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## **1985 Congregational Studies Conference Papers**

**John Penry 1563–1593**

*Prof. R Tudur Jones*

**Owen on the Mortification of Sin**

*Peter Golding*

**Walter Cradock**

*Prof. R Tudur Jones*



**Congregational  
Studies Conference  
Papers  
1985**

**Prof. R Tudur Jones,  
and  
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# John Penry 1563–1593

## R Tudur Jones

By 1563 Queen Elizabeth had been on the throne for four years. She was preceded by her half sister Mary who was a Roman Catholic and had attempted to restore Catholicism but had failed, despite bitter persecution to repress the burgeoning Protestantism of the period.

Elizabeth came to the throne and that meant a change—the establishment at last of the Anglican church, mainly in the form in which it has still continued to exist. We may assume that a boy like John Penry, being brought up in Breconshire, would almost certainly start off as a Catholic, because by 1563 the new reformed religion would barely have penetrated into rural Wales, and that's true of many parts of rural England at that time too. So we may assume that he would have been brought up in a Catholic atmosphere—the debased folk Catholicism that existed at the time.

So, if that is true, then Penry during his career covered virtually the whole spectrum from Catholicism to Separatism and that makes him a very interesting character to study. Just a word about the background. He was born at a place called Cefn-Brith. Now it is appropriate, I think, to say in passing, as a kind of footnote, that we are not absolutely certain that John Penry was a Breconshire man. But I won't press the point that he may have been a Glamorgan man.

What kind of place was Wales at that time? As I have said, it was still mainly Catholic in its atmosphere although that Catholicism was virtually moribund, and even after the coming of the Anglican Reformation the bishops found it immensely difficult to recruit men to work in the parishes (a point to which we shall refer again, because Penry was intensely interested in this problem). We have a report in the Public Record office dated 4 July 1586 (MS 12/191 No 17). It is a report on conditions in the County of Brecknock Shire. I don't know who composed this, possibly a government official or even an ecclesiastical official, but the heading says; A briefe collection of the state of Brecknock Shire, May 1586: 'Where Gods service is neglected, and his worde not effectualle preached, Common wealth cannot prosper, or be well governed'. Then it goes on

In all Brecknock Shire are very fewe spirituale livinges or parsonages, but are improprieate [that is, the profits of the living devoted to other uses than the service of the parishioners], and in those fewe not one preacher, but ignorant and vnlearned ministers'.



It's rather interesting that a considerable proportion of the old Catholic personnel of the church in England and in Wales continued to serve into the Elizabethan period and this was part of the difficulty that the authorities were facing. The report continues:

The rest are in manner all served with vnlearned stipendiarie curates whereof diverse do serve two or, some three parishes; So in most countrie parishes if vppon Sondaie and high holie daies some part of the morning prayer be said [and that in such posting manner, that the hearers are little, or nothing the better for it] seldome or never is there any evening prayer: Neither in the weeke daies [not in Lent] is any service said at all: And many tymes for want of the Minister, the parishioners are fayne to burie the dead themselves. Howe the sick are visited and what ghostlie counsell [that is what spiritual counsell], and comfort they receave from their curates in their greatest extremitie may be conjectured by that hath been said.

That was the kind of religious background against which John Penry was reared.

Now we don't know where he got his initial education—possibly at Christ College, Brecon. That's the only possibility. In fact a portion of the tithes of his native parish Llangamarch did go to the support of Christ College, but wherever he went he must have acquired sufficient Latin to enable him to avail himself of a university course. So he went up to Cambridge in 1580 and became a student at Peterhouse. His name appears in the Buttery books for the first time on 11 June 1590. The head of the College at that time was an interesting scholar called Dr Andrew Perne (1519?–89). He was one of those men who succeeded, in that period, in following every religious fashion. He did not have an over-sensitive conscience. He was a Protestant at the time of Edward VI, he was a Catholic under Queen Mary, and became a Protestant again under Elizabeth. In that respect he was very like the bishop of Llandaff, Anthony Kitchin (1477–1563), whose career follows the same pattern. But more remarkable than that, Perne played a very odd role in the period of Queen Mary and subsequently. Queen Mary's persecution extended, not only to the living, but to the dead, and amongst the distinguished foreigners who had been refugees in England were Martin Bucer (1491–1551) from Strasbourg and Paul Fagius (1504–49). They both died in England during their stay and now their bodies were disinterred and burnt. The preacher on that occasion was Dr Andrew Perne and for his sermon he took the astonishing text 'Behold how good and joyful a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in unity'.

In four years Queen Mary had died, Elizabeth was on the throne, and the University of Cambridge decided to make amends to these great scholars and

so the senate of the university resolved that their old honours should be restored. The vice-chancellor at the time was no other than Dr Andrew Perne and, in fact, he was foremost in his enthusiasm to have the names of these great men honourably restored to the university registers. To have such a college head was not all a disadvantage for young students like Penry, because Andrew Perne sat very lightly, you notice, on religious convictions. Since Cambridge at that time was a hotbed of Puritanism, there's little doubt that the young Penry came very heavily under the influence of the Puritan movement at the university. He completed his course and graduated at Cambridge and then there is a gap in our information about him. His name disappears from the Buttery books of his college. During the nineteenth century that gap was very quickly filled because there was an oral tradition which claimed that what happened to Penry at that time was that he returned to Breconshire to evangelise and that in fact he did gather a congregation, a congregation that still exists at Troedrhwdalar and if you look at the old Congregational Year Book you will see that its foundation date is given as 1593, which is just a little later than the gap in our knowledge of Penry's career. But we don't know. Personally, I think it's rather unlikely. However, he reappeared at Cambridge briefly and then migrated to Oxford and graduated there. So he was ready to begin his public career.

By that time (the mid-1580s) the Puritan movement had taken root and flourished, particularly at the University of Cambridge, but also it was spreading in the Midlands of England. Here in London it was flourishing and it had maintained a very powerful campaign not only in the country but in the House of Commons as well, seeking to modify the settlement of religion made by Queen Elizabeth. Their Puritan ideal was the Presbyterian (Reformed) Church of Scotland and they hoped that it would be possible to develop the Anglican reformation yet further in the same direction to remove the bishops, or the office of bishop, and to construct on English soil a Presbyterian church, not strictly on the Scottish or the Genevan model but fundamentally the same in principle. Now the point I'm making is rather an interesting one, perhaps, for this audience. One of the differences was that English Puritanism always insisted that the local congregation should have a greater measure of sovereignty than was usual up north in the Church of Scotland. Quite a significant difference. Nevertheless, the aim of the campaign was to set up a Presbyterian system, another concern as well. A concern which makes him unique in the story and that is his concern for the spiritual condition of Wales. He decided that his first great public act would be to appeal to the Queen and to the Commons by means of a petition. That, at the time, was the customary method of drawing the attention of the House of Commons to any public

grievance. In fact we still use the petition today, of course. Petitions have been presented quite recently on important public matters, but up to the great Parliamentary reforms of the last century the petition was used as the best method of forcing the Commons to take notice of any matter that was of concern to the public. Penry decided to present a little petition of his own, supported by a document. Now this document was his first book. It is entitled *Aequity of an Humble Supplication*.

It is (those of you who have read his *Aequity* will agree, I'm sure), a passionate plea to the Queen and Parliament to take notice of the spiritual desolation in Wales. For Penry, and Calvinists like him in the days of Elizabeth as in other periods, not to have the Gospel preached meant depriving people of any hope of salvation. It meant consigning people to hell. Now we need to grasp this because otherwise it is very difficult for us to think historically about the language used by a man like Penry—not least, the bitterness of his attacks on the people whom he deemed to be responsible for creating this desolation. Human souls were at risk and that was the most serious of all problems to a man like Penry. His copy was ready for the press by January 1587.

As a petition to Parliament it had to be presented. It was presented by the member of Parliament for Carmarthen, a man called Edward Dunn Lee and by Job Throckmorton (1545–1601), who will appear again in our story, a swashbuckling Puritan, the member for Warwickshire. They presented the petition, the *Aequity*, to the House of Commons and it was received. That was important because it meant that now it could be published. In the days of Elizabeth, there was a form of censorship, or at least government control, over publications. In his *Aequity*, Penry appealed to her majesty Queen Elizabeth and to her Parliament. In his opening remarks in the *Aequity*, he says that only the poor welcome the Gospel. Learned people are not prepared to carry the gospel to others and God has put the burden upon him of making the plight of his fellow countrymen known. They are descending into paganism. The Queen has reigned for 28 years and things have not improved. He reminds the Parliament at the beginning of the *Aequity* that it is a very serious matter indeed to defy the will of God. Wales must be released from the spiritual darkness as well as from God's judgement upon it.

What is his solution? Teaching ministers. One of the most important planks in the Puritan platform. It was not sufficient to have ministers. That would be pure formalism and might not help. They must be teaching ministers and that implied that they must be learned ministers. Men learned in the Bible, able to teach their parishioners. If the Welsh nation could be saved by hearing the word of the Gospel then indeed there is a future for it. But that cannot be done without preaching. We must have a ministry, says Penry, that

really breaks the bread of life for people. We must have ministers who are present in their parishes. One of the great evils of the late medieval church, and it tended to re-appear also in the Anglican church in the early years, was absenteeism. That is, clergymen drawing salaries, profits, incomes from a number of parishes or other offices in the church and obviously, since a man cannot be omnipresent, that meant absenteeism—living away from his duties. Now we must have men, says Penry, who actually live and work in their parishes. ‘Moreover you may be assured dread sovereign,’ he writes, ‘both that we and our children forever will bless our God that he has inclined mercy unto us in your eyes; and also our calling will be a testimony of our burning zeal unto the truth among all the ages to come, even to the enemies of your good name. Whereas on the other hand, the continuance of our blind ignorance will be, I fear, a blemish unto your credit among our woeful posterities and the enemies of God forever.’ People will say, writes Penry, if the Queen forgets her religious duty [remember that Queen Elizabeth, of course, was the supreme governor of the church, she had a distinct religious responsibility, that is part of the argument] if she neglects her duty, people will say that she wanted the Gospel for herself but was unready to share the Gospel with others. Possibly they might say that the whole point of the Reformation in England was so that she and her friends could pocket the wealth of the monasteries. Consequently, Penry says, there were scores of parishes without a single soul in them knowing anything of Christ.

