

Benedict Bird

John Owen's Defence of the Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints

In opposition to the Arminian doctrine
taught by John Goodwin



Reformed Historical Theology

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Preface

John Owen (1616–83) published his major treatise, *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, in 1654. He did so in response to an equally weighty work by an Arminian minister and author, John Goodwin (1594–1665), who published *Redemption Redeemed* in 1651. The debate between them goes to the heart of what it means to become and remain a true believer; and the basis upon which such a person may have any assurance of salvation.

This book begins with the historical background and the influences upon the two authors that led to their writing. Goodwin studied at Queens' College, Cambridge, in the 1610s; Owen at Queen's College, Oxford, in the 1620s. Both were ordained ministers in the Church of England. Both were influential supporters of the parliamentary cause in the Civil Wars. Both were regarded as Puritans, and Congregationalists. Yet, by the early 1650s, each regarded the other's understanding of God's sovereignty and human freedom as theologically wrong and pastorally disastrous.

Goodwin is said by his biographers to have converted suddenly from Calvinism to Arminianism, in a matter of months, in the year 1647. At that point, they say, he became strongly opposed to the idea of a divine determinism in which God has the last word in anyone's salvation and continuation in the faith. It was from then, they say, that he argued that whether someone continues in the faith, or not, must ultimately be determined by that person. This book refutes this 'sudden conversion' understanding of Goodwin's theological trajectory. It demonstrates from his earliest surviving sermons, and other works written before *Redemption Redeemed*, that there was considerably more continuity in his thought and expression throughout his ministry than has previously been acknowledged – including a longstanding antipathy to 'Calvinistic' predestination. This is historically significant because his biographers have argued that the sudden conversion of someone as prominent as Goodwin created not merely a "sensational," but "disarray and panic" among English Reformed theologians, as it revealed "the secret of the weakness of Calvinism in the critical years before and after the Restoration."¹

The book goes on to provide a detailed examination of Goodwin's theological arguments concerning the perseverance of the saints, and a comparison with some important prior Arminian works on the doctrine, in order to draw conclusions concerning his contribution to the advancement of the Arminian cause.

1 John Coffey, *Goodwin*, 10, 225–26.

The historical background to Owen's treatise shows why he took it upon himself to provide his compendious response. He had risen quickly from parish minister in 1643 to theological right-hand-man of Oliver Cromwell by 1651. By the time he wrote *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* he had been appointed first as Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, then Vice-Chancellor of the university. As well as running and reforming the university, he was also advising Cromwell and Parliament on the re-organization and reformation of the Church of England. It is a measure of how strongly he felt about Goodwin's theology that he found time, in the midst of these responsibilities, to write five hundred folio pages in rebuttal of Goodwin's work.

Having explained how Owen came to write his response, the book examines his arguments and their interaction with Goodwin's. Owen argues that God's grace is inwardly and infallibly effectual in every stage of a man's conversion and perseverance, such that God – not man – is the ultimate arbiter of man's destiny. In other words it is God who has the 'last word.' But his efficacious grace never operates in such a way as to compel a man to believe or persevere against his will. It operates by way of the Holy Spirit working within his mind, heart and soul to change what he *freely* desires and wills: indeed, freeing him from his sin-born desire to rebel against God. By this means, there is certainty of outcome; but it is achieved through the restoration, not the destruction, of human freedom.

The analysis of Owen's arguments is then used to make comparisons with Goodwin's work, and with influential prior Reformed works on perseverance, from which conclusions are drawn concerning Owen's distinctive contribution to the doctrine of perseverance. From this, it becomes clear that the Reformed position that Goodwin consistently rejected is *not* the Reformed position that Owen or his theological forebears ever taught. According to Owen, Goodwin was fighting a "man of straw."² Goodwin's more sympathetic biographers have lauded his conversion from and conquest of a 'Calvinism' that neither Calvin nor Reformed theologians taught, or, as Owen puts it, "ever spent a pen full of Inke... in the defence of."

But exposing this lacuna in Goodwin's work was not Owen's primary objective. He wrote it to reassure all who are today trusting in Christ for salvation that they need not fear that they will cease trusting him tomorrow. If continuing in the Christian faith were an exercise in self-preservation and self-maintenance, everyone without exception should be not so much fearful of apostasy, but certain of it. Instead, Owen argues, perseverance is ultimately the outworking of the unchangeable purposes of an unchanging God, who in eternity set his unchangeable

2 John Owen, *Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, 18 (11:100-01).

love upon those who will believe. Surely, argued Goodwin, this must induce complacency and wilful sin? Not so, replied Owen: a true believer will be kept from such thoughts by the same Spirit who first moved him to love and trust Christ for salvation. To understand these things, he argues, will bring to a believer much peace, comfort, and desire to live a godly life.

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Margaret; all of whom have shown not only much love, but also more than polite interest in my work and writing over many years. Above all, in the words with which Owen concluded at least one of his works:

Μόνω σοφῶ Θεῷ, διὰ Τησοῦ Χριστοῦ ἡ δόξα εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας. Ἀμήν.

