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**A theological study of hyper-Calvinism  
in the writings of  
Joseph Hussey (1660-1726),  
John Skepp (1675-1721),  
John Gill (1697-1771),  
and John Brine (1703-1765)**

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the Degree of PhD

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I dedicate this study to my beloved mother, who inspired me with her love of theology, and also by her resistance to the pressure to deny what she knew was true, because she feared God more than man.

‘I publicly proclaim bold promises.

I do not whisper obscurities in some dark corner.

I would not have told the people of Israel to seek me if I could not be found.’

Isaiah 45:19 (NLT)



## Definitions / Abbreviations

*All abbreviations are in footnotes:*

### **magazines/journals**

Association of Historic Baptists	AHB
Baptist Magazine	BM
Baptist Quarterly	BQ
Calvin Theological Journal	CTJ
Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal	DBSJ
Dissenting Academies Online	DAO
Dutch Review of Church History	DRCH
Evangelical Quarterly	EQ
Earthen Vessel	EV
Free Grace Record	FGR
Gospel Standard	GS
Journal of Andrew Fuller Studies	JAFS
Journal of Ecclesiastical History	JEH
Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society	JETS
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society	JEGS
Journal of Reformed Theology	JRT
Journal of Theological Studies	JTS
Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society	JURCHS
Protestant Reformed Churches in America	PRCA
Protestant Reformed Theological Journal	PRTJ
Puritan Reformed Journal	PRJ
Reformation Today	RT
Scottish Journal of Theology	SJT
Scottish Reformation Society Historical Journal	SRSHJ
Sword and Trowel	S+T
Transactions of the Baptist Historical Society	TBHS
Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society	TCHS

### **churches**

Orthodox Presbyterian Church	OPC
Christian Reformed Church	CRC

### **Bible Version**

The New Revised Standard Version is the default version, although the Authorised Version takes precedence when quoted.

## Caveats

This thesis is set in the eighteenth century, and as such embraces its language when quoting and referring to that period. This includes the literary practice of capitalised common nouns, random italicisation, different spelling, along with occasional spelling and punctuation errors, and irregular pagination. It also includes the use of 'men', 'man' and 'mankind' as generic terms.

The term 'hyper-Calvinism' is somewhat anachronistic, in that it was not in general use till Andrew Fuller's time, who overlapped Gill by seventeen years and Brine by eleven. However our authors recognised and referred to a specific scheme, notion or doctrine with all the characteristics of hyper-Calvinism. This thesis therefore uses the term in recognition of the fact that it was an emerging distinctive theology during the early 1700s. Similarly the term 'duty-faith' which was coined in 1737 is used throughout the thesis.

# Introduction

The objective of this thesis is to analyse the writings of four original hyper-Calvinists in order to better understand their theology and how they reached their conclusions.

Over chapters two to five we will consider Joseph Hussey, a Congregationalist, and the three Johns: Skepp, Gill and Brine, all Particular Baptists, and see the strong connection between them and their theology. Each chapter length reflects the originality and importance of each. We begin with Hussey who in 1706 and 1707 wrote two books explicitly teaching his new theological convictions. It is probable this would have fizzled out had not his convert John Skepp, whose only book was posthumously published, transferred to the Baptists from where he introduced Hussey's theology and directly influenced John Gill and John Brine through whom it was consolidated and disseminated. Although Brine wrote two books expressly against duty-faith, generally his and Gill's hyper-Calvinistic theology is interspersed throughout their writing.

Before the 1720s hyper-Calvinism as a theological scheme was disorganised and leaderless. Hussey and Skepp, and to a lesser extent Richard Davis, were pivotal in the period from 1690 to 1720, 'but they were popular only in a small circle and wrote relatively little,' Curt Daniel remarks. It was in John Gill that hyper-Calvinism 'found its cohesion'. Nevertheless the progression from Hussey through Skepp and thence into the Particular Baptists was crucial, for they 'provided the direction' for both Gill and Brine. All four were bound closely together both geographically and theologically, and 'a complicated network of associations' formed around them which continued and increased into the next generation.<sup>1</sup> Without the contribution of each, and their interdependence, hyper-Calvinism would not have developed and thrived as it did. Allan Sell notes: 'It is not difficult to trace the theological pedigree of Gill and Brine. They were both indebted to the ministry of John Skepp, ... [who] had been a member of Hussey's church at Cambridge.' It was Hussey's and Skepp's position 'which Gill and Brine strenuously defended' during the Modern Question controversy.<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Nuttall

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 9,18-19,7.

<sup>2</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 78; also Stevenson, *Doctrines of Grace*, 30.

not only emphasises the early hyper-Calvinists' many geographical associations with Northamptonshire, 'a traditional stronghold of High Calvinism', but he also links Hussey's theology with the Modern Question controversy thirty years later: the negative answer to that question of whether the unconverted have a duty to believe being the logical consequence of Hussey's negative answer to the question whether God offers grace to the unconverted.<sup>3</sup> Thus Lewis Wayman, a major protagonist in the controversy, claimed that the modern question was not modern at all, but a reworking of the question he believed Hussey had successfully scotched.<sup>4</sup>

This thesis is limited by its title: it is a theological study of hyper-Calvinism within these primary sources. (I am grateful for the now-discontinued platform which digitalised many rare early historical texts for download.<sup>5</sup>) It makes no attempt to reach beyond that to other areas of theology, which should not be construed as criticism or prejudice. This should be particularly noted in Gill's case whose writings were exhaustive. Further, it intentionally engages extensively, objectively and rigorously with these primary sources. There are several reasons for this. First, it allows the writers to speak for themselves, ensuring particularly in Gill's case that the context is well observed, which means clearly understanding *his* classifications and vocabulary and not succumbing to the temptation of imposing well-recognised definitions, categories and expressions onto his. Second, as Daniel notes, since some may disagree with the assessments, there is a compelling need 'to provide more than sufficient documentation, even to the point of being pedantic'. Third, research on the precise scope of this study is very limited if not non-existent. Unfortunately most secondary sources do not interact with the original books but rely on and quote each other, particularly Peter Toon, or they use abridged and edited versions of Hussey rather than the original. Daniel also encountered this issue, referring to the 'very few secondary works about Hyper-Calvinism' and thus the necessity of relying 'almost entirely upon the primary sources themselves'.<sup>6</sup> Ian Shaw recognises high Calvinists (as he consistently calls hyper-

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<sup>3</sup> Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965) 102,111,114.

<sup>4</sup> Wayman, *Further Enquiry*, iv.v.x.

<sup>5</sup> JISC Historical Texts, retired July 2024.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 37-38 (both quotes).

Calvinists) are a ‘neglected grouping’ whose beliefs deserve attention.<sup>7</sup>

Nevertheless the thesis engages as much as possible with scholars and historians who have studied the subject. These include Andrew Fuller who understood hyper-Calvinism by experience, and his friend Joseph Ivimey. Toon and Daniel are the primary present-day scholars of hyper-Calvinism: Toon’s book *The Emergence of Hyper-Calvinism in English Nonconformity 1689-1765*, and Daniel’s PhD ‘Hyper-Calvinism and John Gill’ are valuable contributions. Others include Barry Howson who in his study on Hanserd Knollys has included a helpful chapter on hyper-Calvinism; and Sell’s *The Great Debate*. The well-organised site <https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/> makes numerous journals accessible including *Baptist Quarterly*, and has been an invaluable source of information, from Nuttall’s extensive historical research to Robert Sheehan’s informed articles on gospel presentation. Gill has been the subject of considerable interest, although much less in the area of hyper-Calvinism. Michael Haykin and David Rathel have written excellent articles on the subject which have been most helpful. In particular Rathel’s have confirmed my own conclusions following careful study. Robert Seymour’s thesis on Gill’s theology has been useful. Some have recently questioned whether Gill had any leanings towards hyper-Calvinism at all. These include Thomas Nettles, Jonathan White, Clive Jarvis and George Ella. Within the context of the 1924 common grace controversy in the American Dutch Reformed church, John Murray was commissioned by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in 1948 to write a report on the free offer of the gospel, while David Engelsma has attempted to show that rejection of the well-meant offer is not hyper-Calvinism. Generally the period of the late 1700s into the 1800s has enjoyed significant research, especially Andrew Fuller and his Particular Baptist colleagues as they revolutionised their denomination, but some of these historians reference the earlier 1700s, including Robert Oliver, Kenneth Dix, Peter Naylor, and Philip Roberts, and we engage with their books and articles where appropriate, along with others.

However, before we begin the detailed analysis of Hussey, Skepp, Gill and Brine, chapter one casts the net wide, presenting hyper-Calvinism as a theological system; exploring, clarifying, and demarcating terminology in order to demonstrate why the name, generally unpopular among scholars and

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<sup>7</sup> Shaw, *High Calvinists*, 1.

theologians, is not only suitable but necessary. Its final part leads us into chapter two by recognising important influences which facilitated and enabled Hussey's formal articulation of it.

The Modern Question controversy has already been referenced in this Introduction, and will be throughout. It was a significant development in the history of hyper-Calvinism. Thirty years after Hussey's introduction of the theology, it was openly challenged in 1737. This sparked a debate which lasted seventeen years through several books, evangelical Calvinists arguing that faith is a duty and hyper-Calvinists that it is not. This thesis, particularly in chapter 4, engages with some theologians contemporaneous with Gill in order to compare their theology with his. I have also included the later John Murray (1898-1975), because his association with hyper-Calvinism through the common grace controversy and its links with the free gospel offer, makes his contribution especially valuable. The thesis also compares Gill's teaching with current Gospel Standard Articles of Faith, the intention being to demonstrate the connection between classic eighteenth-century hyper-Calvinism and contemporary hyper-Calvinism within some denominations and branches of the church.

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# Chapter one

## Part 1 Theological definition of hyper-Calvinism

Toon defines hyper-Calvinism as follows. It is ‘an exaggerated, rationalist form of the Reformed faith that originated in English nonconformity in the eighteenth century and is still found among Strict and Particular Baptists as well as some Dutch-American Calvinistic groups.’ Its major proponent was John Gill, who learned his system from Joseph Hussey. It is framed to exalt the honour and glory of God by acutely minimising the moral and spiritual responsibility of sinners. It emphasises God’s immanent acts (eternal covenant, eternal justification and adoption). It makes no meaningful distinction between the secret and revealed will of God, thereby deducing sinners’ duty from God’s secret decrees. It places excessive emphasis on irresistible grace, meaning that Christ is only offered to the elect, who are passive in their conversion. Assurance of salvation is an inner conviction of one’s election. These emphases obscure the central message of Christ crucified, undermine the necessity of evangelism and encourage introspection.<sup>1</sup>

Daniel defines hyper-Calvinism as the school of supralapsarian five-point Calvinism which stresses the sovereignty of God by over-emphasising God’s secret over his revealed will, and eternity over time. It minimises human responsibility, notably denying the offer of the gospel. Thus it undermines the universal duty of sinners to believe savingly with the assurance that Christ actually died for them. Consequently it warns of presumption, encourages introspection, and its view of sanctification is akin to doctrinal antinomianism. Specifically ‘it is the rejection of the word ‘offer’ in connection with evangelism for supposedly Calvinistic reasons.’<sup>2</sup>

These two definitions of hyper-Calvinism are not exhaustive. One of the earliest is Gabriel Croft’s in his 1825 *Christian Instructor*.<sup>3</sup> More recently, Fuller scholar Ernest Clipsham provided eight characteristics of hyper-Calvinism, which include

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<sup>1</sup> Toon, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, *Encyclopedia*, 190, and *New Dictionary*, 324-325; *Emergence*, 144-145.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 767; Toon, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, *New Dictionary*, 324.

<sup>3</sup> Croft, *Christian Instructor*, 169-172.

denial of anything spiritually good—whether prayer, repentance or faith—being the duty of the unregenerate; the necessity of a divine warrant or qualification proving election and therefore entitling faith; and the incompatibility of law (covenant of works) and gospel (covenant of grace).<sup>4</sup> Gerald Priest provides six characteristics: supralapsarian election, reprobation, eternal justification, passive faith, divine warrant for faith, distinction in preaching to non-elect and sensible sinners.<sup>5</sup> James Garrett suggests five indicative doctrines: prioritising of election and reprobation, eternal covenant of redemption, eternal justification, no general offers of grace, and antinomianism.<sup>6</sup> Howson defines two primary distinctives of hyper-Calvinism: rejection of indiscriminate gospel offers, and its corollary, that saving faith and evangelical repentance can only be exercised by the elect (rejection of duty faith); and three secondary distinctives: eternal justification, eternal covenant of grace, and excessive emphasis on irresistible grace and the passivity of the elect in their salvation.<sup>7</sup> Philip Johnson popularly but accurately defines hyper-Calvinism as five denials: denial of the general gospel call, denial of duty-faith, denial of offer of Christ or salvation to the non-elect, denial of common grace, denial of God's love toward the reprobate.<sup>8</sup> Others definitions include Haykin's who highlights the importance of the central reasoning behind rejection of the indiscriminate gospel offer (sometimes simplistically reduced to hyper-Calvinism's single doctrinal point), namely the doctrine of the eternal intratrinitarian covenant of redemption regarding the elect's salvation, followed by the argument that the divine acts of union and justification were 'totally accomplished by God in eternity past'.<sup>9</sup> Sheehan demonstrates the difference between hyper- and traditional Calvinists. Both agree that repentance and faith are God's gifts, but 'the Hyper-Calvinist builds a superstructure on this truth drawing out what he believes to be its logical consequences,' and making the following three deductions. 1) The unregenerate cannot be commanded to believe and repent. 2) All scriptural commands,

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<sup>4</sup> Clipsham, 'Fuller' pt 1, *BQ* (July 1963) 101-105 (for more on points 7-8 see Fuller *Works* 4:79-111).

<sup>5</sup> Priest, 'Fuller's Response', *DBSJ* (Fall 2001), 45,46n3.

<sup>6</sup> Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 89.

<sup>7</sup> Howson, 'Question of Orthodoxy', PhD, 188.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, 'Primer' on Hyper-Calvinism', <http://www.romans45.org/articles/hypercal.htm>

<sup>9</sup> Haykin, 'Hyper-Calvinism', 5-6,9-15: <https://credomag.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Hyper-Calvinism-and-the-theology-of-John-Gill.pdf>



exhortations and invitations to repent and believe must either be directed to the regenerate, or 'made in a context unconnected with spiritual salvation'. 3) Only those conscious of the Spirit's work (sensible sinners) can respond to these commands, and only these should be directed to do so.<sup>10</sup> Roberts identified its strong emphasis on God's sovereignty and supremacy especially in providence and salvation, its support for double predestination or positive reprobation, its supralapsarian position on election, and eternal justification, all evidenced by 'a passive or even resistant attitude towards evangelism and the missionary enterprise', and no place found for human effort or responsibility.<sup>11</sup> R T Kendall defines hyper-Calvinism as 'a spirit that militates against evangelism and the free offer of the gospel', a spirit because it 'does not essentially differ from high Calvinism except in actual practice'.<sup>12</sup> Finally a dictionary of reformed tradition defines hyper-Calvinism as 'an extreme form of Calvinism' which denies universal calling, and thus the need for evangelism through the free gospel offer. This grows 'out of a rationalistic bent, focusing on God's eternal decrees while remaining uncomfortable with the dynamic interplay between God's sovereignty and human responsibility'. Its 'excessively monergistic perspective on salvation and irresistible grace that denies or strongly downplays the means God uses' to accomplish his purposes is unlike Reformed theology which 'normally affirms the mysterious concordance between God's sovereignty ... and genuine human agency'.<sup>13</sup>

Some who self-identified as hyper-Calvinists have also defined it. William Palmer (1799-1873) informed Charles Spurgeon that there were three 'cardinal points of difference, tangible, and easily understood' between Spurgeon and hyper-Calvinists, ie the nature and extent of these three: moral obligation, the atonement, and gospel invitations.<sup>14</sup> James Wells (1803-1872), another critic of Spurgeon, stressed the importance of distinct categories particularly two kinds

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<sup>10</sup> Sheehan, 'Presentation: Critique', *Foundations* (Nov 1982) 42.

<sup>11</sup> Roberts, *Continuity and Change*, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Kendall, *Stand Up*, 120.

<sup>13</sup> Kapic/Lugt, *Pocket Dictionary*, 61,99.

<sup>14</sup> Palmer, *Letter to Spurgeon*, 1-8.

of believing: temporal non-saving faith and God's gift to his elect.<sup>15</sup> William Styles (1842-1914) trained at Spurgeon's College, later joined the Strict and Particular Baptists but continued to hold Spurgeon in high regard. He defined hyper-Calvinism as the creed of those who 'regard salvation as a Divine work wrought in the hearts of the elect only, and in no sense contingent on the will of man for its commencement, continuance, and consummation'.<sup>16</sup>

There are of course variations within hyper-Calvinism, as within any tradition. Denial of common grace was not characteristic during our period of study, for example, although it is a logical progression from rejection of the well-meant offer. Hyper-Calvinism may be more conspicuous in polemical writings, particularly against Arminianism. Its strength typically lies in oral tradition and practice such as discussion, fellowships, letters and preaching, and in preaching it is often recognised by the absence of words rather than their presence. Some preachers studiously avoid addressing the unconverted at all. Others skirt around the way they address them, never offering Christ nor calling for faith, guarding themselves from implying 'creature ability'.<sup>17</sup> Yet others stress the need for warrants and qualifications necessary for faith.