The document I read at the beginning supports the testimony of Penry. In fact, we can make the general statement that the facts referred to by Penry have never been confuted. He talks about the woeful ignorance of people about Christian theology. He quotes one of his neighbours in Breconshire saying ‘I care very little for the Father, that cruel man, but the Son is a good fellow’. Similarly the cult of Mary was still flourishing. In other words the remains of Roman Catholicism, as he illustrates, were to be seen in every part of the country.

So the petition was presented. The church authorities and the Queen soon took notice of the *Aequity*. Job Throckmorton was brought before the Queen and made to apologise because he, too, in seconding the motion in the Commons that the petition be accepted, had said some rather harsh words, not so much about the Queen herself as about her leading ministers. Job apologised and then the Court of High Commission (that was the body that had the chief responsibility for religious discipline in the kingdom in those days) took the matter up. Penry was brought before this court. What was the accusation he had to face?—It was ‘to be a factious slanderer of Her Majesty’s government and to have published flat treason and heresy’. There were

distinguished people on the bench, Archbishop John Whitgift was in the chair, John Aylmer the bishop of London was there, Thomas Cooper the bishop of Winchester and so on. When Penry was led in, Whitgift was astonished to discover that he was so young. If my dating is correct he was 24 years old at that time and Whitgift, who was always irascible exploded, and in fact some of the words he used in referring to the defendant were not the kind of words you expect from an archbishop: 'knave', 'varlet', 'slanderer', 'lewd boy', 'lewd slanderer'! and so on. Bishop Aylmer of London asked him why did he object to priests living outside their parishes. Penry said, 'Because that is unacceptable to God and unacceptable to men because men are being denied salvation'. Then Aylmer asked him 'Is preaching the only means of salvation?' Penry replied 'It is the only usual means of salvation'. A careful answer. Then the bench of bishops fell out amongst themselves on this question because some of them agreed with Penry. The one with the loudest voice was Cooper, the bishop of Winchester, and he in a great fury said 'My lords, I can assure you, this is a damnable heresy', and Penry intervened to say 'My lord, it is a heresy, but it is a heresy that I will not recant so long as I live, God willing'.

Now the court, you see, was embarrassed because the *Aequity* had been submitted to the House of Commons in a perfectly orderly way. The House of Commons had received it and that meant it could be legally published; it was duly published and entered with the Stationers' Company. Everything was in order so that the Court of High Commission had no legal grounds on which to proceed—but they had Penry in prison. They didn't know exactly what to do with him because they might find themselves on a collision course with the Commons and they did not want that. In fact the Commons were saying some pretty rough things about Archbishop Whitgift as it was. Well, the end of the incident was that, after a month in prison, the jailer was instructed to unlock the door of Penry's cell and to inform him that the door was open and leave it at that. Penry walked out. That is how the authorities got out of their embarrassment.

No sooner was Penry free than he returned to the attack with his *Exhortation; An Exhortation to the governors and people of her Majesty's Country of Wales, to labour earnestly to have the preaching of the gospel planted among them*, published in April 1588. He returns to the same theme as he had expounded in the *Aequity*, namely, the need for resident ministers, the need for teaching ministers, and he adds to those points the suggestion that the Bible should be translated into Welsh. He discusses some possible difficulties. This is an interesting point because, you see, in April 1588 William Morgan (1541?–1604), later bishop of Llandaff and after that of St Asaph, was reading the proofs of his great translation of the Bible into Welsh. In fact he was being

patronised by Archbishop Whitgift who was quite generous in the patronage he provided for the Welsh Bible. William Morgan spent some time at the palace at Lambeth on this work. But obviously this news hadn't reached Penry so that that point was already out of date because, before the end of 1588, William Morgan's translation appeared.

But his language is getting more strident; he is impatient.

Woe be to the shepherds of Wales, saith Jehovah. They feed themselves and eat of the fat and clothe themselves with the wool and let the flock go hungry. God will send a just judgement on their offices. Men will fear to enter into the sees of David, Asaph, Bangor and Llandaff and I trust in the Lord Jesus to see his church flourish in Wales when the memories of the lord bishops are buried in hell whence they came.

Very fierce language indeed. He's not damning the bishops, so much as the episcopal office. It's the *lord* bishops he objects to, that is, bishops who also held civil jurisdiction and were members of the House of Lords and so on. But the language is fierce. This was addressed, now, not to London, but to the Council of Wales and the Earl of Pembroke the president of the Council. Penry realises that he is playing with fire.

I know not my danger in writing these things. I see my dear native countrymen perish, it pitieth me. I come with the rope round my neck to save you. However it goes with me, I labour that you may have the Gospel preached among you, though it cost me my life, I think it well bestowed, and seeing I seek nothing hereby but the glory of God and your salvation, what devils will be so shameless as to molest me for this work and hinder the word preached?

There is no harm, I think, in remembering when we listen to a sermon, what a privilege it is, even if it is a poor sermon. Some people have paid dearly to ensure the freedom to listen to a sermon.

As I have said, Penry was getting desperate. You can feel this in the growing bitterness of his language. Now he joined the Puritan underground. There were other Puritans who were getting impatient and they decided that they would challenge the Elizabethan censorship and so they set up a secret press to produce literature untrammelled by the interventions of authority. By today we know a considerable amount about the work of this secret press. William Pierce (1853–1928) was a Congregational minister and finally librarian at the Memorial Hall here in London. He edited the pamphlets which I am going to mention now but he also provided a historical introduction to them and, it must be said, that historical introduction is a marvellous piece of detection work by a very capable historian. The story in itself is romantic enough though we have no time to stay with many of the details. An

Elizabethan press was not something like a Xerox, something that you could hide in a corner. It was a massive piece of heavy equipment, not to mention the type and so on. Well they got a press and they lodged it first of all in the house of Mrs Crane. She belonged to a Separatist family at Aldermanbury, and in fact Penry's own next volume was partially printed on this press. Who the group were we do not know. Penry was implicated, Job Throckmorton was implicated. There is a character that appears in this story—the man with the green cloak. Who exactly he was we cannot be sure but the suspicion is that he was the squire of Haseley in Warwickshire, Job Throckmorton. There were others too. They started work at Mrs Crane's house but, when the authorities got wind that there was something sinister going on there, they decided to move all this equipment to East Molesey because Mrs Crane, conveniently enough, had another house there. So the secret press began its wanderings.

It produced a series of pamphlets called the Marprelate Tracts. They were written, so the title pages said, by Martin Marprelate, obviously a pen name. The Martin Marprelate tracts do something that other Puritans very much disapproved of. There was something very solemn about our Puritan forefathers, Thomas Cartwright, John Udall and Walter Travers. Martin Marprelate on the other hand decided to give us something, dare I say, that might be considered the Elizabethan equivalent of *Private Eye*. His strategy was to tease the authorities and to poke fun at the religious establishment. He had excellent sources of information in the court of Elizabeth. He had discovered, for example, that Bishop Aylmer cheated at cards.

The more solemn Puritans disapproved intensely of all this. They did not like it, but obviously Job Throckmorton, Penry and the others, although it was a highly dangerous business, were very obviously enjoying themselves. Who actually wrote these tracts? Penry, of course, has been an obvious candidate, but apart from an occasional paragraph, it is almost certain that Penry did not actually write them. Throckmorton is another candidate but I think the true answer, at least the safest answer, is that we still have not solved the mystery of the authorship of the Marprelate tracts. I might say, if you are tempted to turn to the tracts, that nothing dates so quickly as humour, as all watchers of television know. It is a fact that many people when they turn to the Marprelate tracts are disappointed. That is because of the vast changes in humour over the intervening period. But at the time they cut to the quick.

Archbishop Whitgift put Richard Bancroft (1544–1610), who was later himself to be an Archbishop of Canterbury, onto the task of finding out who these illicit publishers were, where did they hide their press and who distributed the printed material and so on. Gradually, Bancroft was able to gather information through his spies, sufficient to force the group to move the

press, first of all from London to the Midlands. At the time it was at Fawsley House near Daventry. Later on it was moved to Coventry. In fact, it does seem that at Coventry the secret press was lodged at property belonging to John Hales, who provided hospitality to Queen Elizabeth herself on one of her journeys through the Midlands. Later on the press was moved to Wolston Priory which is between Coventry and Rugby. Wolston Priory is still standing and at least one or two of the bedrooms still preserve their Elizabethan panelling but I doubt very much myself whether they would have housed the printing press in those rooms. It would have been too obvious. I should imagine an outhouse or a barn far away from the mansion would be the more likely place. However, Wolston Priory was where the other Puritan leaders, Roger Wigston and his wife, lived. Finally the press was moved to Manchester. At Manchester a tragic accident happened because, while they were unloading the type, one of the boxes spilt and the type fell into the gutter and some boys who were playing around pocketed the type and showed it to somebody who realised what it was. So the result was that John Hodgkins, the printer employed by Penry and Throckmorton, and the others were arrested and put to torture to try and discover who exactly was implicated. The great Puritan printer who was responsible for the technical aspects of all this was Robert Waldegrave. He had withdrawn just before the press was moved to Wolston Priory and gone over to La Rochelle in France where he continued his activities as a printer before going up to Scotland. His place had been taken by John Hodgkins.

So Penry was implicated in this matter of the Martin Marprelate tracts and this was known. Richard Bancroft and the Archbishop of Canterbury very much wanted to lay their hands on the perpetrators of these scandalous documents. Penry now became a fugitive. We hear in a deposition made by a kinsman of his, a man called Jenkin Jones, that Penry in this period 'lurked here and there like a fox'. But eventually he migrated up to Scotland. An obvious thing for a Puritan of Penry's stamp to do. Now remember, all this time, Penry is an enthusiastic supporter of the Presbyterian system and it was natural for him to seek a haven up in Edinburgh. He was received there with honour. The leaders of the Kirk in Scotland took care of him, provided for his necessities, gave his wife Eleanor and their little girl, Deliverance Penry, every help (in fact two little girls were born up in Scotland, Safety and Comfort.) Penry took his place alongside his Presbyterian brethren up there. But Elizabeth was pressing for his extradition.