Benedict Bird
Cambridge, 2025

Abbreviations

CH	<i>Church History</i>
CJ	<i>House of Commons Journal</i>
CTJ	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
DAS	The Doctrine of the Apostasy of the Saints
DPS	The Doctrine of the Perseverance of the Saints
DRCH	<i>Dutch Review of Church History</i>
EEBO	<i>Early English Books Online</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
JBS	<i>Journal of British Studies</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
MAJT	<i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>
Millington	<i>Bibliotheca Oweniana sive Catalogus Librorum</i> , edited by Edward Millington
NPNF	<i>The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i> , edited by Philip Schaff
ODNB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia Græca</i> , edited by Jacques-Paul Migne
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> , edited by Jacques-Paul Migne
PRRD	<i>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics</i> by Richard Muller
RAP	<i>Recherches Augustiniennes et Patristiques</i>
SCJ	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
STC	<i>A Short-Title Catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and English books printed abroad 1475–1640</i> , compiled by A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave (London, 1976–91)
Thomason	<i>Catalogue of the Pamphlets, Books, Newspapers, and Manuscripts Relating to the Civil War, the Commonwealth, and Restoration, 1640–1661</i> , collected by George Thomason (London, 1908)
Wing	<i>A Short-Title Catalogue of books printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and British North America and English books printed in other countries 1641–1700</i> , compiled by Donald Wing (New York, 1972–94)
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>

Citations of John Owen's works refer to the first edition, where available in *EEBO*, together with corresponding references to the William Goold twenty-four volume edition of Owen's works. For example, *Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, 1 (11:77) refers to page 1 of the work as printed by Leon Lichfield, Wing O740, which may be found on page 77 of volume 11 of the Goold edition. Works of which authorship is in doubt, including those

discussed by John Coffey in *John Goodwin*, 299–303, are indicated by square brackets in the bibliography.

Citations of the works by Jacobus Arminius, Simon Episcopus, William Perkins and the British Delegates at the Synod of Dort, discussed in chapter five, will be abbreviated as below, followed by the page reference for the English translation and then for the Latin original, for example *DS/DS*, 1/1.

<i>DS/DS</i>	Arminius, <i>Declaration of Sentiments</i> , translated from <i>Declaratio Sententiæ</i>
<i>ETP/EM</i>	Arminius, <i>Examination of a Treatise of Perkins</i> , translated from <i>Examen Modestum</i>
<i>RC/CR</i>	Episcopus, <i>Remonstrant Confession</i> , translated from <i>Confessio Remonstrantium</i>
<i>CPT/DPM</i>	Perkins, <i>Christian and Plaine Treatise</i> , translated from <i>De Prædestinationis Modo et Ordine</i>
<i>CS/SC</i>	<i>Collegiat Suffrage of the Divines of Great Britaine</i> , translated from <i>Suffragium Collegiale Theologorum Magnæ Britannicæ</i>

Citations of works of the Church Fathers generally follow the chapter:section format, such as i:1; or, where relevant, the book:chapter:section format, such as II:ii:2. In *NPNF* the citation indicates series:volume:page. Where Goodwin or Owen quote from a text without identifying the edition from which they are quoting, either a *PG*, *PL* or *NPNF* reference has been included in the bibliography for convenience; or reference is made, where appropriate, to the edition listed in Millington's auction catalogue of Owen's library.

The spelling, emphasis and capitalization of the original editions in *EEBO* are preserved in quotations from primary texts, except where otherwise indicated.

All dates are Old Style, but the year is taken to begin on 1st January.

Introduction

A *Learned man*, in his Treatise Intituled *Redemption Redeemed*, for to dispoyle the spouse of Christ of this most Glorious pearl wherewith her beloved hath adorned her, ... hath with great paines ... gathered together whatever hath been formerly given out and dispersed by the most considerable Adversaries of this Truth, ... giving it ... not only an elegant dresse, and varnish of Rhetoricall expressions, but moreover reinforcing the declining cause of his *Pelagian* Friends with ... supplies of *appearing* Reason, and *hidden* Sophistry.
Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*.¹

John Goodwin, that “*Learned man*,” wrote *Redemption Redeemed* in 1651. He argued that “*Christ Died for all Men without exception*,” so as to “put all Men into a capacity [of] salvation.”² Thereby he facilitated the salvation of all, but necessitated it for none. Goodwin devoted the middle section of his book to arguing that true believers, redeemed by Christ, may nevertheless apostatize totally and finally: this event being “frequent, and ordinary.”³ John Owen replied to Goodwin’s apostasy arguments in 1654, in *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*. He argued that faith and perseverance were inseparable gifts of God, and everyone to whom they are given “*shall infallibly persevere to the end*.”⁴

An account of this disputation could be confined to an extraction from these works of two competing sets of theological propositions, one representing the position of the “great Red Dragon of Coleman-street,” the other, that of the “over-Orthodox Doctor” of Oxford.⁵ But that would be deficient in at least two respects.

First, it would be to fail to explain why they wrote what they did, and when; why, with such urgent and polemical tone; why at such length, ranging through matters exegetical, historical, scholastic and pastoral. *Redemption Redeemed* and *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* were no mere position-statements exchanged in an academic disputation. The decade of civil wars from which the three kingdoms were emerging was, to no small degree, the result of a widespread

1 John Owen, *Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, 8 (11:87).

2 John Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 110.

3 *Redemption Redeemed*, 328.

4 *Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, sig. F^r (11:64).

