Andrew M. Leslie

The Light of Grace: John Owen on the Authority of Scripture and Christian Faith

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The study itself grows out of an admiration for Owen which was initially provoked during a stint as a divinity student at Oak Hill Theological College, London, in 2005. It was Garry Williams who first sowed the idea of pursuing further studies in early Reformed thought, and it was gradually nurtured into reality through the encouragement and advice of tutors and friends at Moore Theological College in Sydney, especially my now beloved colleagues, Mark Thompson and Robert Doyle.

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Andrew M. Leslie *Moore Theological College, Sydney*
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Abbreviations

Ad Hebraeos	*Super Epistolam ad Hebraeos Lectura*
Comm STh	*Commentaria in Summa Theologiae*
DLGTT	*Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*
DV	*Questiones Disputatae de Veritate*
Lect	*Lectura in libros Sententiarum (Oxoniensis)*
Ord	*Ordinatio*
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
PRRD	*Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*
RD	*Reformed Dogmatics*
Rep	*Reportatio Parisiensis*
SCG	*Summa contra Gentiles*
Sent	Referring to Peter Lombard's *Sententiarum libri quatuor* or a mediaeval commentary thereon
SQO	*Summa Questiones Ordinariae*
STh	*Summa Theologiae*
Sup Boethium	*Super Boethium de Trinitate*
Vg.	Vulgate

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1. Introduction

1.1 Prologue

Since his death, John Owen (1616–1683) has enjoyed a hallowed if somewhat uncritical reputation among admirers of Reformed theology as a towering giant of seventeenth-century English theology and piety. Born into a Puritan home in Stadham, Oxfordshire, it is his formidable, multi-volumed library of works for which he is largely remembered and esteemed. Outside these circles, however, it is only in the last century or so that Owen has earned more than periodic judgments of contempt for his relentlessly unyielding defences of quaintly "Calvinist" prerogatives such as particular redemption and the doctrine of "limited atonement". Most of this more recent scholarly interaction has been driven by historical theologians who have rightly discerned Owen's considerable stature as a uniquely learned, articulate and influential advocate of Reformed theology in seventeenth-century England.[1] Recent years have also witnessed a growing historical interest in Owen's contribution to seventeenth-century Puritanism and polity, particularly since the appearance of Peter Toon's fine monograph in 1971,[2] although this still remains significantly overshadowed by the focus on his theology – partly because it is his unique Reformed voice that continues to intrigue, but also because the biographical data available on Owen is sufficiently slim to render assessments of his impact on seventeenth-century polity somewhat opaque.

Recently, Tim Cooper has lamented the relative paucity of biographical studies on Owen, and while recognising the possibly insurmountable difficulty of containing within a single volume a thoroughly balanced integration of social

1 For a relatively up-to-date and comprehensive bibliography of the literature on John Owen, see John W. Tweedale, "A John Owen Bibliography", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

2 Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: the Life and Work of John Owen, Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971).

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history and theology, wishes more scholarship would emerge along these lines.[3] A few pieces have begun to grapple with clues Owen gives about his response to national developments, particularly where these tumultuous happenings appreciably seem to influence his thought.[4] Perhaps the most successful full-length attempt at this is the work of Steve Griffiths, *Redeem the Time: Sin in the Writings of John Owen*. Griffiths consciously avoids getting bogged down in purely historiographical debates that have often dominated recent analyses of seventeenth-century theology, for fear that it artificially portrays an abstract and detached theologian with relatively little pastoral concern.[5] Others, to varying extents and with somewhat divergent results, have also recognised the importance of examining Owen's Congregational ecclesiology with a careful eye to his political engagement before, during and after the Interregnum.[6] Not to be forgotten, either, is Cooper's own recent and highly stimulating attempt to integrate aspects of Owen's thought into a biographical evaluation of Owen's infamously fraught relationship with Richard Baxter.[7]

Cooper's warning of intellectual abstraction is a salient one as our study embarks on yet another examination of Owen's thought.[8] Even where most studies dominated by intellectual interests rightly appreciate that Owen's theology cannot be analysed in a vacuum, he certainly has not escaped having his

3 Tim Cooper, "John Owen Unleashed. Almost", *Conversations in Religion and Theology* 6 (2008), *passim*. It is worth noting that a major new biography of Owen by Crawford Gribben is forthcoming.

