The Works of Thomas Goodwin

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INTRODUCTION

This reprinting of *The Works of Thomas Goodwin* stands as a fitting climax to the past half-century of the rediscovery and republication of the writings of the Puritans. Renowned for intelligent piety at its Puritan best, Thomas Goodwin, "the Atlas of independency," stands on a par with John Owen, "the prince of Puritans," as a theologian and an exegete, and often surpasses him in experimental depth. Slightly easier to read than Owen, Goodwin's writings demand concentration for maximum benefit. Any lover of the biblical and experimental emphases of the Puritans will find Goodwin both readable and spiritually rewarding. He represents the cream of Puritanism, capturing the intellect, will, and heart of his readers. His treatises join the vigor of earlier Puritans such as William Perkins and Richard Sibbes to the matured thought of later Puritan divines, represented supremely by Owen.

Those influenced by Goodwin's writings include John Cotton, Jonathan Edwards, George Whitefield, and John Gill. Alexander Whyte confessed: "I have read no other author so much and so often. And I continue to read him to this day, as if I had never read him before." He calls Goodwin's sermon, "Christ Dwelling in Our Hearts by Faith," one of the "two very greatest sermons in the English language." Whyte aptly concludes:

> Goodwin is always an interpreter, and one of a thousand.... All his work, throughout his twelve volumes, is just so much pulpit exposition and pulpit application of the Word of God....

> spiritual experience—all the same, he is always so simple, so clear, so direct, so untechnical, so personal, and so pastoral.[1]

In our generation, Puritan scholar J.I. Packer concurs: "Whyte called Goodwin 'the greatest pulpit exegete of Paul that has ever lived,' and perhaps justly; Goodwin's Biblical expositions are quite unique, even among the Puritans, in the degree to which they combine theological breadth with experimental depth. John Owen saw into the mind of Paul as clearly as Goodwin—sometimes, on points of detail, more clearly—but not even Owen ever saw so deep into Paul's heart."[2]

The Life of Thomas Goodwin

Thomas Goodwin was born in 1600, at Rollesby, Norfolk, in a county of England famed for Puritan resistance to religious persecution by the Crown. This Puritan climate impacted his God-fearing parents, who strove to rear him in preparation for the ministry by their own example and by providing him with the best classical education offered by neighboring schools. In early school days he had a tender conscience, experiencing from the age of six impressions of the Holy Spirit that produced tears for sin and "flashes of joy upon thoughts of the things of God."[3] At the age of twelve, one year before the usual time, he was able to enter Christ's College, Cambridge (1613), a "nest of Puritans" in those days. The young Goodwin found that the memory of the father of Puritanism, William Perkins (1558-1602), permeated Cambridge. Here too Richard Sibbes, the "sweet dropper of Israel," was preaching at Trinity Church, attracting those who yearned for spiritual edification rather than embellished rhetoric.

Goodwin's memoir, edited by his son, reveals a great deal about his induction into the Puritan movement at Cambridge

[1] *Thirteen Appreciations* (London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1913), 158ff.

[2] "The Witness of the Spirit: The Puritan Teaching," in *The Wisdom of Our Fathers* (London: Puritan Conference, 1956), 14; cf. J. C. Philpot, *Reviews by the late Mr. J. C. Philpot* (London: Frederick Kirby, 1901), 2:479ff., who comments, "Being a man of choice experience, Goodwin so blends with [his sound expositions of doctrine] the work of the Spirit, in all its various branches, as to enrich his exposition with a heavenly savour and unction which carries with it great force, and commends itself in a very sensible and profitable manner to the conscience."

[3] *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 2:xi.

under the direction of several godly and learned tutors.[4] At age fourteen, Goodwin eagerly anticipated Easter when he hoped to partake of the Lord's Supper for the second time because he thought he found those marks of saving grace within him which were expounded by Zacharius Ursinus in his *Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism.* He also prepared himself by praying, attending Sibbes's lectures, and reading Calvin's *Institutes.* When the day arrived, however, his tutor, Mr. William Power, who had a profound influence upon him, lovingly restrained him from receiving Communion due to his age and spiritual immaturity.

Feeling rejected, the young Goodwin stopped attending Sibbes's sermons and lectures, ceased praying and reading the Scriptures and Puritan literature, and instead set his heart on becoming a successful preacher in the world. He determined to study the art and rhetoric of preachers who cared more for style than substance and were inclined to embrace the current brand of Arminianism being imported from the Netherlands.

In 1619 he continued his studies at St. Catherine's Hall in Cambridge, probably to obtain early promotion where scholars were not as abundant as at Christ's College. He became a fellow and lecturer in the Hall. Among the fellows there were John Arrowsmith, Andrew Perne, William Spurstowe, and William Strong, all future colleagues of Goodwin in the Westminster Assembly. Several of these and other Puritan friends sought to persuade him, somewhat successfully, that his pursuit of embel-

[4] *Ibid.*, 2:lii ff. For biographical material on Goodwin, see "Memoir of Thomas Goodwin, D.D.," by Robert Halley, and "Memoir of Thomas Goodwin, D.D., Composed out of his own papers and memoirs, by his son," *ibid.*, 2:ix-xlviii, lii-lxxv respectively. Also, consult Edmund Calamy, *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, ed. Samuel Palmer (London: Alex. Hogg, 1778), 1:183-87; James Reid, "Life of Thomas Goodwin," in *Memoirs of the Westminster Divines* (1811; reprint Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 319-43; Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee, eds., *The Dictionary of National Biography [DNB]*, vol. 22 (1890; reprint Oxford: University Press, 1922), 148-50; A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), 228-29; Whyte, *Thirteen Appreciations,* 157-76; Philip E. Hughes, gen. ed., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Marshallton, DE: National Foundation for Christian Education, 1972), 4:392-94; Brian Freer, "Thomas Goodwin, the Peaceable Puritan," Graham Harrison, "Thomas Goodwin and Independency," in *Diversities of Gifts,* Westminster Conference Reports, 1980 (London: The Westminster Conference, 1981), 7-44.

lished rhetoric and flirtation with Arminianism could serve neither edification nor truth. Moreover, he never could fully free himself from the preaching of Sibbes at Trinity Church and the catechetical sermons of John Preston in the college chapel. Nevertheless, his interest in Puritan spirituality remained spasmodic for another year, usually intensifying prior to the Lord's Supper.