5 Thomas Edwards so describes Goodwin in *Gangræna*, 2:25; and Richard Baxter, Owen, in *Reliquiæ Baxterianæ*, ii:199.

perception that true religion was under attack.⁶ Some in the Caroline years had seen Arminianism as a “meere stirrop to helpe men into the saddle of poperie,” or even as a beguiling “Trojan horse ... ready to open the gates to Romish tyranny.”⁷ Others saw it as the primary threat itself. But even after the vanquishing of the Laudian-Royalists in the 1640s, it soon became all too evident that the Arminian tide was still rising. Worse, it began flowing out from the Puritan camp itself: not least *via* the pen of Goodwin, who became its most prominent advocate.

Goodwin’s discovery as an Arminian occurred in the years when the nation was wading through one of the most profound identity-crises in its history. All of its institutions, including church, Parliament, army and monarchy, were undergoing radical reconfiguration. Simultaneously, a revolution was under way in the matter of toleration of dissent. The very definition of Christianity was a crucial component of these debates, because it was inseparable from questions such as who should rule, who should minister, what should be the involvement of the state in matters of worship. These were no peripheral issues, mid-century. Goodwin and Owen both knew the importance of this vital definition question, and had fundamentally different answers to it, and the issues that depended upon it. Their writings should not be seen as a mere exchange of credal statements, but as urgent interventions in a battle for the heart of the nation.

Secondly, it would be to allow a misunderstanding to continue regarding Goodwin’s theological trajectory. His most recent biographer, John Coffey, has produced a fine and valuable analysis of Goodwin’s life and work. But this book parts company with him and earlier biographers on the question of Goodwin’s commonly supposed conversion from ‘Calvinism’ to a rationally defensible Arminianism, which Coffey says occurred between February and December 1647.

This book seeks to provide an historico-theological account of this disputation but without these deficiencies.⁸ Its thesis, so far as Goodwin’s theology is concerned, is that Goodwin did not ‘reject Calvinism and convert to Arminianism in the late 1640s’: a proposition examined with particular reference to his doctrine

6 John Morrill, for example, refers to “the passionate belief ... that England was ... being subjected to the forces of Antichrist,” *Nature of the English Revolution*, 63. On “the misleading impression” given by Quentin Skinner “that religion was of negligible importance in 1642,” see John Coffey, *Seeing Things Their Way*, 55–68. On the background to the Civil Wars and the “fight for the very life of the Protestant faith” that preceded them, see Dewey Wallace, PhD diss., 86.

7 Francis Rous, addressing Parliament on 26th January 1629, *Commons Debates*, eds. Notestein and Relf, 13; and “I. P.” in *Christs Confession* (1629), 43, the subject of inquiry by the High Commission: see Cyndia Clegg, *Press Censorship*, 110; Susan Hardman Moore, “Reformed Theology,” 208, 211.

8 To use Richard Muller’s terminology, this is to employ an “objectivistic historical” rather than “positive philosophical” approach: *Divine Will*, 12. A similar historical-analytical approach is commended by Willem Van Asselt, *Reformed Thought*, 16.

concerning perseverance in *Redemption Redeemed*; and compared with Owen's in *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, as well as selected influential works from preceding decades. As for his adoption of Arminianism, there was no sudden conversion to it; rather, he progressively discovered his alignment with Arminianism over the course of a couple of decades. As for what he rejected, it was not the Reformed doctrine as taught by his opponents; Owen also rejected what Goodwin rejected.

To demonstrate this, it is necessary to compare what Goodwin taught before his putative 'conversion'; what he taught subsequently, particularly in *Redemption Redeemed*; what he rejected as the "Doctrin of Perseverance, comonly taught", particularly what Owen taught in *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*; and what was taught in the selected influential antecedents of their two works.⁹

Accordingly, chapter one contains an examination of Goodwin's life and writings, so far as pertinent to his theological trajectory up to 1651. It reveals a considerable degree of consistency in his understanding of soteriology, across at least two decades, that contradicts the 'sudden conversion' thesis. His essentially consistent but progressively elaborated position was that God facilitated the salvation of every man, but compelled no-one to persevere in faith and obedience unto glory. God and man act concurrently, but salvation is ultimately humanly determined – in the sense that it is man who, in the end, decides whether he will accept or resist God's saving grace. What Goodwin rejected was a hard-determinism that was irreconcilable with his understanding of human freedom and made God the author of sin.

Goodwin's theology as presented in *Redemption Redeemed*, centred on the doctrine of perseverance, is explained in chapter two. It will be apparent from this analysis that many of his arguments were but repetitions and corollaries of those that he had been making since the 1630s.

Proceeding similarly with Owen, chapter three considers the historical context in which *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* was written, before turning to its theological content in chapter four. These chapters discuss why he made time, burdened with enormous responsibilities laid upon him by Cromwell in the early 1650s, to write a five hundred page response to Goodwin's two hundred and fifty page digression in *Redemption Redeemed*. Owen taught that God eternally intended, and temporally ensured, that every elect person will believe and persevere to salvation. God and man act concurrently, but salvation is ultimately divinely determined. In bringing this about God does not compel the human will in a manner that denies human freedom, properly understood, or responsibility for

9 *Redemption Redeemed*, 156; similarly 155, 178, 224, 233, 301–02, 394.

sin. Owen repeatedly takes issue with what he sees as Goodwin's misrepresentation of the Reformed position that Goodwin purports to oppose.

These four chapters facilitate some comparisons in chapter five, beginning with a comparison of the perseverance theology in *Redemption Redeemed* and *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*. The differences are assessed under the headings of anthropology, pneumatology and covenant theology. The comparison is then extended to some important earlier works which are likely to have been of influence upon Goodwin and Owen. These comparisons demonstrate substantial agreement between Goodwin and his forebears, and Owen and his; but also some notable differences. They facilitate an assessment of what each contributed to the *status doctrinae ante*.