## Part 2 Hyper-Calvinism in literature

The concept behind hyper-Calvinism exploits the human tendency to absolve oneself from blame in view of God's irresistible will, pleading impotence while hiding behind his decrees. The apostle Paul questioned culpability in light of God's sovereignty: 'Why then does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?' (Romans 9:19). There are complex issues concerning God's permission of his ethically-responsible creatures to perform evil in order to accomplish what he has prohibited.<sup>18</sup> At face-value such cases as God's intentional use of men to crucify his Son, or his hardening Pharaoh's heart to demonstrate and heighten

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<sup>15</sup> Wells, 'Epistles' Nos 18 and 47, *EV* (1855) 282ff and (1858) 230ff, available at [http://surreytabernaclepulp.ipage.com/files/Other%20Documents/WELLS%20LITTLE%20ON%20LETTERS%2011\\_20.pdf](http://surreytabernaclepulp.ipage.com/files/Other%20Documents/WELLS%20LITTLE%20ON%20LETTERS%2011_20.pdf) 28-32, [http://surreytabernaclepulp.ipage.com/files/Other%20Documents/WELLS%20LITTLE%20ON%20LETTERS%2041\\_50.pdf](http://surreytabernaclepulp.ipage.com/files/Other%20Documents/WELLS%20LITTLE%20ON%20LETTERS%2041_50.pdf) 19-20.

<sup>16</sup> Styles, *Guide*, 246-247.

<sup>17</sup> See Sheehan, 'Presentation', *Foundations* (May 1982) 28-29.

<sup>18</sup> eg Exodus 4:21, 9:16-17; Acts 2:23; Romans 11:7-9.

his own power, appear to suggest he is bypassing or overruling human accountability to achieve his purpose. It is at this enigmatic junction between the polarities of human responsibility and divine sovereignty that hyper-Calvinism emerges.

Several Scottish writers have linked hyper-Calvinism to a kind of overbearing and narrow portrayal of Calvinism. In one of James Grant's stories, *Jonah on Rousay*, the violence-hating Hobo abused Peigi the minister's daughter. He tried to analyse his complicated feelings, listening 'in his mind to a dialogue between an all-seeing God who had foreordained the rape from the beginning of time for His own inscrutable purpose, and a blind scientist with a dice box in his hand' who said everything was 'random chance, and didn't signify'.<sup>19</sup>

Perhaps the best example is James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, in which the antihero Robert Wringhim skewed predestination to absolve him from accountability: 'No act of mine can mar the eternal counsel, or in the smallest degree alter or extenuate one event which was decreed before the foundations of the world were laid.' Despite his attempts to earn God's favour with prayers and duties, he remained fatalistically convinced that if his name were missing from the eternal book of life, it could never be inserted in time. Nevertheless he allowed his father to persuade him of his conversion, despite lack of any evidence, or personal conviction of faith. From that day he became confident of his election and consequent infallibility and immunity, and the devil began his association with him. He believed that God's withholding the grace of repentance rendered him unaccountable for failure, and his justified elect state granted him the assurance of the impossibility of ever falling from it. Retreating increasingly into 'the eternal and irrevocable decrees of God', his spiritual pride was only equalled by his contempt for sinners, for he had been raised to pray only for the elect. Immediately his election was 'revealed on earth', he began to argue against the kind of fervent gospel preaching which strove to change what God 'by his act of absolute predestination' had rendered impossible. He saw 'the folly and inconsistency' of ministers inducing ('haranguing') sinners to do that for which they lacked power. 'Seeing that God had from all eternity decided the fate of every individual that was to be born of woman, how vain was it in man to

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<sup>19</sup> Grant, 'Jonah', *Their Children*, 140-141.

endeavour to save those whom their Maker had, by an unchangeable decree, doomed to destruction.’ Despite Wringhim’s misgivings that the scriptures seemed to teach otherwise, he wrestled with this ‘absolute contradiction’.<sup>20</sup>

In exposing this most complex theological paradox of the interplay between divine sovereignty and human duty, Hogg’s parody of hyper-Calvinism and predestinarian antinomianism displays uncannily-accurate observations on the damaging results of misrepresenting such Calvinistic tenets as predestination, human inability and final perseverance. Not only does it result in abdication of responsibility, but it tends to a cynicism regarding the logic and imperative of the universal gospel offer. Andrew Fuller, one of hyper-Calvinism’s earliest and most effective opponents, could have been describing Wringhim when he wrote of those who deludedly rely on a ‘supposed revelation’ of their election to secure their eternal safety and happiness. Any later susceptibility to doubt or suspicions of self-deception they dismiss as temptation or unbelief, so convinced are they of the divine source of their revealed election. ‘Stupified by the intoxicating potion, he dreams of being a favourite of heaven,’ and evinces ‘bitter contempt of others’.<sup>21</sup>

John Bligh claims Hogg’s work is less a satire than an exposure of ‘Antinomian Predestinationism’, showing that when St Paul’s thought is interpreted not ‘in a wholesome sense’ within the New Testament context, but ‘isolated and overemphasized ... it reveals dangerous tendencies’. Paul’s combination of predestination with justification by faith and eternal security brings ‘absurd implications’, Bligh says. His failure to draw conclusions from his own teaching have enabled others to draw them: ‘The Antinomian does not need to introduce any tenets of his own; he has only to select from St. Paul, to omit certain distinctions and qualifications, ... to draw inferences which Paul himself did not draw.’<sup>22</sup> In fact Paul was acutely aware that the theology of salvation by grace alone has the potential for abuse: he repudiated the claim that faith and grace make the law void, upheld the liberty of God’s law in salvation, and defended

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<sup>20</sup> Hogg, *Confessions*, 228,111,122,124-125,43,130-131.

<sup>21</sup> Fuller, ‘Antinomianism’, *Works* 4:148-149,152-153.

<sup>22</sup> eg Bligh, ‘Doctrinal Premises’, *Studies in Scottish Literature* (1984), 149-151.

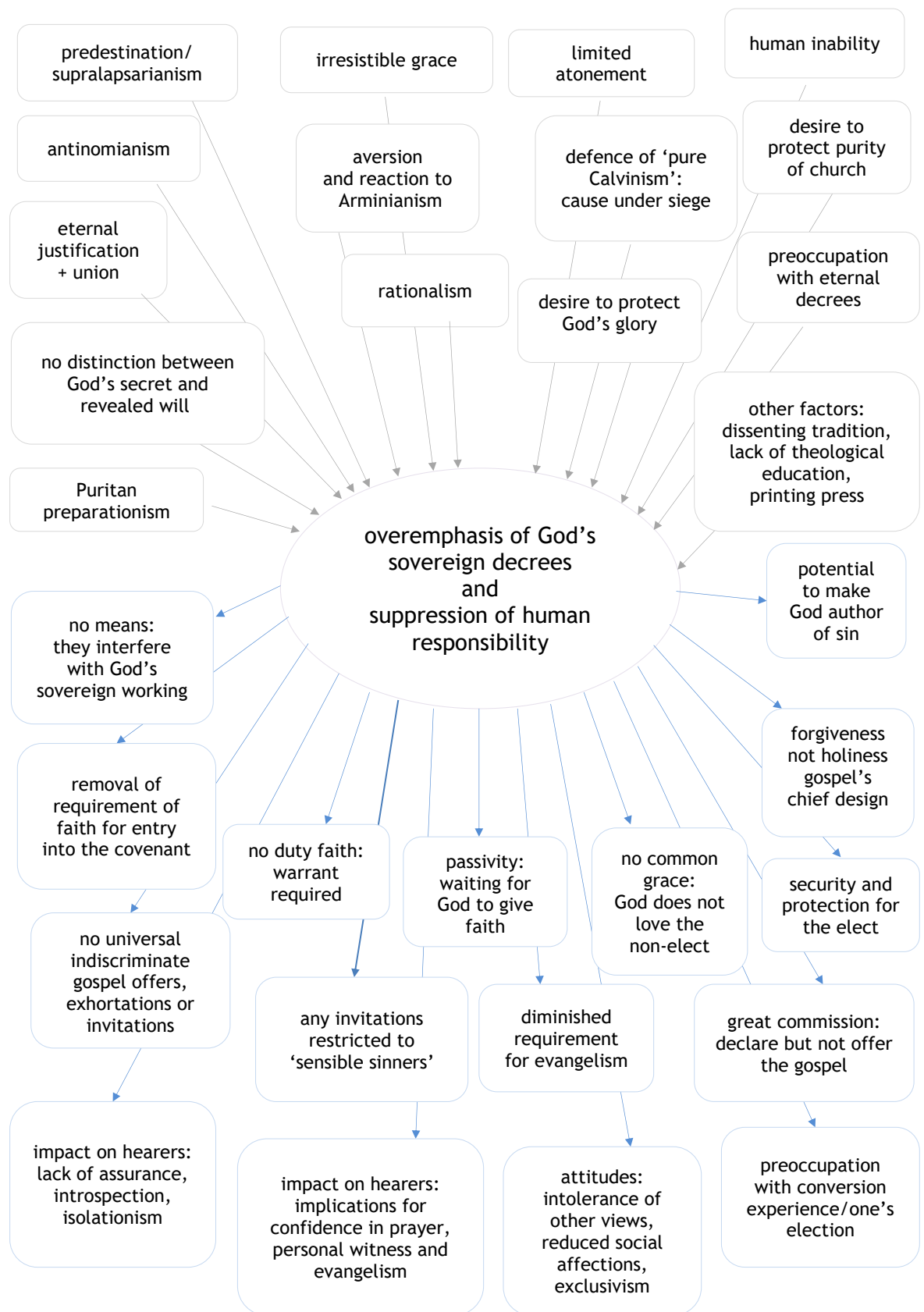
himself against the charge of *anti nomos*.<sup>23</sup> Bligh's critique may be harsh about Paul's teaching, but it highlights something fundamental about hyper-Calvinism: it is neither invention nor heresy, but rather a tilting of existing doctrine, a way of looking at theology that emphasises some aspects and minimises others. Thus at every stage it can produce scriptural justification.

### **Part 3      The theological system of hyper-Calvinism**

Some of the factors which contributed to the development of hyper-Calvinism in the early 1700s (grey inward arrows) with a cluster of identifiable outcomes (blue outward arrows) are shown in this diagram, which might help illustrate the complex process.

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<sup>23</sup> Romans 3:31, 6:1-2; Galatians 5:13-14



**Figure 1 Contributory factors to, and outcomes of, hyper-Calvinism**

The core of hyper-Calvinism is an imbalance in the imbedded relational tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility, allowing the divine

initiative to eclipse the human response. It conflates God's eternal decrees and their temporal execution, arguing from the first to the second, rather than from the second to the first. Scripture is not silent concerning God's secret or decretive will, but its emphasis is obedience to his preceptive will.<sup>24</sup> 'The general course of scriptural instruction does not proceed on the basis of these awful and mysterious truths, but on the plain and intelligible ground of God's revealed will to man, as ... rational and accountable,' wrote Daniel Wilson in an article describing seven characteristics of hyper-Calvinism or what he called 'a crude Calvinistic theology'. 'I apprehend, that for one verse referring to the secret decrees of God, there are an hundred which stand on the broad foundation of man's responsibility and duty.'<sup>25</sup> Therefore William Cunningham advised that scripture's plain declarations should form our opinion of what is less clearly revealed.<sup>26</sup>

'Arminianism was the theological system to which the Hyper-Calvinists showed the greatest animosity,'<sup>27</sup> Toon stated, and there was clear divergence between them. Nevertheless the two theological systems share philosophical principles. One is that divine sovereignty is incompatible with human freedom or responsibility; another that ability limits or determines obligation. Thus while John (Rabbi) Duncan observed that 'hyper-Calvinism is all house and no door; Arminianism is all door and no house,' he also suggested that hyper-Calvinism (antinomianism) and Arminianism share the same root, the 'true synergia' being that 'God works all, and man does all.'<sup>28</sup> This thesis argues that a theological formulation which claims that God commands everyone to repent and believe despite their lack of moral ability to do so better reflects the mainstream position of Reformed theology and does more justice to the teaching of scripture as a whole than the constrained logics of either of these two formulations:

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<sup>24</sup> eg from gospels: Matthew 3:2,8, 4:17, 9:2,9,29, 11:28, 12:13, 14:29, 15:28, 20:31, 28:19-20; Mark 1:4,15; Luke 13:3; John 20:31. From Acts: 2:38-39, 3:19, 15:7, 16:31, 17:30, 22:16, 26:20, 28:24. Other examples: Numbers 14:11; Joshua 24:15; II Chronicles 7:14; Proverbs 28:13; Isaiah 1:18; Romans 10:9; II Corinthians 5:20; Hebrews 11:1,6; James 4:8; I John 1:9, 3:23; Revelation 3:19.

<sup>25</sup> DW, 'Remarks', *Christian Observer* (Oct 1814), 622.

<sup>26</sup> Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 2:428.

<sup>27</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 133.

<sup>28</sup> Knight, *Colloquia*, 156,27,29-30.

**Table 1 Comparison between Arminian and hyper-Calvinist logic**

<b>scheme</b>	<b>belief</b>	<b>logic</b>
Arminianism	God commands everyone to repent and believe <i>therefore</i> they must have the ability to do so	obligation ∴ ability
hyper-Calvinism	no one has the ability to repent and believe <i>therefore</i> there is no obligation to do so	inability ∴ no obligation

Fuller recognised this phenomenon. ‘As in many other cases, opposite extremes are known to meet.’ ‘There are certain important points in which false Calvinism, in its ardent desire to steer clear of Arminianism, is brought to agree with it. ... The one pleads for graceless sinners being free from obligation; the other admits of obligation, but founds it on the notion of universal grace. Both are agreed, that where there is no grace, there is no duty.’<sup>29</sup> John Macleod also recognised this: ‘In regard to the claims of God, each of these extremes worked from a common principle which they turned to opposite ends. The Hyper-Calvinistic brethren held that there is no world-wide call to Christ sent out to all sinners ..., neither are all bidden to take Him as their Saviour.’ They came to this position because they reasoned that spiritually-bankrupt man ‘cannot be called upon to do what is out of the compass of his power.’ His inability to repent or believe renders it ‘out of place’ to command him to do so. Macleod observed, ‘In this ... we find the common Arminian position that man’s responsibility is limited by his ability,’ for Arminians believe sinners would not be called to repent and believe without a certain ability to do so. ‘Each side’, explained Macleod, ‘takes up the principle from its own end. They fail together to recognise that the sinner is responsible for his spiritual impotence.’<sup>30</sup>

The conviction of the incompatibility of divine sovereignty and human freedom is generally addressed by suppressing one and maximising the other. Writing on behalf of the Strict and Particular Baptists, Styles, an educated influential hyper-Calvinist, exemplified this. He was convinced that truth must be consistent with itself, and therefore, ‘since Human Responsibility and Divine Sovereignty do not simply involve a paradox, but are destructive to each other,

<sup>29</sup> Fuller, ‘Gospel Worthy’, *Works* 1:12,98-99.

<sup>30</sup> Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 140-141.



*one must be untrue.*<sup>31</sup> Fuller did not deny or simplify the dilemma. He also argued for the consistency of truth but reached a different conclusion to Styles:

Were a difficulty allowed to exist, as to the reconciling of these subjects, it would not warrant a rejection of either of them. If I find two doctrines affirmed, or implied in the scriptures, which, to my feeble understanding, may seem to clash, I ought not to embrace the one, and to reject the other, because of their supposed inconsistency: for, on the same ground, another person might embrace that which I reject, and reject that which I embrace, and have equal *scriptural authority* for his faith, as I have for mine.

Yet this is exactly what many have done: some taking one side, some the other, wrote Fuller. Hence ‘we hear of *Calvinistic* and *Arminian texts*; as though these leaders had agreed to divide the scriptures between them. The truth is, there are but two ways for us to take: one is, to reject them *both*, and the Bible with them, on account of its inconsistencies; the other is, to embrace them both, concluding that, as they are both revealed in the scriptures, they are both true, and both consistent, and that it is owing to the darkness of our understandings that they do not appear so to us.’<sup>32</sup> Spurgeon, surrounded by hyper-Calvinism as he was, recognised that few can see the ‘two facts’ of God’s predestination and man’s responsibility. ‘They are believed to be inconsistent and contradictory; but they are not.’ They do not need to be reconciled any more than friends who have never fallen out.<sup>33</sup> In more modern terms, Michael Horton ponders the question of ‘double agency’. He explains that ‘Ironically Arminians and hyper-Calvinists typically view divine and human activity as a single pie, divided unevenly between both parties.’ More helpful is to think ‘of God’s own way of being free (as sovereign Creator) and the creaturely freedom that God has given to us as his image-bearers. This view of the God-world relationship shapes our understanding of “double agency.” God wills and works and we will and work, but at no point do we trip over each other. God’s agency operates over, in, and with creaturely agency.’ He further explains: ‘Hyper-Calvinism begins with the central dogma of divine liberty (what Pinnock calls “omnicausalism”), while Arminians begin with the central dogma of human liberty. However, the consistent teaching of Reformed theologians has affirmed God’s sovereign

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<sup>31</sup> Styles, *Guide*, 86 (my italics).

<sup>32</sup> Fuller, ‘Gospel Worthy’, *Works* 1:78.