Hardness of heart increased until God finally brought Goodwin to a more profound conviction of sin and genuine conversion on October 2, 1620, just after his twentieth birthday. On that afternoon, as Thomas met with some friends to "make merry," one of the friends convinced the group to attend a funeral sermon preached by a Dr. Bainbridge, which focused on the need for personal repentance from Luke 19:41-42. God used this message to show Goodwin his dreadful sins both original and actual, the essential depravity of his heart, his averseness to all spiritual good, and his desperate Christless condition which left him exposed to the just wrath of God and an open hell.[5]

Happily, it was not many hours later "before God, who after we are regenerate is so faithful and mindful of his word,"[6] came and spoke to him a "speedy word" of deliverance from Ezekiel 16:

> '[Live,] yea, I said unto you, Live,'—so God was pleased on the sudden, and as it were in an instant, to alter the whole of his former dispensation towards me, and said of and to my soul, Yea, live; yea, live, I say, said God: and as he created the world and the matter of all things by a word, so he created and put a new life and spirit into my soul, and so great an alteration was strange to me....
>
> God [then] took me aside, and as it were privately said unto me, Do you now turn to me, and I will pardon all your sins though never so many, as I forgave and pardoned my servant Paul, and convert you unto me....[7]

Goodwin explains four reasons why he believed that "these instructions and suggestions [of deliverance and pardon] were immediately from God": (1) the condition of his heart prior to receiving the word of God's willingness to pardon—"the posture and condition of my spirit, and that this suggestion took me when my heart was fixed, and that unmoveably, in the contrary persuasions"; (2) the appropriateness of this divine word when it did

[5] *Works*, 2:lii-lx.

[6] *Ibid.*, lxi.

[7] *Ibid.*, lxi-lxii.

come—"it was a word in its proper season"; (3) that this word was "not an ungrounded fancy, but the pure word of God, which is the ground of faith and hope"; and (4) that this divine intimation had "consequents and effects after God's speaking to me," including an altered disposition of soul; a dissolution of the works of Satan; an enlightened understanding; a melted will disposed to turn to God; a new nature "inclining me to good"; the Spirit of God as "a new indweller"; and "an actual turning from all known sins, and my entertaining the truth of all godliness."[8]

Upon conversion, Goodwin aligned himself unequivocally for the remainder of his life with the theological tradition of Perkins, Bayne, Sibbes, and Preston. He resolved never to seek personal fame but "to part with all for Christ and make the glory of God the measure of all time to come." Consequently, he abandoned the polished style of preaching then common among Anglican divines, since it promoted the preacher, and adopted the Puritan plain style of preaching, which, in its self-conscious disuse of human embellishment, sought to give all glory to God. His preaching became earnest, didactic, experimental, and pastoral.

For the first seven years after his regeneration in 1620, Goodwin struggled for personal assurance of faith. During these years he was largely "intent on the conviction God had wrought in him, of the heinousness of sin, and of his own sinful and miserable state by nature; of the difference between the workings of natural conscience, though enlightened, and the motions of a holy soul, changed and acted by the Spirit, in an effectual work of peculiar saving grace. And accordingly he kept a constant diary."[9] Through letters and conversations with a godly minister, Mr. Price of Kings Lynn (of whom Goodwin "said that he was the greatest man for experimental acquaintance with Christ that ever he met"), he was led to see his need to "live by faith in Christ, and to derive from him life and strength for sanctification, and all comfort and joy through believing." Of this period of spiritual struggle and difficulty, he confessed: "I was diverted from Christ for several years, to search only into the signs of grace in me. It was almost seven years ere I was taken off to live by faith on Christ, and God's free love, which are alike the object of faith."[10]

[8] *Ibid.*, lxii-lxiv.

[9] *Ibid.*, lxviii.

[10] *Ibid.*

Goodwin's soul finally found rest in Christ alone. He learned that he could not live from marks of grace. Writing to Mr. Price, he states: "I am come to this pass now, that signs will do me no good alone; I have trusted too much to habitual grace for assurance of justification; I tell you Christ is worth all." His son concludes: "Thus coming unto Christ, his weary soul found rest, when in all its unquiet motions it could not find it anywhere else."[11]

Goodwin's preaching now became considerably more Christ-centered. He could now agree with Dr. Sibbes's advice: "Young man, if you ever would do good, you must preach the gospel and the free grace of God in Christ Jesus."[12]

Shortly before this time, Goodwin was licensed as a preacher in Cambridge University. The following year (1626) he was influential in bringing Sibbes to St. Catherine's Hall as Master. In 1628 he was appointed lecturer at Trinity Church, succeeding Sibbes and Preston at the age of twenty-seven! From 1632 to 1634 he served as vicar of this church. In 1634, not willing to submit to Archbishop William Laud's new articles of conformity and having become a target of Laudian repression, Goodwin resigned his offices and left Cambridge. Numerous people, including several who later became influential Puritan pastors, were converted under Goodwin's preaching and lecturing in Cambridge.

During the mid-1630s, largely under the influence of John Cotton, Goodwin adopted Independent principles of church government.[13] From 1634 to 1639 he was probably a Separatist preacher in London. In 1639, because of increasing preaching restrictions and the threat of fines and imprisonment, he took refuge in the Netherlands where he labored in Arnhem with other well-known Independent ministers in serving a group of more than one hundred refugees from Laud's persecution. For two years he also exchanged reflections with his Dutch colleagues and came to realize that the Dutch Second Reformation (*Nadere Reformatie*) divines were emphasizing the same kind of Reformed, experimental truths in preaching and pastoring as were

[11] *Ibid.*, lxx.