The book proceeds to a conclusion that recapitulates its thesis. *Redemption Redeemed* and *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* present radically different understandings of the doctrine of perseverance, flowing from their authors' distinct and long-held convictions. For Goodwin, these yield a soteriology that may be summarized in the expression 'humanly determined concurrence', wherein God and man have necessary and concurrent parts to play in conversion and perseverance, but God's grace is ultimately resistible. Owen too speaks of a necessary concurrence, but ultimately a 'divinely determined concurrence'. *Sine exceptione* God's elect will never totally or finally apostatize. Goodwin consistently maintained that such certainty could only be achieved if God operated upon man's will 'physically', destroying human liberty and making God responsible for human sin; that offensive thing God would not do; *ergo* his opponents' case must fail. He did not fully engage with the objection that what he was rejecting was *not* his opponents' case. The significance of this omission is considered.

Certain terms are used herein that require explanation and definition: in particular, 'Reformed', 'Calvinist' and 'Arminian'. As Richard Muller advises, one should "confine [one's] meanings to the meanings of the era."¹⁰

'Reformed' or 'Reformed orthodox' will be used to refer to the "normative and defensible body of doctrine" developed and codified by the non-Lutheran Protestants who followed the sixteenth-century Reformers.¹¹ This is represented in the confessions of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries, developed by British and continental Protestants.¹² By the 1650s, the relevant boundary markers of the international consensus took in the doctrines settled upon at the Synod of Dort, being the largest and most international gathering of Protestant divines ever yet held, those doctrines being substantially represented and endorsed in the West-

10 Muller, *PRRD*, 1:30.

11 *PRRD*, 1:27–28.

12 *PRRD*, 1:28.

minster Standards.¹³ On this definition it may be asked whether the terms serve reliably to distinguish Goodwin and Owen. There is some complexity here because each regarded his own position as being in some sense ‘Reformed’. Goodwin does so by widening the field to include Lutheranism, only excluding Roman Catholicism.¹⁴ But in relation to the doctrine of perseverance specifically, while claiming that “the Fathers more generally ... stood for the possibility of the Saints defection,” he regrets that “the greater part of our modern Reformed Divines have departed from them.”¹⁵ He is conceding that the consensus was against him. Accordingly, it is reasonable to regard him as outwith the definition for present purposes. His claim to alignment with the Fathers is another matter, discussed below. Owen’s inclusion in the above definition is uncontroversial, and consistent with his use of the term, distinguishing as he does the views of “the Reformed Churches” from those of “the *Arminians*.”¹⁶

‘Calvinism’ is a term that will be largely avoided: whether as a descriptor of the position of men such as Owen, or as an ‘opposite of Arminianism’, or at all. Calvin’s views aligned with much of the Reformed consensus in the mid-seventeenth century, but did not define it.¹⁷ Owen cited Calvin with approval in many places, but so did Goodwin.¹⁸ Some reference to the term is unavoidable, when interacting with its use by others. Coffey, for example, uses it more than a hundred times in his biography, often synonymously with ‘Reformed’, distin-

13 Van Asselt refers to the Synod of Dort (1618–19) as the “first and only *international* Reformed synod,” *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 132. Muller says “The [Canons] mark the full confessional codification of early Reformed orthodoxy ... as an interpretive codicil to the Belgic Confession and the Heidelberg Catechism in which the major deviations from the Reformed confessional consensus are ... refuted,” *Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor Hart, 481. Jay Collier agrees, arguing that after the Synod, “perseverance ... became a Reformed distinctive [in] that churches could not maintain their Reformed identity without it”; and functioned as the most-distinguishing of the five points, being rejected by Romanists, Lutherans and Remonstrants alike: *Debating Perseverance*, 10–12.

14 *Redemption Redeemed*, 344, 384, 387.

15 *Redemption Redeemed*, 171.

16 *Doctrine of the Saints’ Perseverance*, 17 (11:99). Having noted that the meaning of ‘Reformed’ developed over time, Muller sets an important limit to that caveat: its “contemporary relevance ... arises from the fact that it remains the basis for normative Protestant theology in the present,” *PRRD*, 1:29. The confessional boundaries changed little after the period of “high orthodoxy” beginning in around 1640, *PRRD*, 1:31–32. Cf. Muller, “Diversity in the Reformed Tradition,” in *Drawn into Controversy*, 18.

17 *PRRD*, 1:30; Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*, 44–48; Gavin McGrath, PhD diss., 63; Coffey, *Seeing Things Their Way*, 164; Van Asselt, *Introduction to Reformed Scholasticism*, 8, 201; Dewey Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism*, 9–10; Hardman Moore, “Reformed Theology,” 202; Stephen Hampton, *Grace and Conformity*, 31–32.

18 “Goodwin quoted Calvin more than any other Reformed theologian,” Coffey, *Goodwin*, 37.

guishing between Calvinists ‘moderate’ or ‘soft’, and ‘high’ or ‘strict’.¹⁹ These are not terms used by Goodwin or Owen in the works under consideration; nor had they a clear and accepted meaning in their era. They imply judgments either laudatory or pejorative: ‘moderate Calvinism’ being sober and reasonable; ‘strict’ suggesting immoderate or severe.²⁰ Some writers seek to equate ‘moderate Calvinism’ and ‘hypothetical universalism’, without demonstrating that it was a position that Calvin himself endorsed.²¹ In this book, ‘Calvinist’ and its compounds will be treated as terms of dubious utility.