4 E.g., Sarah G. Cook, "A Political Biography of a Religious Independent: John Owen, 1616–1683" (Unpublished Ph.D., Harvard University, 1972); Lloyd G. Williams, "'Digitus Dei': God and Nation in the Thought of John Owen: A Study in English Puritanism and Nonconformity" (Unpublished Ph.D., Drew University, 1981); Paul C.H. Lim, "The Trinity, Adiaphora, Ecclesiology, and Reformation: John Owen's Theory of Religious Toleration in Context", *Westminster Theological Journal* 67 (2005); Alan Bearman, "'The Atlas of Independency': The Ideas of John Owen (1616–1683)" (Unpublished Ph.D., Kansas State University, 2005).

5 Steve Griffiths, *Redeem the Time: The Problem of Sin in the Writings of John Owen* (Fearn: Mentor, 2001), 11–12.

6 Williams, "'Digitus Dei'"; Lim, "Toleration"; Bearman, "'Atlas'"; Ryan Kelly, "Reformed or Reforming? John Owen and the Complexity of Theological Codification for Mid-Seventeenth-Century", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012); John Coffey, "John Owen and the Puritan Toleration Controversy, 1646–59", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

7 Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Andover: Ashgate, 2011); also, "Owen's Personality: The Man behind the Theology", in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

8 Throughout this study, we will use the standard "Goold" edition of Owen's works. We have generally removed any printed italics from quotations. See, John Owen, *The Works*, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–1855).

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thought assessed against the alien criteria of subsequent centuries. To some extent this is unavoidable. Modern interpreters will bring their own agendas when analysing an historical figure, but the best couple a degree of self-awareness with a disciplined desire to uncover and assess their subject on its own terms, conscious that this process needs to occur before a careful and critical contemporary appropriation can proceed.[9] In that spirit, Carl Trueman has echoed Quentin Skinner in advocating a chiefly historical approach to examining the thought of significant British Puritans like Owen, which is sensitive to both the "synchronic" and "diachronic" context of their ideas, listening for their distinctive contribution to the history of Western Christianity, while also recognising how that contribution evolved from an undoubtedly eclectic array of influences.[10]

It is along these lines that our study intends to examine how Owen understands the nature and authority of scripture and, particularly, how he sees that authority intersecting with the life of faith. According to Richard Muller, the Reformed doctrine of scripture typically centred upon the complementary twin *foci* of authority and interpretation, reflecting the primary intellectual and polemical tensions of the era.[11] While two recent monographs have devoted substantial attention to different aspects of Owen's approach to scriptural interpretation,[12] it is, perhaps, surprising that no comprehensive exposition of his understanding of its authority has yet appeared. I say surprising because this is one of a number of aspects of his thought which continues to attract attention across a relatively diverse range of fields such as philosophical apologetics, hermeneutics, and, not least, systematics. For example, Catholic philosopher John Lamont regards Owen's careful articulation of faith as something grounded exclusively in divine "testimony", rather than any supporting proofs or "motives

9 On this issue generally, see, Richard A. Muller, "Reflections on the Persistent Whiggism and Its Antidotes in the Study of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-century Intellectual History", in *Seeing Things Their Way: Intellectual History and the Return of Religion*, ed. Alister Chapman, John Coffey, and Brad S. Gregory (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009).

10 Carl R. Trueman, "Puritan Theology as Historical Event: A Linguistic Approach to the Ecumenical Context", in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001). Cf., Quentin Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas", *History and Theory* 8 (1969).

11 Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), II.146.

12 Henry M. Knapp, "Understanding the Mind of God: John Owen and Seventeenth-century Exegetical Methodology" (Unpublished Ph.D., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2002); Thomas J. Tucker, "Safeguarding the Treasury: John Owen and the Analogy of Faith" (Unpublished Ph.D., University of Aberdeen, 2006). Cf., Carl R. Trueman, "Faith Seeking Understanding: Some Neglected Aspects of John Owen's Understanding of Scriptural Interpretation", in *Interpreting the Bible: Historical and Theological Studies in Honour of David F. Wright*, ed. A.N.S. Lane (Leicester: Apollos, 1997).