[12] *Ibid.*, lxxi.

[13] Cf. Freer, "Goodwin, the Peaceable Puritan," 12-13. "Cotton's Congregationalism was given a final expression in *The Keys of the Kingdom* (1644), about which Goodwin said it provided a middle way between Brownism and Presbyterianism" (*ibid.*, 13).

the English Puritans, and were provoking similar responses from many of their colleagues. Just as some of the orthodox Dutch Calvinists looked askance at pietists such as Gijsbertus Voetius, the Dutch Owen, so some Calvinistic clergy in the English establishment viewed the Puritans with a certain degree of suspicion. In Holland, however, there was more freedom to experiment in the area of church government, so Goodwin found opportunity to explore the "Congregational Way," knowing that Independency was at best a minority view among the Puritans in England.[14]

In 1641, after Laud had been impeached and the Long Parliament had convened, Goodwin responded to Parliament's invitation to all who had left England for nonconformity to return. Some have claimed he gathered a church on Anchor Lane in the parish of St. Dunstan's in the East, London, later to become one of the most influential of the Independent churches. There is no conclusive evidence to substantiate this claim although Goodwin was preaching to an Independent church in St. Michael's Crooked Lane in London in 1646.[15]

Goodwin's rise to fame began with an invitation to preach to Parliament on April 27, 1642. Subsequently, he was appointed a member of the Westminster Assembly, where he is said to have been "the most decisive figure and the great disturber of the Westminster Assembly," due to his continual promotion of the Independent view of church government. Records of the assembly covering 243 sessions held from August 1643 to December 1644, indicate that Goodwin gave more addresses than any other divine—357 in all![16] Goodwin, Philip Nye, Sydrach Simpson,

[14] At Arnhem he studied church order and church discipline extensively with his colleague, Philip Nye. For additional detail on Goodwin's stay in the Netherlands, see Joel R. Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 330-32, 353-54.

[15] *The Registar-Booke of the Fourth Classis in the Province of London,* transcribed by Charles Surnam (London: Harleian Society, 1953), 143.

[16] Wayne R. Spear, "Covenanted Uniformity in Religion: The Influence of the Scottish Commissioners Upon the Ecclesiology of the Westminster Assembly" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1976), 362.

For Goodwin's role in the Presbyterian-Independent controversy, see Fienberg, "Thomas Goodwin: Puritan Pastor and Independent Divine," 80-265; Berndt Gustafsson, *The Five Dissenting Brethren: A Study of the Dutch Background of Their Independentism* (London: C. W. K. Gloerup, 1955); R. B. Carter, "The Presbyterian-Independent Controversy with

William Bridge, and Jeremiah Burroughs became nicknamed the five "Dissenting Brethren" on account of their Independent views which they also presented to the Westminster Assembly in their *Apologeticall Narration* (1644).[17] Despite Goodwin's prolonging of the debate on church government, he retained the respect of the Presbyterian majority as a capable and irenic Puritan.[18] He was chosen to pray in the solemn meeting of seven hours' duration in which the assembly prepared to enter on the debate concerning the discipline of the church. This respect is also evident by his being appointed in 1644 to present to Parliament *The Directory of Public Worship*, at which time (and on several other occasions) he preached before Parliament. Subsequently, the House of Lords gave Goodwin and Jeremiah Whitaker the oversight and examination of the papers to be printed for the assembly.[19]

After the assembly recessed, additional preferments followed in rapid succession for Goodwin. In 1649, Goodwin, Joseph Caryl, and Edward Reynolds were appointed lecturers at Oxford. On June 7, 1649, both Goodwin and Owen preached before the House of Commons on a special day of public thanksgiving and the next day the House put their names forward for promotion to the presidency of two Oxford colleges. In 1650, Goodwin became president of Magdalen College, Oxford, while Owen similarly became dean of Christchurch. The pair must have had considerable influence, since Cromwell yielded his power as Chancellor to a commission headed by Owen. At his post, Goodwin was made a close adviser to Cromwell and the protector's Oxford Commissioner.

Goodwin's influence shaped Magdalen College into an institution known for adherence to scriptural truth and Calvinistic, experimental doctrine. Demanding academic excellence and

Special Reference to Dr. Thomas Goodwin and the Years 1640 to 1660" (Ph.D. dissertation, Edinburgh, 1961); David R. Ehalt, "The Development of Early Congregational Theory of the Church with Special Reference to the Five 'Dissenting Brethren' at the Westminster Assembly" (Ph.D. dissertation, Claremont, 1969); J. R. De Witt, *Jus Divinum: The Westminster Assembly and the Divine Right of Church Government* (Kampen: Kok, 1969).

[17] *Ibid.*, 88-99.

[18] Freer, "Goodwin, the Peaceable Puritan," 15-18.

[19] Goodwin's own shorthand notes on the Assembly filled fourteen volumes!

dealing plainly with the spiritual lives of the students, he was soon accused of operating a "scruple shop" by those who did not appreciate his Puritan emphasis on intelligent piety. It was in these years, however, as even Lord Clarendon later pronounced, that "the University of Oxford yielded a harvest of extraordinary good and sound knowledge in all parts of learning."[20]

As he began his college presidency, Goodwin married for the second time. In 1638 he had married Elizabeth Prescott, the daughter of a London alderman, but she died in the 1640s, leaving him with one daughter. In 1650 he married Mary Hammond, "of ancient and honorable Shropshire lineage." Goodwin was forty-nine and she was in her seventeenth year. By this second marriage Goodwin had two sons, Thomas and Richard, and two daughters, both of whom died in infancy. Richard died as a young man on a voyage to the East Indies. Thomas followed in his father's footsteps as an Independent pastor and later established a private academy for the training of ministers.