<sup>33</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:176-177; also Sermons 207, 1762.

decree concerning “whatsoever comes to pass,” yet without coercion or directly causing every event ... . *How* both can be true remains a mystery to us, but *that* both are true is clearly revealed in Scripture. It would only be a contradiction if God’s freedom and ours belonged to the same register.’<sup>34</sup>

The Westminster Confession, to which Horton refers, while upholding God’s sovereignty in foreordination also guards human freedom (3.1):

God, from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby **neither** is God the author of sin, **nor** is violence offered to the will of the creatures; **nor** is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

And again (5.2):

Although, in relation to the fore-knowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

Cunningham explained that, respecting both liberty and contingency, disowning determinism, it grants the freedom and responsibility of the creature, and demonstrates that it is established by God’s decree, as a second cause and condition, so that men’s actions are mysteriously both free *and* predestined, predestined and contingent. It seems on reading the first two lines of 3.1 that ‘in some sense’ liberty is excluded and necessity established, but the series of negative observations, (‘neither’, ‘nor’, ‘nor’, marked in bold above) is intended to disclaim ‘certain extreme views as to the inferences which some might deduce from ... universal foreordination’. The Confession is expressly asserting ‘that the three things here specified do not follow from foreordination’. Calvinism maintains that God executes his decrees by bringing about different classes of events ‘in full accordance with their own distinct, proper natures,—bringing to pass necessary things necessarily, free things freely, and contingent things contingently’. In this sense, Cunningham affirmed, human beings are free, not necessary, agents: ‘God has made them rational and responsible, and He has

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<sup>34</sup> Horton, *For Calvinism*, 65-67.

endowed them with at least such freedom or liberty as is necessary to responsibility.’<sup>35</sup> ‘This world of free beings, and the order of nature which works by second causes and God-established laws, is the product of the sovereign God.’<sup>36</sup>

Within the Reformed tradition, there was generally no inherent conflict between the universal gospel offer and basic Calvinistic tenets such as particular redemption, irresistible grace and human inability; albeit the principle of accommodation and the understanding of God’s one will expressed as both hidden and revealed, were important elements in impacting their understanding and easing inherent tensions between them.<sup>37</sup> Arminianism states that Jesus obtained redemption and forgiveness for everyone, enjoyed only by those who believe.<sup>38</sup> John Goodwin, the new Arminianism’s exponent,<sup>39</sup> believed that the numerous texts offering pardon for all on condition of belief clearly evidenced universal redemption, and that to restrain salvation and redemption ‘to any lesser number of men than all’ was to make God duplicitous.<sup>40</sup> Hyper-Calvinists reached a different conclusion: not universal redemption, but a restricted gospel. With the birth of hyper-Calvinism there was a shift in terms, so that advocates of the free offer were termed Arminian, because it was deemed impossible to offer Christ freely without holding universal redemption. The following diagram demonstrates this shift:

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<sup>35</sup> Cunningham, ‘Calvinism’, *Reformers*, 491,495.

<sup>36</sup> Jansma, ‘Westminster Confession’, *Presbyterian Guardian* (Jan 1942), 11.

<sup>37</sup> for more see Maclean, *Durham*, 19-20.

<sup>38</sup> Arminian Article II, Schaff, *Creeds*, 3.546.

<sup>39</sup> see More, ‘Goodwin’, *Journal of British Studies* (Autumn 1982); Coffey, *Goodwin*.

<sup>40</sup> Goodwin, *Redemption Redeemed*, 185-186.

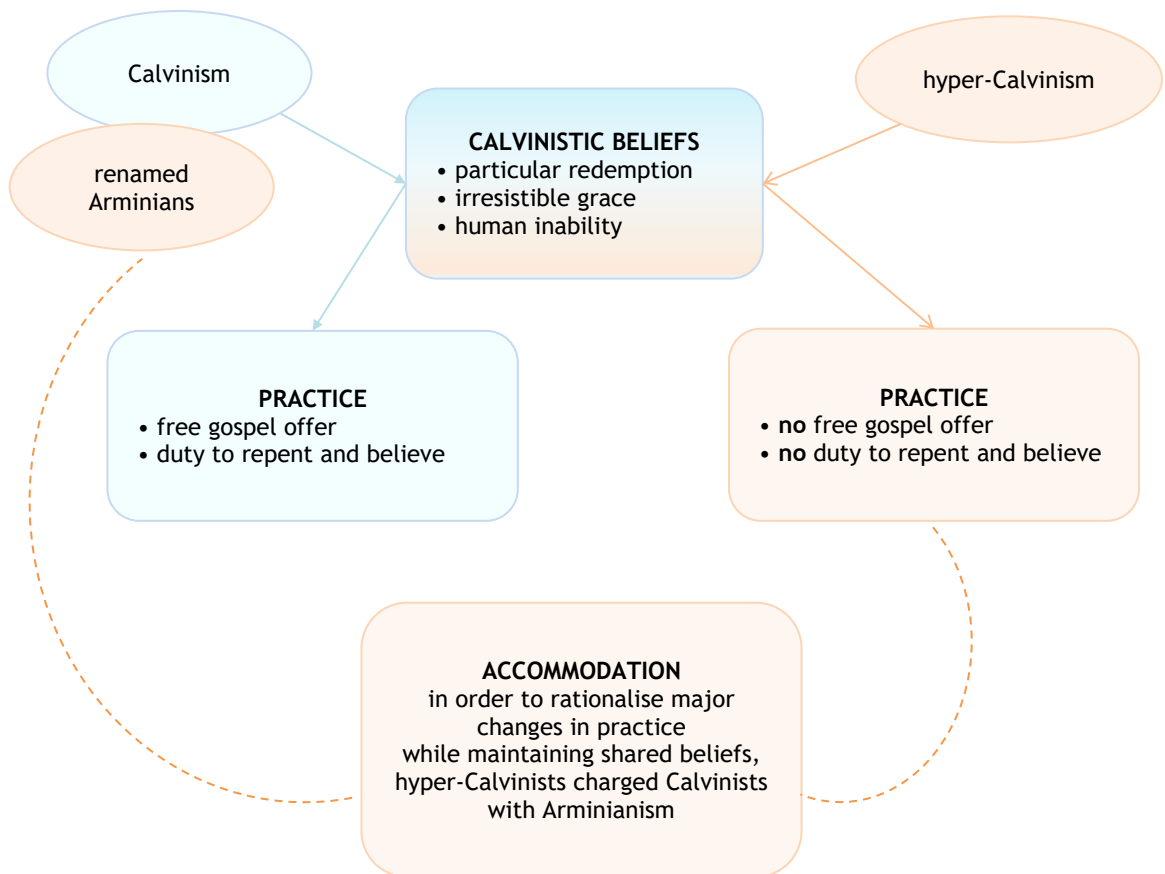


Figure 2 Diagram to illustrate hyper-Calvinism's shift of parameters

## Part 4 Clarifying terminology

This part with its six sections is intended to demonstrate some of the technical complexities around the precise classification of 'hyper-Calvinism'.

Preconceptions, inaccuracies, and even deliberate redefinitions, can lead to conflation or confusion with other kinds of Calvinism. As Peter Beck puts it, 'Different people mean different things even while using the same words.'<sup>41</sup> Its purpose is not to define or discuss Calvinism, but, while recognising that exact definitions can be problematic, to reaffirm boundaries, and to demonstrate that, though not always acknowledged, hyper-Calvinism is a separate identifiable

<sup>41</sup> Beck, 'Brine', *British Particular Baptists*, 4:217

system and its name, though often unpopular, is an accurate description of that system.

## 1 The term Calvinism

The theological system of Calvinism has been well defined in church confessions and creeds, based on the conclusions reached at the Synod of Dort's response to the Remonstrants in 1618-1619. These include the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Savoy Declaration of Congregationalism, the London Baptist Confessions, and the Westminster Standards representing Presbyterianism, including the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms and the Directory for Public Worship. But the *term* 'Calvinism' is not so well defined, and Horton, commenting on its unpopularity, states his preference for 'doctrines of grace', for example.<sup>42</sup>

First employed by Lutheran Joachim Westphal, John Calvin disliked the term.<sup>43</sup> As Muller explains, he 'thought of his own theology as an expression of catholic truth'. The later Reformed tradition has drawn on Calvin 'as one founding teacher among others, recognizing his abilities as a second-generation codifier of the Reformed faith'. Muller concludes that the term Calvinism and its acrostic TULIP have been problematic concerning the identity of the tradition and Calvin's relationship to it, and 'both identifiers are anachronistic and reductionistic'.<sup>44</sup> Donald Sinnema agrees that 'while the Canons are formulated in five points, it is historically misleading to designate these points as "Calvinism", as if they stemmed directly from Calvin; and the acronym TULIP is 'an unnuanced oversimplification and distortion that does not well represent Calvin or even the Canons', its first reference being 1905.<sup>45</sup> Kenneth Stewart writes that despite recent resurgence 'the modern Calvinist movement is conflicted' in its response to these five points: the 'sovereign grace' school defending its acronym as 'sacrosanct', and the 'apologetic' school equally zealous of advocating electing

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<sup>42</sup> Horton, *For Calvinism*, 19.

<sup>43</sup> Cottret, *Calvin*, 239.

<sup>44</sup> Muller, 'Was Calvin a Calvinist?' esp 1-2,4-5,7-8,15-17  
<https://agrammatos.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/was-calvin-a-calvinist-12-26-09.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> See Sinnema, 'Calvin', *Church History and Religious Culture* (2011) 87-89,102-103n78. Stewart, 'Points of Calvinism', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* (2008) 189-197.

grace but aware the five points ‘are capable of being grossly misunderstood’.<sup>46</sup> David Allen observes Daniel’s ‘crucial point’ that four-point Calvinism historically preceded five-point Calvinism.<sup>47</sup>

Given the ‘less than desirable’ term ‘Calvinism’, Stewart recommends replacing it with ‘Reformed theology’.<sup>48</sup> But this is not necessarily definitive either, being susceptible to misrepresentation. Ken Keathley, admittedly a non-traditional Calvinist,<sup>49</sup> appears to compound Reformed and hyper-Calvinistic theology when he identifies Reformed theologians such as Louis Berkhof and Francis Turretin with hyper-Calvinistic theologians such as Herman Hoeksema and Engelsma. He calls them all ‘decretal theologians’ because they adhere to the distinctive corollaries of decretal theology, namely denial of God’s universal love and desire for the salvation of all, resulting in restriction of gospel preaching with no genuine offer or appeal, negative consequences for evangelism and mission, and evisceration of the gospel.<sup>50</sup> This demonstrates confusion between Reformed and hyper-Calvinistic (or decretal as he calls it) theology. Association of Berkhof with Hoeksema is particularly problematic, for Hoeksema refused to subscribe to Berkhof’s denomination’s 1924 articulation of common grace and the gospel offer, and departed to found a separate denomination, whose distinctive was the sovereignty, particularism and unconditionality of grace.<sup>51</sup> Matthew Barrett, a strongly-traditional Calvinist who believes Keathley is Arminian, agrees that he ‘misrepresents the “decretal” view’ by putting hyper-Calvinists ‘in the same camp as traditional Calvinists’. ‘It is unfortunate’, he writes, that ‘Hyper-Calvinists like Hoeksema are wrongly used as representatives of Calvinism instead of the traditional Reformed theologians.’<sup>52</sup> Steve Lemke voices his valid concern for the emerging trajectory ‘moving from moderate Calvinism to more militant forms’; nevertheless he too includes Engelsma’s hyper-Calvinism or ‘nonconversionist Calvinism’ in ‘all major forms of Calvinism’, using him as the spokesperson for the ‘controversial point among Calvinists’ of whether the well-

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<sup>46</sup> Stewart, ‘Points of Calvinism’, 187-188.

<sup>47</sup> Allen, *Extent of Atonement*, 419. (See Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, Appendix A, 777-828)

<sup>48</sup> Stewart, *Ten Myths*, 11n1.

<sup>49</sup> see Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 1-12.

<sup>50</sup> Keathley, ‘Salvation’, *JGES* (Spring 2006) 8-12; Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 47-51.

<sup>51</sup> Synod 1924, CRC, 4-126, 145-147.

<sup>52</sup> Barrett, ‘Reclaiming Monergism’, PhD, 420n28, 130n159.

meant offer should be promiscuous and universal.<sup>53</sup> This point should not be contended among Calvinists, but its denial is the hallmark of hyper-Calvinism, and therefore in allowing Engelsma to represent Calvinism, Lemke is conflating Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism. However the issue may be more complex than this misrepresentation of Calvinism by ‘Arminians’: Calvinists themselves may be responsible for smudging the boundaries between Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism, conflicted by the apparently-contradictory theology of God offering something predestination may prevent him from giving. This in turn has led to guardedness around preaching the full free gospel offer, which is a kind of implicit hyper-Calvinism characterised, not by overt denial of that offer, but by a conspicuous lack of its strong positive affirmation.

The simple term ‘Calvinism’ can attract unappealing or inaccurate epithets such as hard-line, extreme, rationalistic, supralapsarian, legalistic, new, or prefixes like neo-, paleo- and hypo-. Similarly the definition of Calvinism itself can be prejudiced or misinformed, with some descriptions sounding more like Hogg’s depressing hyper-Calvinistic caricature, as the following excerpt from a reputable dictionary of church history demonstrates. It is ‘a logical and compact doctrine, lucid, harmonious, and horrible. It starts from one tenet [the sovereignty of God], and from that argues deductively without any qualification. ... The system is an intellectualist construction, entirely regardless of the facts of life. ... There never was nor will be any freedom save that of God’s eternal will.’ Human nature being evil ‘has no rights; every man is *ipso jure* damned;’ only the few fortunate elect, ‘being predestined to glory, cannot by any outward sin sever themselves from their destiny’.<sup>54</sup>

## 2 Variations of Calvinism

Cunningham stated that regarding divine decrees the only two possible alternatives were Calvinism and Arminianism, with ‘no medium between them’; and between Calvinists there could be no significant variation.<sup>55</sup> Daniel however believes church history demonstrates these two systems share middle ground.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Lemke, ‘Critique’, ch5 *Whosoever Will*, 142-145,152.

<sup>54</sup> Figgis, ‘Calvinism’, *Dictionary of English Church History*, 80-81.

<sup>55</sup> Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 2:430-431.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 732.

Shaw calls nineteenth-century Calvinism ‘a fragmentary phenomenon’ which the evangelical movement permeated to varying degrees.<sup>57</sup> And Henry Cole, Calvin’s translator, commented, ‘There are, in the religious world, almost as many different shades, phases, kinds, and degrees, of *Calvinism*, as there are *Calvinists*, (or professors of the doctrines of Calvin).’<sup>58</sup>

Even though hyper-Calvinism as a system originated in the early 1700s, the prefix was not generally adopted for another century. Fuller, one of the earliest recorded to use it, described three ‘shades of Calvinism’: high, moderate and strict. *High* was ‘more Calvinistic than Calvin himself, ... bordering on Antinomianism’ of which kind there were ‘too many’. *Moderate* was half Arminian, also called Baxterian. *Strict* was holding Calvin’s system without slavishly following him. Although this was Fuller’s self-identified position, he was ‘represented throughout the religious circles of London, as an Arminian’ because he taught that the gospel is ‘accompanied with a free and indefinite invitation to embrace it, and an assurance that whosoever complies with the invitation ... shall have everlasting life’, and that this applies to ‘sinners *as sinners*’ without qualification.<sup>59</sup> Later, certainly by 1815, Fuller’s categorisation had progressed: he ‘now accounted’ high Calvinism as *hyper-Calvinism*, feeling it more accurately and expressively described its distance from moderate Calvinism.<sup>60</sup>

Mark Stevenson has categorised nineteenth-century Calvinistic soteriology, drawing on Bruce Hindmarsh’s study of mid-eighteenth-century evangelical theology.<sup>61</sup> Stevenson modified it to distinguish between high and hyper-Calvinism, whereas Hindmarsh blended the two categories. He noted that although categorisation can lead to reductionism, ‘notable distinctions appear on the spectrum of beliefs regarding divine sovereignty and human freedom.’ Real-life terminology was not always as uniform or consistent as these five distinct categories. For example, moderate may embrace strict, and high may

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<sup>57</sup> Shaw, *High Calvinists*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Cole, ‘Preface’, x, *Calvin’s Calvinism*.

<sup>59</sup> Ryland *Fuller*, 346; also Fuller Jr, *Complete Works* 1:77; Fuller, *Gospel its Own Witness*, n261-262 (my italics).

<sup>60</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 25,29 (in Feb 1815 letter); Fuller ‘Strictures’, Letter 3, in *Works* 3:384; Fuller Jr, *Complete Works* 1:12,16,350.

<sup>61</sup> Hindmarsh, *Newton*, 124-125.



refer to hyper-Calvinism.<sup>62</sup> The following is my summary of Stevenson's classification:

**Table 2 Summary of Stevenson's classification**

category	subject	description
1 evangelical Arminianism	election	conditional
	atonement	unlimited, universal in scope
	final salvation	contingent upon perseverance
	free offer	based on universal atonement
2 moderate Calvinism	election	unconditional
	reprobation	denied
	grace	irresistible
	atonement	unlimited re provision, efficient for elect
	perseverance	final, but sanctification necessary
	free offer	based on universal atonement
3 strict Calvinism	election	unconditional, based on infralapsarian scheme
	reprobation	softened/denied
	grace	irresistible
	atonement	particular
	final perseverance + sanctification	affirmed
	free offer	based on general sufficiency of Christ's death for sinners, whose duty is to repent and believe
4 high Calvinism	election	unconditional based on supralapsarian scheme
	reprobation	strongly held
	justification	eternal (often produced theological antinomianism)
	free offer	did not generally restrict gospel preaching
5 hyper-Calvinism	free offer	<i>mirrored high Calvinism at most points but</i> - unwilling to offer the gospel freely to everyone
	divine sovereignty	took to such an extreme that they:
	duty of sinners	1 denied it was the duty of all to repent + believe
	preaching	2 restricted gospel preaching

Toon categorised three types of Calvinism. *Moderated*: 'a combination of Calvinism and Arminianism' emphasising experience rather than dogma such as predestination, limited atonement or irresistible grace; *high*, emphasising these key Reformed doctrines, and which, when modified and hardened by antinomianism, progressed to *hyper-Calvinism*.<sup>63</sup> Because the division of high and

<sup>62</sup> Stevenson, *Doctrines of Grace*, 41-42.

