seventeenth century puritans like Baxter and Owen advocate this step in order to find assurance? Introspection was never rejected: "it is the duty of every one to give all diligence to make his calling and election sure...", claimed the Westminster Confession of Faith. <sup>83</sup> The Larger Catechism (Q.80) clearly referred to the Spirit enabling believers "to discern

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<sup>81</sup> Baxter, *The Last Work of a Believer... prepared for the funeral of Mary... Hammer... at the death of her daughter, before her death, reprinted (1682)*, p.43; see also pp.39-56. For Baxter's treatment of covenant and covenant conditions see chapter 3.3.1.

<sup>82</sup> Owen, *Salus Electorum*, p.34; cf. Thomas Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth*, p.193.

<sup>83</sup> Westminster Confession XVIII iii, in Schaff, *Creeds*, pp.638-39.

in themselves those graces to which the promises of life are made...".<sup>84</sup> Baxter suggested that assurance required one to discover the sincerity of one's faith, "For his assurance is the conclusion of this argument, [Whosoever sincerely believeth and repenteth is justified: But I sincerely believe and repent; therefore I am justified] And the weakness of the apprehension of either of the premises is even in the conclusion, which always followeth *partem debiliores*."<sup>85</sup> Puritans like Baxter and Owen recognized, like Calvin, that the fruit of one's sanctification could aid the believer along the way to assurance. Indeed certain preachers, as we have seen, encouraged the saints to look for particular qualities within themselves. Here is detected evidence of a voluntarism, for the saints were encouraged to choose a way of life which would manifest certain qualities. If a person was willing to choose the means and gospel-aids, then he or she would be on the way to assurance.<sup>86</sup> Even Owen suggested that individuals should examine the choices of their lives: has there been an abiding choice of Christ, a choice away from temptation to sin, and a choice to love the person of Christ?<sup>87</sup> Baxter went further and exhorted the godly to see a strict correlation between duty and assurance, and they should choose to act

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<sup>84</sup> Torrance, *School of Faith*, p.201.

<sup>85</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii. p.89.

<sup>86</sup> Baxter, *Now or Never*, pp.40-41.

<sup>87</sup> Owen, Discourse II, 7 February, 1672, in John Asty, *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of the Reverend and Learned John Owen D.D.* (1721), pp.541-42.

accordingly.<sup>88</sup> "And they that have a great degree of grace, and also keep it in lively exercise, do seldom doubt of it."<sup>89</sup> Earlier he had written, "Assurance and peace are Christ's great encouragements to faithfulness and obedience: and, therefore, though our obedience do not merit them, yet they usually rise and fall with our diligence in duty."<sup>90</sup>

Yet this observation cannot be pushed too far because at the same time there was a scepticism about the practical syllogism: it was fallible because it expected the individual to have an accurate self-awareness, and this could lead either to further fear or presumption. If the saints were to examine themselves for external or internal signs of sanctification then they must do so only with the greatest caution. Thomas Goodwin wrote,

Thus whensoever we would go down into our owne hearts, and take a view of our graces, let us be sure first to look wholly out of our selves unto Christ, as our justification, and to close with him immediately; and this as if we had no present, or by-past<sup>91</sup> grace, to evidence our being in him.

John Owen was even more sceptical. He preferred to stress the testimony of the Spirit of adoption. "Yea, in the very graces themselves of faith and uprightness of heart, there is such a seal and stamp, impressing

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<sup>88</sup> For Baxter (and Owen) on the relationship between grace and duty see chapter 6.1.2.

<sup>89</sup> Baxter, *The Character of a Sound Confirmed Christian, as also of a Weak Christian: And of a seeming Christian*, the second part of *Directions for Weak Distempered Christians* (1669), pp.66-67.

<sup>90</sup> Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650), p.514.