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of credibility", as a "major advance" in the centuries-long quest to furnish Christian faith with a coherent, indefeasible explanation.[13] Similarly, in his mission to recover a "theological hermeneutic" where self-understanding is finally dependent upon a knowledge of God, Jens Zimmerman believes Owen's harmonious subordination of human reason to a personal, dynamic faith, which is mediated through an authoritative scriptural text, is paradigmatic of the best pre-critical offerings.[14] More recently still, John Webster has prized the dogmatic value of Owen's statements on spiritual illumination, which enables a regenerated person to recognise scripture's divine origin and perceive its material content, while fully engaging their created rational capacities without in any way casting them aside.[15]

It is not just recent scholars who have detected some lasting constructive value in Owen's treatment of scriptural authority. Long ago, his nineteenth-century editor, William Goold, repeated the judgment of Thomas Chalmers, who regarded Owen's explanation of scripture's self-evidencing authority as superior even to those of Leslie, Lyttelton, Doddridge, Bates and Baxter. According to Chalmers, Owen

> rendered a more essential service to the cause of divine revelation, when, by his clear and irresistible demonstrations, he has proved that the written Word itself possesses a self-evidencing light and power for manifesting its own divine original, superior to the testimony of eye-witnesses, or the evidence of miracles […].[16]

At the very least, all these judgments suggest Owen's formulation on this issue is worthy of some fresh, detailed examination. None of these claims are regulated foremost by historical conventions, of course. To a greater or lesser degree, they are influenced by the diverse constructive agendas of their authors. This point is most starkly illustrated by those who have come to rather different conclusions about Owen's treatment of this subject. The relentlessly negative appraisal offered by Dale Stover, for instance, is quite obviously and explicitly dominated by his commitment to a modern, existential understanding of revelation as "event", which typically demurs against the standard Reformed emphasis upon the in-

13 John R.T. Lamont, *Divine Faith* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004).

14 Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004). Cf., Barry H. Howson, "The Puritan Hermeneutics of John Owen: A Recommendation", *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001).

15 John B. Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 50–64.

16 Quoted by Goold in, Owen, *Works*, XVI.296; cf. IV.4. See, Thomas Chalmers, ed. *The Christian's Defence Against Infidelity* (Glasgow: William Collins, 1829), xxxiii–iv.

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spired form of the scriptural text (which Owen shared).[17] Similarly, the ambivalence of Jack Rogers and Donald McKim towards Owen in their now infamous study is clearly influenced by the authors' own stance towards the various controversies over scripture within more recent American Protestantism.[18] In other words, the extent to which any of these judgments – affirming or otherwise – fairly represent the historical Owen can only really be assessed after Owen's own writings have been examined on their own terms, within their native intellectual context. That is certainly not to condemn the practice of theological retrieval; it is only to suggest, as we have already, that such appropriation ought occur alongside, and in conversation with the more strictly historical exercise, which studies like ours attempt.

To some degree, this historical evaluation of Owen's doctrine of scripture has already commenced in the excellent, paradigmatic studies of Trueman and Sebastian Rehnman.[19] Both of these scholars suggest Owen needs to be viewed not just as an English Puritan, but also as belonging to a European community of Reformed orthodox thinkers. These thinkers were united by their confessional commitments, and possessed a certain penchant for the tools of scholastic methodology alongside traditional, broadly Aristotelian metaphysics, as instrumental means for articulating those commitments.

On the specific issue of biblical authority, Trueman points to Owen's explicit confrontation with the Catholics, Quakers, and the authors of that landmark in Early Modern biblical criticism, the London *Polyglot Bible* (1657). He helpfully

17 Dale A. Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (Unpublished Ph.D., McGill University, 1967).

18 Jack B. Rogers and Donald K. McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: an Historical Approach* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 218–23. For this reason, the approach of this study has been challenged: John D. Woodbridge, *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Robert W. Godfrey, "Biblical Authority in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Question of Transition", in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D.A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); Muller, *PRRD*, II: *passim*.