Goodwin's ten years at Oxford were active and productive. During this time he and John Owen shared a Sunday afternoon lecture for the students at Oxford, and both were chaplains to Cromwell. Goodwin also formed an Independent church and preached to a unique mixture of hearers, uneducated and educated, including Stephen Charnock and Thankful Owen. In 1653 Goodwin was awarded a doctorate in divinity by Oxford University. The following year he was chosen by Cromwell to sit on the Board of Visitors of Oxford University, as well as to be one of the Triers on The Board for the Approbation of Public Preachers, whose task it was to examine men for both pulpit and public instructional work. He was also appointed to the Oxfordshire Commission for the Ejection of Scandalous Ministers. During this decade, Goodwin was probably closer to Cromwell than any other Independent divine and attended the Lord Protector on his deathbed.

Before Cromwell died (September 3, 1658), Goodwin secured his reluctant permission for the Independents to hold a synod and draft a confession of faith. On September 29, 1658 Goodwin, Owen, Philip Nye, William Bridge, Joseph Caryl, and William Greenhill were appointed to draw up a confession of faith to be used by some 120 Independent churches. Owen almost

[20] Cited by Peter Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Swengel, PA: Reiner, 1973), 47.

certainly wrote the lengthy introduction, but it was Goodwin who probably had the most important hand in writing the first draft:

> Goodwin again was prominent and this declaration amounted to a statement of his convictions on Church faith and order spawned in his twenties, triggered into action by John Cotton, consolidated in his thirties, thrashed out in Holland, practised in London and Oxford, defended in the Westminster Assembly and thus at last given a definitive expression. Goodwin's star had reached its zenith.[21]

The resulting document was presented for approval to a group of representatives from over one hundred Independent churches. After eleven or twelve days of work, the *Savoy Declaration of* Faith and Order was adopted October 12, 1658, being unanimously approved. On October 14 Goodwin led a delegation to present the *Savoy Declaration* to Richard Cromwell. Closely resembling the Westminster Confession of Faith with the major exception of church polity, it became the confessional standard for British and American Congregationalism from that date.[22]

With the Rump Parliament restored in 1659 the Presbyterian state-church was restored as well, but one year later, with the support of many Presbyterians and Anglicans, Charles II landed at Dover on May 25. Due to the accession of Charles II and the accompanying loss of Puritan power, Goodwin felt compelled to leave his work at Oxford. He moved to London, together with a substantial part of his congregation, and formed a church there in 1660. Despite assurances to the contrary, the new king enacted strict acts of conformity. In 1662 two thousand godly ministers were ejected from the national church. Being in an Independent church, however, and holding no offices to which he had been appointed by the government, Goodwin was not among them. He was allowed by God's overruling providence to continue preaching throughout the many years of persecution under Charles II. He also was enabled to lead his London congregation through the dreaded Plague, when most Established Church pastors abandoned the city. He devoted his last years to preaching, pastoral work, and the writing of numerous treatises, of which we are

[21] Freer, "Goodwin, the Peaceable Puritan," 14.

[22] Cf. *The Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order*, edited by A. G. Matthews (London: Independent Press, Ltd., 1959); Beeke, *Assurance of Faith,* 237-38, 273.

beneficiaries more than three hundred years later with this timely reprint of his *Works*.

Reading Goodwin

Thomas Goodwin was a prolific author and editor. During the 1630s he coedited with John Ball the works of John Preston and Richard Sibbes. He began to publish some of his own sermons in 1636.[23] Prior to his death, he published at least twelve devotional works, most of which were collections of sermons.[24] The fact that they were reissued forty-seven times indicates the high demand and wide circulation of his publications.

Most of Goodwin's major theological writings were the fruit of his riper years and were published posthumously. His unusually large corpus of treatises displays a pastoral and scholarly zeal rivalled by few Puritans.

The first collection of Goodwin's works was published in five folio volumes in London from 1681 to 1704 under the editorship of Thankful Owen, Thomas Baron, and Thomas Goodwin, Jr. An abridged version of Goodwin's works, condensed by J. Rabb, was printed in four volumes (London, 1847-50). The presently reprinted twelve-volume authoritative edition was printed by James Nichol (Edinburgh, 1861-66) as his first choice in what would become known as the well-edited and highly regarded *Nichol's Series of Standard Divines*; not surprisingly, it is far superior to the original five folio volumes.

Goodwin's treatment of his subjects is massive, sometimes liable to exhaust the half-hearted. The pull of his writings is not always felt immediately. His first editors (1681) explained his occasional prolixity in these terms: "He had a genius to dive into the bottom of points, to 'study them down,' as he used to express it, not contenting himself with superficial knowledge, without wading into the depths of things."[25] Edmund Calamy put it this way: "It is evident from his writings, he studied not words, but things. His stile is plain and familiar; but very diffuse, homely and tedious."[26] Though Calamy has exaggerated the problem of

[23] *DNB*, 8:149.

[24] Reid, *op. cit.*, 1:341-43.

[25] For the reprinting of the original, succinct preface, see *Works*, 1:xxix-xxxii.

[26] *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, 1:186.

style, one does need patience to read Goodwin at times; along with depth and prolixity, however, he combines a wonderful sense of warmth, unction, and experience. The reader's patience will be amply rewarded.

How then ought a beginner in Goodwin's *Works* proceed? Here is a suggested plan:

First, begin by reading some of the shorter, more practical writings of Goodwin, such as these:

(1) *Patience and Its Perfect Work*, four sermons expounding James 1:1-5, was written after the loss of a large part of Goodwin's personal library by fire (volume 2, pages 429-467 [hereafter 2:429-467]) and is replete with practical instruction for enhancing a spirit of submission.