<sup>91</sup> Goodwin, *Christ Set Forth, To the Reader*, Sig A3.

the image of God upon the soul, as without any reflex act, or actual contemplation of those graces themselves...".<sup>92</sup>

Baxter's principal exhortation was that the faithful be willing to accept the covenant of grace; in their willingness was the procurement of assurance. Baxter maintained that as long as one was willing to accept the offered Christ then this was evidence of justifying faith. "For his willingness is his very consent or Acceptance; and that Consent is true Faith: Christ expecteth no more to make up the match."<sup>93</sup> It was not a perfect, sinless, willingness which was required but sincerity or, "which way goes the prevailing bent or choyce of your will...".<sup>94</sup>

Thus, this reflex act was received with hesitancy and considerable qualification. At times Baxter seemed to suggest that discovering one's sincerity was the way to assurance, but he urged that sincere faith was only brought about by a predisposing act of grace.<sup>95</sup> Always the final word was an acknowledgment of God's work in the believer's life.<sup>96</sup> He declared that the syllogism's conclusion was only a "fruit of faith". "This is a rational conclusion helped by Grace, whereof the major only is *de fide* [He that believeth is

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<sup>92</sup> Owen, *Perseverance*, pp.83.

<sup>93</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification*, p.278.

<sup>94</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification*, p.279.

<sup>95</sup> He states this explicitly in *The Saints Everlasting Rest* p.490.

<sup>96</sup> Baxter, *Divine Life*, Orme ed. vol 13, II., p.245.

justified] but not the minor [I believe]. Therefore we usually call it a Fruit of Faith." <sup>97</sup> One was assured, therefore, not by exalting one's own act of faith or sanctification but by recognising the love and mercy of God which enabled one's act of faith. Whatever assurance came from the practical syllogism it was qualified by a greater emphasis upon the person of the Savior and the work of the Spirit. "It is by the Spirit", explained Baxter, "that all Christians must come to their assurance...". <sup>98</sup> Owen suggested that while the work of the Holy Spirit might take a long time there could never be any full assurance without the Spirit's work, a work in which, "when our spirits are pleading their right and title, he comes in and bears witness on our side...". <sup>99</sup>

By examining puritan writers like Baxter and Owen a fundamental conclusion may be reached: the practical syllogism was not dismissed outright, but Christocentrism and pneumatology were far more central in explaining assurance. It was mentioned above that Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* illustrates mid-seventeenth century puritan struggles with doubt. Bunyan was not fully at peace until he recognised the alien righteousness of Christ imputed to him:

this Sentence fell upon my soul, thy  
Righteousness is in Heaven: And  
methought withal, I saw with the Eyes of  
my Soul, Jesus Christ at God's  
Right-hand; there, I say, was my

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<sup>97</sup> Baxter, *An End to Doctrinal Controversies*, p.239.

<sup>98</sup> Baxter, *Catholick Theologie* I.ii, p.91; cf. Baxter, *The Saints Everlasting Rest*, p.493.

<sup>99</sup> Owen, *Of Communion*, p.241; cf. *Hebrews*, Vol.2, p.147.

Righteousness; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, He wants my Righteousness, for that was just before him. I also saw moreover, that it was not my good Frame of Heart that made my Righteousness better, nor yet my bad Frame that made my Righteousness worse; for my Righteousness was Jesus Christ himself, the same Yesterday, today, and forever Heb. 13.8. <sup>100</sup>

What is seen in the issue of assurance, then, is a qualified voluntarism. The will had a role to play in experiencing assurance, for assurance did not come through a passive persuasion of faith. Mid-seventeenth century puritans, as represented chiefly by Baxter and Owen, cautiously advocated introspection to see the handiwork of the Spirit and God's grace. In this sense they continued the distinction between faith and assurance. But for them this distinction had more to do with particular experiential issues: it was just a fact that many of the godly had a difficulty in appropriating the confidence which both Scripture and the preacher promised. To save the godly from destructive anxiety Baxter and Owen appealed to the person of Christ. In him <sup>were</sup> ~~was~~ the saints' hope and assurance. Owen pointed to the death of Christ; Baxter to the universal covenant. Both stressed the comforting work of the Holy Spirit. The voluntarism - that is the will's choosing - was always subordinate to the work of grace. The state of the renewed will, as Baxter and Owen explained it, has to be remembered when

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<sup>100</sup> Bunyan, *Grace Abounding* #229, p.117. See Richard Greaves, "John Bunyan and Covenant Thought in the Seventeenth-Century," *CH* 36 (1967), p.163. He argues that Bunyan accepted the need for a "personal, experiential awareness of being under the covenant of grace ...". This is true, but Greaves seems to have passed over the emphasis which Bunyan gave to Christ's imputed righteousness even in the quote he offers from *Law and Grace*.