19 Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998); Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002). Note also, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford", in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). Not to be missed, either, are the brief, but valuable discussions in Stanley N. Gundry, "John Owen on Authority and Scripture", in *Inerrancy and the Church*, ed. John D. Hannah (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); J.I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 81–96; Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 11–26; Ryan M. McGraw, *A Heavenly Directory: Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship and Reassessment of John Owen's Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014), 81–9.

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underlines the way Owen grounds scripture's authority and sufficiency as the *verbum engraphon* in its relationship to Christ (the *verbum agraphon*), whose Spirit both "controlled its composition", and operates within believers, enabling them to perceive its divine authority and interpret it according to his will. In particular, Trueman draws attention to the important inter-relationship Owen perceives between divine revelation, the faithful, spirit-led apprehension of its authority and perspicuity, and the subordinate function of reason and ecclesiastical helps in aiding a believer's interpretation of its content.[20]

Rehnman's study intends to analyse Owen's theological method, largely following the contours of his monumental *Theologoumena*, published on the cusp of the Restoration, in 1661. Like Trueman, he highlights Owen's use of scholastic terminology when distinguishing between God's infinite self-knowledge (*theologia archetypa*), and the finite expression of that truth (*theologia ectypa*), graciously communicated via the incarnate Christ, the pages of scripture, and creation itself.[21] As Rehnman shows, Owen views scripture as the pre-eminent "supernatural" expression of ectypal theology, second only to the christological *theologia unionis*, reflecting God's gracious revelation to humanity after the Fall, as distinct from what can be known of him through our naturally created means.[22] Rehnman especially wishes to explore the relationship between faith and reason in Owen's thought, offering a plausible contextual explanation for the apparent incongruity between Owen's scathing condemnations of scholastic metaphysics in *Theologoumena*, versus the relative ease with which he uses these tools elsewhere.[23] In connection with this theme, Rehnman devotes a chapter to Owen's mature statement on scriptural authority, *Reason of Faith* (1677), pointing to the way Owen distinguishes true Christian belief as something based exclusively on divine testimony and enabled via the Spirit, from a purely natural "opinion" founded on rational arguments or evidences.[24] Indeed, Rehnman has been sufficiently intrigued by this treatise to offer some further observations in a very recent article.[25] Although he now appears to approach Owen from a more philosophical angle, this piece possibly does a better job still of highlighting the inseparable connection Owen sees

20 See, Trueman, *Claims*, 64–99.

21 Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 57–71; Trueman, *Claims*, 48–64. On the Reformed use of this terminology, see, Willem van Asselt, "The Fundamental Meaning of Theology: Archetypal and Ectypal Theology in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Thought", *Westminster Theological Journal* 64 (2002); also, Muller, *PRRD*, I.225–38, 248–69.

22 Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 73–89.

23 *Divine Discourse*, 109–28.

24 *Divine Discourse*, 129–54.

25 Sebastian Rehnman, "Graced Response: John Owen on Faith and Reason", *Neue Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie und Religionsphilosophie* 53 (2011). Rehnman's chapter in the recent *Ashgate Research Companion* (Kapic and Jones, ed.) is identical.

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between a certain perception of scripture's divine origin and faith proper, together with the nuanced relationship of this claim to other intellectual acts.

Notwithstanding the numerous strengths of these studies, there is still scope for a full-length treatment of scriptural authority in Owen. While both Trueman and Rehnman illuminate some of its salient features, their respective *foci* are clearly broader than scripture itself, and naturally enough, important aspects to both the intellectual context and specific features of Owen's formulation remain unexplored. A longer study affords the opportunity to trace the crucial relationship of scripture to connected themes like christology, pneumatology, anthropology and soteriology in more depth. It also allows us to explore the contextual factors and metaphysical commitments which have apparently shaped Owen's doctrine, features which are, at times, surprisingly obscured in Rehnman's account. While Rehnman does flag the so-called "rule of faith" controversy which erupted between Catholics and Protestants over the authority of scripture, he underplays the extent to which Owen's argument was influenced by the evolution of this dispute among his Establishment contemporaries, especially when it comes to the role of "evidence" in securing faith, and the metaphysical implications this entails. Owen does not merely restate "the conservative Reformation position in scholastic terms";[26] rather, as we intend to show, he creatively draws upon an "ecumenical" dogmatic and metaphysical heritage to refine the traditional Reformed position in a fashion that was sensitive to intellectual developments in his own late seventeenth-century context.