‘Arminianism’ has been used to describe the theology of Jacobus Arminius himself, that of the Remonstrant party, and that of other followers including Goodwin. It invites the question ‘whose Arminianism?’²² With that caveat, and recognizing its tendency to be used pejoratively, it will be used circumspectly to refer to the soteriologies of Arminius, Remonstrants and Goodwin, according to context, as opposed to Reformed orthodoxy.

Prior scholarship tends to be either historically focussed or theologically focussed; and primarily concerned with either Goodwin or Owen. There is little that squarely addresses all four quadrants. Coffey’s biography was the “first substantial book on Goodwin to appear ... since Thomas Jackson’s” in 1872.²³ Coffey’s work is a carefully researched corrective to Jackson’s hagiography, and takes into account important unpublished doctoral dissertations including those of William Hinson, William Strickland and Ellen More. This book seeks to build on these historical analyses by providing a more detailed theological analysis of Goodwin’s writing up to *Redemption Redeemed*, as the basis for critiquing the More-Coffey ‘sudden conversion’ thesis.

The most detailed recent assessment of Goodwin’s theology is Andrew Ollerton’s 2016 dissertation.²⁴ He argues that the greatest advance of Arminianism was

19 See also Coffey, “Puritan Legacies,” 334.

20 Dewey Wallace contrasts “moderate Calvinists” with “strict,” “high,” “extreme Calvinists”: *Puritans and Predestination*, 110, 150.

21 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 26; cf. Coffey, *Politics*, 122–23. Muller denies that Calvin “speculate[d] concerning an unfulfilled divine will concerning all humanity,” *Calvin*, 158. Cf. Jonathan Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 95n5. Coffey acknowledges that in the minds of many of Goodwin’s contemporaries, ‘Calvinist’ and Arminian, there was “a serious problem” with hypothetical universalism, Coffey, *Goodwin*, 202. It could easily be seen as “disingenuous and incoherent [in that] ‘sufficient’ means seemed curiously insufficient, and natural ‘ability’ seemed oddly incapable.” Cf. Coffey, *Politics*, 121–22. Matthew Pinson suggests that ‘moderate-Calvinist’ and ‘moderate-Arminian’ are more-or-less interchangeable: *Four Views*, 13.

22 Cf. Carl Bangs, “Arminius and the Reformation,” *CH* 30, 155.

23 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 3. Thomas Jackson’s approval of Goodwin evaporates only at Goodwin’s support for Charles Stuart’s execution.

24 Andrew Ollerton, PhD diss., 54–63, 165–99.

not during the Laudian years, nor post-Restoration, but during the 1650s, when Cromwellian toleration allowed it to rear its head.²⁵ He says that Goodwin migrated to Arminianism from the inconsistencies of “softened forms of Calvinism,” within which he includes hypothetical universalism.²⁶ He too dates Goodwin’s “conversion to Arminianism [to] around 1647.”²⁷ He devotes a chapter to “a synchronic analysis of ... Goodwin’s Arminianism,” drawing together quotations from two decades of Goodwin’s writing.²⁸ While compendious, he discusses *Redemption Redeemed* and perseverance only briefly.²⁹ The reply by “high Calvinist John Owen” is mentioned only in passing.³⁰

Four other theologically focussed works deserve mention. Hinson’s 1953 dissertation moves from Goodwin’s history to his theology. He gives some attention to *Redemption Redeemed*, its context and replies made to it.³¹ The usefulness of his analysis of *Redemption Redeemed* is marred by its brevity and synchronic-blending with other works by Goodwin, and by Hinson’s repetitively expressed disdain for the “harshness” of the “rigid orthodox Calvinism” with which Goodwin was “indoctrinated.”³² Henry Knapp mainly considers Goodwin’s arguments concerning Hebrews 6:4–6.³³ David Parnham provides a dense running commentary on *Redemption Redeemed* in his *Heretics Within*.³⁴ He focusses on the doctrine of justification, but gives some pages to perseverance.³⁵ Jay Collier refers to *Redemption Redeemed* and *The Doctrine of the Saints’ Perseverance* in his study of competing readings of Augustine in the English church. He considers how both Reformed and Arminian authors claimed Augustine’s support, each side regard-

25 Similarly, William Lamont: “the golden age of theological debate on Arminianism was ... the 1650s,” “Arminianism,” 45; Anthony Milton, *England’s Second Reformation*, 422.

26 Ollerton, PhD diss., 57, 65, 69, 74, 134, 177, 198.

27 Ollerton, PhD diss., 54.

28 Ollerton, PhD diss., 166n9, 168.

29 Ollerton, PhD diss., 193–97.

30 Ollerton, PhD diss., 52, 136–37, 197.

31 William Hinson, PhD diss., 50–58. Coffey notes that Hinson’s dissertation says “little ... about his contexts,” Coffey, *Goodwin*, 9.

32 Hinson, PhD diss., 11, 109–13, 131–40. Hinson sometimes presents this disdain as being that of Goodwin, but does not disguise his own. By advocating the “broad-minded, tolerant spirit” of Arminianism, “Goodwin ... succeeded rather well in maintaining the balance” between “Calvinism[’s] harsh, unrealistic orthodoxy ... and heretical Pelagianism or Socinianism,” Hinson, PhD diss., 140–42. Yet Hinson declares Jackson “highly partisan”! – Hinson, PhD diss., ii. William Strickland, PhD diss., 5, criticizes Hinson’s study as “weak in historical areas,” and seeks to remedy that weakness.