(2) *Certain Select Cases Resolved* includes three experimental treatises which unveil Goodwin's large pastoral heart for afflicted Christians, each of them aiming at specific struggles in the believer's soul: (a) *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*, a classic treatise of Puritan encouragement for the spiritually depressed based on Isaiah 50:10-11 (3:231-350). Its subtitle summarizes its contents well: *A Treatise shewing The Causes by which, The Cases wherein, and the Ends for which, God leaves His Children to Distress of Conscience, Together with Directions How to Walk so as to Come Forth of Such a Condition.* (b) *The Return of Prayers*, based on Psalm 85:8, a uniquely practical work that affords discernment in ascertaining "God's answers to our prayers" (3:353-429). (c) *The Trial of a Christian's Growth* (3:433-506), based on John 15:1-2, a masterpiece on sanctification which focuses on the graces of mortification and vivification. For a mini-classic on spiritual growth, this gem remains unsurpassed until today.

(3) *The Vanity of Thoughts*, based on Jeremiah 4:14 (3:509-528), is a convicting little work, stressing the need for bringing every thought into captive obedience to Christ, and providing remedies on how to foster that obedience.

Second, read for instruction and edification some of Goodwin's great sermons which inevitably bear a strong, Biblical, Christological, and experimental stamp (2:359-425; 4:151-224; 5:439-548; 7:473-576; 9:499-514; 12:1-127).

Third, delve into Goodwin's great works which expound major doctrines, including the following:

(1) *An Unregenerate Man's Guiltiness Before God in Respect of Sin and Punishment* (10:1-567) is a weighty Puritan

treatment of human guilt, corruption, and the imputation and punishment of sin. For exposure of the total depravity of the natural man's heart, this treatise is unparalleled in all of Christian literature. It aims to produce a heartfelt sense of dire need for saving faith in Christ rather than the quick-fix approach of contemporary, superficial Christendom.

(2) *The Object and Acts of Justifying Faith* is a frequently reprinted classic (8:1-593). Part I, on the *objects of faith*, focuses on God's nature, Christ Himself, and the free grace of God revealed in His absolute promises. Part II deals with the *acts of faith*—what it means to believe in Christ, to obtain assurance, to find joy in the Holy Ghost, to make use of God's electing love. A concluding section beautifully expounds the "actings of faith in prayer." Part III addresses the *properties of faith*—its excellency, for it gives all honor to God and Christ; its difficulty, for it reaches beyond the natural abilities of man; its necessity, for we must endeavor to believe in the strength of God. A valuable, practical conclusion provides "directions to guide us in our endeavours to believe."

(3) *Christ the Mediator* (2 Corinthians 5:18-19), *Christ Set Forth* (Romans 8:34), and *The Heart of Christ in Heaven Towards Sinners on Earth* are great works of Christology (5:1-438; 4:1-92; 4:93-150). *Christ the Mediator* sets forth Jesus especially in His substitutionary work of humiliation, and rightly deserves to be called a classic as well; *Christ Set Forth* proclaims Him largely albeit briefly in His exaltation; *The Heart of Christ* expounds the neglected theme of the affectionate tenderness of Christ's glorified human nature shown to His people still on earth. In this latter work Goodwin waxes more mystical than anywhere else in his writings, but as Paul Cook has ably shown, his mysticism is confined within the boundaries of Scripture.[27] Here Goodwin is unapproached "in his combination of intellectual and theological power with evangelical and homiletical comfort."[28]

(4) *Gospel Holiness in Heart and Life* (7:129-336) is a convicting and stimulating masterpiece, based on Philippians 1:9-11, expounding the doctrine of sanctification in every sphere of life.

(5) *The Knowledge of God the Father, and His Son Jesus*

[27] Paul Cook, "Thomas Goodwin—Mystic?," in *Diversities of Gifts*, 45-56.

[28] Whyte, *Thirteen Appreciations*, 165.

Christ (4:347-569), combined with *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (6:1-522), speak much of a profound experimental acquaintance in the believer's soul of each of the three divine persons in their personhood and saving work. *The Work of the Spirit* is particularly helpful in the doctrines of regeneration and conversion, and in delicately yet lucidly discerning the work of "the natural conscience" from the Spirit's saving work.

(6) *The Glory of the Gospel* (4:227-346) consists of two sermons and a treatise based on Colossians 1:26-27, and ought to be read together with *The Blessed State of Glory Which the Saints Possess After Death* (7:339-472), based on Revelation 14:13.

(7) *A Discourse of Election* (9:1-498) is a profound work which delves deeply into questions such as the supralapsarian-infralapsarian debate which wrestles with the moral order of God's decree, but it also deals practically with the fruits of election (e.g., see Book IV on 1 Peter 5:10 and Book V on how God fulfils His covenant of grace in the generations of believers).

(8) In *The Creatures and the Condition of Their State by Creation* (7:1-128) Goodwin waxes more philosophical here than elsewhere.

Fourth, digest prayerfully and slowly Goodwin's profound 900+ page exposition of Ephesians 1:1 to 2:11 (1:1-564; 2:1-355)—a work of which has been justly concluded, "Not even Luther on the Galatians is such an expositor of Paul's mind and heart as is Goodwin on the Ephesians."[29]

Finally, save for last Goodwin's exposition of Revelation (3:1-226) and his sole polemical work, *The Constitution, Right Order, and Government of the Churches of Christ* (11:1-546). Independents, of course, would value this latter work highly, while Presbyterians would hold that Goodwin is a safe guide in nearly every area but church government. Happily, Goodwin's work does not degrade Presbyterians; in fact, one of his contemporaries who felt compelled to answer it confessed the author conveyed "a truly great and noble spirit" throughout the work.[30]

Goodwin's Distinctive Teachings: Sealing and Assurance

In discussing Goodwin's teaching, the pastoral context of his writing must be remembered. Most of his writing focuses on the

[29] *Ibid.*, 162.

[30] *Ibid.*, 169.

doctrine of salvation and its personal application; he is seldom interested in dogmatics or metaphysics for their own sake. All his teaching and theology are ultimately pulpit exposition and application. Consequently, he commences each book and usually each chapter of each book with a scriptural text that he first expounds and applies. He excels in drawing all his theology out of the fountainhead of Scripture. This renders his writings fresh, rich, and personal. In short, his sermons and treatises were written to help believers know their spiritual state and grow in their relationship with the Triune God.