However, before outlining the scope of this study, it is worth paying some attention to the wider scholarly discussion concerning the general prominence of scripture within Protestant and Reformed thought, together with the more controverted issues it entailed.

1.2 The evolving scripture "principle": some issues

The distinctive emphasis upon the final authority of scripture, with its famous polemical slogan "*sola scriptura*", is a virtual commonplace in popular perceptions of the Reformation. Yet, however much the principle has acquired a hallowed, virtually confessional status as a kind of Protestant shibboleth, it cannot so straightforwardly be claimed as a novel discovery or invention of the sixteenth century. Nor, even, can it be readily pinned down to certain "proto-Protestants" like John Wyclif or Jan Hus, as if their lonely resistance to the wild inventions of the Papacy somehow blazed the trail for the great events which followed a century or two later, when the slate was finally wiped clean of any

26 Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 130.

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illegitimate traditionary dogmatic incursions, allowing a truly "biblical" theology to emerge in its wake. Rather, as is often the case, the reality is a good deal more nuanced than the hagiography can sometimes suggest. Thanks, in large part, to Heiko Oberman and others, scholars have come to appreciate the relationship of this reformational principle – amongst many others – to the currents of thought percolating in the centuries leading up to time of the Reformers. And what seems closer to the truth is that the Reformation claim for scriptural supremacy represents the decisive, and perhaps, radical culmination of a recognisable stream within mediaeval Catholic thought, which had always sought to acknowledge scripture's transcendence over the churchly process of interpretation and doctrinal formulation, even while aiming for an essential harmony between the two – what Oberman has rather prosaically labelled "Tradition I". In Oberman's view, this stance towards scripture is, in fact, the best way to categorise the majority of theologians up until the fourteenth century. Indeed, until the Renaissance, it was chiefly the canon lawyers, more than the theologians, he feels, who typified the other identifiable pattern within late mediaeval theology, which explicitly gave tradition a distinct authority alongside scripture in the codification of churchly dogma (so-called "Tradition II").[27]

In other words, if Oberman is correct, the reformational commitment to *sola scriptura* was not an "unprecedented" "supernatural breakthrough", but more a product of the swelling tension between these two traditions as the Middle Ages drew to a close.[28] More recently, Muller has augmented this observation by suggesting that a trend towards more literal methods of exegesis significantly exacerbated this tension from the fourteenth century onwards. In his view, the bitter antagonism between scripture and tradition which erupted at the Reformation did not so much stem from a desire to wrest scripture from its churchly or traditionary interpretive context, but from a growing realisation that the plain teaching of scripture could not easily harmonise with various traditional doctrines, or a *magisterium* increasingly settled in its commitment to "Tradition II", and resistant to the call for biblical reform.[29]

Yet, however much the Reformers' commitment to scriptural supremacy can be shown to come from good Catholic stock, it is well known that with their vehement rejection of anything approximating "Tradition II", they soon found themselves embroiled in a protracted clash with Rome over this issue, lasting well into the seventeenth century. The particularly contentious question did not so much concern the status of scripture as the authoritative "Word of God", but

27 Heiko A. Oberman, *Forerunners of the Reformation: the Shape of Late Medieval Thought*, trans. Paul L. Nyhus (London: Lutterworth, 1966), 53–66.
28 Oberman, *Forerunners*, 65.
29 Muller, *PRRD*, II.51–80.

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the possibility of being certain that its authority transcends the teaching of the church.[30] In his seminal studies on the history of scepticism, Richard Popkin has shown how various influential Catholics – particularly those trained in the French Jesuit schools of Clermont and Bordeaux – leaned heavily on the strategies of ancient Pyrrhonism in their polemics against the Protestant appeal to *sola scriptura*. If the Reformers rejected any reliance upon the final authority of churchly interpretation to decide controverted questions of scriptural exegesis, on the grounds that interpreters can err, how is it, they replied, that any fallible person can be certain of scripture's supreme authority, canonical limits, fundamental perspicuity, or its capacity to settle Christian doctrine decisively?[31] As Popkin observes, Protestants frequently responded by appealing to the Spirit's inward testimony or illumination, which secures an infallible conviction of scripture's canonical boundaries and authority, and delivers a certain grasp of its core teachings necessary for saving faith.[32]