33 Henry Knapp, PhD diss., 342–48; “John Owen’s Interpretation of Hebrews 6:4–6,” *SCJ* 34, 32–36.

34 David Parnham, *Heretics Within*, 272–306.

35 Parnham, *Heretics Within*, 298–306. Parnham summarizes Goodwin’s position as advocating “divinely assisted human self-determination,” *ibid.*, 282.

ing the other's misappropriation of him as "audacious."³⁶ To that end, he engages with only small portions of *Redemption Redeemed* and *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*.

The main biographies of Owen all mention *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* but provide little or no analysis.³⁷ More theological considerations of it include those of Knapp, Parnham and Collier, mentioned above; but none addresses the whole work or compares it with *Redemption Redeemed* in a fittingly detailed manner.³⁸ Gavin McGrath's 1989 dissertation deserves mention as the most pertinent precursor. Although principally concerned with comparing the views of human voluntarism expressed by Owen and Richard Baxter, he gives ten pages to Owen's understanding of perseverance and *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*.³⁹ That follows an extensive survey of the understanding of human free-will as it interacts with the divine, beginning with Augustine. He finds "striking similarities" between Augustine's, Calvin's and Owen's understandings of voluntarism, and how God moves the will without compulsion, yet without suspending the saving-efficacy of grace upon man's decision.⁴⁰ McGrath does not explore Owen's perseverance arguments in detail, nor Goodwin's; but his discussions of Owen's understanding of the nature of the will, necessity of the

36 Collier, *Debating Perseverance*, 165–71, 174–80, 169n26.

37 John Asty, "Memoirs," xii–xiii; William Orme, "Owen," 155–60, commenting "It is rather surprising ... that [*The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*] is less known than its importance demands"; Andrew Thomson, "Life of Dr. Owen," 1:vi–lvii; Wallace, PhD diss., 246–47, 264–67, 286–88; Peter Toon, *God's Statesman*, 95–96; Sarah Cook, PhD diss., 165–67; Crawford Gribben, *Owen*, 159–60. Thomson calls *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* "undeniably ... the most masterly vindication of the perseverance of the saints in the English tongue."

38 Knapp's PhD diss., 351–60, focuses on the few pages of *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* concerned with Hebrews 6. Parnham provides a brief synopsis of *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* in *Heretics Within*, 358–62, focussing on the argument that apostates were never true-believers. Sinclair Ferguson's PhD diss., 449–60, concisely summarizes Owen's main arguments (subsequently published as *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 262–69). Robert Wright gives a largely descriptive account of chapter 7 of *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, and chapter 9 concerning Christ's priesthood, PhD diss., 115–26, 196–202. Edwin Tay also confines his study to these chapters: *Priesthood*, 170–78. Joel Beeke refers to *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* in *Assurance*, 215–18, limiting his examination to "the four main objections Goodwin continually raises." Christopher Cleveland, PhD diss., 75–91, considers Owen's use of Thomistic ideas, particularly God as *actus purus*.

39 McGrath, PhD diss., 352–61. He defines voluntarism as "the prominence, but not dominance, of the will's response to God's sovereign initiatives in the divine/human encounter," *ibid.*, 3. He means that the choices made by the human will are real and significant, but not ultimately determinative of man's destiny: *ibid.*, 369.

40 McGrath, PhD diss., 346.

work of the Spirit, and covenantal context of salvation, set the stage well for the discussion in this book.⁴¹

The lengthiest but least persuasive discussion of *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance* is an unpublished Master's dissertation by Mark Reynolds. He distances himself from Arminianism but echoes many of Goodwin's criticisms of the Reformed position. Owen was, he says, a "high Calvinist" who adopted the "abstract and logically determinist" position of the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, wherein "people are not only saved by an abstract decree but ... are called to persevere by [it]."⁴² Owen's "determinist logic ... destroys the meaning and mechanism of human responsibility" by making God's promises unconditional.⁴³ It "renders God's promises, exhortations, and threats useless and empty."⁴⁴ Owen's "Federal Calvinism" prevented him from discovering the commendable "balance" found in Calvin.⁴⁵

Thus there are a good number of prior works which discuss either *Redemption Redeemed* or *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, with either an historical or theological focus, but no detailed comparative study of the two works together in historical context. That is what this book aims to provide. It is hoped that as it stands, it may facilitate a more thorough consideration of the influence of these works upon later writers; but that assessment remains to be done.⁴⁶

41 McGrath's categories for comparison are not those employed herein, viz, anthropology, pneumatology and covenant theology. He compares their "attitudes towards apostasy"; their description of "the nature of God's will"; and whether they considered perseverance to be a "covenant condition."

42 Mark Reynolds, MTh diss., 13, 16, 21, 31.

43 Reynolds, MTh diss., 33.

44 Reynolds, MTh diss., 35.

45 Reynolds, MTh diss., 44. Reynolds approves Anthony Hoekema's understanding of "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin," *CTJ* 2, 133–61. On this view, election and the Covenant of Grace are unconditional; but fulfilment of the covenant is conditional upon faith and obedience, whereupon "God accepts our imperfect works as if they were perfect," Reynolds, 40–45. If man does his part, God "supplies what is missing." He rejects salvation-by-compulsion ('Owen') and salvation-by-works ('Arminius'), but is vague about how "the balance" between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility is maintained; whether faith is resistible; whether apostasy is possible. Cf. Muller, "Diversity in the Reformed Tradition," in *Drawn into Controversie*, 14–16.