The King of Scotland at that time was James VI who, after Elizabeth's death, became also King of England as James I. He was constantly at verbal war with the leaders of the Presbyterian church and Elizabeth put pressure on



him to expel Penry from Scotland. Penry did the Scottish Kirk a good turn by publishing a couple of books to defend Presbyterianism from the attacks of the English Anglicans. They were, *A Briefe Discovery* (1590) and *Reformation no Enemie* (1590). Penry's attitude to Scottish Presbyterianism has been recorded. The source is King James himself. King James fancied himself as a theologian, and since Scotland was full of theologians all dying for an argument, the King time and again was in public argument with his theologians. At the General Assembly in December 1597, King James came face to face with one of the Scottish leaders, John Davidson (1549?–1603). Davidson pressed the point that the church is, under Christ, independent from the state. The King was very displeased. He did not like this talk at all and suddenly he said that Davidson spoke 'anabaptistical-like, and had too much acquaintance with Mr Penrie'. This is interesting because in fact there is evidence that, during his Scottish residence, Penry changed his position on this point—the relationship between state and church. He came to believe that the separation should be much more distinct even than it was in Scotland, because, as you know, up in Scotland the leaders of the Reformation from John Knox onwards were insistent that the two great institutions, state and church, must be kept separate, but not apart, whereas in England they were fused very closely together, the monarch, in fact, to this day being the nominal head of the Church of England. But Penry obviously was now asking himself questions whether this kind of close relationship between church and state was in accordance with the New Testament. King James knew this.

Bancroft had spies up in Scotland watching Penry. In fact, one of them lived in the same street as Penry in Edinburgh. But the Scottish Kirk had spies watching the English spies and, in fact, reading their letters. They knew exactly what Archbishop Whitgift and Richard Bancroft were receiving by way of information from their spies and, since Penry was very friendly with them, they warned him of the increasing danger. So Penry withdrew to London. Eleanor Penry and the little girls came down by sea to London and Penry himself arrived in London about September 1592. By then it was obvious that he had decided to abandon the Presbyterian position and to become a Separatist, so he joined the Separatist church of which Francis Johnson was the minister.

At this time, 1592, that was a church under the cross. Henry Barrowe was in prison, Francis Johnson was in prison, Greenwood was in prison, many of the members of the church were in prison, and it was these people that Penry joined. We know that he preached to them because, later on, when he was being examined by the justices in preparation for his trial before the King's Bench, he specifically said so. He argues that it is important that every member

of the church should be allowed to preach. This is what we mean, says Penry to Justice Fanshaw, when we use the word prophet, ‘Not such as doe foretel things to come but those who are furnished with graces meet for the interpretation and application of the word vnto the edification and comfort of the church ... and therefore mistake not the word prophet or prophesie as though we leaned unto any inward revelations or motions besides the written word.’ He preached because only by allowing the freedom to preach was it possible for the congregation to decide who was good at it. If you want ministers, and good ministers, you have got to test the gifts of the congregation. That was the argument of Penry. When he was asked, ‘How cam it to passe that you were not made an officer amongst them?’ this is how he replied,

Surely I was desired to take a charge and to continue with them but I would not because it hath bene my purpose always to imploy my smal talent in my poore countrie of Wales where I know that the poore people perish for want of knowledge: and this was the only cause of my coming out of that country wher I was [i.e. Scotland] and might have stayed privatly al my life, even because I saw my self bound in conscience to labour for the caling of my poore kindred and countrymen vnto the knowledge of their salvation in Christ.

His only motive was his desire to go back to Wales.

Now coming back to where we started, you see what has happened. Penry has become convinced at last that there was no hope for Wales from the State. All the appeals had been quite fruitless. That is how he sees it. In fairness to the Authorities, it was quite literally true. The hope for a large scale evangelisation of Wales would not come from official sources. So what was the solution? The solution, he felt, was the Separatist one. Forget now about the state. Reformation was to be without tarrying for any, particularly without tarrying for the magistrate. He would go back himself, preach the Gospel, and hope to gather a congregation that would itself become the centre of evangelisation. In other words he saw the solution in voluntary evangelisation, the means already adopted by the early Separatists and Congregationalists. But a Congregational church was a proscribed body and so Penry, like the other members of the church in London, had to meet here, there and everywhere, in private houses or in taverns or out in the woods in Islington—wherever might be convenient and wherever the authorities were unlikely to hinder them. They were hindered on several occasions, but the end of the Story was that Penry was recognised at Stepney on 22 March 1593 and arrested. Then the process of trial began. First of all before the two Justices, Henry Fanshawe and Richard Young, magistrates here in London, and then finally in the King’s Bench, before the Lord Chief Justice, Sir John Popham (1531–1607).

Those who have studied this trial in detail are agreed that it was a travesty of justice. Just one point I think is a telling one. When he was up in Scotland, Penry had put his pen to paper and he had drafted a pamphlet, more than one possibly, and written notes, but he had decided that this material was too seditious and had thrown the papers away. Well, as I have said, there were spies watching him pretty closely. They stole these documents, and these documents appeared at the trial at the King's bench and Penry was partially, at least, found guilty on the basis of documents that he had rejected because he had believed them to be seditious. So he was found guilty by the jury and on 29 May 1593 he was led out to be executed by hanging at St Thomas a Watering, not very far from where the present Borough Welsh Congregational chapel stands, and I think I am correct in saying that in 1953 the street nearest the place where this place of execution used to be, was renamed Penry Street.

I am stopping there, not because I have exhausted the material, but because my main intent was to tell the story and to say something about the period and to introduce John Penry to you, and to say something about the development of his ideas. It was my hope also to underline the sheer courage of the man and his readiness to sacrifice everything he had, not excluding his own life, in the service of the Gospel.

(transcribed from a recording and edited by Dr Tudur Jones)

# Owen on the Mortification of Sin

## Dr Peter Golding

I am sure it will not have escaped your attention that pretty well everything about this year's conference has a strongly Celtic flavour to it—the chairman, our distinguished main speaker Prof. Tudur Jones, and the three men who are the subjects of our consideration today, John Penry, Walter Cradock and John Owen.

Only one thing, or rather one person, has prevented what would otherwise have been a Welsh whitewash, a kind of theological Eisteddfod, or a meeting of Plaid Cymru (Congregational branch)! The present speaker is very definitely English! But it's only fitting that a paper on Owen should be given in London by an Englishman. For this reason, although Welsh by name and descent, John Owen belongs very specially to this country, where he was born, where he exercised his ministry and where he died.

What is certain is that the appearance of 'the Prince of the Puritans' at this conference is long overdue. Dr Sinclair Ferguson's view is that Owen was 'perhaps the foremost theologian England has ever produced'.<sup>1</sup> AF Walls, a Methodist, has described him in his *Guide to Christian Reading*<sup>2</sup> as 'perhaps the greatest British theologian of all time'. Dr Packer has no doubts. He *is* the greatest, comparable to Calvin and Edwards.<sup>3</sup>

Who was John Owen? Well, strangely enough, considering the influence he had in his lifetime, very little biographical detail is known. He was born in 1616, in Stadham, Oxfordshire, the son of an Anglican minister of Puritan convictions, going up to Oxford at the age of 12 and graduating BA at 16. However, it seems that in spite of his family background, he knew no true peace with God, and in fact spent some five years in deep melancholy of spirit. Then one day he went with his cousin to hear the famous Puritan preacher, Edmund Calamy. To his great disappointment, a total stranger entered the pulpit. But his text was not a disappointment. It was Matthew 8:26: 'Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith.' The sermon proved to be a word from heaven to Owen and that very day he entered into the assurance of sins forgiven, although, like CH Spurgeon two hundred years later, he never did discover the identity of the preacher who was used of God in his conversion.

During the course of his life, Owen held pastorates at Fordham and Coggeshall in Essex, became army chaplain to Oliver Cromwell and Vice-chancellor of Oxford University and served finally as the pastor of a gathered congregation here in the City of London. He died on 24 August 1683. On the very day of his death, his publisher, a Mr Payne, came to tell him that he had

just sent Owen's book on 'The Glory of Christ' to press. 'I am glad,' was the reply, 'but, O brother Payne, the long-looked-for day is come at last, in which I shall see that glory in another manner than I have ever done yet, or was capable of doing in this world.'

After he died, his doctors described the lingering character of his passing as 'due to the strength of his brain'! As the 24 volumes, 14,000 pages of divinity of which he was the author certainly testify, his was a massive intellect. But as those words uttered on his deathbed also testify, he had a spiritual experience to match. Not only that, for although Owen is well known for his doctrinal and controversial writings, especially those directed against the Arminians, in the opinion of many, he is at his best in his more practical and experimental works. 'The cardinal and distinctive honour of Owen as a great divine,' said WH Goold at a lecture in Edinburgh in 1883, 'is the spiritual application or bearing of divine truth on the experience of the saint.'

Then, coming to the theme before us this afternoon, Goold, who edited the standard edition of Owen's works published in 1850 (since republished by the Banner of Truth in 1965), went on to say this. 'Some of the ablest men I have met with, who have made a study of Owen, give the palm to his work on *The Mortification of Sin*'. Earlier on in the 19th century, William Wilberforce had this to say in his *Practical View of Christianity*.—'The writings of the Puritans are a mine of wealth in which anyone who will submit to some degree of labour, will find himself well rewarded for his pains. ... Of Dr Owen's there are two pieces which I would specially recommend to the reader's perusal, one on *Heavenly Mindedness*, and the other *The Mortification of Sin in Believers*. Now, such a tribute, coming as it does from a man whose energies and life's work was devoted to the abolition of slavery (and who can hardly be accused of not being 'practical' in his Christianity) is surely sufficient recommendation in itself for us to study Owen on this subject.