Even still, however important (and convenient) this solution may have been, it had problems of its own. Indeed, according to D.F. Strauss, the confessional reliance upon the so-called *testimonium internum* was "the Achilles' heel of the Protestant system".[33] As G.C. Berkouwer remarks, it raises the thorny possibility that "for Protestantism", ultimate authority no longer resides "in the 'objective' revelation itself, but in the human heart, feeling, or experience, or at least in the subjectivity of an 'internal' revelation."[34] Wolfhart Pannenberg even claims that Calvin's *testimonium internum* was, perhaps, the decisive "turning point in a major shift away from the Reformation thesis of the precedence of God's truth over human judgment to the modern neo-Protestant conviction that subjective experience is the basis of faith and Christian doctrine."[35]

Certainly, the Catholics quickly seized upon this vulnerability, denouncing the doctrine for its unverifiable subjectivity and precarious similarity to the "enthusiastic" teachings of Reformation radicals who were derided by Catholics and Protestants alike.[36] Take, for example, the English Catholic polemicist, Thomas Stapleton. While conceding that the mainstream Protestants do uphold

30 *PRRD*, II.76–7.
31 Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 66–73.
32 Popkin, *Scepticism*, 69. Cf., Muller, *PRRD*, II.77. For the Reformed confessional consensus on the *testimonium internum*, see, for instance: *Gallic Confession* (1559) c.4; *Belgic Confession* (1561) a.5; *Westminster Confession* (1647) c.5.
33 Quoted in G.C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 39.
34 Berkouwer, *Scripture*, 39–40.
35 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991–1993), I.34; cf. 33–4.
36 Popkin, *Scepticism*, 69.

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the church's teaching ministry – unlike the radicals,[37] Stapleton thinks the Fall has necessitated the divine establishment of the church as the authoritative, infallible "medium" for recognising and trusting the truthfulness of scripture.[38] And so the argument goes that scripture has no more authority than the voice of the church (*vox ecclesiae*), at least in respect to us (*quoad nos*). Ironically, perhaps, the Catholics did not necessarily question the need for an inward spiritual work in faith – so called "infused faith" – which provides the capacity to assent to the authority of revealed truth;[39] something Protestants were quick to point out.[40] But for Stapleton, any spiritual testimony to scriptural authority must be "public" – that is, it must operate through the *vox ecclesiae* – and not "private" or "secret" (*arcanum*), lest it "be easily alleged (*obtendi*) by someone", hinting at the dangers of "spiritualism".[41] Similarly, on the related matter of scriptural interpretation, someone like Robert Bellarmine would insist that scripture's inherent lack of clarity could only be resolved by appealing to the Spirit-guided judgment of the church and its councils, lumping "Calvin and the other heretics" in with Schwenckfeld for their refusal to follow this route.[42]

The Protestants responded to these allegations by simply appealing to the "public" nature of scripture itself as the yardstick of the Spirit's internal testimony, claiming an inseparable unity of "Word" and "Spirit".[43] However, this alone may not have been enough. Indeed, Muller notices how Reformed thinkers increasingly turned to various "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" arguments to support the objective or rational credibility of scripture. Catholic writers had used these too:[44] they were hardly new to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but emerge from a long pedigree of Christian apologetics. Nonetheless, these arguments certainly do appear to have become increasingly important for Protestant writers as time wore on; especially those intrinsic features of the text, such as its internal harmony or majestic style and content, which could be used to

37 Thomas Stapleton, *Principiorum fidei doctrinalium* (Paris: Apud Michaelem Sonnium, 1579), 275.

38 Stapleton, *Principiorum*, 281–7, 294–7.

39 *Principiorum*, 275–7.

40 William Whitaker, *A Disputation on Holy Scripture: Against the Papists, Especially Bellarmine and Stapleton*, trans. William Fitzgerald (Cambridge: University Press, 1849), 346, 355. Cf., Owen, *Works*, IV.114–5.