<sup>63</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 41-43,66,143-144.

low Calvinism is used in different ways, some equating high with hyper-Calvinism, and low with everything else, Daniel shares Toon's and others' common descriptions of low, high and hyper-Calvinism (although in fact Toon never referred to low Calvinism!). But he admits this classification can also be simplistic and 'susceptible to misunderstanding'; partly because the terms have been used inaccurately, and partly because the two higher schools which stress limited atonement tend to dismiss low Calvinists as Arminians, an 'incorrect evaluation'; or as is the tendency of hyper-Calvinists to label moderate Calvinism as low. Daniel illustrates this by Calvin's position within this 'division' based on the extent of the atonement. According to him, Calvin did not embrace limited atonement, therefore was not high. He embraced the free offer, therefore was not hyper-. Thus his affinity would have been with low, or four-point, Calvinism. Lower Calvinists strove to maintain the balance of divine sovereignty and human liberty, while higher Calvinists jeopardised it.<sup>64</sup> Fuller would have agreed with Daniel's assessment of Calvin: 'Were you to read', he wrote to a hyper-Calvinist, 'many of Calvin's Sermons, without knowing who was the author, you would be led, from the ideas you appear at present to entertain, to pronounce him an Arminian; neither would Goodwin, nor Owen, nor Charnock, nor Flavel, nor Bunyan, escape the charge.'<sup>65</sup>

The tendency to redefine Calvinistic categories is an important characteristic of hyper-Calvinism. Its followers habitually downgraded Calvinists to Arminians, because they believed the gospel offer had 'an Arminianising tendency which could only detract from God's sovereignty in salvation, and foster unworthy synergistic notions', as Sell explains.<sup>66</sup> We have noted Fuller's relegation to Arminian, despite his self-definition as a 'strict' Calvinist. In a memoir after his death it was recorded that what pseudo-Calvinists labelled his Arminian 'new system' was in fact 'little more than a revival of the old Calvinism, which subsisted before the time of Hussey and the other founders of Pseudo-Calvinism'.<sup>67</sup> John Watson of the American Primitive Baptists warned of this realignment of terms by 'ultra' Calvinists who had successfully suppressed gospel

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<sup>64</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 734-735, 737.

<sup>65</sup> Fuller, 'Two Sermons', *Works*, 4:445.

<sup>66</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 87.

<sup>67</sup> 'Memoir', *BM* (July 1815), 267.

invitations by labelling them Arminian: ‘the exhorter is afraid to call on sinners to repent, for fear of being called an Arminian.’<sup>68</sup> Redefinition of mainstream Calvinism into ‘modern Calvinism’ was common,<sup>69</sup> for example the *Earthen Vessel* editor referred to its ‘apparently new systems of preaching’.<sup>70</sup> Palmer defined those who ‘hold forth general invitations and offered mercy’ as ‘modern Calvinists’, demeaning them as ‘those of middling stature’.<sup>71</sup> Styles defined moderate Calvinism as embracing the ‘five points’ but incorporating Arminianism with them, styled Baxterianism, Fullerism, or ‘the “yea and nay” Gospel, on account of the contradictions it contains’. Unlike some he acknowledged hyper- (or ‘extreme’) Calvinism as a separate category.<sup>72</sup> Along with his denomination, the Protestant Reformed Church which split from the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 over the common grace controversy, Engelsma rejects the well-meant offer as both a compromise and surrender of the Reformed faith. To avoid the inevitable charge of hyper-Calvinism, he recalibrates theological categories and claims the well-meant offer ‘conflicts with basic Reformed truths’, notably predestination, calling it ‘hypo-Calvinism’ because ‘it *falls below* true Calvinism.’ ‘Rejection of the well-meant offer is pure, sound, consistent Calvinism,’ he writes, harmonising with other truths like predestination and reprobation. He even warns that some might confuse his denial of the free offer with true hyper-Calvinism, which he defines as restriction of gospel preaching to the elect, and denial of duty-faith.<sup>73</sup> Hoeksema, Engelsma’s predecessor, spoke of ‘double-track theology’ which runs on both Reformed and Arminian tracks: ‘They claim that they believe the doctrine of predestination, election and reprobation; but they also defend and hold the error that God loves all men.’<sup>74</sup> He likened this rotation between Calvin and Arminius to the two-faced Roman god Janus who simultaneously looked in opposite directions.<sup>75</sup> Walter Copinger described ‘a modification of Calvin’s scheme known as *semi-Calvinism*, or *Baxterianism*’ which ‘strikes into a middle path between Calvinism and

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<sup>68</sup> Watson, *Old Baptist*, 327-330, 84-85.

<sup>69</sup> Palmer, *Free Enquiry*, 9, 10; Wilks, *Defence*, 14-16, 18, 20 etc.

<sup>70</sup> Editor’s comment in Wyard, ‘Explanatory Note’, *EV* (Jan 1868), 30.

<sup>71</sup> Palmer, *Free Enquiry*, 10; Palmer, *Letter*, 6.

<sup>72</sup> Styles, *Guide* 246-247, Preface v-vi.

<sup>73</sup> Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 7-8, 14-15.

<sup>74</sup> Hoeksema, ‘Single or Double?’, *Standard Bearer* (1964).

<sup>75</sup> Hoeksema, *Triple Breach*, 30.

Arminianism, endeavouring to unite both schemes'. There are various modifications which differ as the views approach nearer to Calvinism or to Arminianism.<sup>76</sup> James Wells, Charles Spurgeon's contemporary, said that 'half-way Calvinism is little better than freewill [Arminianism]. Yea, in some respects worse, because more deceptive.'<sup>77</sup> This 'contradictory' gospel was variously labelled a 'yea and nay gospel', a 'motley religion', 'evangelical';<sup>78</sup> and William Gadsby called low Calvinism or Fullerism 'a religion of the mongrel breed', as he emphasised the antithesis between that and high Calvinism or antinomianism.<sup>79</sup> Spurgeon testified: 'It is the custom of a certain body of Ultra-Calvinists, to call those of us who teach that it is the duty of man to repent and believe, "Mongrel Calvinists."'"<sup>80</sup>

High and hyper-Calvinism are similar in emphases and terminology, for underlying both, as Daniel wrote, are premises shared by them distinct from the lower schools. Both are particularist and stress divine sovereignty over human responsibility, but the distinction lies in the former's acceptance of free offers and duty-faith. Hyper-Calvinism's rejection of these puts it into a category of its own, or, as Daniel puts it: 'Hyperism is the intruder into Reformed theology and by over-emphasizing divine sovereignty it has effectively threatened the doctrine of human responsibility as taught by the original Reformers.'<sup>81</sup> It is significant that Toon and Daniel, both modern students of hyper-Calvinism, clearly differentiate these two categories. In an attempt to prove Knollys was high but not hyper-Calvinist, Howson also clearly differentiates the two, emphasising that 'Hyper-Calvinism is one step beyond that of the High Calvinism of the seventeenth century.' He illustrates this by listing seven theological tenets of high Calvinism to which Knollys conformed, and five distinctives of hyper-Calvinism, two primary and three secondary (see pt1), to which he did

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<sup>76</sup> Copinger, *Treatise*, 400.

<sup>77</sup> Wells, 'Epistles', 46, *EV* (1858), 176ff, available at [http://surreytabernaclepulp.ipage.com/files/Other%20Documents/WELLS%20LITTLE%20ON%20LETTERS%2041\\_50.pdf](http://surreytabernaclepulp.ipage.com/files/Other%20Documents/WELLS%20LITTLE%20ON%20LETTERS%2041_50.pdf) 15.

<sup>78</sup> eg Parks, 'Evangelical', *Sunday-School Dictionary*, 25; Hawker, 'True Gospel', *Works* 9:471-514; Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 14; Cottle, *Strictures*, 94n; Palmer, *Letter*, 6-7; Palmer, *Free Enquiry*, 344; Styles, *Guide*, 247.

<sup>79</sup> Gadsby, *Memoir*, 33-35, 82.

<sup>80</sup> Spurgeon, Sermon 207, 8; eg Skelton, 'Marks', *EV* (1846), 38.

<sup>81</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 739-740, 769.

not. Although, as Howson pointed out, the last two tenets of hyper-Calvinism (eternal covenant and irresistible grace/elect's passivity) 'are harder to assess because the difference between High Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism is a matter of emphasis' in their case.<sup>82</sup> This is a valuable contribution of Howson's.

This condensed synopsis provides some insight into the complexity, confusion and lack of uniform terminology within the Calvinistic system, and illustrates that labels and terms can be misleading and inconsistent. Daniel has written a helpful section on varieties of Reformed theology.<sup>83</sup>

### 3 Tendency of Calvinism to be extreme

Although the inclination is present in other forms of Christianity, Calvinism 'by its own genius and necessary tendency'<sup>84</sup> seems to possess a predisposition towards extreme views, perhaps associated with its conviction of God's sovereignty and power. Daniel Steele remarks that 'the doctrines of Calvinism can be logically pushed to that conclusion.'<sup>85</sup> Stewart notes the Calvinist movement's reluctance 'to admit that this tendency to extremes exists', and therefore to restrain its 'ultras' as he calls them. 'This obsession with omnipotence is lopsided; it is not sufficiently recognized today that because of it Calvinism is quite capable of assuming degenerate forms.'<sup>86</sup>

Arminius wrote the following concerning Theodore Beza:

Beza and his followers proceeded to a much greater excess of rigour in fixing the decree of Predestination before the fall, which Calvin had himself placed in *massâ corruptâ*, the corrupted mass of mankind; and which was maintained by the more moderate Calvinists.—But as they agreed with the rest with regard to personal election and reprobation, in restraining the benefit of our Saviour's sufferings to the elect, and asserting the irresistible efficacy of grace, with the impossibility of falling from it, there was hardly

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<sup>82</sup> Howson, 'Question of Orthodoxy', PhD, 157,163-177,188-205.

<sup>83</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 726-745.

<sup>84</sup> Conclusion of Canons, in Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:596-597.

<sup>85</sup> Steele, *Antinomianism*, 38-39.

<sup>86</sup> Stewart, *Ten Myths*, 12-13.

any notice taken of their deviation, though they differed in the foundation; and they passed under the general name of Calvinists.<sup>87</sup>

Augustus Strong claimed that Beza ‘carried Calvin’s doctrine of predestination to an extreme supralapsarianism, which is hyper-Calvinist rather than Calvinist’.<sup>88</sup>

Joel Beeke, more defensive of Beza, affirms his ‘supralapsarian direction’, and regarding predestination his ‘going further than Calvin himself’. Its close association with hyper-Calvinism is seen by Beeke’s definition:

‘Supralapsarianism places its stress on the sovereignty of God and decretal theology. Infralapsarianism accents the mercy of God and soteriological theology, in conjunction with the responsibility of man.’<sup>89</sup> Robert Letham highlights Beza’s ‘open espousal of supralapsarianism’, atypical of Calvin, making it ‘the apex of his teaching on predestination’.<sup>90</sup> Cunningham highlighted the tendency of some to ‘express Calvinistic doctrines in an unnecessarily ... harsh and offensive form’, making ‘more unwarrantable and startling statements about the decrees and the agency of God, in their bearing upon men’s actions, than Calvin ever uttered’. Asserting ‘the very highest predestinarian and necessitarian tenets’, claiming that scripture removes ‘liberty from our wills by the necessity of predestination, ... forms no necessary part of the Calvinistic system, though it has been held by some Calvinistic theologians’. Like Beza, these were ‘Calvino Calvinior’, he said.<sup>91</sup> Cunningham also reported that some bold Calvinists such as Twisse, the prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly, have argued that the principle of God’s sovereign right to bestow different degrees of happiness and privilege without the necessity of ‘any previous ground in justice to warrant this’, means that ‘an eternal existence even in misery is a better and more desirable condition than non-existence or annihilation.’ In other words, hell is a blessing not a curse, an ‘extraordinary’ notion ‘diametrically opposed’ both to common sense and human feelings, Cunningham observed.<sup>92</sup> Recognising this tendency, the Remonstrants concluded their Articles with the warning ‘that it is not necessary or edifying to rise higher or to descend deeper’ than the

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<sup>87</sup> Arminius, ‘Life’, Appendix G, *Works*, 1:88.

<sup>88</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 1:46.

<sup>89</sup> Beeke, ‘Beza’, *Reformation and Revival Journal* (Spring 2003) 71,76,78-79.

<sup>90</sup> Letham, ‘Beza’, *SJT* (1987) 28.

<sup>91</sup> Cunningham, ‘Luther’, ‘Melancthon’, *Reformers*, 83-84, 161.

<sup>92</sup> Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 1:510.

scriptures.<sup>93</sup> A conviction also reflected in the Canons of Dort, which concluded with the exhortation to regulate sentiments and language by both the scripture and the analogy of faith, ‘and to abstain from all those phrases *which exceed the limits* necessary to be observed in ascertaining the genuine sense of the Holy Scriptures’.<sup>94</sup> Similarly, the Westminster Confession safeguards against abstract speculation and abuse of predestination by placing it within the context of practical assurance: ‘The doctrine of this high mystery of predestination is to be handled with special prudence and care, that men ... may ... be assured of their eternal election.’<sup>95</sup> James Garrett comments that ‘each of [the] Dutch-derived theological stances was capable of spawning extremes, notably Hyper-Calvinism from Dort and neo-Pelagianism from the Arminians.’<sup>96</sup> John Macleod observed, ‘To speak broadly, in English Theology those whose tendency was Calvinistic inclined to become Hyper in their type of Calvinism, while the alternative to such Calvinism was Arminianism, more or less modified in the form that it took.’<sup>97</sup>

This inclination to ‘stand higher’ than Calvin, rather than maintaining ‘a judicious scriptural’ Calvinism, led, according to the historians David Bogue and James Bennett, to a misrepresentation or ‘perversion of Calvinism’, such as ‘crude’ predestinarianism, by those who were not ‘well skilled in unfolding its divine nature’. Such uninformed men ‘did not see all the bearings of their own system’, and principles left uncontrolled resulted in hyper-Calvinism and antinomianism.<sup>98</sup> Stuart Picken calls hyper-Calvinism ‘a negative term used to refer to an extreme form of Calvinism that has been severely criticised by even some orthodox Calvinists, who regard it as a confused mixture of narrow-minded old English Baptist thinking and minority Dutch American Reformed groups.’<sup>99</sup> Fuller’s rationalisation for the expression ‘hyper-Calvinism’ was that it goes ‘as far *above*, or *beyond* Calvinism, as Arminianism falls *below* it’.<sup>100</sup> Reviewing a

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<sup>93</sup> Note following Article 5 of ‘Arminian Articles’, Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:549.

<sup>94</sup> Conclusion of Canons, Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:597 (my italics).

<sup>95</sup> Westminster Confession 3.8. See Hyde, ‘Handling High Mystery’, *PRJ* (July 2010).

<sup>96</sup> Garrett, ‘Future’, *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* (Fall 2010), 72.

<sup>97</sup> Macleod, *Scottish Theology*, 140.

<sup>98</sup> Bogue and Bennett, *History*, 4:392-394.

<sup>99</sup> Picken, *Historical Dictionary*, 104

<sup>100</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 25n\*.

hyper-Calvinistic preacher's sermons, he wrote, 'The doctrine which *you* call Calvinism, (but which, in reality, is Antinomianism,) is as opposite to that of the Reformers, Puritans, and Nonconformists, as it is to that of the apostles.'<sup>101</sup> Spurgeon also testified that 'ultra-Calvinism ... goes vastly beyond what the authoritative teaching of Christ, or the enlightened ministry of Calvin, could warrant.'<sup>102</sup> Fuller's biographer John Ryland noted that it was the Particular Baptists' zeal for particularism which drove them 'into an extreme; so as to deny that all who hear the gospel are *called* to that exercise of repentance and faith which is connected with salvation.'<sup>103</sup> Daniel calls hyper-Calvinism 'the most extreme variety of Calvinism that the history of Reformed theology has yet seen.'<sup>104</sup>

Therefore the term '*hyper-Calvinism*' accurately represents this tendency to stretch Calvinism to an extreme, as catechist Croft explained: 'Hyper-Calvinists are so called, because their system is above genuine Calvinism.'<sup>105</sup> Or, as Packer puts it, the eighteenth-century reaction to departure from the Reformed supernaturalistic frame 'fairly ran the thought of God's free sovereignty to death. It earned itself the name "Hyper-Calvinism".'<sup>106</sup>

#### 4 Issues with the concept of hyper-Calvinism

Shaw calls it 'a highly refined and complex theological system which could appear, if not dangerous, at least abstruse to the outsider', and an 'unusual doctrinal stance'.<sup>107</sup> Keith Tillman terms it 'an extremely complex theological position which has generated much debate within historical Calvinism'.<sup>108</sup> Its definition is elusive, complicated by the fact that it is made up of several components which, taken in isolation or even partial combination, may indicate high rather than hyper-Calvinism. Very few would acknowledge themselves

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<sup>101</sup> Fuller, 'Two Sermons', *Works* 4:445.

<sup>102</sup> Spurgeon, Sermon 394, 2-3; also Cracknell, 'Calvinism', *EV* (June 1864), 167.

<sup>103</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 4.

<sup>104</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 767.

<sup>105</sup> Croft, *Christian Instructor*, 169.

<sup>106</sup> Packer, Preface, in Toon, *Emergence*, 7-8.

<sup>107</sup> Shaw, *High Calvinists*, 3.

<sup>108</sup> Tillman, 'Ryland', MTh, 5n12 (Supervisors: Michael Haykin and Thomas Nettles).



hyper-Calvinistic; those who fit the criteria generally self-identify as authentic Calvinists, and therefore are not inclined to codify the system. Moreover hyper-Calvinism can be covert, characterised by what is *not* articulated rather than by what is, and typically perpetuated within an oral rather than written tradition. John Murray refers to this phenomenon, where assent is given to *the fact* of the free offer, ‘even a vigorous defence of it in the polemics of ecclesiastical and theological controversy, and at the same time an almost complete absence’ of it in the actual presentation of the gospel.<sup>109</sup> Toon suggests it is not easily detected, its presence even in prominent hyper-Calvinist authors such as Gill and Hoeksema being ‘only obvious to those who are fully acquainted with authentic Calvinism and orthodox Reformed theology’.<sup>110</sup> As he says elsewhere, it can only be understood within this context: ‘to people outside the Reformed faith it merely appears as a form of Calvinism, no better or worse than others.’<sup>111</sup>

Given these properties, together with various perspectives, theological backgrounds and prejudices, it unsurprisingly attracts negativity. Sheehan observed that hyper-Calvinism ‘has suffered from misrepresentation even at scholarly level’,<sup>112</sup> and Daniel confirms that ‘scholars have not been agreed as to what exactly constitutes this school.’<sup>113</sup> As the following examples show, there has indeed been a general lack of intellectual robustness, and a tendency to allow the complexity and intricacy of the system to provide sufficient reason to dismiss it. This is exemplified in the debate over the traditional evaluation of hyper-Calvinism in John Gill’s ministry. Daniel in his extensive thesis argues that Gill epitomised hyper-Calvinism and was prominent in its spread, in accordance with the historical view. Muller influentially believes the frequent identification of Gill’s thought as hyper-Calvinist is ‘less than helpful’, referring particularly to Toon, Sheehan and Daniel.<sup>114</sup> Clive Jarvis has challenged the prevailing view that hyper-Calvinism negatively impacted Particular Baptists prior to Fuller.<sup>115</sup> Citing Muller and Jarvis, Brandon Jones bluntly states regarding Gill, ‘There seems to

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<sup>109</sup> Murray, ‘Necessary Emphases’, *Collected Writings*, 1:145.