46 Hinson and Coffey give some attention to Goodwin's legacy, and the influence of *Redemption Redeemed* upon "three future Archbishops ... Sancroft, Tillotson and Tenison," and the Wesleys: Hinson, PhD diss., 254–55; Coffey, *Goodwin*, 227, 286–90. *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance's* legacy, in terms of authors specifically influenced by it, deserves exploration.

1. John Goodwin's 'Conversion to Arminianism'

My Adversary is a person, whom his worth, paines, diligence, and opinions, and the contests, wherein on their account he hath publicly engaged, have delivered from being the object of any ordinary thoughts, or expressions. Nothing not great, not considerable, not some way eminent, is by any spoken of him, either consenting with him, or dissenting from him.

Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*.¹

John Owen's "Adversary" emerged as an Arminian some years before writing *Redemption Redeemed*, after thirteen years at Queens' College, Cambridge, and a couple of decades as a clergyman. The consensus among his biographers is that he was a 'moderately Puritan' conformist until the early 1640s, and a 'Calvinist' until the late 1640s. He is then said to have abandoned his Calvinism, having become increasingly radical in his views on church government and politics. John Coffey says that Goodwin "changed [his] theology," and ceased to "consider ... himself a Calvinist," some time between February and December 1647.²

It will be argued in this chapter that while certainly he taught Arminian theology with increasing openness as the 1640s proceeded, there was no sudden 'conversion' to it; nor 'conversion' *from* thoroughgoing Calvinism, whether that is taken to mean what Calvin actually taught or what 'Calvinist' successors such as Owen taught.³ Instead, it seems that from the earliest days for which there is evidence, he was sympathetic to the view that God makes *possible* the salvation of all who are willing to be saved, but does not *compel* anyone to be saved. In the mid-1640s, Goodwin discovered that these sympathies aligned well with the Arminian ideas that had been rapidly gaining popularity during recent decades. His discovery coincided with a painful experience of rejection by his Presbyterian contemporaries, that happened as much because of his changing views on church government and toleration of dissent, as because of his thoughts on the way of salvation. Although the focus of this chapter is on the respective rôles of God and man in salvation, it is necessary to give a certain amount of attention to these broader issues to understand what motivated Goodwin to write *Redemption Redeemed*, and to see that it was the expression of a theology that had been many decades, not a few years, in the making.

1 *Doctrine of the Saints' Perseverance*, sig. A3^v (11:13).

2 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 202.

3 On the term 'Calvinism', see p. 18 above.

Childhood in Norfolk, 1594–1612

Little is known of Goodwin's early years, other than his baptism in May 1594 in Helloughton, Norfolk, and some family connexions.⁴ The strongest influences upon him as a child were probably those of his father, also called John, who died in 1636, and the son of his father's employer. His father spent his whole life working as a surveyor for the Townshend estate in nearby Rainham. One critic, claiming to be quoting Thomas Goodwin, suggested that the author of *Redemption Redeemed* had learnt his "scoffing, or ... unmannerly jeering" from his father.⁵ Thomas Goodwin, the Puritan who is today much better known, later referred to John as "my ancient friend," and may have been a relative.⁶

The stronger theological influence upon him may therefore have been that of Roger Townshend (1596–1637), son of the estate owner. Roger Townshend's father, another John (1564–1603), died following a duel on Hounslow Heath, which "hardly suggests a paragon of godly virtue."⁷ By contrast, Roger was "a religious Gentleman, expending his soul in piety and charity, a lover to God, ... A grave Divine."⁸ From his father's death, Roger would have been under the care of his mother and her brother, the "eminent Puritan gentleman" Sir Nathaniel Bacon.⁹ With Roger being only a couple of years younger than John Goodwin, it is reasonable to infer that they would have known each other from childhood, and for Coffey to suggest that their "close relationship ... is the key to Goodwin's early life."¹⁰ It probably helped Goodwin to secure and fund his place at Cambridge and to obtain his first ministerial appointments.¹¹

Student and fellow in Cambridge, 1612–25

Goodwin arrived at Queens' College in July 1612, graduating as Bachelor of Arts in 1616 and Master of Arts in 1619. Evidently an impressive student, he went on to serve as a fellow, 1617–25, combining teaching responsibilities and further studies. The three greatest influences upon him at Queens' may well have been

4 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 13–14.

5 Jenkyn, Ὁδηγὸς Τυφλός, *The Blinde Guide*, 55, cited by Coffey, *Goodwin*, 15.

6 See p. 34 below. Thomas Goodwin grew up in King's Lynn, a few miles from Helloughton.

7 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 14.

8 Coffey, *Goodwin*, citing Fuller, *History of the Worthies of England*, ii:272.

9 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 14.

10 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 14–15.