Wilberforce's remark also serves to remind us of one of the most significant and important features of the history of evangelicalism in England—namely, the way in which men used of God in their own generation, have drunk so deeply from the wells dug by their forebears. As Owen and the Puritans of the 17th century went back to the fathers of the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, so George Whitefield and other leaders of the 18th century, Spurgeon and Bishop Ryle of the 19th century, and Dr Lloyd-Jones and others in the 20th century, have acknowledged in turn the great debt they owed to the Puritans; and the debt they owed to Owen in particular. Bishop Ryle, whose book *Holiness* has been a help to so many over the last 30–40 years, put it like this. The subject

is of such deep importance and the mistakes made about it so many and great, that I make no apology for strongly recommending Owen ... to all who want to study more thoroughly the whole doctrine of sanctification. I assert unhesitatingly that the man who wants to study experimental theology will find no books equal to Owen ... for complete, Scriptural, and exhaustive treatment of the subjects they handle.<sup>4</sup>

Or, if you want a more up to date recommendation, Dr Packer wrote this a few years ago in an article that appeared in the *Evangelical Magazine* (now defunct). Says Packer:

When I was going silly through what used to be called Keswick teaching, I chanced on his treatise on Indwelling Sin and Mortification. They are not the sort of works which you would normally expect to generate joy, but they brought joy to me, for they freed me from the bondage of unreality, and showed me what I had to do with myself. I became an Owen addict, and have been one ever since.<sup>5</sup>

Those of you who have the more recent edition of Ryle's *Holiness* will know that Jim Packer says more there to the same effect in his introductory preface.

However, having whetted your appetite for Owen (if it hadn't already been whetted) one has to be realistic and honest and point out that like living the Christian life itself, reading Owen is never easy. Here too, you must count the cost! Owen *ought* to be purchased and read (and I mean by ordinary Christians), but quite frankly, he is heavy going. When such outstanding Christian leaders as Dr Lloyd-Jones and Dr Packer have to write respectively, 'John Owen on the whole is difficult to read',<sup>6</sup> and 'There is no denying that Owen is heavy and hard to read',<sup>7</sup> then lesser mortals like ourselves may be excused for fighting shy of the task; but that doesn't have to follow, and I hope it won't. The truth is that Owen did not write simply for other theologians, but for fellow *Christians*, and much of what he wrote is well within the grasp of the average Christian who is dead serious about his spiritual life, and wants the best human help he can get. Says Dr Packer again,

His style is tortuous and turgid. It has a clumsy dignity, as has Stonehenge, and its elephantine windings are tiring to the plain man. Yet for all Owen's unhandsomeness of expression, his meaning, once you have sorted out his syntax, is invariably clear and his thoughts orderly, massive, profound, and for the most part compelling.<sup>8</sup>

Andrew Thomson, one of Owen's biographers, said of his writings that 'More than any other writer, he makes you feel, when he has reached the end of his subject, that he has exhausted it'.<sup>9</sup>—We might add, exhausted the reader! But he is worth the trouble, he really is. 'All Owen's works,' says Dr Packer again, 'breathe a common concern for God's glory, and this, together with the

warmth of love for Christ which constantly breaks through them, gives them the rare and precious quality of unction ... Such a man deserves our best attention.'<sup>10</sup> 'He requires hard study,' said Charles Spurgeon, 'but none of us ought to begrudge it.' Well, I hope I've convinced you, but if I haven't, or if you chicken out later, then let me recommend two modern writers on holiness, who unlike many moderns, devote a chapter to mortification and give you some choice quotations from Owen in doing so. I am referring to Kenneth Prior's book, *The Way of Holiness*, published by IVP. Also to Dr Packer's book *God's Words*, also by IVP.

Now I haven't forgotten the story of the man who, when he was asked what he thought of one particular preacher, replied, 'Well, he spent so long in laying the table, that by the time he served the meal, I'd quite lost my appetite!' This is Owen's first visit to this Conference. A vital part of my brief is to so introduce you to the man and his writings, that the next time we have a paper on Owen, on church government say, you'll all be here again! A tall order, but I'll do my best! So much then by way of background.

Turning to our subject proper, we find that Owen deals with the theme of Mortification in two places in his works. First, there are 30 pages or so in volume 3, as part of his wider treatment of the work of the Holy Spirit in sanctification. Now I shall be quoting from that section, but I want to focus mainly on the treatise in volume 6, where it is dealt with in its own right, as a separate subject. Owen himself tells us in his preface that he published it at the request of 'sundry persons', to whom he had preached the substance of it with 'great acceptance'.

No doubt his sermons on the Mortification of Sin were of the same calibre as those which produced such a deep and lasting impression on Philip Henry (father of Matthew Henry, the commentator), who was among the circle of young men who sat under his preaching at Oxford during the time when Owen was Vice-chancellor of the University.

Owen's teaching is based on Romans 8:13—'If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live'—although he also alludes to the other New Testament reference to mortification, Colossians 3:5, where the Apostle Paul exhorts his readers to 'Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth: fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry'.

However, although the actual word 'mortify' appears only twice in the New Testament, 'it gets right to the heart of the conflict in which the Christian is involved,' says Ken Prior, 'and which is such an essential part of his sanctification'.<sup>11</sup>

Then commenting on Romans 8:13, Dr Lloyd-Jones described mortification as ‘Vital and crucial to a true understanding of the New Testament doctrine of Sanctification’. Now that being so, the first question we need to ask is, ‘what is mortification?’ *So we begin with a definition.* ‘To mortify,’ says Owen, ‘is to put to death or crucify any living thing or principle, to take away its strength, so that it cannot act according to its nature.’ Or again, ‘to mortify is to extinguish and destroy all that force and vigour of corrupted nature which inclines to earthly, carnal things, opposite unto that spiritual, heavenly life and its actings, which we have in and from Christ.’<sup>12</sup> However, lest anyone should deduce from that the possibility of complete success in that activity in this world, Owen adds a vital qualification, ‘This word is used by our Apostle not absolutely to destroy and kill, so that that which is so mortified or killed should no more have any being, but that it should be rendered useless as unto what its strength and vigour would produce.’<sup>13</sup>

In other words, mortification, to Owen, is not eradication—it is the daily fighting against sin, and the weakening of it by the crucifying of the old nature through the power of the Holy Spirit. If Christ died for all your sins, he asks, ‘why dost thou not set thyself against them also?’<sup>14</sup> As Christians, we are committed to a lifelong battle against the world, the flesh and the devil. Mortification is our fight against the second of that trinity of evil. So, to sum this point up in Owen’s own words,

To mortify a sin is not utterly to kill, root it out, and destroy it, that it should have no more hold at all nor residence in our hearts. It is true this is that which is aimed at; but this is not in this life to be accomplished. There is no man that truly sets himself to mortify any sin, but he aims at, intends, desires its utter destruction, that it should leave neither root nor fruit in the heart or life. He would so kill it that it should never move nor stir any more, cry or call, seduce or tempt, to eternity. Its ‘not-being’ is the thing aimed at. Now, though doubtless there may, by the Spirit and grace of Christ, a wonderful success and eminency of victory against any sin be attained, so that a man may have almost constant triumph over it, yet an utter killing and destruction of it, that it should not be, is not in this life to be expected.<sup>15</sup>

Having defined his terms then—what it means to mortify—Owen proceeds in typical Puritan manner to summarise the teaching of Romans 8:13 in propositional form; thus—‘The choicest believers, who are assuredly freed from the condemning power of sin, ought yet to make it their business all their days to mortify the indwelling power of sin.’<sup>16</sup> Now that is Owen’s fundamental assertion; and in the time remaining, I want to unpack that



general statement and consider it, in Owen's own words, under the form of several particular principles.

1. *A Basic Assumption*, and it's this. Though delivered from the guilt and dominion of sin, no Christian, whatever spiritual experiences he may have enjoyed, or however advanced in the Christian life he may be, is freed from the duty and necessity of mortification. The *cause* of this continual warfare is found in the remaining presence of sin in the Christian. 'Indwelling sin always abides while we are in this world,' says Owen, 'therefore it is always to be mortified.'<sup>17</sup> 'This duty being always incumbent on us, argues undeniably the abiding in us of a principle of sin whilst we are in the flesh'—and he quotes Galatians 5:17—'For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh.' Or again, 'By the entrance of grace into the soul [sin] loseth its dominion, but not its being, its rule, but not its life.'<sup>18</sup> In other words, our first need as Christians is to know ourselves. 'It is because so many of us think of self-examination as old fashioned and morbid,' says Dr Packer, that 'we are hardly aware of indwelling sin at all.'<sup>19</sup> Now I'm stressing the point for this reason—there are two schools of thought, still popular in some evangelical circles, which, because they go astray over this basic assumption, end up by denying that mortification is a constant necessity, although they deny it for different reasons.

The *first* is what we can describe as the Perfectionist teaching, which tells us that as the result of an experience which is open to all Christians, sin can be totally eradicated from our nature in this life. Now this teaching is usually explained in terms of a baptism of the Spirit subsequent to conversion, by which the Christian is entirely cleansed from sin. But altogether apart from any other texts, Romans 8:13 is sufficient to demonstrate the utter falsity of such a view. Owen refers to 'the vain, foolish and ignorant disputes of men about perfect keeping of the commands of God, and being wholly and perfectly dead to sin'.<sup>20</sup> So Perfectionism was not unknown in Owen's day, as it certainly is not in ours.

The *second* school of thought to which Owen's teaching has special relevance is that which teaches the principle of counteraction. Now this second view rejects the Perfectionist claim completely, that sin can be entirely eradicated in the Christian. Instead, it teaches that by a second experience of surrender, we can attain to a position in which there is no more struggle or tension involved, a state in which even the desire to sin is no longer troublesome. Now this experience has been variously described as 'the deeper life', 'the higher life', or 'the victorious life', and it received its classic expression in the platform of the famous Keswick Convention. The idea is this, that as we cease from struggling against sin, and abide in Christ by faith, he will obtain

the victory for us, so that all we have to do is 'Let go and let God', as it's put. A famous American holiness teacher by the name of Charles Trumbull put it like this in his book *The Life that Wins*, published round about 1910. 'I have learned that as I trust Christ for surrender, there need be no fighting against sin, but complete freedom from the power, and even the desire of sin.'