<sup>110</sup> Toon, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, *New Dictionary*, 324.

<sup>111</sup> Toon, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, *Encyclopedia*, 190.

<sup>112</sup> Sheehan, ‘Presentation’, *Foundations* (May 1982) 29.

<sup>113</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, x

<sup>114</sup> Muller, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 52n3.

<sup>115</sup> Jarvis, ‘Growth’, PhD; also Jarvis, ‘Myth?’ *Recycling*, 234-240.

be little fruit in discussing whether anyone is a ‘High or Hyper-Calvinist’ since it is difficult to objectively define and apply this label to people past and present.’ Referring to Priest’s defence of the term as used in the eighteenth century, Jones writes, ‘his discussion of its elaborateness (a combination of six positions or variations of them<sup>116</sup>) and different meanings both then and now demonstrates just how unhelpful it is.’<sup>117</sup> Jonathan White argues against Gill being a hyper-Calvinist, because it is problematic to label anyone such given the ‘incredible lack of agreement on a definition’.<sup>118</sup> Consequently Timothy George advises that indiscriminate linking of all hyper-Calvinists compromises their various theological nuances.<sup>119</sup> Haykin and others testify to scholars’ disagreement on the best way to define hyper-Calvinism.<sup>120</sup> Hoeksema’s biographer, Patrick Baskwell, agrees it may seem a precise technical term, but in fact it eludes definition.<sup>121</sup> Roger Olsen concedes, ‘It is an essentially contested concept; there is no “official” definition.’<sup>122</sup>

There can also be resistance towards the idea of hyper-Calvinism in general, or at least labelling people such. At the 2008 *John 3:16 Conference*, in response to Allen explaining hyper-Calvinism and providing examples including Gill, the next speaker Steve Lemke said that he doubted there was ‘such a thing as a living hyper-calvinist. I find that those who call others hyper-calvinists have simply run into people more calvinistic than they are.’<sup>123</sup> A Christian publisher called it ‘a mythological name for something that does not really exist. ...The name ‘hyper-Calvinist’ is hypothetical, without meaning or context.’<sup>124</sup> And a theological

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<sup>116</sup> Priest, ‘Fuller’s Response’, *DBSJ* (Fall 2001), 45-46n3.

<sup>117</sup> Jones, ‘Restricting Gill’, 6-7 n24, <https://sfseminary.academia.edu/BrandonJones>

<sup>118</sup> White, ‘Gill’s Soteriology’, PhD, abstract, 246.

<sup>119</sup> George, ‘Gill’, ch2: *Theologians*, 29.

<sup>120</sup> Chute, *Baptist Story*, 69.

<sup>121</sup> Baskwell, *Hoeksema*, 233.

<sup>122</sup> Olsen, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, blog *Patheos* (15.4.2015), <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/rogereolson/2015/04/why-hyper-calvinism-is-consistent-calvinism/>

<sup>123</sup> Burleson, ‘Problem’, blog (11.11.2008), <https://www.wadeburleson.org/2008/11/problem-with-calling-people-hyper.html>. Conference details: <https://founders.org/2008/03/03/john-316-conference/>. Allen’s handout: <http://hereiblog.com/files/John316Allenhandout.pdf>

<sup>124</sup> Green, Preface to reprint of Gill, *Body*, x-xi (thanks to Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 755-756).

lecturer suggested to myself that it is a pejorative term conjured up by Arminians.<sup>125</sup>

In the main those labelled hyper-Calvinists, such as Engelsma, naturally find the title ‘irksome’ and dismissive, keenly feeling the reproach of this charge which they believe ‘masks an attack on ... thorough-going, consistent Calvinism’.<sup>126</sup>

According to Daniel, this is to be expected: ‘That most of those who deny the doctrine of the free offer also reject the label ‘Hyper-Calvinist’ is obvious, for to accept it is virtually tantamount to admitting that one is either in error or that he has gone beyond Calvin.’<sup>127</sup> The Gospel Standard denomination, for example, claim to have been ‘stigmatized as “hyper Calvinists” because we do not believe in offering Christ indiscriminately to all’.<sup>128</sup> They say that the proponents of ‘unscriptural theories’—such as the free gospel offer and common grace on which it is based—continually contradict themselves, delighting to speak of scriptural tension and antinomy. ‘They all set up a “bogey man” of Hyper-Calvinism (which has never existed) and then assail it.’<sup>129</sup> Gospel Standard spokesman John Broome wrote, ‘Hypercalvinism is a false epithet ... used by offer ministers to describe those who truly preach the gospel and do not exceed the divine commandment, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel.”’<sup>130</sup>

Others however happily aligned themselves with the popular term ‘hyperism’ or hyper-Calvinism. Among these were Strict Baptist minister Barrington Wale, who believed it accurately maintained ‘the pure and undiluted doctrines of grace’ and ‘is identical with the truth’,<sup>131</sup> and Styles, as noted above. Palmer, at a large gathering at the Surrey Tabernacle on Good Friday 1865, ‘clearly showed that unless we were hyper-Calvinists, we could not be really in the truth of the Gospel. He declared that John Calvin’s writings contained a contradictory mixture of free-will with free grace; and that Andrew Fuller drew his system

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<sup>125</sup> In discussion, 20.11.2014.

<sup>126</sup> Engelsma, ‘Denial?’, *PRTJ* (April 1990), 18; also Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 8, 12, 96, 106, 122, 129 etc.

<sup>127</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 756-757.

<sup>128</sup> Ramsbottom, ‘Address’, *GS* (Jan 2014), 2.

<sup>129</sup> *GS* ‘Review’: Ella, *Common Grace*, *GS* (June 2004), 198-199.

<sup>130</sup> Broome, *Gill*, 9.

<sup>131</sup> Wale, ‘Ministerial “Appeals”’, 121; also Brunt, ‘Poor Jacob’, 283: ref to ‘we Hyper-Calvinists’, *EV* (May, Oct 1864).

from Calvin; in fact, that all the yea and nay systems of the day are only so many degenerating deductions from the theology of Calvin.’<sup>132</sup> James Popham, a Strict Baptist minister, was ‘reproached’ with the name, but his biographer called it ‘an honourable distinction early conferred and indicative of the discriminating character of his testimony’.<sup>133</sup>

## 5 Issues with the term ‘hyper-Calvinism’

High and hyper-Calvinism should be clearly distinguished despite sharing certain doctrinal features. The essence of hyper-Calvinism is rejection of the gospel offer and duty-faith; this rejection, Daniel specifies, is its ‘vital ingredient’.<sup>134</sup> They were sometimes used synonymously before Fuller replaced ‘high’ with ‘hyper-’ to describe the system which also opposed missions.<sup>135</sup> However some theologians and scholars, who for various reasons are uncomfortable with the expression hyper-Calvinism, have continued this practice, either using ‘high’ exclusively, or the two interchangeably, some examples of which are provided below. This has been a contributory factor towards confusion over terms and meanings.

The *Dictionary of English Church History* quoted earlier describes hyper-Calvinism while avoiding the term itself: ‘The Particular school was to pass through a phase of high Calvinism, which in many cases verged upon fatalism and Antinomianism, ... the strict Calvinists, who believed that God would save those who were to be saved, and that human effort was presumptuous and futile.’<sup>136</sup> Hannah Adams’ influential dictionary, edited by Fuller, described high Calvinists as those who think Calvin ‘did not go far enough’. In another article however she wrote of Independents and Baptists ‘earnestly contending for the doctrines of grace, and conceiving ... that the danger of erring lay entirely on one side, first veered towards high Calvinism, then forbore to exhort the unregenerate to repent, believe, or do any thing spiritually good; and by degrees many of them

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<sup>132</sup> ‘Meeting’, *EV* (May 1865), 159.

<sup>133</sup> Gosden, *Valiant*, 7.

<sup>134</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 740,751.

<sup>135</sup> Fuller Jr, *Complete Works*, 1:15n\* re John Martin; Toon, *Emergence*, 145; Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 746,751.

<sup>136</sup> Watson, ‘Nonconformity’, *Dictionary of English Church History*, 401.

settled in gross Antinomianism.’<sup>137</sup> To Michael Haykin this indicates that high Calvinism was a step towards hyper-Calvinism, but ‘not exactly equivalent’. He thus prefers to retain ‘hyper-Calvinism’, although he also employs ‘high Calvinism’.<sup>138</sup> But Nuttall used Adams’ article to justify his choice: ‘I prefer the term High Calvinism, which was in use in Fuller’s time (cf. Hannah Adams, *View of religions*, 1805, p.111) to the now more usual Hyper-Calvinism as less prejudiced and question-begging. One does not speak of a Hyper-Churchman.’<sup>139</sup> Some Baptist historians share Nuttall’s preference,<sup>140</sup> including Dix who prefers it to the ‘more provocative hyper-Calvinism’,<sup>141</sup> Naylor,<sup>142</sup> Peter Morden,<sup>143</sup> Shaw,<sup>144</sup> and Roberts.<sup>145</sup> Others use the terms high and hyper- interchangeably.<sup>146</sup> Priest is one of these, although he notes ‘some prefer the less pejorative term “high” Calvinism/Calvinists.’<sup>147</sup> Oliver also uses both terms.<sup>148</sup> Tillman opts for high over hyper-Calvinism as ‘a position within the boundaries of Calvinism that rejects the theological importance of the free offer of the gospel to sinners’.<sup>149</sup> In her thesis on William Gadsby, Ruhl also opts for ‘the term “high Calvinism” instead of the colloquial term, “Hyper-Calvinism,” because of negative associations with the latter and because I desire to respect Gadsby’s own designation for his theological system.’ But she goes on to write, ‘the precise definition of high Calvinism is complex and controversial,’ as if the issue lay not with the name but

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<sup>137</sup> Adams, ‘Calvinists’, ‘Puritans’, *View of Religion*, 111,270-271; (Ryland, *Fuller*, 242).

<sup>138</sup> Haykin, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, 5n12: <https://credomag.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Hyper-Calvinism-and-the-theology-of-John-Gill.pdf>. For Haykin’s use of ‘high’: ‘Baptist Identity’, *EQ* (April-June 1995) 139,141,143.

<sup>139</sup> Nuttall, ‘Northamptonshire’, *JTS* (April 1965), 101n4,106.

<sup>140</sup> eg Manley, ‘Rippon’, *BQ* (April 1976), 254-255,265,268; Cross, *Useful Learning*, 4n30; Stoughton, *History*, 6:373-374; Dix, ‘Varieties’, *BQ* (April 1999), 56-57,67.

<sup>141</sup> Dix, ‘Strict and Particular’, PhD, 32n8:60.

<sup>142</sup> Naylor, *Picking up a Pin*, 145,280; *Calvinism*, 12,164.

<sup>143</sup> Morden, *Offering Christ*, 12n23.

<sup>144</sup> Shaw, *High Calvinists*, 11.

<sup>145</sup> Roberts, *Continuity and Change*, 36.

<sup>146</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 4:41; Chute, *Baptist Story*, 69; Robison, ‘Legacy’, *BQ* (July 1971): high 116-117, hyper 113,122; Roberts, *Continuity and Change*, 36; White, ‘To Offer’, 2n4 at <https://echoesfromthepast.files.wordpress.com/2008/01/to-offer-or-not-to-offer.pdf>; Wheeler, ND, ‘Eminent Spirituality’, PhD, 20n12; Sciretti, “Dutton”, PhD, 67-68,176-177,308.

<sup>147</sup> Priest, ‘Fuller’s Response’, *DBSJ* (Fall 2001), 45n3.

<sup>148</sup> Oliver, ‘Emergence’, PhD, 21n72; Oliver, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 49.

<sup>149</sup> Tillman, ‘Ryland’, MTh, 5n12.

the theology. She also uses ‘high Calvinism’ and ‘high orthodoxy’ interchangeably.<sup>150</sup> This general reluctance to use the expression ‘hyper-Calvinism’ is not a modern phenomenon. A reviewer in the 1889 *Sword and Trowel* was apologetic for the ‘distastefulness’ of the word, and substituted ‘stronger Calvinism’.<sup>151</sup>

It could be objected that use of the term hyper-Calvinism implies association with Calvinism. Toon addressed this, explaining that out of the Independents and Baptists seeking to maintain Puritan orthodoxy a minority ‘influenced by the pressures of the day, took High Calvinism through a logical step to produce’ hyper-Calvinism; and that this transition, fed by doctrinal antinomianism, resulted in something quite different, where ‘any resemblance to authentic Calvinism is difficult to see.’ (Note how Toon’s opinion contrasts with Tillman’s definition ‘within the boundaries of Calvinism’.) Therefore Toon deemed it preferable to use a term to describe Hussey’s, Skepp’s, Gill’s and Brine’s theology ‘which did not make use of Calvin’s name’, but since these men used the term ‘Calvinism’ to describe their theology, this ‘would not be practicable’. Thus Toon defended the need for three distinct terms: Calvinism, high Calvinism and hyper-Calvinism.<sup>152</sup>

A final point is that rarely hyper-Calvinism can exhibit itself in shades and subtleties within individuals, such as Anne Dutton (1692-1765) who ‘defies easy categorization’. She was steeped in hyper-Calvinism and revered hyper-Calvinists such as Hussey and Skepp, but she also embraced the Evangelical Revival, exercised a ministry of spiritual encouragement and counsel, and communed with Howell Harris and George Whitefield. She learned to successfully move between these two camps without alienating either. She is ‘an intriguing study’ of someone who struggled with competing *theoria* and *praxis*, developing her unique hybrid of hyper-, high and evangelical Calvinism, and using it as a theological framework.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Ruhl, ‘Gadsby’s *Hymns*’, PhD, 9,n25,10n27,75n32.

<sup>151</sup> ‘Notices’: Styles, *Hazelton*, *S+T* (1889) 37.

<sup>152</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 41,29,144.

<sup>153</sup> Thanks to Sciretti, ‘Dutton’, PhD, 311-313.

## 6 Terms synonymised with hyper-Calvinism, particularly antinomianism

Other terms were employed for hyper-Calvinism before its common usage, often reflecting its variance from Calvinism. Indeed some hyper-Calvinists like Styles synonymised ‘extreme’ and ‘consistent’ Calvinism.<sup>154</sup> Such names were employed as ultraism, ultra-Calvinism, ultra-predestinarianism, super-Calvinism<sup>155</sup> and extra-Calvinism.<sup>156</sup> Fuller, Ryland and others used the terms false Calvinism<sup>157</sup> and pseudo-Calvinism<sup>158</sup> gradually dovetailing the term hyper-Calvinism.<sup>159</sup> The divergence from Calvinism could only be represented in these terms, explained the 1819 *Baptist Magazine*:

We use this term, Pseudo (False or Counterfeit) Calvinists, not by way of disrespect, (for we esteem many ministers and private Christians of this description,) but to show our conviction that their system is not real Calvinism. The terms “High Calvinists” and “Rigid Calvinists” seem to us improper.<sup>160</sup>

In the States the prefixes ‘old school’, ‘predestinarian’, ‘primitive’, ‘hard-shell’ and ‘anti-means’ were all attached to hyper-Calvinist Baptists who in the early 1800s split from ‘Fullerite’ Baptists over ‘offerism’, use of means, duty-faith and duty-repentance.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Styles, *Guide*, 24.

<sup>155</sup> eg Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 2.344; Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2.68; Spurgeon, *Commenting*, 8; Pink, *Sovereignty*, 105-106; Watson, *Old Baptist*, 84,86,89,327,516,526,535-537; ‘Hawker Obituary’, *BM* (May 1827), 227; ‘Review of Publications’, *Christian Observer* (Jan 1819), 38; Sheppard, ‘Correspondence’, *BM* (April 1838), 165; Spurgeon, Sermon 207, 7; Bateman, *Wilson*, 2:207; Wilks, *Defence*, 78.

<sup>156</sup> Spurgeon, *Commenting*, 89.

<sup>157</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 1,7,21n\*,28,37,65n†,79,86,115,123. Fuller ‘Gospel Worthy’, *Works* 1:98; ‘Two Sermons’, *Works* 4:445; Fuller Jr, *Complete Works* 1:2,16,37; Clipsham, ‘Fuller’ pt 1, *BQ* (July 1963) 100-101; Ryland, *Serious Remarks*, 1:22, 2:27.

<sup>158</sup> Fuller, ‘Reality and Efficacy’, *Works* 1:341,355n\*,419; ‘Dialogues’, Letter V, *Works* 4:71; ‘Memoir’, *BM* (July 1815), 267; ‘Allen Obituary’, ‘Review, Ryland’, *BM* (Feb, Oct 1819), 67,434; Dowling, *Riches*, 31.

<sup>159</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 25,29; Fuller, ‘Strictures’, *Works* 3:347,384; Fuller Jr, *Complete Works* 1:12,15n\*,16,350; Dowling, *Riches*, 31; see also Toon, *Emergence*, 144; Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 746.

<sup>160</sup> ‘Review’, *BM* (Oct 1819), 434n.