reading of the will's activity in assurance. In general many of the doctrinal implications of Perkins et al were continued after 1649; so R.T. Kendall's argument cannot be dismissed outright.<sup>101</sup> Nevertheless, when mid-seventeenth century puritan understanding of the will is examined -- as it related to the covenant, the use of means and the relation between grace and duty -- it is clear that particularly Owen, and even Baxter to an extent, qualified and modified earlier teachings on the nature of assurance.

### Conclusion

In this chapter on perseverance and assurance a number of conclusions have been reached. With regard to Baxter and Owen's views on perseverance, it was argued that their opinions reflected points along a spectrum of mid-seventeenth century thought. Owen was one whose understanding of election led him to stress the immutable certainty that God's people would persevere. He was not ignoring the reality of indwelling sin; rather, sin notwithstanding, the saints would endure because of God's commitment to them. Owen's Christology also shaped his interpretation of the saints' duty to persevere: the promises and hopes were found in Christ. Baxter's consideration of perseverance shows how subtle were the shades of thought along the spectrum in the mid-seventeenth

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<sup>101</sup> See chapter 1, pp.4 ff.

century: he neither fully agreed with the Arminians nor entirely concurred with Owen. Still, for Baxter the guarantee of perseverance was not so much with a person's performance of duties as with the sure promises of God in the covenant of grace.

For Baxter and Owen assurance, therefore, involved supremely a sure confidence in the grace of God extended in the covenant and the indwelling Spirit. Yet, both reveal a tendency among mid-seventeenth century puritans to make a clearer distinction between faith and assurance than, say, Calvin. Provided that one appreciates that Calvin recognized the experiential problems of believers, then Baxter and Owen's view on assurance was not altogether a fundamental departure from Calvin. On the other hand, it is clear that Baxter and Owen tacitly advocated the practical syllogism; yet the evidence would suggest that they placed only slight confidence in the exercise. Instead, greater stress was placed upon the work of the Spirit. What is manifestly obvious from the material considered in this chapter is that for both Baxter and Owen assurance was more than result of a passive persuasion of the mind. Voluntarism was involved.

This voluntarism suggests, in the final analysis, a piety which demanded a willingness. To be sure, this chapter also showed that such a willingness was controlled, subordinate to, and moderated by the truths (as Baxter and Owen conceived them) of Christology, predestination and pneumatology. Still, the prominence, but not dominance, of the will's choosing

to respond to the divine initiative was a key element of the day to day living of the saint, and a salient aspect of his hope.

### CONCLUSION

This thesis has studied the importance of voluntarism within mid-seventeenth century puritan theology and practice. It has been argued that voluntarism should be defined as the prominence, but not dominance, of the human will in response to the divine initiative in the divine/human encounter. Richard Baxter and John Owen have been taken to illustrate mid-seventeenth century puritanism. Because of their prominence within mid-seventeenth century puritanism and the significance of their publications it was argued that they were valid representatives of the period. Nevertheless, it was also shown that they reflected the diversity of opinion within seventeenth century Calvinism.

To introduce the question of "Calvinism", however, only begs further questions concerning voluntarism. Specifically, in what sense was there a theological continuity from Calvin to Baxter and Owen with regard to the doctrine of the human will? Additionally, "Calvinism" is hard to define. Should Calvinism be equated with the theology of Perkins and Ames, and how did their views on human willingness relate to Calvin's? Is there any specific evidence to suggest that later Calvinists were modifying or correcting Calvin's theology of the human will? Lastly, due to the infrequent references to Calvin's writings in the works of Baxter and Owen, it remains difficult to

confine a study of mid-seventeenth century puritan voluntarism to a comparison and contrast with the voluntarism of John Calvin. This thesis has argued that there were notable similarities between Calvin's voluntarism and Baxter and Owen's: thus suggesting a significant degree of continuity. Yet, this continuity should not be limited to the issue of Calvin versus the Calvinists.