*In other words*, sin is there, but dormant, kept in a state of suspended animation, as it were. What would Owen say to that? Let's hear him—'When sin lets us alone, we may let sin alone; but as sin is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, ... so ought our contrivance against it be vigorous at all times, even when there is least suspicion.'<sup>21</sup> So, according to Owen, the sinful nature which remains in us will constantly endeavour to express itself through the medium of the body and its faculties, hence the need of mortification. 'Sin aims at the utmost', he warns. 'Every unclean thought or glance would be adultery if it could. You know what it did to David.' In Owen's view then, the clear assumption underlying Romans 8 :13 is that although the believer must not, and need not, fall into acts of sin, he will be plagued by desires to sin. Not only so, but so long as we are in the body, these desires are more or less permanently on active service, the traitor within the very gate of mansoul itself, to borrow from John Bunyan's imagery in *The Holy War*.

Another poet (Dante) put it like this. Turning his face and feet towards the sunlit mount of holiness, he saw 'a leopard supple, lithe, exceeding fleet, whose skin full many a dusky spot did stain; nor did she from my face retreat, nay hindered so my journey on the way, that many a time I backward turned my feet.' The leopard was indwelling sin. Some years ago, a friend of mine was present at a conference in which the famous Dr Cornelius Van Til of the Westminster Theological Seminary was taking part. Now Van Til was already in his seventies and in the question and answer session, someone asked him, 'Dr Van Til, isn't there a sense in which as you get older, sins that once bothered you no longer do so?' My friend said he never forgot how Van Til, with his shock of white hair, and his finger shaking, answered the question. 'Young man,' he said, 'that's incipient perfectionism. The greatest battles I have now are the sins of my youth!'

So it comes to this. When you hear that holiness teacher say, 'Look, wouldn't you like release from this conflict? Wouldn't you like deliverance from the tension? And step into instant consecration, where it is just rest and abide, and no more struggling and striving?' Then remember that, in Owen's view, that is false teaching. It is false because it fails to take proper account of the alien forces that are residual in the Christian until his dying day, the fact that although he has died to sin, sin has not died in him. Now that being so, the

question before us now is this: How does the Christian go about dealing with indwelling sin? Well, Owen not only recognises the problem confronting us, but like the New Testament itself, he instructs us how to handle it. However, before we're exhorted to set about the work of mortification, or indeed to do anything, we need to grasp that the only way by which sin can be Scripturally mortified is by the presence and power of the indwelling Spirit of God. So having considered Owen's basic assumption, we move on to our second principle.

2. *The True Foundation*, for Paul says, 'If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live'. To put it in Owen's own words, 'the foundation of all mortification of sin is from the inhabitation of the Spirit within us'<sup>22</sup> ... 'and by no other power is it to be brought about',<sup>23</sup>—and therefore, he says, 'The Holy Spirit is the author of the work in us, so that although it is our duty, it is his grace and strength whereby it is performed.'<sup>24</sup> This he does by 'implanting in our minds and all their faculties a contrary habit and principle ... (contrary to sin, that is), namely, a principle of spiritual life and holiness, bringing forth the fruits thereof'<sup>25</sup>—and by those 'supplies and assistances of grace which he continually communicates unto us'.<sup>26</sup>

Now because mortification is carried out by means of the Spirit, this is a work of which the unbeliever is totally incapable. 'An unregenerate man may do something like it,' says Owen, 'but the work itself, so as it may be acceptable to God, he can never perform.'<sup>27</sup> Here Owen quotes Romans 8:8, 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God'. 'Men seek for other remedies in vain,' he adds, 'they shall not be healed by them.' He continues, 'Mortification from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and strength of all false religion in the world.'<sup>28</sup>

Now there, Owen no doubt had in view the monasticism of the Roman church and things like taking early morning communion on an empty stomach; but the idea that holiness consists in 'giving up' things under a self-imposed discipline (which is wiser than Scripture), is not confined to such systems. A false unscriptural asceticism, which 'scorns delights and lives laborious days', is not infrequently found in evangelical circles, where it is put forward as the condition of, and gateway into, 'blessing'. Negatively then, true mortification can never be accomplished by the imposition of human rules and regulations. How then is it accomplished? Positively, the Holy Spirit enables us to mortify sin by creating and sustaining our union and communion with Christ, by applying his fullness to us, and not only strengthening us to resist temptation, but causing our hearts to abound in grace and those fruits of the Spirit which are contrary to the flesh.

Yet the Holy Spirit is not given in a kind of spiritual vacuum. He is communicated through the means of grace. Therefore, says Owen, it is required of us that we look for supplies of grace ‘in all those ways and means whereby they are communicated; for although the Lord Christ giveth them freely and bountifully, yet our diligence in duty will give the measure in receiving them’.<sup>29</sup> By duty, Owen instances ‘prayer, meditation, reading, hearing of the word, and other ordinances of divine worship’.<sup>30</sup> However, he mentions prayer particularly. ‘It doth itself mightily prevail unto the weakening and destruction of sin.’ Or again: ‘The soul of a believer is never raised unto a higher delight in holiness, nor is more conformed to it than in prayer.’<sup>31</sup> Now that’s where we start, says Owen in effect; with the realisation that the Holy Spirit is in us, as believers; in us, as the hymn puts it, as ‘a gracious, willing guest’. In other words, we must know our resources, we must begin from a position of strength, by realising what is already true of us as Christians.

However, the Spirit’s method is not so to work mortification in us as to bypass our activity, but rather to enlist it. We are not spectators in the work, but participants. This brings me to a third principle, which I am calling—

3. *A Clear Implication.* It is that mortification is a work in which the believer is fully taken up and involved. ‘If ye through the Spirit, do mortify the deeds of the body’, says Paul. There, the Apostle brings together in a beautiful fusion the relationship between our activity and the Spirit’s power. Says Owen, ‘[the Spirit] works upon our understanding, will, conscience, and affections, agreeably their nature; he works in us, and with us, not against us or without us’;<sup>32</sup> and he quotes Philippians 2:12–13, ‘Work out your own salvation ... for it is God that worketh in you’. The Spirit does not mortify sin for you, says Paul.—No, you do the mortifying, but by means of the Spirit’s enabling. Now I stress this because both those systems of holiness teaching to which I’ve referred critically this afternoon teach the exact opposite. They say we are passive in this. Let me give just one example, from the book *So Great Salvation* by Dr Steven Barabas, published in 1952 and accepted as the standard work on the historic Keswick teaching. With reference to our text, Romans 8:13, Barabas makes this comment, ‘Deliverance is not attained by struggle and painful effort, by earnest resolution and self-denial.’ Instead, he says, the Christian is to ‘hand over the fleshly deeds of the body to the Spirit for mortification. ... He is then to stand in faith in the knowledge that he died to sin in Christ at Calvary. It is the Spirit’s responsibility to do the rest.’<sup>33</sup>

But according to John Owen, that is precisely what the text does *not* teach. The fact that God is working in you by his Spirit does not mean that you don’t need to do anything. The truth is, it means just the opposite!

Now let me expand this point a little and let Owen speak for himself on the necessary activity on our part. 'In whomsoever the death of Christ is not the death of sins, he shall die in his sin.'<sup>34</sup> Or even more sternly, '[God] will deliver none from destruction that continue in sin'<sup>35</sup>—'The contest is for our lives,' he says. He tells us why. Taking up Paul's statement that if we 'mortify the deeds of the body, we shall live', Owen points out that mortification is urged on us as a condition of life, not because our activity provides the *grounds* of our salvation (Owen steers well clear of justification by works), but because, as he put it, 'God hath appointed this means for the attaining [of] that end which he hath freely promised.' In other words, the relationship between our activity in mortification, and the attainment of life, is not a relationship of 'cause and effect', but of 'means and ends'.<sup>36</sup> It is the way to 'life', spiritual well-being in this world, and eternal life in the world to come. 'He who does not kill sin in his way,' says Owen, 'takes no steps towards his journeys end.'<sup>37</sup> Therefore, if you and I would travel so as to arrive, we must mortify sin!

Now again, this is a vital issue confronting us, because Owen's teaching at this point has come under attack from certain quarters, as legalism, a form of salvation by works. For instance, Dr RT Kendall committed himself to the following statement in his book *Once Saved, Always Saved*. 'I state categorically that a person who is saved will go to heaven when he dies no matter what work, or lack of work may accompany such faith.—In other words, no matter what sin (or absence of Christian obedience) may accompany such faith.'<sup>38</sup> In other words, Dr Kendall is teaching 'once saved, always saved' no matter what you do, or how you live. But the question is what do we mean by 'saved'? 'Once saved, always saved?' Yes, certainly, so long as we remember that salvation is not a point only, but a line. Consequently, salvation to John Owen and the New Testament is never confined to deliverance from the power of sin (sanctification). It is as dangerous to rest on a justification unattended with holiness as it is to rest on a justification that has works for its basis (WS Plumer on Romans 8). In other words, 'once saved, always saved', irrespective of mortification, is a contradiction in terms, because it sets up an impossible combination of things. The mortification of sin is an essential and an integral ingredient in the Christian life, and as such, is essential to salvation, not just an optional extra.

But not only is mortification a necessity, it is a continual necessity. As Owen points out, the verb in Romans 8:13 is in the present tense (if ye keep on mortifying, ye shall live). Just as the principle of indwelling sin is a constant problem to the believer, so the putting to death of that principle is likewise always incumbent upon him. So there are no holidays in the spiritual realm for Owen. 'Be always at it,' he urges us, 'cease not a day from this work; be killing

sin or it will be killing you.’<sup>39</sup> ‘He who ceases from this duty lets go all endeavours after holiness.’<sup>40</sup> He adds, ‘Sin will not die, unless it be constantly weakened. Spare it, and it will heal its wounds and recover its strength. We must continually watch against the operation of this principle of sin; in our duties, in our calling, in conversation, in retirement, in our straits, in our enjoyments, and in all that we do. If we are negligent of any occasion, we shall suffer by it; every mistake, every neglect is perilous.’<sup>41</sup>

It comes to this then, that mortification of sin is never an easy undertaking. Owen is quite realistic in this. ‘Men look upon it as an easy task, and as that which will be carried on with a little diligence. But is it for nothing that the Holy Spirit expresses it by mortification, or killing?’<sup>42</sup> Quite so, and we can add, ‘Is it for nothing that our Lord himself likened it to cutting off a hand, or gouging out an eye?’ (Matthew 5:29–30). Carnal self does not want to die, understandably! and will do all it can to stay alive and kicking. Nevertheless, die it must! ‘Unmortified sin will weaken the soul,’ says Owen, ‘divert it from a close communion with God, fill the mind with thoughts of sin, and hinder in spiritual duties, so that the saint will lose his comfort and assurance.’<sup>43</sup> In other words, happiness and holiness are inseparably joined together by God. Few things give more encouragement to the Christian than increasing victory over sins which once had victory over him.