<sup>161</sup> For more see Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 29-30. Also see *Biographical History*, ed Pittman; Mathis, ‘Origins’, PhD; Guthman, ‘Primitive Baptists’, PhD; Watson, *Old Baptist*; Philips, ‘Defination’ at <https://www.refoforum.nl/forum/viewtopic.php?f=43&t=7399>. For magazines: *Old Faith Contender* at <https://www.chapellibrary.org/author/contenteroldfaith>; *Signs of the Times*

‘All high-Calvinists were popularly called antinomians in this period,’ explained Toon.<sup>162</sup> While today we perhaps have a crisper honed understanding of the term (although Packer calls it a ‘cluster of deviations’<sup>163</sup>), during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it encompassed complex, diverse and even inharmonious views largely concentrating not so much on the law but on the characterisation of justification as eternal and the covenant as unconditional. Fuller observed that the many ‘distinguishing opinions of which the system is composed’ hampered accurate terminology.<sup>164</sup> Nevertheless there is little doubt antinomianism, spearheaded by its controversies,<sup>165</sup> catalysed and found a soulmate in hyper-Calvinism.<sup>166</sup> This is not to say they are identical, but there is significant affinity and overlap of properties culminating in the minimisation or even cessation of human accountability.<sup>167</sup> John Eaton, for example, acknowledged to be antinomian’s architect, developed a theology of grace which emphasised the passive aspects of faith and sanctification.<sup>168</sup>

Abraham Kuyper said, ‘The tenet that divine sovereignty and human responsibility are logically reconcilable has been held by two schools of thought’: Arminianism and antinomianism, which violate the former and latter respectively. He attributed this phenomenon of antinomianism, found almost exclusively in Reformed churches, to a one-sided emphasis on God’s decreative will at the expense of his preceptive will. He stressed scripture’s distinction between the two spheres of divine sovereignty and human responsibility, a distinction ‘so absolute that one can never pass from the one into the other’.<sup>169</sup> Fuller taught that antinomianism explains away both moral government and accountableness on the two principal grounds of human inability, and gospel liberty and privileges; the former applying to the unregenerate, the latter to the

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at <https://dl.atla.com/concern/works/37720s18s?locale=en>; ‘Primitive Baptists’ at <http://www.pbpage.org/believe.php>; <http://www.primitivebaptist.net>

<sup>162</sup> Toon, ‘Brine’, *FGR* (Autumn 1965) 560.

<sup>163</sup> Packer, Foreword, in Jones, *Antinomianism*, ix

<sup>164</sup> Fuller, ‘Antinomianism’, *Works* 4:159.

<sup>165</sup> see Kevan, *Grace*, 31-38; Toon, *Emergence*, 49-54; Arnold, ‘Antinomian Controversies’, *JGES* (Autumn 2012).

<sup>166</sup> see Toon, *Emergence*, ch3: 49-69.

<sup>167</sup> see Jones, *Antinomianism*, 29, 84; Hall, ‘Preface’ iv, to Chase, *Antinomianism Unmasked*.

<sup>168</sup> eg Eaton, *Honey-combe*, 33-41, 168-171; see Burgess, *Vindiciæ Legis*, 216.

<sup>169</sup> OPC Minutes 1945, 25; (quote from Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek, Locus de Deo* (pt 3, 113f).



regenerate. Its stress on free grace, which emphasises passivity and shifts the responsibility onto God for the duty he requires all humans, irrespective of regeneration, to perform, together with its disregard of God's revealed will as the rule of life, which led to gospel invitations being addressed only to those with a warrant to believe—all influenced and fed into the hyper-Calvinistic scheme.<sup>170</sup> The root of antinomianism, according to Steele, lies in a false view of Christ's mediatorial work, 'that He performs for men the obedience which they ought to perform, and God can justly demand nothing further from the delinquents.' Steele said that this is based on failure to limit Christ's vicarious efficacy to his *passive* obedience. 'His *active* obedience constitutes no part of His substitutional work.'<sup>171</sup> John Paul Wheeler explains antinomianism as 'a misconception of man's response to grace', which explains why hyper-Calvinism with its 'supralapsarian interpretation of sin, followed closely by the doctrine of irresistible grace', its belief that God would save the elect and damn the reprobate 'independent of all human factors', and its refusal to give general gospel invitations, was inclined towards it.<sup>172</sup> Haykin confirms that antinomianism 'often accompanied' the rejection of the free gospel offer.<sup>173</sup> Fuller rebutted William Button's (Gill's successor) charge that many who address unconverted sinners 'have dabbled in Arminianism' because 'they *tend* that way.' Fuller insisted 'the very reverse' is true, namely that 'many who have maintained the doctrines of grace, have more than dabbled in Antinomianism,' yet there is no proof these doctrines are 'of that *tendency*'.<sup>174</sup>

Fuller and others thus connected antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism (often juxtaposed to Arminianism), and sometimes synonymised them, as do some current scholars like Naylor who explains an old citation: 'When they become Antinomians [i.e. high Calvinists] ...'.<sup>175</sup> Fuller said to a hyper-Calvinist, 'The

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<sup>170</sup> See Fuller, 'Antinomianism', *Works* 4:161-163, 188-189; also Flavel, 'Treatise', *Works* 2:583; 'Antinomianism', 3:551-591.

<sup>171</sup> Steele, *Antinomianism*, 39-40.

<sup>172</sup> Wheeler, 'Missionary Awakening', PhD, 203-204.

<sup>173</sup> Haykin, 'Hyper-Calvinism', 4: <https://credomag.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Hyper-Calvinism-and-the-theology-of-John-Gill.pdf>

<sup>174</sup> Fuller, 'Defence', *Works*, 1:236.

<sup>175</sup> Naylor, *Calvinism*, 174. Examples of others: Daniel 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 749; Ryland, *Fuller*, 7, 55-56, 65, 115, 119, 152, 208, 346. Fuller, 'Gospel Worthy', *Works* 1:12, 'Defence', 1:236; 'Reality and Efficacy', 1:355; Three conversations', *Works* 4:109, 'Antinomianism', 4:145-192,

doctrine which *you* call Calvinism, (but which, in reality, is Antinomianism).'<sup>176</sup> Many other theologians associated hyper-Calvinism and antinomianism. John Hooper (1780-1825), classics teacher at Hoxton Academy, in his lecture on antinomianism warned of the complacency of 'not venturing to invite sinners, lest ... they should be found interfering with the secret purposes of the Almighty'.<sup>177</sup> Particular Baptist minister in Plymouth Isaiah Birt directly connected the prominent Anglican hyper-Calvinist Robert Hawker's denial of general offers or invitations to his antinomianism, proceeding from 'uniform inattention to the moral government of God, and to those obligations which it necessarily involves'.<sup>178</sup> Joseph Cottle, who took notes of Hawker's sermons, wrote of his antinomianism which led him to the classical hyper-Calvinist differentiation between preaching and offering the gospel. Hawker said: 'I do as I am commanded, preach the gospel. ... But were I to go beyond this commission, and offer, and persuade, and strive, with fair words, to *win* and *woo* men to believe, what is this but pretending to have *more mercy than God?*'<sup>179</sup> Spurgeon synonymised 'Antinomian doctrine' with hyper-Calvinist preaching, describing fatalism, denial of human responsibility, rejection of the duty of repentance and faith, teaching that God hates the non-elect irrevocably, preaching predestination instead of gospel invitations.<sup>180</sup> So strongly did he view this that he believed it was better 'to endorse Arminianism, rather than Antinomianism', quoting Rowland Hill that Arminianism was a white, antinomianism a black, devil.<sup>181</sup>

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dealing with issues directly relating to hyper-Calvinism, 'Two Sermons', 4:445; 'Memoirs of Pearce', *Works* 6:286. Ryland, *Serious Remarks* 1:36; Watson, *Old Baptist*, 328,330,535; Cottle, *Strictures*, throughout. Bogue, *History*, 4:392-393; Gadsby, *Memoir*, 21n\*,69,82. Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:260; also Spurgeon's sermons frequently, eg 207, 2 (where he also synonymises fatalism), 7,11-12; 289, 6-7; 303, 2; 499, 11; 716, 2. Knight, *Colloquia*, 29,164; Croft, *Christian Instructor*, 169; Dowling, *Riches*, 31; Wilks, *Defence*, 78. Murray, *Spurgeon*, 60n2,141-143; Naylor, *Picking up a Pin*, 146; Wheeler, 'Missionary Awakening', PhD, 87,149-150n54,200,204,208; Nuttall, 'Calvinism', *BQ* (Oct 1968) 425; Irons, 'Withholding', *GS* (March 2008), 79; Gideon, 'Table', *EV* (Feb 1865), 51; 'Review', *BM* (Oct 1819), 434-435; 'Hawker Obituary', *BM* (May 1827), 227; 'Antinomian Secession', *British Review* 1819, 388-390.

<sup>176</sup> Fuller, 'Two Sermons', *Works* 4:445.

<sup>177</sup> Hooper, *Best Means*, 7,27-28.

<sup>178</sup> Birt, *Moral Government*, 36-40.

<sup>179</sup> Cottle, *Strictures*, 65

<sup>180</sup> Spurgeon, Sermon 289, 6-7.

<sup>181</sup> Spurgeon Sermons 323, 9-10; and 940, 1.

Toon noted that hyper-Calvinists were called antinomians by many of their contemporaries, while distinguishing between doctrinal and practical antinomianism (libertinism).<sup>182</sup> Nevertheless Fuller did say that many hyper-Calvinists were ‘known to be loose in their general deportment’ and displayed dishonourable behaviour towards the churches.<sup>183</sup> Stevenson concurs: ‘Though high Calvinists did not encourage practical antinomianism, it was often perceived to be the logic of their preaching—and actual examples among their congregants only added fuel to the fire.’ He quotes Joseph Philpot decrying ‘the loose, Antinomian spirit so widely prevalent in the Calvinist churches’, and were the preacher to insist on holiness of life and conduct, ‘a suspicion would be spread from pew to pew that he was wavering in his creed, and was secretly introducing free will and Arminianism.’<sup>184</sup> Ryland observed that those who refused to change their views following religious controversy on hyper-Calvinism generally went from ‘False-Calvinism into downright Antinomianism’.<sup>185</sup>

Many hyper-Calvinists, notably its formal originator Joseph Hussey, embraced the title ‘antinomian’, their hyper-Calvinism being its logical expression. Hawker, who claimed in rejecting gospel offers and invitations he was ‘in perfect harmony both with Christ and his apostles’, accused his traducers of ‘confounding libertinism with antinomianism’ to the distress of the godly, but defined ‘the *true* antinomian’ as one ‘looking for justification before God solely on the footing of Christ’s person, blood, and righteousness; without an eye to the deeds of the law, yea, even against them’. Hawker claimed, ‘There are many (and not a few whom I personally know) who are God-fearing, Christ-honouring men, and in the true scriptural sense of the word, are antinomians.’ These alone have ‘the faith of God’s elect’; thus ‘to be an antinomian upon true gospel principles, is a badge of peculiar honour.’<sup>186</sup> Responding to what he called ‘the moderate Calvinist assumption ... that provisions of mercy are universal’,

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<sup>182</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 145.

<sup>183</sup> eg Fuller, ‘Gospel Worthy’, *Works* 1:41,49,112, ‘Reality and Efficacy’, 1:330,355; ‘Dialogues, VII on Antinomianism’, *Works* 4:37-40, ‘Two Sermons’ 4:446-447, citing Wm Huntington, ‘Essay on Truth’, 4:470-471.

<sup>184</sup> Stevenson, *Doctrines of Grace*, 46-47n20 re Philpot, ‘Address’, GS (Jan 1860), 10-11; Stoughton, *History*, 6:363-364.

<sup>185</sup> Ryland, *Serious Remarks*, 2:26-27.

<sup>186</sup> Hawker, ‘True Gospel’, *Works* 9:487; ‘Antinomianism’, 9:535-536,542-544,546,550.

minister Washington Wilks wrote, ‘we Antinomians nauseate the dogma of universal offers, invitations, and indiscriminate exhortations.’<sup>187</sup>

## Part 5 Precursors of hyper-Calvinism

There were many complex factors involved in the emergence of hyper-Calvinism, as Toon has aptly demonstrated.<sup>188</sup> Daniel contributes that, as limited atonement slowly infiltrated high Calvinist theology, which by the 1640s dominated English Calvinism, the door was opened to limiting God’s revealed will that everyone be saved. ‘Hyper-Calvinists went through that door and logically diminished the Gospel ministry and content.’ They fell prey to Calvin’s warning that limiting the ‘all’ of the atonement limits the revealed salvific will of God, which limits gospel preaching, which limits ‘the hope of salvation’.<sup>189</sup> Allen confirms that controversy within second- and third-generation Reformed theologians ‘did not involve the *rejection* of limited atonement but the *introduction* of limited atonement,’ and this introduction eventually led to rejection of the free gospel offer, and ‘when the free offer was finally and explicitly rejected, hyper-Calvinism was born.’<sup>190</sup> This section looks at two specific pointers which powerfully directed and eased Hussey’s radical journey into hyper-Calvinism.

### 1 Antinomianism

The strongest indicator of impending hyper-Calvinism was antinomianism, a widespread, complex and diverse web which tended to hit the religious scene in waves, a reflection of the wider unstable milieu of theological debate and social unrest.<sup>191</sup> While not all of it led along distinctive lines towards organised hyper-Calvinism, there was a definable antinomian identity taking shape during the late 1600s and early 1700s which did.<sup>192</sup> Conversely Bogue suggested that latent

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<sup>187</sup> Wilks, *Defence*, 363n\*.

<sup>188</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, chs 1-3.

<sup>189</sup> See Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 514-515, 519-520, 529, 603; ref to Calvin, *Commentary on I Timothy 2:5*, 57.

<sup>190</sup> Allen, ‘Atonement’, ch4 *Whosoever Will*, 77.

<sup>191</sup> see Kevan, *Grace*, 22-38.

<sup>192</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 49-69.

hyper-Calvinism, 'which had long lurked', broke out during this period, finding its expression in antinomianism.<sup>193</sup> David Como refers to 'England's antinomian underground', identifying themselves as 'the faithful', showing that 'antinomianism had crystallized into a self-conscious movement, a network of social and ideological commonality that stretched far beyond London.' This subculture produced 'new, compound forms' encouraged by manuscript exchange, oral transmission, public and private teaching.<sup>194</sup> Bozeman calls it 'free grace radicalism'.<sup>195</sup> It emphasised the passive aspects of justification and sanctification, had a 'strong predestinarian component',<sup>196</sup> taught the unconditional nature of the covenant which 'required nothing, including faith, of its participants', hence justification without faith:<sup>197</sup> all of which would become hallmarks or points of discussion among hyper-Calvinists. While the Westminster divines regarded it as fundamentally at odds with Reformed theology,<sup>198</sup> the antinomians themselves believed they were the orthodox defenders of free grace, upholding 'the genuine Protestant Doctrine', appealing to Calvin in their defence,<sup>199</sup> and rediscovering the Reformation.<sup>200</sup> Robert Towne claimed that in all the sermons of 'Ministers and Professors' who condemned antinomianism, he 'never heard one doctrine of Free-grace, of Christ, Faith, or Justification'.<sup>201</sup> Some Puritans responded to antinomianism with commendable self-criticism. Anthony Burgess believed that God suffered antinomianism to grow, 'that Ministers may humble themselves, they have not set forth Christ and grace in all the glory of it.'<sup>202</sup> Richard Baxter agreed, that '*Antinomianism* rose among us from our obscure Preaching of Evangelical Grace, and insisting too much on tears and terrors.'<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Bogue, *History*, 4.392.

<sup>194</sup> Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 60,326-330.

<sup>195</sup> Bozeman, *Precisianist Strain*, 197.

<sup>196</sup> Wallace, *Shapers*, 5.

<sup>197</sup> Arnold, 'Antinomian Controversies', *JGES* (Autumn 2012), 44-46.

<sup>198</sup> see Gamble, 'Westminster Assembly', PhD, chs2-5,72-212.

<sup>199</sup> eg Towne, *Assertion*, 20,84,91 etc.

<sup>200</sup> Eaton, *Honey-Combe*, 97,168 etc; also Towne, *Re-Assertion*, Preface xii (unnumbered).

<sup>201</sup> Towne, *Re-Assertion*, Preface xiii (unnumbered).

<sup>202</sup> Burgess, *Vindiciæ Legis*, 20-21.

<sup>203</sup> Baxter, *Apology*, 226.

The posthumous publication of Tobias Crisp's (1600-1643) sermons by his son in 1690 reignited controversy. That year Baxter (1615-1691), a strong opponent of antinomianism, condemned Crispian theology at the weekly Merchants' Lecture in Pinners' Hall,<sup>204</sup> years later referred to by Hussey as highly significant: 'the first *Thunder-Clap*' of the storm against antinomianism.<sup>205</sup> In 1694 Presbyterian minister Daniel Williams (1643-1716), Baxter's friend and moderate Calvinist, wrote his book *Gospel-Truth Stated and Vindicated* which forensically exposed Crisp's antinomianism under twenty-three heads. He was accused of neonomianism,<sup>206</sup> or moderate Calvinism, and expelled from the lectureship. The split between moderate and high Calvinism was widening and hardening, the former tending to develop towards Arminianism, and the latter towards antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism. Dewey observes that 'the Antinomian crisis and controversy acted as a catalyst in the forming of theological parties,' driving a wedge between moderate and high Calvinists.<sup>207</sup> Daniel has written a detailed section on antinomianism.<sup>208</sup>

In his book, Williams's insight into antinomianism prophetically illuminates its coalescence with and consolidation into impending hyper-Calvinism, as reviewed in this paragraph. He explained that foundational to antinomianism is the conflation of eternal decree and its temporal execution. This confusion between means and end, this failure to recognise that the decree 'puts nothing in present being', this loss of connection between benefits and duties, activates an inexorable chain of unsound reasoning. This includes the actual pardoning of the elect before being called, the actual discharge of all their sins 'at the time that Christ made Atonement', all the saving benefits of the unconditional covenant being 'actually ours before we are born' (for since faith is promised to the elect it cannot be a condition), and the elects' actual justification and union with Christ from eternity. This antinomian reasoning significantly impacted the nature of saving faith, the necessity and benefit of good works, gospel preaching, and the free offer of Christ. Williams insisted the covenant of grace, or the gospel, is

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<sup>204</sup> see Wilson, *History*, 2:249-254; Toon, *Emergence*, 49-51.