Appropriately, the thesis looked to earlier antecedents for Baxter and Owen's voluntarism. It was shown that Augustine was the principal influence not only upon Baxter and Owen, but upon a tradition in which Luther and Calvin both stood. Attention was given to Augustine's theories on divine sovereignty and human freedom. While important modifications were made to Augustine's theology, principally due to a revived Aristotelianism during the middle ages, there was a tradition which understood freedom in a particular way. Freedom of the will was relative: the will chose relative to its nature. As affected by sin the will chose according to its sinful nature; in this sense it chose to sin freely. There was no external necessity or constraint upon men and women to sin. While the will was free in this relative sense, only by grace could a sinful will be healed and corrected. How grace and human nature interacted, however, was shown to have been explained in varying ways: this was the issue with which medieval theologians like Aquinas, Duns Scotus, Ockham and Bradwardine were concerned. In reaction to the conclusions reached by the *via moderna* of Ockham

and Biel, Luther built on the work of Bradwardine and led the subsequent Reformers into a revived Augustinianism. It was suggested, however, that Luther's anthropology was less optimistic than Calvin's; and Calvin, while very much an Augustinian, was also less willing to dismiss certain Scholastic metaphysical conclusions. These antecedents and the Augustinian tradition shaped the context in which Baxter and Owen wrote.

This thesis has also argued that Baxter and Owen were influenced by covenant theology. Covenant theology was a central aspect of mid-seventeenth century puritan theology and practice. It was stressed, however, that covenant theology was not a "system" of theology. It was a way of explaining the divine initiative. This explanation was never free from paradox: both divine sovereignty and human secondary agency were defended. Yet in this context it was noted that Baxter and Owen differed. Baxter was far more willing to accept a universal and conditional covenant. Owen claimed that the covenant was absolute, for by the death of Christ the elect were infallibly predestined. It was argued, therefore, that attention must be given to Christology when reading seventeenth century covenant theology. Baxter viewed Christ as the covenant law satisfier: by his merits and death a new covenant was established into which all were invited provided that they met the condition of faith. Owen, on the other hand, gave far more emphasis to Christ's atonement: namely that Christ died in substitution for

the elect only and by his death they were infallibly brought into the covenant. Neither Baxter nor Owen were willing to go to the extremes of either Arminianism or Antinomianism; in this respect their interpretations of the covenant of grace were, on one level, similar. Yet due to their different understandings of the merits and righteousness of Christ, and conditionality and contingencies, they arrived at divergent views of the covenant of grace.

Despite this difference, both stressed the importance of a "willingness". Their voluntarism meant that faith was more than a passive persuasion of the mind. Faith involved the whole of man's faculties: intellect, will and affections. In the exercise of the will both Baxter and Owen pressed upon their readers the necessity of human choice. This willingness was not an exaltation of the human will, yet it was with a recognition that grace and the Holy Spirit renovated the will because choice was fundamental to the image of God in men and women. Baxter and Owen both spoke of the "suitability" of human choice in response to the gospel. Nevertheless, there was a paradox here and it cannot be resolved: there was no way the human will could choose to respond to the gospel apart from the sovereign work of God, but a choice had to occur.

Justification, therefore, according to Baxter and Owen, involved voluntarism. What must be remembered is that voluntarism did not minimize the sovereignty of God in justification. While Baxter and Owen differed in their understanding of predestination and election,

they both claimed that justification was a sovereign work of God in a person's life, through the merits of Christ and the influence of the Spirit. Only a renovated will responded to the call of the preacher to repent and believe. Baxter and Owen did not entirely dismiss preparation for faith: but they were reluctant to go any further than to suggest that there was a preparation, through means which God ordained, which brought a person to faith. Through this process the will was changed and redirected. The main cause, however, was not the work of the law as much as it was the work of the Spirit.

On this basis the Christian life, according to Baxter and Owen, involved a mysterious dialectic between divine sovereignty and human response. Christians were not to ignore duty, for in the performance of duty they grew in grace. It was not so much a case of works meriting further grace as it was obedience appropriate to the believer's new creation in Christ. The inverse of the life of duty was the profound self-awareness of indwelling sin and failure. The greatest challenge in the Christian life was a watchfulness of the self. Essential to this self-awareness was willingness. Were the saints willing to use the means of grace? Were they willing to fight indwelling sin? Never could they rely on the steadfastness of their willingness, for it was the person of Christ in whom they gained solace and strength; but their willingness mattered.