It comes to this then, that we are not passive in holiness, but active. ‘Holiness by faith in Jesus, not by effort of my own’ may sound very spiritual, but the trouble is, it is not Scriptural. Mortification therefore is not the consecrating act of a moment, but the persevering activity of a lifetime. May God help us all to realise that! Now my time is going. But I cannot end without saying something as to how we are to go about this in practice. So my fourth and last principle is—

4. *Practical Direction.* We can divide this up under two aspects, negative and positive. *Negatively*, mortification means a refusal to allow sin to gain a foothold in the life, denying sinful self the sustenance it craves for. In that connection Owen gives us nine preparatory directions! Now I’m not going to give them all, it would take too long, but here are some of the most significant—

Aim for a clear sense of the guilt, danger and evil of sin, lest you grow ‘sermon proof and sickness proof’.<sup>44</sup>

Pray for a strong desire to be delivered from sin’s present power. ... Assure thyself that unless thou longest for deliverance, thou shalt not have it.<sup>45</sup>

Seek to analyse your occasions of sin, and avoid them. He that dares to dally with sin will dare to sin.<sup>46</sup>

Rise mightily against the first actions of sin.<sup>47</sup>

So much for the negative. But Owen is insistent that this is never enough. So we turn briefly to the *positive*. Here the essence of wisdom according to Owen is ‘the weakening of the flesh by the growth of positive graces’. ‘Let men take never so much pains to mortify, crucify, or subdue their sins,’ he says, ‘unless they endeavour in the first place to weaken and impair its strength by the increase of grace, they will labour in the fire where their work will be consumed.’<sup>48</sup> Or again: ‘The more vigorous the principle of holiness in us, the more weak, infirm and dying will be that of sin.’ ‘The more we abound in the “fruits of the Spirit”, the less we shall be concerned in the work of the flesh.’<sup>49</sup> In other words, it is as the Christian walks in the Spirit, that he is kept from fulfilling the lust of the flesh (Galatians 5:17)—what Thomas Chalmers described as ‘the expulsive power of a new affection’.

However, Owen didn’t leave it there. Pastoral concern leads him to consider how we may discern success in the work of mortification. Here he is particularly helpful. Take this for instance—‘We cannot test our mortification by such things as natural temper gives no vigour to. One man may be troubled by anger and passion as much during one day as another all his life, by reason of constitution, yet the former may have done more to mortify sin than the latter. But if we try ourselves by self denial, envy or some other spiritual sin, we will have a better view of ourselves.’<sup>50</sup> In other words, if you happen to be equable and even-tempered by disposition, the fact that you haven’t blown your top for at least six months is no proof at all of progress in mortification. Test yourself rather against those sins to which you are temperamentally and constitutionally inclined!

Well, there it is. There’s a lot I’ve had to leave out, but time forbids, so I must come to a close. But this is a vital subject, of tremendous relevance at the present time. ‘The evident importance of the subject,’ says Dr Packer, ‘makes the long standing neglect of it among Christians appear both sad and odd.’<sup>51</sup> The truth is that the subject we have been considering this afternoon is much more closely linked to the present depressed state of evangelicalism than is generally realised. Indeed, one contemporary writer has put it like this: ‘It seems to us that possibly the most important current controversy in the church concerns the nature of true Christian experience.’ He goes on: ‘False or superficial teaching has given rise to the exaltation of a certain type of alleged experience as being the most desirable for all Christians. Because it begins at the wrong place, much current discussion on Christian experience is man centred, concerning itself with our “happiness” or “power”, rather than moral conformity to God.’<sup>52</sup> In view of the emergence of the charismatic movement,

that danger exists today with a new urgency. Whether or not some of the charismata were temporary is beside the point here. The point is that according to the New Testament, there is no necessary connection between gifts and holiness. As our Lord made clear in those awesome words towards the close of the Sermon on the Mount, it is not those who prophecy or cast out demons, or perform miracles, who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only those who do the will of his Father who is in heaven (Matthew 7:21). Doing the will of God from the heart is therefore the immediate goal of all true Christian piety. To promote that great and glorious end was the purpose John Owen saw in his own ministry. He put it like this in a rare personal comment in the preface to the treatise we've been considering, and with this we can fitly leave him:

I hope I may own in sincerity, that my heart's desire unto God, and the chief design of my life in the station wherein the good providence of God hath placed me, are, that mortification and universal holiness may be promoted in my own and in the hearts and ways of others, to the glory of God; that so the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be adorned in all things.<sup>53</sup>

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# Walter Cradock 1606–1659

## R Tudur Jones

Walter Cradock was a close friend of John Owen (of whom we have heard so excellently this afternoon). But he was very different from Owen. You will discern, as we proceed with our story, that Walter Cradock did not approve of everything that John Owen said and did. That was because Cradock, with the passing of the years, grew into the very embodiment of Cromwellian respectability and sagacity. John Owen had a touch of the dandy about him. It is not realised, I think, that John Owen was rather proud of what he wore. He always dressed fashionably. One commentator in a pamphlet says ‘You could not tell the colour of his coat because so much powder dropped from his wig on his shoulders’. It was a protest against the distinction between clergy and laity and he carried it to extremes, apparently, at Oxford, but students used to admire the cut and colour of his coats. It is worth knowing, that when you get locked up in the turgidity of some paragraphs by the great doctor, that he had beautiful coats and a full bottomed wig. Walter Cradock would hardly approve of that kind of thing.

He was a Monmouthshire man, from Gwent as it is known today, born at a little estate called Trefela. It was quite a substantial inheritance, in fact, when he, Walter, inherited it from his father, it brought an annual income of £60. Trefela was in the parish of Llangwm. We do not know anything about his education except that he was a student at Oxford. He himself says that in one of his sermons but, as with many other Oxford students, there is no other record of his presence at the university. He returned to his home neighbourhood and became a curate at Peterston upon Ely, in the Vale of Glamorgan. And then he moved a few miles from there to become curate to William Erbury at St Mary’s, which is just off Queen Street, the main street at Cardiff.

William Erbury (1604–54), of course, was one of the great and bizarre characters of the Puritan revolution. He came from Roath which was not then part of Cardiff but a very small village outside the bigger village of Cardiff. William Erbury eventually became a denomination in himself because he disagreed with everybody before the end of his life and became a denomination in which everything was passed without any opposition because there was only one man in it! But he is still a fascinating character, it must be said, and reading his pamphlets is always amusing if nothing else. The activities of the vicar of St Mary’s and his curate soon attracted the attention of the authorities. The Court of High Commission that had harried Penry was still in existence,

(we're in the 1630s now) and William Laud was archbishop of Canterbury—a martinet for discipline who insisted on receiving full reports from every diocese in his province including the diocese of Llandaff. The reports are still extant and in those reports the bishop tells Canterbury about the trouble that was going on in St Mary's. The report on Cradock was particularly offensive. He is described by the bishop as 'a bold ignorant young fellow'. Apparently one of the things that offended people was the metaphors and comparison he used in preaching. It is interesting to know this because, as we shall see later on, Cradock had a distinctive pulpit style and he could use, and did use, bold comparisons. The result was the withdrawal of his licence to preach. That was in 1634. So, having been ejected in South Wales he wisely made his way north to Wrexham

He was in Wrexham from 1635 to 1639 and during that period blossomed as an evangelist. There is every evidence that his influence as a preacher, and as an evangelist, extended westwards towards Merionethshire and, oddly enough, in the eighteenth century, one of the nicknames for dissenters in North Wales was 'Cradocks'. The other one was 'Rumps'. When Howel Harris (he tells us in his diary) was going on his first journey north in 1740 to preach, he was shouted down with the cry 'Down with the Rumps'. It is an interesting echo of the Cromwellian period. The Rump was what remained of Parliament after the Cromwellians had disbarred the Royalists and the Presbyterians—the Rump Parliament. At Wrexham, Cradock attacked the brewers (Wrexham was famous and has continued to be, as the centre of the brewery trade) and, so it was said, their opposition eventually drove him away.

So he left Wrexham, moved down along the Welsh Marches, the border with England, and began to associate with a group of Puritans who were to play a large part in the subsequent story. The centre of this group on the border of Herefordshire and Radnorshire was at the mansion of Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire, where Sir Robert Harley (1579–1656) and his wife Lady Brilliana Harley (1600?–43) lived. They were the centre, the heart as it were, where the Puritans foregathered. Quite a large group of them eventually. Cradock got employment as a school teacher at Llanfair Waterdine right on the border of Herefordshire and Radnorshire. But he got into trouble because he was arrested at an illegal religious service at the house of a Mrs De Lamars in Barnaby Street, London, 8 May 1638, and that brought him a citation before the High Commission. He did not appear. The High Commission, under Laud, did strike fear into the Puritans because they were really harried, even more so than in the age of Whitgift. That is why, of course, when the long Parliament met, in 1640, one of the first things it did was to abolish the High Commission as well as the court of Star Chamber. So you see, Cradock was

now joining this enthusiastic group of people working, and evangelising along the Welsh border.

Vavasor Powell (1617–70) was one of them. He was, indeed, an enthusiast if ever there was one. It was said when Vavasor Powell preached at Blackfriars, one of his preaching stations here in London (the report comes in 1653) he preached with such zeal and unction that you could see the steam rising from his head. I can quite believe that, because one spy has reproduced a sermon of his verbatim—his great attack on Oliver Cromwell—and there was a lot of steam about when that attack was made.

Morgan Lloyd (1619–59, Llwyd in Welsh), another member of the group, is one of the very great figures of Welsh literature, a master of Welsh prose and much studied. (A new book in English, by the way, has just been published by the University of Wales Press on Morgan Llwyd in the *Writers of Wales* series). But Lloyd is not only a great writer—he is a very interesting character and a fascinating thinker. He was later Puritan vicar of Wrexham. His thinking is a complex combination of Calvinism and mysticism. It is not always easy to be quite sure what Lloyd is saying. But, even so, there are many passages that are tremendously moving where, I am almost sure, we can hear the authentic voice of the preacher and his sermon. He was another close friend of Cradock.