<sup>205</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 209.

<sup>206</sup> For Baxterianism, see Toon, *Emergence*, 52-69; Packer, 'Redemption and Restoration', PhD; Jones/Ramsey, 'Antinomian-Neonomian Controversy', *New Divinity*, 15-35.

<sup>207</sup> Wallace, *Puritans*, 120.

<sup>208</sup> Daniel, 'Gill', *Life and Thought*, 172,179; 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 608-691.

conditional upon faith and repentance, ‘our Duty by God’s Command’, though God enables this obedience. In fact the conditionality of the covenant is what validates the sincerity and seriousness of the offer, connecting benefit and duty. Thus unbelief is the only hindrance to the sinner’s interest in the covenant and entails culpability. Williams showed that antinomian teaching that the elect are actually united to Christ before they believe, and that saving faith is the inward persuasion that sins are pardoned and Christ is ours, rather than assent to his word and acceptance of Christ as saviour, directly impacts gospel offers. It means that the purpose or design of offers is no more than a manifestation of the elect’s prior interest in Christ, meaning that ‘They need the Gospel only for Assurance, but not for Title; to change their Apprehensions, but not their State.’<sup>209</sup>

Although seventeenth-century gospel preaching widely included offers and invitations, it is clear from Williams’s nuanced analysis that *the motive or reasoning behind such offers differed*. If gospel offers were merely to persuade the elect of their status and benefits, not to freely offer the good news of salvation, persuading and commanding men in Christ’s name to comply with the terms of the gospel, no wonder he believed antinomianism dethroned Christ, ‘enervating his Laws and Pleadings, obstructing the great Designs of Redemption, opposing the very Scope of the Gospel, and the Ministry of Christ and his Prophets and Apostles.’<sup>210</sup>

## 2 Declaration of the Congregational Ministers 1699

Many Congregationalists were ‘seriously troubled by the damage done by Antinomians and irregular preachers’,<sup>211</sup> thus in 1699 a Declaration was drawn up signed by five Congregational ministers, stating eleven antinomian ‘Errors’. Each error was then restated, and their ‘Opposition’ to it clearly declared with scripture references. Of these errors, three were soon to become powerful characteristics of hyper-Calvinism. The First Error was ‘That the Eternal Decree gives such a Real Existence to the *Justification* of the *Elect*, as makes their

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<sup>209</sup> Williams, *Gospel-Truth*, To Reader [iv], 4,16,55,59,63,65,71-75,81-82,207-211,244.

<sup>210</sup> Williams, *Gospel-Truth*, To Reader [iv].

<sup>211</sup> Thomas, ‘Break-Up’, *Beginnings*, 58n4.

*State*, whilst in Unbelief, to be the same as when they do believe, in all Respects save as to Manifestation, and that there is no other Justification by Faith, but what is in their Consciences.’ The Seventh Error stated, ‘Believers not having in themselves an *Ability* to do Good Works, are not Bound to Perform any good Duty.’ The Tenth Error declared

That Ministers of the Gospel ought not to propound the *Offers* of Salvation unto all those to whom God calls them to Preach; seriously Inviting them to Improve the Means of Grace, that they may be Saved; and assuring them in the way of their Ministerial Duty of the Salvation of all such as believe in Christ, because they want Ability to close with the Offer; and all shall not be saved.<sup>212</sup>

The first of these errors allows its undue stress on the eternal decree to remove justification by faith as a temporal act. The seventh dismisses responsibility on the grounds of inability. The tenth demonstrates that before Hussey’s dramatic move away from Reformed orthodoxy, the idea of refusing to invite, encourage or offer was recognised as a tenet of antinomianism; and that this was inferred from the Calvinistic principles of human inability and predestination.

As early as 1675 Andrew Gifford (1641-1721), Particular Baptist minister in Bristol, responsible for founding churches in Somersetshire and Gloucestershire and known for his evangelistic skill, was embroiled in a dispute with some other Baptist ministers respecting ‘the *obligations of unconverted men to pray*’. These ministers believed none could pray acceptably without the Spirit; and thus it was neither the duty of sinners to pray nor the duty of ministers to exhort them to. Gifford appealed to London ministers, and received a letter signed by thirteen including William Kiffin and Hansard Knollys, who condemned this attitude, affirming that prayer is ‘comprehensive of all mankind’, that the want of ability does not discharge from duty, otherwise sin ceases to be sin.<sup>213</sup> This example illustrates the perspicacity and timeliness of the Declaration’s opposition to the antinomian excuse of human inability, an excuse which would soon be specifically exploited by hyper-Calvinism. Part of its Opposition to the Tenth Error is the following:

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<sup>212</sup> *Declaration*, 41. 1<sup>st</sup> 12-18, 7<sup>th</sup> 26-27, 10<sup>th</sup> 41-46.

<sup>213</sup> Letter from London ministers, cited in Ivimey, *History*, 1:416-420.



it's the Peoples Duty to make use of their Natural Faculties, with such External Means and Workings of the Spirit, as God Affords them, that they may Believe, Repent, and be Saved.<sup>214</sup>

As we shall see later Hussey identified himself with the antinomianism against which this Declaration was written, specifically contesting its opposition to the Tenth Error.<sup>215</sup>

### 3 Richard Davis 1658-1714

Richard Davis was a forceful influence on Hussey. In fact he tied together the four early hyper-Calvinists and the Modern Question controversy. Nuttall notes these important associations: 'In the partnership of Gill and Brine the varying High Calvinist strands—Joseph Hussey, both through the Baptists in Cambridge and through Skepp; Richard Davis; and the Kettering Baptists—were all united.'<sup>216</sup>

Born in Wales, Davis was a school-master in London until 1689 where he joined Thomas Cole's Congregational church. Before long he was urged by his friends to enter the ministry, and a week after Baxter's condemnation of Crisp, what Hussey called the first 'thunder-clap', Davis was dismissed to Rothwell (or Rowell as it was known locally), Northamptonshire, as its new minister.<sup>217</sup> He exerted considerable influence throughout the county, and by his preaching he 'started a movement which had repercussions far beyond the village of Rothwell',<sup>218</sup> extending to an eighty-mile radius, sometimes breaking up existing churches.<sup>219</sup> Not unnaturally this caused 'embittered feeling' from the ministers of such churches, particularly in Cambridge, Hitchin, Kettering, Newport Pagnell, Northampton and Oundle.<sup>220</sup> Davis set up 'about Thirteen gathered Congregations of this Separation under settled Pastors, the Members whereof are computed to be between two and three thousand.'<sup>221</sup> A forceful, indefatigable

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<sup>214</sup> *Declaration*, 42.

<sup>215</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 10-11.

<sup>216</sup> Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965), 118 (104-118 for more on Davis).

<sup>217</sup> Coleman, *Memorials*, 53-65; Toon, *Emergence*, 51-52; Thomas, 'Break-Up', *Beginnings*, 42-45; Naylor, *Calvinism*, 69-73.

<sup>218</sup> Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965), 104; Ryland, *Fuller*, 4-7.

<sup>219</sup> Davis, *Truth*, 44-45, 78.

<sup>220</sup> Glass, *History*, 134, also 54-56.

<sup>221</sup> Anon, *Account of Doctrine*, 22.

and influential evangelist, in the early 1690s ‘he drew into membership at Rothwell many scores of people from an astonishingly wide area,’ some unchurched, some attached to or members of other churches.<sup>222</sup> He was a popular preacher, and people would trudge to Rothwell from miles around, ‘clusters of them, leaving their homes before daylight on Lord’s Days’, increasing and gathering as they went. They left their lanterns at Cranford, walked to Rothwell to worship, then returning from the afternoon service they collected and lit their lanterns for the long journey home. Davis carefully hand-picked his ‘select band’ of lay preachers, with scant regard for education.<sup>223</sup> He trained them personally in his own house, and he tailored his church under fiercely-separatist principles where anyone wishing to withdraw from them to join the Church of England, Presbyterians, Quakers or Strict Baptists was refused a discharge and was ‘cut ... off as an Apostate’; for these churches ‘do not walk accordingly to the Rule of God’s Word’.<sup>224</sup> The United Ministers considered these laymen were ‘unfit for the Ministry, and unapproved by the Neighbouring Ministers’, and he himself ‘never was, nor is by us esteemed, of the number of the United Brethren’.<sup>225</sup> Davis courted controversy both for antinomianism and irregular practices, and consequently Williams’s book was written to refute both him and Crisp, and a deputation was sent to Kettering to investigate, which Davis called an inquisition and refused to attend.<sup>226</sup>

Nevertheless at the beginning of his ministry Davis did not allow his antinomianism to prevent him offering Christ freely, as his *Hymns* show.<sup>227</sup> His Rothwell congregation testified he freely offered pardoning grace to sinners, pressing them to accept on pain of damnation.<sup>228</sup> One of his lay preachers Joseph Perry, who struggled with fears he was not elect, remembered favourably how Davis would ‘exhort with great Earnestness poor Sinners to come to Christ’, it being God’s command to believe on his Son, and no doubts concerning their

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<sup>222</sup> Nuttall, ‘Baptists’, *BQ* (Jan 1983) 26.

<sup>223</sup> Glass, *History*, 32-34, 64-65, 88-89, 111.

<sup>224</sup> Anon, *Account of Doctrine*, 21-22; Glass, *History*, 73-82.

<sup>225</sup> *Sense of United Ministers*, 6.

<sup>226</sup> Thomas, ‘Break-Up’, *Beginnings*, 46; Sell, *Great Debate*, 51.

<sup>227</sup> Davis, *Hymns*.

<sup>228</sup> Davis, *Truth*, 12.

secret election must prevent this obedience.<sup>229</sup> Bogue and Bennet praised Davis as ‘an extraordinarily zealous minister of Christ’ who understood the Calvinistic system well.<sup>230</sup>

It appears though that Davis’s strongly-antinomian views gradually steered him towards hyper-Calvinism. He struggled with making offers of grace to the non-elect, because ‘Christ died intentionally only for the Elect, therefore the saving Benefits of his Death in the general tenders of the Gospel’ are intended only for them. However because ministers do not know who the elect are, they must ‘offer the grace of the Gospel to all that hear them universally without exceptions’. His anxiety was ‘that others might be Saved besides the Elect’, because ‘this sort of Doctrin fixeth two sorts of Eternal Decrees’ on God, ‘both respective and irrespective’, constituting ‘a two-fold Will in God’, namely ‘to save some absolutely, and others upon Conditions’. To the conflicted Davis this compromised effectual calling, limited atonement, election and free grace.<sup>231</sup> This was his inchoate hyper-Calvinism. He was intolerant of the tension between God decreeing grace for the elect ‘irrespective’ of them, and universal offers ‘respective’ to the conditions of faith and repentance, *as if there might be two ways into heaven: one by election, the other by repentance and faith*. Unable to reconcile the dichotomy between God’s secret and revealed will, he balked at ministers ignorant of the first but eager to obey the second, presenting an inclusive offer, when he believed that clashed with God’s exclusive design behind the offer.<sup>232</sup> He began to think that ministers who offered grace promiscuously were misrepresenting God. This struggle is apparent in his reasoning, and although it may have taken time, sadly the result was assured. The dilemma of whether the gospel offer is well-meant and genuine, accurately representing God’s attitude towards the non-elect, or whether it is an insincere offer of non-existent and unavailable grace, confusing call and intention, continues to be at the heart of hyper-Calvinistic debate.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Glass, *History*, 104.

<sup>230</sup> Bogue, *History*, 394-395 (more on Davis: 392-398).

<sup>231</sup> Davis, *Truth*, 10,21,44,65-66 (numbered 75-76)

<sup>232</sup> Daniel also notes Davis’s wrestling with God’s two wills: ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 400.

<sup>233</sup> eg Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*; Blacketer, ‘Three Points’, *CTJ* (April 2000).

In 1694 his Church Covenant was printed. It contained some interesting clues. There were signs of dissatisfaction with orthodox theology with its 'Darkness and Legality', and of veering into hyper-Calvinist territory. Davis warned of those who 'add the least mixture to Christ's Righteousness, though it be their own acts of Faith in point of Acceptance', and those who require 'imperfect Faith and Repentance, and Gospel Obedience on Man's part, as the imperfect and sinful Conditions of the Gospel-Justification'. This, the Covenant stated, is 'contrary to the freeness of his Love and Grace, from the Eternal Purpose thereof in Election'. Moreover they said 'That God hath before ordained whatsoever comes to pass, even the worst of Sins, and that Sinners cannot avoid committing them; That it is to no purpose to pray for, or endeavour after Repentance, because the Sins of the Elect, past, present, and to come, are already forgiven; and therefore they ought to pray only for the Manifestation of their Pardon.'<sup>234</sup>

Thirty-four years after Davis's death, Gill was requested to write a preface to the seventh edition of Davis's popular *Hymns*, which he concluded with a significant caveat (ch4, 2.2) assuring the reader that although some hymns contained *offers of Christ and grace*, Davis later 'changed his mind in this matter, and disused the phrase'.<sup>235</sup> One wonders whether a fellow hyper-Calvinist requested Gill, wishing to enfold Davis posthumously within their camp. Anyhow, Gill's testimony, assuming it was correct, confirms Davis's later hyper-Calvinism. Although most evidence points in that direction, there are conflicting opinions. It was reported that during Davis's ministry and principally in his church-plants 'the Modern Question' of whether faith is a duty 'was first agitated'.<sup>236</sup> Lewis Wayman claimed that he learned to reject the gospel offer and the duty of faith while growing up in Davis's church, where such notions were 'generally received and held'.<sup>237</sup> However Davis's successor Matthias Maurice believed the opposite, that Davis preached the requirement of God's word for faith and repentance.<sup>238</sup> Ryland too could 'find no evidence' that Davis

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<sup>234</sup> Anon, *Account of Doctrine*, 5-6,22.

<sup>235</sup> Gill, 'Preface': Davis, *Hymns*, iii-v.

<sup>236</sup> 'Memoirs of Maurice', *London Christian Instructor* (Dec 1824), 674.

<sup>237</sup> Wayman, *Defence*, 30.

<sup>238</sup> Maurice, *Modern Question Affirm'd*, 112.

denied duty-faith, although the controversy started in his church plants.<sup>239</sup> More recently, Nuttall concedes that although ‘Davis’s Calvinism was still positive and expansive,’ later ‘as Hussey came nearer to him, so he came nearer to Hussey.’ Hussey then ‘with fearless logic began to draw the negative implications of Davisism’.<sup>240</sup> Given the change in Davis towards hyper-Calvinism, Toon suggests ‘it is very probable that many of his converts and followers also adopted Hussey’s belief that the doctrines of grace should only be preached not offered.’<sup>241</sup> Daniel strongly links Davis with Hussey as ‘the first two Hypers’, and ‘the first to actually teach hyper-Calvinism’. In them, ‘the two definitive strains of Hyper-Calvinism merged: Crispianism and the “no offer” line.’ In fact he claims Davis had already ‘turned “no offer”’ before Hussey wrote his 1706 book,<sup>242</sup> although he provides no proof. The Baptist historian William Whitley also believed Davis ‘taught hyper-Calvinistic doctrine’.<sup>243</sup> And according to Naylor, ‘the Rothwell Independent church was nearly, if not totally, high-Calvinist.’<sup>244</sup>

This section shows that there were strong inclinations towards restricting the gospel before 1706. Indeed so great was Crisp’s antinomian influence on Davis and the early hyper-Calvinists that with some justification Naylor comments, ‘High Calvinism can be traced back at least as far as Dr Tobias Crisp.’<sup>245</sup> It should be recorded that although Crisp demonstrated some characteristics of hyper-Calvinism (such as his tendency to telescope regeneration, justification and sanctification, noted by Sell<sup>246</sup>), he did not demonstrate its defining one, in that he offered Christ in the gospel without qualification.<sup>247</sup> Daniel says it would ‘be fair to contend that ‘Crispianity’ was virtual but not actual Hyper-Calvinism’.<sup>248</sup> Given the prevalence of antinomianism well before Hussey’s time, it is no surprise that ‘amongst some uneducated London lay preachers the notion was

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<sup>239</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 4-5.

<sup>240</sup> Nuttall, ‘Northamptonshire’, *JTS* (April 1965), 113-114.

<sup>241</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 93 (more on Davis: 51-52,93,95).

<sup>242</sup> Daniel, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 178; Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 6,289,364,377.

<sup>243</sup> Whitley, *History*, 201.

<sup>244</sup> Naylor, *Picking up a Pin*, 70,151 (more on Davis: 69-73,151).

<sup>245</sup> Naylor, *Calvinism*, 172.

<sup>246</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 49; Shaw, *High Calvinists*, 14.

<sup>247</sup> eg Sermon 14, ‘Christ’s free welcome to all comers’, *Christ Alone*, 1:211-229.

<sup>248</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 749.

being put forward that preachers were not to invite all their hearers to receive the grace of Christ since that grace was only intended for the elect.<sup>249</sup>

Having described and clarified hyper-Calvinism, and demonstrated significant trends existent at the beginning of the eighteenth century which were predisposed towards it, we are now in a position to introduce Joseph Hussey, the first person to allow his deep affinity with antinomianism to propel him into forging a daring new system which, despite its denial of God's universal grace in the gospel, was to become popular and influential, even among prominent respected theologians.

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<sup>249</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 64.

## Chapter two

### Joseph Hussey 1660-1726

Set within the first half of the eighteenth century, the next four chapters will study the writings of Hussey, Skepp, Gill and Brine for evidence of hyper-Calvinistic theology. Although for the first thirty years the system remained largely uncontested, a few individuals did challenge it, and these are also chronicled and evaluated.