11 Ellen More, PhD diss., 17, 19, 28–29.

his tutor, William Cox, and the “formidable double-act” of John Davenant and John Preston.¹²

Cox is not known to have been “a member of the ‘spiritual brotherhood’ of godly divines.”¹³ He would probably have been chosen for Goodwin by Goodwin’s father, in consultation with Nathaniel Bacon, assuming that both were contributing to the cost of his education. Davenant (1572–1641) had been the Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity since 1609, and was President of Queens’ from 1614 until 1621 when he became Bishop of Salisbury. According to Coffey, Davenant was a conformist and “the very model of a moderate English Calvinist.”¹⁴ Preston (1587–1628) had been elected a fellow of Queens’ in 1609, undergoing “a classic Puritan conversion experience” in around 1611. He became “one of the most popular tutors in the University,” and “was set to become England’s leading godly divine, ‘the Puritan pope of all England’.”¹⁵ In 1622 he became Master of Emmanuel. Unlike Davenant, Preston leaned towards non-conformity, and was nearly removed from Queens’ after being accused of opposing set-form prayers.¹⁶ Otherwise, his theological sympathies had much in common with Davenant’s.

A striking similarity between Davenant and Preston was that they both advocated hypothetical universalism, having apparently been led to it by James Ussher, the Irish scholar and later Archbishop of Armagh.¹⁷ Davenant asserted that God had two distinct intentions behind Christ’s death: an “*antecedent and gracious* ... will of complacencie,” that he should die for all men, to render them hypothetically ‘salvable’; and an “absolute will of efficiencie” that his death should be efficacious for the elect, who alone would actually be given the saving faith necessary to receive effectual redemption.¹⁸ Foreshadowing the Arminian language that Goodwin would employ in *Redemption Redeemed*, Davenant argued that God’s ‘antecedent will’ aimed to provide “an universal capacity of salvation in all persons living”; while also maintaining “the liberty of the creature to hinder

12 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 17.

13 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 18. He was a fellow at Queens’, 1610–43: see “Queens’ College Cambridge Fellows 1600–1699.”

14 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 17. As for the term ‘moderate Calvinist’, see p. 20 above.

15 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 17, citing Collinson, “Puritan Emmanuel,” 220.

16 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 22.

17 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 25–27. Baxter recalled that Ussher “gloried that he [had] brought ... Davenant and ... Preston” to hypothetical universalism: *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ii:206; cf. Jonathan Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 174, 209–13. On the coining of the term after Davenant’s time, see Michael Lynch, *John Davenant’s Hypothetical Universalism*, 14.

18 Davenant, *Animadversions*, 395.

& frustrate" that divine purpose.¹⁹ On that basis, he denied that salvation was "altogether impossible in any living person"; but simultaneously he denied that anyone would in fact be saved except those to whom God additionally provided special grace to believe.²⁰ Preston, too, endorsed this "uneasy marriage of Calvinist and Arminian motifs," in his rejection of limited atonement and this 'softening' of double predestination.²¹ Jonathan Moore concludes that "the whole ... system swings in a potentially Arminian or semi-Pelagian direction."²² Yet this was the view for which Davenant contended, along with Samuel Ward, when they were sent as delegates to the Synod of Dort in 1618–19. This view was advocated by only a tiny minority of the Synod's eighty or more delegates: principally by Davenant, Ward and Matthias Martinius of Bremen.²³ Some time after the Synod, Davenant gave a series of lectures in Cambridge teaching his hypothetical universalist views. Goodwin "would surely have attended" these, and presumably also often heard the very popular preaching by Preston.²⁴ Moore goes so far as to refer to Goodwin as "the protégé" of Davenant and Preston.²⁵

It is evident from Goodwin's earliest publications that he was influenced by these opinions, particularly regarding the universality of God's 'antecedent' salvific intent.²⁶ Later he would come to see that it was a position that was fittingly described by Coffey as "riddled with logical contradictions."²⁷ Davenant, Preston and Ussher had settled upon it as a way of reconciling biblical teaching such as 'For God so loved *the world* ...' with 'I lay down my life *for the sheep*.' Goodwin would find a different way.

19 "Universalem salutis capacitatem in omnibus & singulis viatoribus": Davenant, "De Gallicana," *Dissertationes Duæ*, sig. Ii5^r, in English in *Dissertation*, 566; *Animadversions*, 391–92. See p. 81 below.

20 Davenant, "De Morte Christi," *Dissertationes Duæ*, 50; *Dissertation*, 429.

21 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 26–27.

22 Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 206–07. Cf. Coffey, *Politics*, 127.

23 Anthony Milton, *British Delegation*, xlv, 215. In "Review of English Hypothetical Universalism," *CTJ* 43, 149–50, Muller suggests, questionably, that the English delegation *in toto* were hypothetical universalists. Lynch denies that Davenant was pursuing a *via media* between Reformed and Arminian, maintaining that he upheld "true Reformed Augustinianism" against "extreme" and "uncatholic deviations," *John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism*, 15–19, 74–75, 102–07. What Lynch regards as 'extreme' was undoubtedly the majority view.

24 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 19, 26.

25 Moore, "The Extent of the Atonement," in *Drawn into Controversie*, 159n146.

26 See, for example, *Saints Interest*, p. 21.

27 Coffey, *Goodwin*, 27. Davenant's views were "considered problematic by the majority of the Reformed orthodox," says Muller, *After Calvin*, 15. Lynch defends them, *John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism*, 162. Some of the problems in Lynch's analysis are addressed by Garry Williams, "Idem Fecit: Irenical Animadversions," *EQ* 90, 3–23, responding to Lynch, "Quid Pro Quo Satisfaction?," *EQ* 89, 51–70.