Surprisingly little has been written on what Thomas Goodwin taught. Major studies on his theology are few.[31] Perhaps this is due to the fact that, for the most part, his doctrine of salvation was not original. Its basic feature was drawn from the classically Pauline-Augustinian-Puritan conviction that true happiness lay in the knowledge of and communion with God by faith, as well as in praise and obedience to Him in daily life. Throughout his life, the believer needs increasingly to grasp by faith the objective work of God in election and redemption as well as subjectively to experience God's work of justification and sanctification within him. There are two areas, however, in which Goodwin does chart his own course soteriologically: the sealing of the Spirit and personal assurance of faith.

On these matters, Goodwin has most to say in his *Exposition*

[31] For Goodwin on the covenant of grace, see Paul Edward Brown, "The Principle of the Covenant in the Theology of Thomas Goodwin" (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1950). Alexander McNally, "Some Aspects of Thomas Goodwin's Doctrine of Assurance" (Th.M., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1972) focuses on covenant, assurance of faith, and sealing of the Spirit. Stanley Fienberg, "Thomas Goodwin, Puritan Pastor and Independent Divine" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1974) studies Goodwin's teaching on depravity, justification, and sanctification. Beeke, "Thomas Goodwin: The Merging of English-Dutch Thinking on Assurance," in *Assurance of Faith* (chapter 9), addresses Goodwin on assurance and compares his views on steps of grace experienced by the believer to the views of John Owen and Alexander Comrie. Michael Horton, "Christ Set Forth: Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance" (Ph.D. dissertation, Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and Coventry University, 1996) provides the most exhaustive look at Goodwin's theology to date, expounding his views on faith, assurance, predestination, justification, covenant, conversion, preparatory grace, temporary faith, perseverance, the church, and the sacraments.

of the Epistle to the Ephesians (sermons 13-17 on Ephesians 1:13-14), and *Of the Object and Acts of Justifying Faith* (Part II ["Of the Acts of Faith"], particularly Book II ["Of faith of assurance"]).[32] Additional thoughts on assurance are interwoven in several other works, most notably, *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness, The Return of Prayers*, and *The Trial of a Christian's Growth*.[33]

Goodwin's view on the sealing of the Spirit must be placed in light of its historical context. The seal of the Spirit was a common theme in the seventeenth century, and one which the majority of Puritans intimately conjoined with assurance. Not that this was always the case, however, for the early Reformers clearly maintained a one-to-one correlation between the "Spirit-regenerated" and the "Spirit-sealed." John Calvin (1509-1564), for example, denies what would become the general Puritan notion that it was possible to believe without being sealed with the Spirit; instead, he declares that the seal is the Holy Spirit Himself.[34] The sealing work of the Spirit also belongs to the essence of faith.

By the time of William Perkins (1558-1602), however, the focus was no longer on the Holy Spirit as seal, so much as on what the activity of the Spirit was in sealing the promise to the believer. Perkins taught that this personal sealing removes all

[32] *Works of Goodwin*, 1:206-252 and 8:338-419.

[33] E.g., *A Child of Light Walking in Darkness*, in which Goodwin affirms that the lack of assurance is compatible with faith (*Works of Goodwin* 3:238). In *The Return of Prayers*, Goodwin distinguishes assurance from "recumbency" (3:368), indicates that the doctrine of assurance will not make believers presumptuous unless it is abused (3:417), and stresses that assurance may be lost (3:422). In *The Trial of a Christian's Growth*, Goodwin asserts that God purges out corruption by assuring the believer of His love (3:480). In 4:207 Goodwin defines assurance as a persuasion that God and Christ "are prepared to save a man's own self in particular." In volume 5, he affirms that perseverance does not make the Christian less resolute in resisting temptation (p. 325), but acknowledges that many believers lack full assurance (p. 394). Moreover, assurance always presupposes a first act of faith's recumbency (5:403).

[34] Cf. Calvin's *Commentary* on Ephesians 1:13-14, 3:12 (reprint Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), and his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. F. L. Battles (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), 3.2.11, 34, 41.

doubt for the believer.[35] In sealing, which is mediated through the Word, the Spirit begets an assured "trust and confidence" in the promises so that the believer's will and understanding is moved to embrace the promises experimentally as his own.[36]

Perkins's successor, Paul Bayne (d. 1617), attempted to unite together both the Spirit as the seal Himself by being Indweller and the consequences of that sealing in the graces of the regenerate life, and thus bring some harmony to the diverse Reformed-Puritan heritage.[37] Bayne distinguished being sealed by the Spirit from being *made conscious* of such sealing. The former belonged to all true believers (Calvin's input); the latter, to some (Perkins's input).

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635), one of Bayne's converts and his successor, taught that the sealing of the Spirit was a "superadded work" and "superadded confirmation" of the believer's faith.[38] Sealing is comparable to the "sweet communion of marriage" with a perfect Bridegroom, Jesus Christ, whose own sealing by God the Father is the foundation of the believer's sealing.[39] For Christ's sake, seals serve for "confirmation, distinction, appropriation, estimation, secrecy," and remain "inviolable."[40] For Sibbes, the internal, sealing testimony of the Spirit is the supreme sign of grace.

Moving a step beyond Sibbes, John Preston (1587-1628) taught specifically that the sealing of the Spirit was a *second work*

[35] *William Perkins, 1558-1602; English Puritanist: His Pioneer Works on Casuistry*, ed. Thomas F. Merrill (Nieuwkoop: B. DeGraaf, 1966), 50-51.

[36] *The Workes of that Famous and VVorthy Minister of Christ, Mr. William Perkins* (London: John Legatt, 1612), 1:104-105.

[37] Paul Bayne, *An Entire Commentary vpon the whole Epistle of the Apostle Paul to the Ephesians* (London: Printed by M. F. for Milbourne and I. Bartlet, 1643), 80-81.