41 "Testimonium quidem Spiritus Dei esse omni authoritate superius, sed ne seductorii spiritus sub titulo Divini Spiritus se ingerant, debere hoc testimonium Spiritus publicum esse, non privatum tantum: & manifestum ac certum, non arcanum: quale obtendi facile a quocunque posset.": Stapleton, *Principiorum*, 336; cf. 334.

42 E.g., Robert Bellarmine, *Opera Omnia* (Naples: Josephus Giuliano, 1856–62), I.106.

43 So, Whitaker, *Scripture*, 345–7. Whitaker would proceed to have an extended debate with Stapleton on this issue.

44 So, Bellarmine, *Opera*, I.24–6.

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defend its inherent superiority over the church's teachings.[45] Another sizeable factor fuelling the growing reliance on these defences was, of course, the emergence of newly critical attitudes towards the scriptural text itself, emanating largely from outside traditional church circles. In late seventeenth-century England, for instance, various Establishment churchmen widely relied on these kinds of arguments to shore up the rational credibility of scripture and the Christian faith amidst deepening (and increasingly fashionable) sceptical attack.[46]

Even still, however important and elaborate these defences became in their increasingly extended *loci scripturae*, Muller believes the orthodox Reformed remained convinced that the Spirit's internal testimony is uniquely decisive in securing a conviction of scriptural authority. The intrinsic and extrinsic arguments may well be compelling enough to quell all reasonable doubt and objection – at least, so they thought – and support the faith of Christian believers. But in themselves, they fall short of securing that faith itself, along with its corresponding state of certainty. For this, only the self-attesting, authoritative voice of God will do.[47] Consequently, Muller concludes that "[t]he continuity of the orthodox position with the Reformation is nowhere more clear than in this presentation of evidence."[48] What the complexity of this development does illustrate, he thinks, is an increasing difficulty in maintaining a "balance between the subjective and inward certainty resting on the Spirit and on faith alone and an external objective certainty resting on evidence." "The former", he suggests,

> must be present if the Reformed emphasis on grace alone to the exclusion of works is to be maintained and paralleled at this crucial juncture, the doctrine of the self-authenticating authority [of: *sic*] Scripture to the exclusion of individual human proof and of churchly testimony. But the latter must also be present if the subjective conviction is to be grounded in reality.[49]

Anyone familiar with the field of early Reformed theology will undoubtedly appreciate the paradigmatic nature of Muller's work in reshaping its assessment – particularly, in its relationship to Catholic thought, or its fundamental con-

45 Muller, *PRRD*, II.267–81.

46 See, Henry G. van Leeuwen, *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630–1690* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963); Barbara J. Shapiro, *Probability and Certainty in Seventeenth-Century England: A Study of the Relationships between Natural Science, Religion, History, Law and Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Gerard Reedy, *The Bible and Reason: Anglicans and Scripture in Late Seventeenth-century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985); John Spurr, "'Rational Religion' in Restoration England", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 49 (1988); Martin I.J. Griffin Jr, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England* (Leiden: Brill, 1992).

47 Muller, *PRRD*, II.281–5.

48 *PRRD*, II.265.

49 *PRRD*, II.259.

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fessional coherence from the early sixteenth century up until the eventual demise of orthodoxy in the eighteenth century. With others, he has overturned older assumptions and hackneyed caricatures of Reformed orthodoxy, enabling the period to be viewed with fresh eyes, an achievement which has now been so well documented that it hardly needs rehearsing at any length here.[50] Certainly, on the gradual emergence of the dedicated Reformed *locus scripturae* out of the earliest reformational convictions, with its central affirmation of scripture as the *principium cognoscendi theologiae*, Muller's second volume in his monumental *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* is a definitive landmark.

It is noteworthy, however, that on this specific matter concerning the conjunction of the Spirit's internal testimony with apologetic arguments, at least two studies have challenged aspects of Muller's claim for a fundamental "continuity" between the Reformers (particularly Calvin), and their successors.