Now this group was especially influential in the southern part of the border between England and Wales, in Gwent. People were being converted. In a famous phrase, Walter Cradock, when preaching before Parliament, said that the Gospel was running across the mountains like fire through thatch. There was a tremendous increase in the number of people who had had what we would call evangelical conversion. The time came to think of bringing these people together in a church and it was that which led to the foundation of the first Congregational, indeed the first dissenting church, on Welsh soil at Llanfaches in Monmouthshire, in November 1639. The interesting thing about the Llanfaches church is that, as William Erbury said on more than one occasion, it was modelled, as he put it, on the ‘New England way’. That is, the model came from America. The meaning of this phrase ‘the New England way’, without spending too much time upon it is this. The vicar of Llanfaches was a Puritan, William Wroth (1576–1641). What happened in November 1639 was that, within the ambit of the parish, a nonconformist church was formed. You see, a church within a church with the blessing of Wroth. That is, it was not a completely separatist church in the style of Robert Browne or Henry Barrow. It was a church which the founders hoped would become a pattern for similar churches throughout the land, and that the Anglican church would be transformed as it were from within the parishes. Well that did not happen, as we know. But that was the idea at the back of the minds of people

like William Erbury. And the first minister of that first church on Welsh soil was Walter Cradock.

The civil war came in 1642. The church now was in considerable physical danger. The little community of Congregationalists at Llanfaches decided to withdraw across the Severn to Bristol, where the Puritan element was sufficiently powerful to ensure their safety. But not for long. The fortunes of war brought Prince Rupert and his Royalist armies to Bristol and it fell to the Royalists. That was in July 1643. So this little Welsh church from Gwent, joined now with their colleagues from Bristol, had to migrate this time to London, and Cradock and his people settled down for the purposes of worship at All Hallows the Great, Thames Street. There Cradock gradually developed into one of the most attractive preachers in London. He took up John Penry's theme that there was desperate need for more effective preaching in Wales and even before this we find him, in June 1641, supporting a petition to Parliament for more ministers and more educated ministers to serve in Wales. Gradually, like Vavasor Powell and others from Wales and from the provinces of England, Cradock now was at the centre of power and was one of the large number of Puritans who were able increasingly to influence policy at the highest possible level. One proof of this is that he was one of the Puritan preachers who was invited to preach before the House of Commons. A signal honour shared by Vavasor Powell also. Powell was, in addition honoured with an invitation to preach before the Lord Mayor of London. But this means you see, from the point of view of shaping the future, that these men had the ear of the people who counted, the people who had the power. It was on 21 July 1646 that Walter Cradock preached his sermon (and a great sermon it is) before the House of Commons. It has a title that is exactly appropriate to Cradock's character *The Saints' Fulness of Joy*. I will return to that point in a moment when I come to talk about the content of his thinking. And then, with the victory of the Parliamentary armies, Wales was open to Puritan influence and in October 1646, Cradock was licensed to go back to Wales to preach. Back he went and started his work there, sent, like many others, by Parliament, which was dominated at this time by the Presbyterians.

The Presbyterians were eventually overthrown and displaced, and Cromwell and his colleagues became the effective governors of the country. Then Parliament did a remarkable thing. They passed an Act, applying specifically to Wales, an Act that was intended to support and to extend evangelisation in Wales. It was exactly as though John Penry's dream had come true. After all that he had written about the need for the government, Elizabeth's government in his case, to take seriously the need to evangelise in Wales, the Cromwellian government took up the challenge and passed the Act

for the Better Propagation of the Gospel in Wales. It nationalised the Anglican church in Wales (I am using modern terms obviously). It took over all the assets; every parish church, every churchyard, every glebe, every pound of tithe. The government took it over and vested it in a committee of 70 Puritan grandees. They were responsible for disposing of all the properties of the church in Wales with one great ideal in view, to secure effective preaching of the Gospel throughout the country. There was another committee, a ministerial committee. This was responsible for finding suitable candidates, examining them to make sure that the men who were actually sent to the parishes did indeed conform to the Puritan ideal. There were twenty five of these ‘Approvers’, and Walter Cradock was one of them. So he was by this time rubbing shoulders with the powerful people in the land.

I will not stay long with the Act for Propagation. It was a bold experiment but its success was only very partial. I would even go so far as to say that in its main intention it failed. There was no lack of enthusiasm and energy on the part of men like Cradock, Powell, John Miles the Baptist, and others. But they had taken hold of an impossible task. It was easy enough, after all, to eject something like 276 Anglican clergymen but where were you to get people to take their places? It was easy enough to empty the parishes, but finding suitable candidates to occupy their pulpits was quite another question. The result was that they reverted to precisely what the Puritans had been thundering against for generations, namely a form of pluralism. Vavasor Powell, under the Propagation Act, was appointed to preach in the counties of Radnorshire, Brecknock Shire and Montgomeryshire—a very large area. These were the people who wanted a minister in every parish and ended up with one minister for a score of parishes. The system just could not be made to work. They were greatly disappointed. The Act was passed initially for three years, and when that period of three years was up, the Act was allowed to die, to the great fury of Vavasor Powell. Powell was even more furious when Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector. Vavasor Powell, like so many Puritans, was an ardent republican, a theocratic republican. He was a Fifth Monarchy Man who believed that the second coming was about to happen and that Jesus Christ would soon appear once again to reign personally. It was therefore the business of the saints to prepare the way. Indeed, if they could, they should capture the reins of government to make way for King Jesus. Powell was running his campaign here in London. I mentioned one of the occasions reported by a government spy—his preaching at Blackfriars. He was running a campaign which for a time had considerable influence on the mind of Oliver Cromwell because he felt that there was some substance in the argument that the country would be so much better if only the saints were allowed to rule. Now this is

not quite as bizarre as one might think. How many of us have said if we could only get better men in Parliament things would be so much better? And it impressed Cromwell. So he decided that he would convene a Parliament nominated by the Congregational and Baptist churches. Of course, the idea was wise enough! But the results were intensely disappointing. This was the Saints Parliament of 1653—the speaker, you may remember, of the Saints Parliament, was that London leather merchant, very successful in business and very ardent Puritan Praise-god Barbon (1596?–1679). The trouble was that the saints were too revolutionary. For example, they were eager to make fundamental changes in the legal system. In consequence, everybody began to get very nervous indeed. There was no knowing where these saints were going to finish and so Cromwell decided to send them back home to their Congregational and Baptist churches. At least they'd be safe there! And he became Lord Protector. Vavasor Powell fulminated against Cromwell on the night he was installed Protector with great pomp and ceremony. 'Whom do you want to reign over you?' said Vavasor Powell, with the steam rising from his head, 'Whom do you want to reign over you? Oliver Cromwell or Jesus Christ?' That was the choice.

Well, it was suggested that they had better silence this man. They placed him in custody, but it was very difficult for the kind of people that surrounded Oliver Cromwell to treat Powell as John Penry had been treated; so after two days in detention they set him free and off he went to Radnorshire to stir up trouble there. And he *was* stirring up trouble because Powell now conceived a plan of having a proper revolution in the name of King Jesus and against Oliver Cromwell. Petitions were flying around. The final petition was called *A Word for God*, and a biting criticism it is of the Cromwellian dictatorship. The old cause had been betrayed, that is how they felt—the old cause for which the great civil wars had been fought. All had been in vain. As for Cromwell, true he had not made himself king, but what was the difference? King, Lord Protector—the substance was the same. He, like Charles I, had taken the reins of government from Jesus Christ. So it was time that an army of Welshmen came up to London to put things to rights. Well, poor Vavasor Powell did not realise that John Thurloe (1616–68), (he was Cromwell's master spy) was reading every letter he was writing, had every speech he gave reported, every sermon taken down, and they are still available. They were printed, in fact, in Thurloe's huge volumes of State Papers. So the government was watching Powell much more closely than he knew.

Nothing came of all this, but the relevance of it to our story is that the great leader of the opposition to Powell was his friend Walter Cradock. Cradock, the 'bold, ignorant young fellow' of 1633, had by 1656 grown into

the embodiment of Cromwellian respectability. A man of the middle way, he rejected the Fifth Monarchists, to his left, as well as the Royalists on his right. He chose the middle way of Cromwellian practical wisdom. This is seen in the *Humble Representation and Address*, 4 February 1656, presented to Cromwell. It was Cradock's reply to Powell's *Word for God*. For him it was wisest to stick by Cromwell. The *Humble Representation*, of course, says some very nice things about Cromwell and the system he directed. But Cradock was now, quite unlike his friend Powell, ready to play safe. He settled down under the wing of the Great Protector became vicar of Llangwm in May, 1655, but not for long. He became ill towards the end of 1659, wrote out his will on 9 December in that year, and died on 24 December, the day before Christmas 1659.

He had married a girl from Wrexham, Catherine Langford, a daughter of Richard Langford (died 1643) of Trefalun, Denbighshire, a well to do family. She was one of twenty children in that family, and Walter and Catherine had two daughters, Eunice and Lois.

Walter Cradock is very different from John Penry. With regard to their basic convictions they were very much at one. But in their attitude, the flavour of their thinking, the temper of their lives, they make a contrast. If you spend some time in the company of Cradock, I think you will soon feel that you are in the company of a man whom it would be indeed delightful to spend a day with. Let me pick up some of the threads in his thinking. I am looking now for the things that are special to Cradock rather than the things that are common to him and his contemporaries. Cradock has a very heavy emphasis in his sermons on God's love. In his volume *Glad Tydings* (1648), for example, he writes (all his volumes are collections of sermons)

the Gospel holds forth to poore sinners that there is a *love*, an *eternale love*, an *infinite love* in Gods breast to poore sinners before ever the world was made ...  
So it was not a *cold* love that ended in nothing: but out of this love God would send his Son Jesus Christ, into the world to save sinners (p. 13).