[38] *Complete Works* (1862; reprint Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1973-82), 3:455. Sibbes preached often on the Spirit's sealing. First, a series of sermons transcribed by a noblewoman, Lady Elizabeth Brooke, was published in 1637 as *A Fountain Sealed* (*ibid.*, 5:409-456). Secondly, sermons on 2 Corinthians 1.22-23 in the *Exposition of Second Corinthians Chapter 1*, were published in 1655 (*ibid.*, 3:420-84). Thirdly, a sermon on Romans 8:15-16, *The Witness of the Spirit*, was first published in 1692 (*ibid.*, 7:367-85). Cf. *ibid.*, 2:453-64, 4:132ff., 6:374-79, 428-30.

[39] *Ibid.*, 5:433-34; 3:443.

[40] *Ibid.*, 434-37; 4:123.

given exclusively to those who overcome.[41] Influenced by this Sibbes-Preston tradition and by his own experience of full assurance, Thomas Goodwin carried the sealing of the Spirit as a second work to its fullest development. Consciously rejecting Calvin's position, Goodwin defines such sealing as a "light beyond the light of ordinary faith."[42] He expands as follows:

> The sealing of the Holy Spirit is an immediate assurance by a heavenly and divine light of a divine authority, which the Holy Ghost sheddeth in a man's heart, (not having relation to grace wrought or anything in a man's self,) whereby he sealeth him up to the day of redemption.[43]

And again:

> It is the next thing to heaven . . . you can have no more until you come thither.[44]

Sealing is the "whispering" of the Holy Spirit that I am elected of God, have my sins forgiven, and belong to Him forever—both intuitively and directly.[45] Thus, Goodwin made a direct tie between the sealing of the Spirit and full assurance of faith, contrary to Owen who rejected identifying the sealing of the Spirit with a post-regeneration experience of assurance.

Interestingly, the Westminster Assembly seems to have left this question open (*Westminster Confession of Faith*, chapter XVIII, paragraph 2). The divines agreed that assurance of faith is grounded primarily upon the promises of God and secondarily on "the inward evidences of those graces unto which these promises are made," but then they added these words without specifying whether they represent a continuation of the second ground or a distinct third ground: "the testimony of the Spirit of adoption witnessing with our spirits that we are the children of God, which Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption."

The Westminster divines knew that the witness of the Holy Spirit was the most difficult ground of assurance to comprehend. They freely confessed that "amazing variety" and vast mysteries

[41] *The New Covenant, or the Saint's Portion* (London: I.D. for Nicholas Bourne, 1639), 2:416-17.

[42] *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 1:236.

[43] *Ibid.*, 233.

[44] *Ibid.*, 236.

[45] *Ibid.*, 236-37.

surrounded them when they spoke of the leadings of the Spirit and how He dwells in believers. Consequently, the assembly desired to allow freedom for different opinions concerning some of the finer details of the Spirit's testimony. There were two, and possibly three schools of thought among the divines.

In the first group are those men, such as Jeremiah Burroughs, Anthony Burgess, and George Gillespie, who regarded the testimony of the Holy Spirit in assurance as exclusively His activity within syllogistic reasoning whereby He brings conscience to unite with His witness that the Christian is a child of God.[46] According to this view Romans 8:15 and 8:16 are regarded as synonymous: the witness of the Holy Spirit is always conjoined *with* the witness of the believer's spirit.[47] For these divines, the inward evidence of grace and the testimony of the Spirit are essentially one; they impart *full assurance*. These divines felt this view was important to maintain in opposition to mysticism and antinomianism which are prone to accent a direct testimony of the Spirit apart from the necessity of bringing forth practical fruits of faith and repentance.

In the second group are those divines such as Samuel Rutherford, William Twisse, Henry Scudder, and Thomas Goodwin, who believed that the witness of the Spirit described in Romans 8:15 contains something in addition to that of verse 16.[48] This group distinguishes the Spirit witnessing *with* the believer's spirit by syllogistic reasoning from His witnessing *to* the believer's spirit by direct applications of the Word. As Meyer points out, the former leaves in its wake the self-conscious conviction, "*I* am a child of God," and on the basis of such

[46] Burroughs, *The Saints' Happiness, together with the several steps leading thereunto. Delivered in Divers Lectures on the Beatitudes* (reprint ed., Beaver Falls, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1988), 196; Burgess, *Spiritual Refining: or, A Treatise of Grace and Assurance* (London: A. Miller, 1652), 44; Gillespie, *A Treatise of Miscellany Questions* (Edinburgh: Gedeon Lithgovv, 1649), 105-109.

[47] Cf. Burgess's exegesis of Romans 8:15-16, Ephesians 1:13, and 1 John 5:8 in *Spiritual Refining*, 49-50.

[48] Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened* (Edinburgh: Andro Anderson, 1655), 65ff.; Twisse, *The Doctrine of the Synod of Dort and Arles, reduced to the practise* (Amsterdam: G. Thorp, 1631), 147ff.; Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk* (reprint Harrisburg, VA: Sprinkle, 1984), 338-42; *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 6:27; 7:66; 8:351, 363.

Spirit-worked syllogisms finds freedom to approach God as Father. The latter speaks the Spirit's pronouncement on behalf of the Father, "*You* are a child of God," and on this basis of hearing of its sonship from God's own Word by the Spirit, proceeds to approach Him with the familiarity of a child.[49] Henry Scudder's breakdown of the Spirit's witness is typical of this second group:

> This Spirit does witness to a man, that he is the child of God, two ways:
>
> First, By immediate witness and suggestion. Secondly, By necessary inferences, by signs from the infallible fruits of the said Spirit.[50]

This second group differed among themselves on whether the Spirit's direct testimony should be regarded as more spontaneous, durable, and powerful than His syllogistic testimony. The most common approach is Rutherford's, which allows for the direct testimony, but then stresses that the reflex act of faith is as a rule "more spiritual and helpful" than are direct acts.[51] Consequently, all believers should be regularly praying for the Spirit's illumination to guide them into syllogistic conclusions. Twisse and Scudder distinguish the Spirit's testifying with our spirit from His witnessing of personal adoption without determining which is most valuable.[52] Goodwin asserts, however, that the direct witness of the Spirit far supersedes the co-witnessing through the syllogisms.[53] For him, "full" assurance is more than *discursive*; it is also *intuitive*. Generally speaking, however, this second group (with the exception of Goodwin and a few others) does not conceive of the direct testimony of the Spirit as being

[49] Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Hand-book to The Epistle of the Romans* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, Publishers, 1889), 316.