While Christians lived in this world, claimed Baxter and Owen, they struggled with doubts and questions. Perseverance and assurance were hopes which, while associated with voluntarism, ultimately depended upon God's gracious and sovereign mercy. Baxter and Owen did not fully reject the practical syllogism, but they gave greater emphasis to a confidence in the Spirit's work and the tenor of the covenant of grace. Such were the doctrinal underpinnings and the practical issues of mid-seventeenth century voluntarism, as seen in Richard Baxter and John Owen.

The contribution which this study makes to the knowledge of puritan theology and practice lies principally in the definition of voluntarism offered. Puritan theology, while shaped by Scholastic rhetoric and methodology, was still a theology which attempted to explain human experience. The experiential aspect of the puritan faith implies that the modern interpreter must be prepared to see numerous contradictions and paradoxes. It is tempting to want to resolve these tensions, either because of a presupposition which assumes that puritan theology was a highly systematic form of thought, exemplified in the work of Perry Miller, or from a concern, as symbolized by R.T. Kendall, to relate puritan theology to earlier expressions (eg. Calvin). It was argued in this thesis that voluntarism, as seen in Baxter and Owen, illumines the <sup>qualifications</sup> ~~contradictions~~, paradoxes and even contradictions within mid-seventeenth century puritanism. This study

explored the theological dimension which Peter Lake and Paul Seaver have charted in practical piety. Voluntarism, as explained in this thesis, was at the centre of puritan piety: not because it was a theory which was superimposed upon predestinarian theology, but because at the heart of practical Christian living it was recognized that part of what it meant to be a moral human being involved choice. This thesis can bring us further along in an understanding of the dynamics of puritan theology and practice as we appreciate how this human aspect related to divine activity.

APPENDIX

The Controversy Surrounding Baxter's  
*Aphorismes of Justification* (1649)

The following details the controversy which developed as a result of Richard Baxter's first publication, *Aphorismes of Justification* (1649), second edition published at the Hague (1653). It was a work quite provocative and involved some of the more notable mid-seventeenth century figures. Presented below is a list of those individuals from whom Baxter received significant reaction. It is arranged chronologically and also records Baxter's response where relevant.

1. John Warren  
*Calamy Revised*, p.511  
 an undated response in Baxter Treatises MS 61, vol 14, item 321. London: Dr. Williams's Library. Warren also wrote letters to Baxter, one especially worth noting is dated August 27, 1649. Baxter responded to Warren on at least two occasions: September 11, 1649 and November, 7, 1649. Later, Warren wrote further animadversions.
2. John Owen  
 Owen responded to Baxter's criticism in the Appendix to *Aphorismes in Of the Death of Christ...* (1650). Baxter responded to Owen in *Rich: Baxter's Confession of his Faith* (1655); Owen responded again to Baxter in *Vindicae Evangelicae* (1655). See Baxter's later comments about Owen in *Reliquiae Baxterianae* I.163, p.111.
3. Richard Vines  
*DNB*, vol 53, p.369  
 One of the two to whom Baxter dedicated *Aphorismes*. Of particular interest see his letters to Baxter: July 1, 1650 and July 3, 1651. Baxter, *Correspondence* MS 59, vol 5.15, 5.17, 18 and 5.19 London: Dr. Williams's Library. Baxter responded in particularly the following letters: July 24, 1650 and June 16, 1651.

Baxter Correspondence, MS 59 vol 5.24 and 5.20. London: Dr. Williams's Library

4. George Lawson  
DNB, vol 32, p.289

See Baxter's comments in *Reliquiae* I.156, p.107. Also see "Dialogue between Baxter and Lawson", Baxter Treatises MS 61 Vol 1.9; Baxter's review of his controversy with Lawson in Baxter Treatises MS 59, vol 7.274 and his letter to Lawson, dated August 5, 1651 which is also in vol 7.

5. John Wallis  
DNB, vol 59, p.141

Epistle from John Wallis, dated June 28, 1652. But see *Reliquiae* I \$156, p.107 where Baxter states that he, "broke it off in the middle because he little differed from me."