There is a tender note in Cradock and he considered this important. I quote again because it tells you something about his concept of preaching, the concept that governed his own preaching in fact. This is from his book *Gospel-Libertie* (1648)

See the language that God puts in our mouthes when he sends us to preach; he sends us not to hire *servants* ... We are not sent to get *Gally-slaves* to the Oares, or a Beare to the stake; but he sends us to woove you as *spouses*, to marrie you to Christ; and in wooing there must not be *harsh* dealing (p. 28).

This gentle touch is very noticeable in Cradock's preaching and in his concept of the Gospel. He was, needless to say, a Calvinist, a main line Calvinist. Let



me quote from him again, this time from *Mount Sion* in T. Charles & P. Oliver, *The Works of ... Walter Cradock* (Chester, 1800). He says of Jesus Christ,

Besides his dying and that as a *public* person, there is a *union* made between every poor *believer* and Christ, as really as between *Christ* and his *Father*. Indeed, it is called in Scripture a *marriage*; because as in a marriage all the *wealth* of the *husband* is the *wife's*, it becomes hers and she hath a *right* to it after marriage, so all that is in *Christ* becomes *ours* by this union. But it is a more *real* union, a *closer* union by far than that of marriage: it is compared to the union between *members* and the *head*. (p. 19)

You note the warmth that he conveys through his words. You will notice also the lucidity of his exposition. The Gospel is not a complex message: I quote:

The Gospel, though there be glorious mysteries in it to feed the soul, yet, notwithstanding, it is a plain, simple thing. Now here the devil endeavours to undo souls, as it is ordinary in this city (London), when men come once to understand a little of the Gospel, and to taste the sweetness of it, the devil screws them up to sublimate all religion into notions, to cleave a hair (split a hair) and religion will be all in ideas and conceits of the nature of God and of the creature. Whereas the Gospel is a plain thing. (Charles & Oliver, p. 63)

I think this goes some way towards explaining the extraordinary appeal that Cradock had for the proletariat, if I may use the term. We know that when he preached at All Hallows the Great, the big and the great and the wealthy had difficulty in getting in because the place was crowded out with waiters and maidservants waiting to hear him. And as you turn the pages of his sermons you realise that he had this rare gift. Cradock never lost the common touch, and that is why I said at the beginning, how curious it is that the bishop should report his objection to some of the metaphors and the comparisons that he used. Let me see if I can give an example. I am concerned now with his rhetoric, with the way in which he expresses himself rather than the substance. The text is 'We have made a covenant with death and with hell are we at agreement'. And then, as he develops his theme, that God will annul the covenant with death, he says,

another thing is, the Lord compares them here to people who would hide themselves by the seaside where the tide comes up. As you see, sometimes when the tide is low there are green meadows and bushes before it be high spring and there they hide themselves and the water comes and overflows their hiding place. If they stay there a while, and it may be are asleep, the tide comes and drowns them all. Do ye not think that a man were mad that should go and hide himself in a hole of a bridge, and sleep when the tide was low, and

then the tide comes in and overwhelms him? So it will be with thee if thou receivest not Jesus Christ (Charles & Oliver, p. 451).

Making a covenant with death, and then saying, ‘we’re quite safe because we’ve made a covenant with death and with hell’. ‘Don’t make any mistake,’ says Cradock. And then these comparisons come in to illustrate dramatically the foolishness of it. ‘Mr Calvin says’ (a rare thing in Cradock—a quote from another theologian),

Mr Calvin saith they may be compared to little chickens or partridges, that run their heads in a bush, that hide their heads from the hawk; the hawk sees all their bodies, only in their own conceit they hide themselves, that is, they hide their own eyes that they may not see the hawk, but they do not hide their bodies that the hawk may not see them (Charles & Oliver, p. 451).

He had a very rare gift, so it appears, for expounding the Gospel in simple and homely terms, sending the message home. We return now from his rhetoric to his theology. Faith, then, means not only that Christ died for us but that there is a union with Christ. This is important in Cradock, this union with Christ, it is closer than the union of marriage. And this union is initiated by Adoption—the spirit of Adoption. He lays considerable stress in his theology on this.

All of you that have *received* Jesus Christ, let me exhort you to this, labour to get up in you a *perfect* spirit of *Adoption*, my meaning is this—you know there is a spirit of *adoption*, and a spirit of *bondage*, the spirit of *adoption* is a *frame of heart*, a *temper* of spirit, like that of a *childe* to his *father*. (*Glad Tidings* p. 40).

Then he goes on to say, that if people are only able to say ‘Abba, Father’, hesitantly and occasionally, they still have much of the spirit of bondage, whereas the spirit of adoption enables us to greet God openly and frequently as Father. He goes on

Now in the *New Testament* we should labour for a *full* spirit of *adoption*. What is that? That is that there may be nothing in my heart towards God, but pure *love* and *grace* and *glad tidings* to me.

Experiences, related in Puritan autobiographies, show that conversion transformed one’s feeling for the creation. For example, George Fox’s claim that the creation smells differently. It is a conviction expressed in a variety of ways in many a Puritan autobiography. Conversion, inner conversion, means at the same time transforming the world. It seemed different. And we have this in Cradock.

A saint that is fond of God in Jesus Christ, he seeth *something of God in everything*. As they say in *love*, one that is in love, sees nothing with her eyes nor hears nothing with her ears but love: so a saint that is fond of God, bring him meat, he sees the *love of God in Christ* in it: bring him cloathes or any

thing, his eye is fastened more upon the *love of God in Christ* than upon the thing

as he says in *Divine Drops Distilled* (1650). Now then, what followed conversion? Adoption, union with Christ. Then we have an emphasis that is in some ways more insistent in Cradock's work than probably in any of his Calvinist contemporaries. His insistence on Christian liberty—liberty from sin, liberty from the eternal battle to earn salvation by good works, liberty from the ceremonial law. He writes,

The Gospel of Jesus Christ was to be preached to all nations, and they being different in custom, in climate, in constitutional dispositions, Christ tied them in his law for the substance but left the rest to be by the Spirit of God in his people, to be determined to the best advantage, for the honour of God, and the good of his church (Charles & Oliver, pp. 251–2).

The substance—that is the same everywhere, but there is a generous measure of freedom and responsibility that falls upon the shoulders of Christians. They are to live their lives and order their lives in this freedom. And, he warns his fellow Puritans, even the Bible must be used with spiritual discrimination under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

This was a problem, as you realise, in the 1640s and 1650s with the flowering of all kinds of sects, some of them with very bizarre ideas indeed. Cradock argued that not all the actions of Jesus Christ and his apostles are intended to be examples that we must follow. As he says, 'Must we walk on the water because our Lord did? Must we kill men and women because of the punishment imposed upon Ananias and Sapphira by Peter?' No, obviously there are histories in Scripture that are not meant to be examples.

You take the book of God [he is attacking the Presbyterians, or some of them, here] you take the book of God as if it were all aphorisms and theorems and canons: No: the book of God ... is like the common law of England, and there we know sometimes what is right by the judge's opinion, sometimes by parallel cases, sometimes by expediency ... remember the greatest misery to an honest heart ... is this, a misdrawing of rules out of the Word of God (Charles & Oliver, p. 274).

He had a very profound objection to any attempt to shackle Christians with laws and rules and regulations.

Make not laws upon the saints where Christ has not made any; for the saints are noble-spirited men, and a noble-spirited man would rather do a hundred things than be bound to one. There are believers that only eye what is lawful and what is unlawful, they are not interested in anything else. ... They go about and trouble every minister, and make endless questions. Is this lawful? Is

that lawful? Is it lawful to play at tables, and at cards? Is it lawful to wear long hair? (Charles & Oliver, p. 295)

You see the point that he is making. People were obsessed with making legal distinctions, whereas for Cradock one of the liberating things about the Gospel is that all this now belonged to the past. The same is true in the realms of worship. He says in one sermon,

You find people to talk of forms of worship and to make laws about how to pray: and standing half an hour confessing sins: and so approaching God step by step. But he who loves God with a holy fondness knows he can jump into his Father's lap and ask him for anything without falsehood or flattery (*Divine Drops Distilled*, p. 49).

What a dramatic description of extemporary prayer! And how exciting it must have sounded amidst all this fury between Presbyterians and Anglicans about what shape the book of Common Prayer should be. 'Tut tut,' says Cradock, 'what's all this got to do with Christianity? A child jumps into his mother's lap. He does not ask permission, he does not say "please", he jumps into his mother's lap and takes things out of her hand. A Christian is no different. Once the adoption has taken place, once we are saved by the grace of God in Christ, we are granted, through the mercy of God, a boldness, and invited to come boldly to the Throne of Grace.' It is poles apart from that restrictive spirit which he called 'the Old Testament spirit'. He says,

So they made the thirty-nine articles, and decrees, and canons to eke out the New Testament, and the minister must say this with a loud voice, and that with a low voice: and now he must sit, and now he must stand: and he must read one lesson here and another lesson there: and if he were rich he must weare long cloathes, and if he were poore he must weare short. What an abominable thing is it to tie the sonnes of God that are not babies now, under tutors, with paltrie things, when the Spirit of God in the least saint is better able to determine than all the bishops (*Gospel-libertie*, p. 48).

And there you have the spiritual democracy that grows out, as Cradock sees it, of the adoption through the merits of Jesus Christ. The impression is given so frequently that the Puritans were people obsessed by legalities, people who knew nothing about a sense of liberation, of release. Cradock is not alone in all this. He represents a very substantial body in the great Puritan movement. Now it is true that Cradock in his day was accused of Antinomianism. I think Richard Baxter, somewhere, points the finger at him and you can quite see why this should be, because he has such a clear vision of the completed work of Christ. He says you can forget now about the past. The past is cancelled out, you are free, the shackles of sin have been broken. So now rejoice in the Lord, stop being gloomy. God has counted your sins and he has settled the whole

account. Sin has been condemned once and for ever. You look to Christ. You stress your union with Christ and then grace will work in you. That was the general run of his logic but some of his sterner critics said, 'Ah, this man is forgetting the importance of good works'. I do not think the accusation is relevant to Cradock. He certainly did not think so. For him, Christianity is, above all, a religion of joy. It is a release from prison. It is a religion which can secure people in the faith that the dominion of death has been broken.

(transcribed from a recording and edited by Dr Tudur Jones)