[50] *The Christian's Daily Walk*, 338.

[51] *Catechisms of the Second Reformation,* ed. by Alexander F. Mitchell (London: James Nisbet, 1886), 207; Rutherford, *The Trial and Triumph of Faith* (Edinburgh: William Collins, 1845), 88ff. and *Christ Dying and Drawing Sinners to Himselfe* (London: J. D. for Andrew Cooke), 71, 94ff. Burgess agrees with Rutherford (*Spiritual Refining*, 672).

[52] Twisse, *The Doctrine of the Synod of Dort and Arles, reduced to the practise*, 156; Scudder, *The Christian's Daily Walk*, 338-42.

[53] *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 1:233; 8:366.

independent of the syllogisms, but as "superadded" to them. They are agreed that the syllogistic way of reaching assurance is more common and probably safer: "Some Divines do not indeed deny the possibility of such an immediate Testimony, but yet they conclude the ordinary and safe way, is, to look for that Testimony, which is by the effects, and fruits of God's Spirit."[54]

Goodwin and those he influenced may also be said to belong to a sub-group of the second group because though their views are intimately associated with the second group *theologically*, they place the event of "immediate" assurance by direct witness of the Holy Spirit on a higher level *practically*. Some Westminster divines, such as William Bridge and Samuel Rutherford, belonging to the second group, believe that such assurance becomes the portion of many Christians before they die.[55] Others, however, and most notably Goodwin, place this experience far beyond the pale of ordinary experience. In fact, Goodwin states that the experience of full assurance pronounced by the Spirit "immediately" is so profound that it is comparable to "a new conversion."[56]

For Goodwin this "full" assurance is the zenith of experimental life. Unlike the position adopted by most in the second group, such assurance is divorced from the syllogisms entirely:

> This witness is immediate, that is, it builds not his testimony on anything in us; it is not a testimony fetched out of a man's self, or the work of the Spirit in man, as the others were; for the Spirit speaks not by his effects, but speaks from himself.[57]

Goodwin repeatedly uses terms such as "immediate light," "joy unspeakable," "transcendent," "glorious," and "intuitive" in describing the experience of full assurance. Indeed, it is beyond human description:

> Those who have attained it cannot demonstrate it to others, especially not to those who have not experience of it, for it is a white stone which no one knows but he that receives it, Rev. 2:17.[58]

Goodwin nevertheless wholeheartedly concurred with his

[54] Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 52.

[55] Cf. *The Works of William Bridge* (reprint Beaver Falls, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1989), 2:140.

[56] *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 1:251.

[57] *Ibid.*, 8:366.

[58] *Ibid.*, 8:351.

fellow divines that the Spirit's testimony is always tied to, and may never contradict, the Word of God. "The Spirit is promised in the Word, and that promise is fulfilled in experience."[59] All the Westminster Assembly divines were most anxious to avoid antinomianism and unbiblical mysticism on the one hand, as well as to protect the freedom of the Spirit and the reality of Biblical-Pauline mystical experience on the other.

Goodwin's Homegoing and Epitaph

Goodwin died in London in his eightieth year embracing the Triune God by victorious faith and reminiscing of God's past faithfulness to him. More than fifty years before that time, he had experienced a sweet, "immediate" assurance sealed to his heart by the Holy Spirit which went far beyond anything he had previously experienced. Inseparable from this personal sense of full assurance, through which he felt almost as if he were "converted again," was an experimental realization of communing with each of the three divine Persons. This conviction strengthened with time and served him in good stead on his deathbed, as his son informs us:

> In all the violence of [his fever], he discoursed with that strength of faith and assurance of Christ's love, with that holy admiration of free grace, with that joy in believing, and such thanksgivings and praises, as he extremely moved and affected all that heard him.... He rejoiced in the thought that he was dying, and going to have a full and uninterrupted communion with God. 'I am going,' said he, 'to the three Persons, with whom I have had communion: they have taken me; I did not take them.... I could not have imagined I should ever have had such a measure of faith in this hour.... Christ cannot love me better than he doth; I think I cannot love Christ better than I do; I am swallowed up in God....' With this assurance of faith, and fulness of joy, his soul left this world.[60]

Throughout a long life, Thomas Goodwin not only attained celebrity or notoriety (depending on one's view) as a leader of Independency during the Civil War and Interregnum period, and as a principal architect of the Cromwellian domestic settlement; he also was known among the Puritan divines of the seventeenth

[59] John Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 165-66.

[60] *Works,* 2:lxxiv-lxxv.

century as an eminent believer, an able preacher, a caring pastor, and a profoundly spiritual writer. Buried in Bunhill Fields, his epitaph, written in long obliterated Latin, is most moving when read in full;[61] it summarizes well his most important gifts: He *was* by the grace of God knowledgeable in the Scriptures, sound in judgment, and enlightened by the Spirit to penetrate the mysteries of the gospel; he *was* a pacifier of troubled consciences, a dispeller of error, and a truly Christian pastor; he *did* edify numbers of souls whom he had first won to Christ. And is not the closing section of his epitaph being fulfilled even today by the reprinting of his works at the close of the second millenium of the Christian era?

> His writings..., the noblest monument of this great man's praise, will diffuse his name in a more fragrant odour than that of the richest perfume, to flourish in those distant ages, when this marble, inscribed with his just honour, shall have dropt into dust.

Joel R. Beeke

[61] *Ibid.*, xlii-xliii.