6. William Eyre  
*Calamy Revised*, p.187

Criticised Baxter in *Vindicae Justificationis Gratuitae* (1653). John Owen wrote the Preface. Eyre had responded to a sermon preached by Benjamin Woodbridge, later published as *Justification by Faith* (1653). Baxter praised Woodbridge's sermon in a response to Eyre in *Rich. Baxter's Apology* (1654). Baxter later furthered his response to Eyre in *Of Justification* (1658). Benjamin Woodbridge responded to Eyre in *The Method of Grace* (1656).

7. Thomas Blake  
DNB, vol 5, p.179

Wrote against Baxter in *Vindicae Foederis* (1653) to which Baxter responded in his *Apology* (1654). Later Blake published *Covenant Sealed* (1655) in which he responded to Baxter's *Apology*. Interestingly, this work by Blake has a commendation by Richard Vines and a preface by Christopher Cartwright in which reference is clearly made to Baxter's *Apology*.

8. George Kendall  
DNB, vol 30, p.405  
Critical reference was made to Baxter in *The Pagan Preacher Silenced*, or an answer to a Treatise of Mr. John Goodwin, entitled *The Pagans Debt and Dowry*. By Obadiah Howe, with a verdict on the case depending between Mr. Goodwin and Mr. Howe (1653). Baxter responded to this in his *Apology* (1654).
9. Anthony Burgess  
DNB, vol 7, p.308  
Baxter dedicated *Aphorismes* to Burgess and Vines. Burgess published veiled criticism in *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted* (1654). Baxter also received letters from Burgess which Baxter later published in *Of Justification* (1658). See also *Reliquiae I* \$156, p.107.
10. John Crandon  
Wrote Mr. Baxter's *Aphorisms Exorcized* (1654). Baxter responded to this in his *Apology* (1654).  
*Biographical Dictionary of British Radicals in the Seventeenth Century, I*, p.188.
11. John Eedes  
DNB, vol 17, p.141  
Challenged Baxter in *The Orthodox Doctrine* (1654). This work dealt with the debate between Baxter and William Eyre.
12. A Mr. Fisher, Mr. Hagger and a Mr. Keye  
Referred to by Baxter in his *Apology*, Part IV, but dismissed by Baxter.
13. John Tombes  
DNB, vol 57, p.2  
Published Latin animadversions and letters, which were published by Baxter in his *Of Justification* (1658).
14. John Warner  
DNB, vol 59, p.394  
*Diatriba Fidei Justificantis* (1657), published in Baxter's *Of Justification* (1658).
15. Giles Firmin  
DNB, vol 19, p.45  
*Meditations upon Mr. Baxter's Review* (1672)

16. Thomas Tully  
DNB, vol 57, p.310
- Justificatio Paulina (1674) and Letter to Mr. Richard Baxter (1675) both of which received response in Baxter's Treatise on Righteousness (1676).
17. Christopher Cartwright  
DNB, vol 9, p.220
- In Reliquiae I §156, p.107, Baxter stated that he received criticism from Cartwright in the latter's defense of the King against the Marquess of Worcester. There is some problem with this. There is a work entitled Certamen Religiosum: or, a Conference (1649). This is an account between the King and an number of divines. The DNB, vol 3, p.450 states that actually this was written by one Thomas Bayly. Thomason, Catalogue of the Pamphlets... (London: British Museum, 1908), concurs. There is a 1651 edition of this work which has a Preface written by C.C. [Christopher Cartwright]. This Preface says that indeed Bayly was the author of the 1649 Certamen. Cartwright was not interested whether the conference took place or not. His problem was with the lack of an answer of what he saw as a one-sided presentation (ie. Roman Catholic) to the King. He claimed that Part II of this book was his response. This may be what Baxter had in mind in Reliquiae. Cartwright later wrote, Exceptions against a Writing of Mr. Baxter's (1675) which Baxter included in his Treatise of Righteousness (1676).

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- B 1383            *The Saints Everlasting Rest* (1650), Orme edition, Vols. 22 and 23.
- B 1187            *Rich. Baxters Apology* (1654).
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