The first is Jeffrey Mallinson's monograph, *Faith, Reason, and Revelation in Theodore Beza 1519–1605*.[51] Following Popkin's lead, Mallinson argues that sceptical attacks on the self-attesting authority of scripture, from both humanist and Catholic quarters, may have been decisive in the eventual incorporation of "objective" arguments by certain Reformed thinkers into their versions of the Spirit's internal work at the foundation of faith. This, in fact, had been the claim of B.B. Warfield many years earlier concerning Calvin himself, namely, that the Spirit effects a certain apprehension of scripture's divine origin "through" use of the arguments or "*indicia*", convincing a person of their cogency, and thereby

50 Amidst his many articles, it is worth singling out Muller's seminal volumes, including, Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1986); *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); *After Calvin: Studies in the Development of a Theological Tradition*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); "The Placement of Predestination in Reformed Theology: Issue or Non-Issue?", *Calvin Theological Journal* 40 (2005); *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012). Also worth noting are six other edited collections from a range of scholars: Carl R. Trueman and Scott R. Clark, eds, *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1999); Willem van Asselt and Eef Dekker, eds, *Reformation and Scholasticism: an Ecumenical Enterprise* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot, and Willemien Otten, eds, *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt* (Leiden: Brill, 2010); Willem van Asselt, ed. *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism* (Reformation Heritage Books, 2011); Jordan J. Ballor, David S. Sytsma, and Jason Zuidema, eds, *Church and School in Early Modern Protestantism: Essays in Honor of Richard A. Muller on the Maturation of a Theological Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Herman J. Selderhuis, ed., *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2013).

51 Jeffrey Mallinson, *Faith, Reason and Revelation in Theodore Beza, 1519–1605* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

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assuring them of scripture's authenticity.[52] Yet, like Muller, Mallinson agrees that Calvin quite explicitly walled off these arguments from the Spirit's *testimonium internum* in his 1559 *Institutes*. According to Mallinson, the Spirit's internal persuasion is, for Calvin, something "immediate and non-inferential", excluding "objective evidence", which only has a subsequent, ancillary function in supporting a believer's Spirit-led conviction.[53] By contrast, however, Beza may mark something of a transition within the Reformed tradition when he seemingly treats the Spirit's internal work not so much as a distinct testimony, as Calvin had done, but as a "power to understand the objective evidence itself". Mallinson is cautious in claiming too much. Muller may rightly describe the "majority of Reformed orthodox theologians" in claiming they did not "attempt to rise from effects to cause and to prove the divinity of Scripture by recourse to an evidentialistic argument." However, Beza represents a notable "exception", he feels. And it may well be his influence that led to an alternative, minority trajectory within the Reformed tradition, followed – he believes – by prominent figures such as Francis Turretin and Philippe de Mornay.[54]

Another more recent study draws a similar conclusion. Against Muller's "challenging" claim for an essential "continuity" with the Reformers on the function of arguments or evidences in securing faith,[55] Henk van den Belt also shows how several later writers integrated these "*notae*" with the *testimonium internum* as its "objective" grounds. Agreeing that this represents a "discontinuity" with Calvin, van den Belt seems to regard this as a more widespread phenomenon than Mallinson, citing several examples from the writings of Whitaker, Junius, Walaeus and Turretin.[56]

It is fascinating to notice how these two independent studies come to radically different assessments regarding this development. On the one hand, Mallinson judges it positively, seeing it as a correction of the subjective, fideistic imbalance he detects in Calvin's thought. On the other hand, van den Belt is far more pessimistic. While Calvin allowed for the limited use of "proofs" when defending the authoritative "majesty" of scripture against the Libertines and sceptical humanists, or in buttressing the faith of believers, he believes the eventual incorporation of these *notae* into the *testimonium internum* obscured Calvin's original insistence that faith must rest exclusively upon the self-authenticating,

52 B.B. Warfield, *Calvin and Calvinism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 87–9.
53 Mallinson, *Beza*, 178; cf. 15.
54 *Beza*, 14–20, 184–7. Cf., Muller, *PRRD*, II.255–6.
55 Henk van den Belt, *The Authority of Scripture in Reformed Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 122. Cf., Muller, *PRRD*, II.265.
56 See, van den Belt, *Scripture*, 130–1, 140–1, 150–1, 155–8, 176, 331–2. Van den Belt makes no mention of Mallinson's work in his study.

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