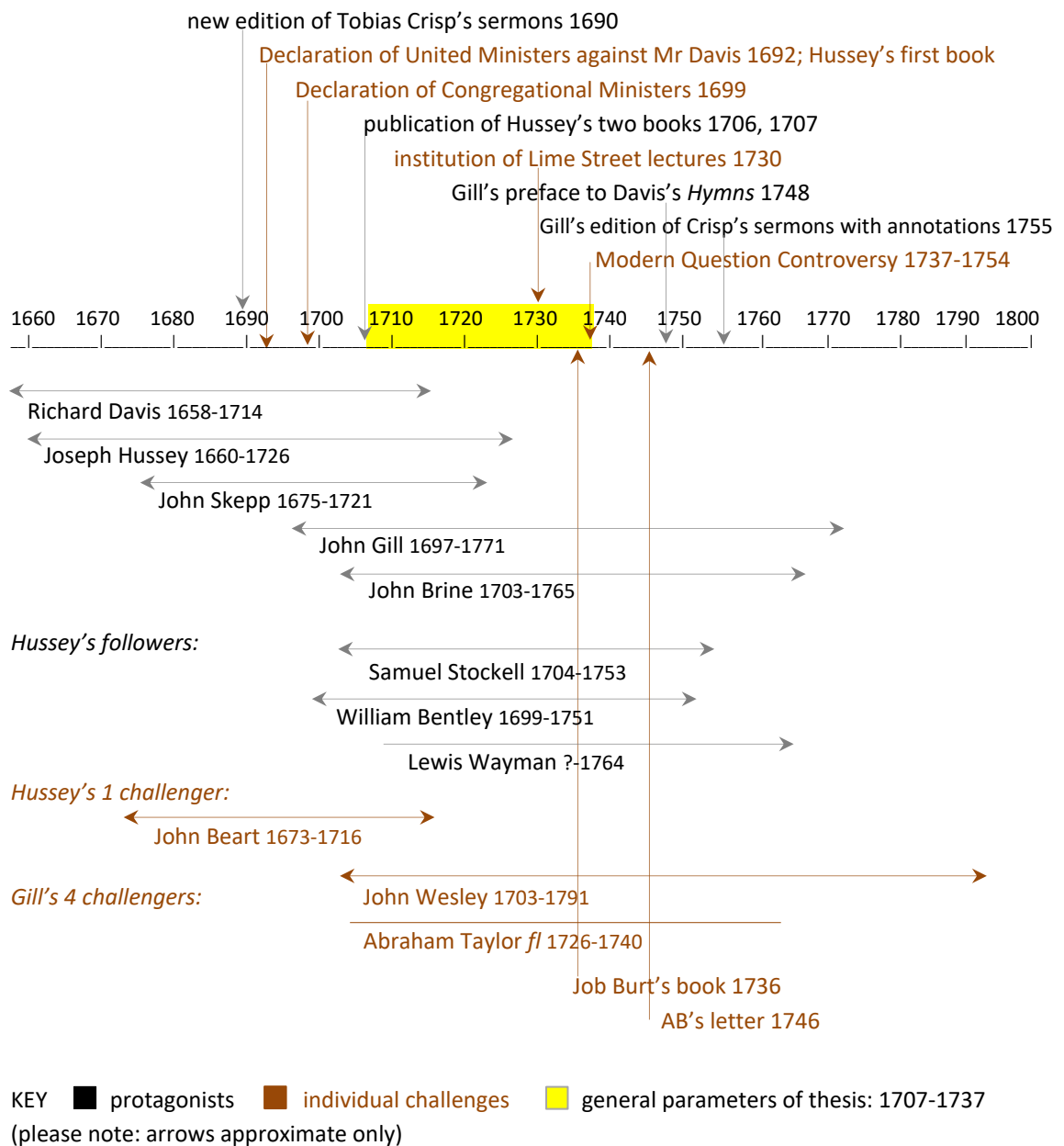


Figure 3 Timeline of significant events and people referred to in chapters 2-5

## Part 1 Hussey and the birth of hyper-Calvinism

### 1 Profile

Born in Fordingbridge, Hampshire, in 1660, Hussey was a well-educated and pious youth. He began preaching at twenty-one, and served as a domestic chaplain. He professed conversion in 1686, and was ordained into the Presbyterian ministry two years later. After a brief charge in Hitchin, in 1691 he moved to Hog Hill Presbyterian church in Cambridge, known as the ‘Great Meeting’. Three years later Hussey caused a complex disruption by shifting his church’s constitution to Congregational, a quarter of his members voting against the decision, and then drawing up a strict church covenant. Also in 1694 he began a period of intense theological reading, culminating in two ground-breaking books. Then in 1719 when Hussey was nearly sixty and his congregation numbered a healthy 1100,<sup>1</sup> disputes arose concerning church discipline and his doctrine. These made him so uneasy, he decided to leave his congregation. He did so without their authorisation; they contended it, admonished him and prohibited him from returning. Hussey’s diary entry notes that he left ‘on account of those horrid grievances in the Church at Cambridge I complained of’. His church fell into divisions and quarrels; some separated to form a Baptist church. Finally Hussey accepted a call to Petticoat Lane, Whitechapel, to succeed John Humphrey, where he continued for six years until his death. In forty-five years of preaching he had delivered 3607 sermons, of which 176 were in London. After his death most of his people moved to Turners’ Hall under William Bentley, then dissolved. The remainder soon scattered.<sup>2</sup>

Hussey was a man of impressive presence. He had a ‘striking and handsome appearance’, and a swashbuckling larger-than-life personality with an infectious and persuasive enthusiasm; he took a ‘positive delight in overkill’, and was ‘capable of carrying all before him’. He was ‘both learned and devout, at once unconscionably opinionated and convincingly common-sensible’.<sup>3</sup> Sadly he used

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<sup>1</sup> Recorded in ‘Statistical View’, *London Christian Instructor* 1820, 170.

<sup>2</sup> See Wilson, *History*, 1:146, 4:408,410-422; Toon, *Emergence*, 70-85; Nuttall, ‘Cambridge Nonconformity’, *JURCHS* (April 1977), 249-257, and ‘Calvinism’, *BQ* (Oct 1968), 422-423; Middleton, ‘John Love’, *SRSJH* (2018), 78-98; Nutter, *Story*, 79-82,127.

<sup>3</sup> Glass, *History*, 51; Nuttall, ‘Cambridge Nonconformity’, *JURCHS*, (April 1977), 251,253.



his talents to spearhead a new movement characterised by the idea that gospel invitations interfere with divine sovereignty, and thus history records him as the pioneer of hyper-Calvinism. The following short study may help to shed light on his rationale for this.

## 2 Hussey's early ministry and later volte-face

Hussey's early ministry was successful; his church grew, and he was well respected. His first book entitled *The Gospel-Feast Opened* was published in 1692, based on thirty sermons from Luke 14:15-23 originally preached in Hertfordshire in 1688, the year of his ordination.<sup>4</sup> It was an unambiguous and welcoming invitation to come to Christ: 'Ministers have received a Command to *Call* you, and you have receiv'd a Command to *Come*.' He emphasised that the divine commission warranted God's servants inviting everyone to the feast, that in doing so they were both executing their duty and fully representing their Master's command and desire. He stressed the importance, the 'perswasive Force ... of this Blessed Word, *Come*'. He did not hesitate to speak of 'the Gospel offer', where 'Grace is offered unto *Sinners*.' He affirmed the unrestricted, authoritative and extensive nature of the call, the arms of love describing a wide circle. He expressed the public, urgent, comprehensive properties of the invitation; it is 'to men indifferently of any Quality, Character or Degree'. He assured his congregation and others of the need to be reconciled, encouraging them to make friends with God, to accept his grace, refusing to allow fear or shame of prevarication to hinder them. Significantly, in his preface Hussey praised the perspicuity and availability of the many hundreds of books in divinity.<sup>5</sup>

However only two years after its publication, and three years after his arrival in Cambridge, Hussey entered a period of radical change. A major contributory factor in this theological shift was Davis's influence over him. Initially there had been animosity between these two. Davis had acerbically remarked, Hussey 'hath no Church, but a part of the Church of *England*'.<sup>6</sup> Hussey's Cambridge

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<sup>4</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 904.

<sup>5</sup> Hussey, *Gospel-Feast*, eg 11-12, 296, 324-340, 386, 400, 449-450; 'to Reader' [vi-vii] unnumbered.

<sup>6</sup> Davis, *Truth*, 78.

church had received a letter from evangelist John Waite warning them against Davis's antinomianism and calling the Rothwell church a 'pest-house'.<sup>7</sup> And the young offer-embracing Presbyterian Hussey had given evidence against Davis's antinomianism at the 1692 Kettering deputation. However that year Davis had established a meeting in Cambridge,<sup>8</sup> and two years later Hussey appears to have completely changed his allegiance. Having now espoused antinomianism himself, he 'had the courage to give public expression to his regret at having attacked Richard Davis' as Nuttall put it,<sup>9</sup> and implied that orthodox theologians were involved in a conspiracy. He wrote in 1706 of this period fourteen years earlier: 'We were generally by the *Evil Spirit* stirred up at that Time to *darken Counsel by Words without Knowledge*; And because ... we had *loved Darkness, rather than Light, because our Deeds were Evil*, ... we were generally agreed to run down *the Glorious Gospel* ... by loading it with the Reproaches of *Antinomianism, Crispianism, Davisism*, and I know not what; which I am afraid the *Body* of us have not been *humbled* for, nor *repented* of to this Day!'<sup>10</sup>

Apart from the magnetism between their personalities, Davis being a rough diamond, fiercely independent, and provocative in his attitude towards orthodoxy, Hussey's youthful experiences seemed to prepare him for Davis's influence. From the age of five or six he read 'two ... if not *four Chapters* every Day, pray'd *secretly* upon my Knees to God, twice every Day without Omission'. As he grew up, he wrote sermons, prayed longer, grew stricter and stricter. But he had no peace, derived no help from books, including Joseph Alleine's and Baxter's which only persuaded him he had committed the unpardonable sin. 'I heard Multitudes of Preachers,' he wrote, 'all agreed to turn me into an *Anvil*,' constantly raining blows upon him, which only increased his desperation, as he realised he could never do enough to please God. But the more he became acquainted with these ministers and their conversation, the more disillusioned he became: 'I call'd my self *Fool* for having been so Precise and Strict, when I did not believe the Ministers gave any firm Credit to the *Duties* and *Watchfulness* they often inculcated on the People.' He began to 'hate *Religion*'

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<sup>7</sup> Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965), 111-112.

<sup>8</sup> Davis, *Truth*, 44-45, 78, 81; Glass, *History*, 54-55, 67, 121 etc.

<sup>9</sup> Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965) 112-113.

<sup>10</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 312-313; Wayman, *Further Enquiry*, 147-148..

and ‘ended in *Apostacy*’. Eventually he discovered Stephen Charnock’s ‘Discourse of God’s being the Author of Reconciliation’,<sup>11</sup> which had a profound effect on him. He was converted in a sudden and intense experience: ‘the *Spirit* of Christ turning me in a moment to the Lord, in managing this one Point, *Everlasting Love* to Me in the *Covenant* which the *Father* made with the *Son* before I had a *Being*,’ instilling in him a foundational sense of God’s electing grace and the prevailing power of ‘*ancient Love*’ revealed in time.<sup>12</sup> This personal testimony demonstrates early suspicion of ministers and theologians, a distrust of duty, and an overwhelming attraction to the eternal covenant. Thus Davis’s antinomianism resonated with him and awakened latent predispositions, inspiring and convincing him to act upon his special and powerful experience. As Nuttall expresses it: ‘He was probably ripe for Davis’ picking.’<sup>13</sup> There is a similarity between Davis and Hussey, not only in temperament but in their attitudes and doctrinal conclusions, and it is unclear who influenced whom regarding rejection of gospel offers.<sup>14</sup>

In October 1694 Hussey held a church meeting, and persuaded his members to adopt Congregational church order,<sup>15</sup> a change which required personal testimony of spiritual experience for admission to membership.<sup>16</sup> Twelve years later he reflected on this transformational change, for which he credited his re-awakened ‘Sense of *everlasting Love*’: ‘Now I love his *Government*, which before I hated; now I love his *Ordinances*, and Christ’s Yoke, *Church-Order*, which I find all my *Old Religion* a meer Stranger to, being cut out more for the *Gentleman*, than the *Believer*!’<sup>17</sup> Hussey felt more comfortable with a church government which he felt was stricter and more Christ-dependent. He now felt more liberty and spontaneity in preaching, and openly condemned his erstwhile reliance on pulpit notes as a ‘scandalous’ indulgence.<sup>18</sup> In a November 1703 sermon Hussey inveighed against those who despise extemporaneous prayer, and against ‘Starcht’

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<sup>11</sup> in Charnock, *Works*, 3:336-500

<sup>12</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 120-122.

<sup>13</sup> Nuttall, ‘Cambridge Nonconformity’, *JURCHS* (April 1977) 253.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel draws this point out: ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 401.

<sup>15</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 72: ref to diary entry for 4 Oct 1694.

<sup>16</sup> Nutter, *Story*, 80; Middleton, ‘John Love’, *SRSJH* (2018), 89.

<sup>17</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 123,46.

<sup>18</sup> *God’s Operations*, 385,453-455.

'*Beau-Preachers*' in powdered wigs producing '*Genteel Sermons*'.<sup>19</sup> Doubtless also Davis's criticism of his compromise with the Established Church helped persuade Hussey to adopt Congregationalism. Further evidence of Davis' influence on Hussey was his new rigidly-separatist Covenant, in which 'the members were forbidden entering on any account whatever the Established places of worship, ... prohibited accompanying with people of that communion, or having any intimacy with them; and the penalty of not submitting to these rules was excommunication.' This was similar to Davis's in Rothwell where 'excommunication was awarded with an unsparing hand'.<sup>20</sup> For example, a letter handwritten by Hussey to a female member in November 1700 was discovered in John Rippon's study years later. It accused her of 'having committed heinous offences & sins against the Ld. Xt. & us of this Congregational Church of saints, & in open slander against the gospel before the world.' He gave her notice that 'the Church is bound by the indispensable laws of Xts Government to proceed in the sharpest way against you for your manifold scandals.' They had voted to meet in January 1701 when they would give her up to Satan and cut her off by 'the terrible sentence from any relation to the Church'. The woman's offence was to marry outside the Congregational 'society'.<sup>21</sup>

Also in 1694 Hussey began an eleven-year period of reading, which was both extensive and intensive. He closely read and weighed all the church Fathers, 'the innumerable Writers' and 'Learned Doctors of the Church', and 'Interpreters of all Sides since the Reformation'. No one escaped his scrutiny, as he measured them against the scriptures. Subsequently he pronounced a sweeping condemnation of all previous theologians: 'Upon the Search I have found them Utterly to fail my Expectation, and to deal Deceitfully.' This included the 'Testimonies even of Modern Authors to Revealed Truths, especially when the Testimony stops the Growth of farther Reformation. ... For the best of Human Testimonies are an ill Medium to testify to the Truth of the Gospel, because the Gospel is all built upon Divine Revelation, and it needs not to receive Testimony from Man.' He trusted only the Spirit's interpretation: 'I prefer *God's* giving me the Holy Ghost, before all the *Men* and *Books* in the

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<sup>19</sup> Hussey, *Warning*, 32,40.

<sup>20</sup> Glass, *History*, 80-81.

<sup>21</sup> 'Remarkable Letter', *TCHS* (1905-1906), 137-138; Nutter, *Story*, 130-131.

World, to understand *the Holy Scriptures*.’<sup>22</sup> He clearly expressed his scepticism of human authorship:

What *Confusion* is almost all Divinity thrown into at this Day! ...  
 What Ignorance is there in our *Systems* of Divinity!  
 What Defects in our *Catechisms* and Confessions!  
 What barren Heaps are our *Librarys*! ...  
 And if it be so in *Doctrines*, no Wonder if it be so too in *Churches* and  
 Professors.<sup>23</sup>

This alone shows the extent of Hussey’s metamorphosis, given his earlier generous assessment of religious books. Eventually he was able to emerge from the internal storm this new understanding had created. Now forty-six years old and fully orientated in his new direction, he wrote two books of a very different character to his first. *The Glory of Christ Unveil’d, or, The Excellency of Christ Vindicated* (1706), was almost 1000 pages long, largely a diatribe against Arminianism, specifically his ministerial colleague in Northampton, John Hunt. The second, *God’s Operations of Grace: but no Offers of his Grace* (1707), was an explicit rebuttal of gospel invitations. He wrote in its preface of his new-found liberty: ‘Christ clearly led me into more of the Love of the Father, the Knowledge of Himself, and the Operations of the Spirit, in my last Book. ... This also calm’d the Storm of Troubles raised upon my Thoughts in departing from Human Testimonies, and wading through Difficult Points, where I saw no Author before me had either waded or ferry’d over!’<sup>24</sup>

Despite Hussey’s dramatic conversion which ‘made quite another Man of me! And I have had the Experience of its *Power*, and *Guidance*, and *Supports* almost these *Twenty Years*’ (which was the interval between his 1686 conversion and his 1706 book in which he wrote these words), for many years he failed to effectuate its power in his preaching. He admitted his own failures in this, while also blaming others. According to him, he lacked ‘*discerning Light*’, lacked the Spirit’s teachings, and lacked ‘*Courage* in my Soul to get above the Times’. He compromised and ‘used to dash my Preachings with some of the Old *Mixtures*’. These were ‘the Days of my *Ignorant* Preaching of *Christ*’, for ‘Books rather

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<sup>22</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, ‘to Ministers’, ii-iv; *Glory*, Introduction, 9.

<sup>23</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 105.

<sup>24</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, ‘to Ministers’, v; also *Glory*, Introduction, 6-9.

made me an *Infidel* than a *Christian*.' He was so 'ensnared' by the 'influence of these *Temptation-Preachers*, that I was ashamed to own my first, *Discerning Faith*; then no wonder,' he wrote, that God 'shut up all my Steps in *Darkness* for a little while.' It was during this bleak period of deception when he had been 'mis-taught' by the 'General *Tradition* of Men and Books', he had been 'easily prevail'd on by an *enticing* Letter of a *Presbyterian* Brother' to publish his first book. Thirteen years on, and with the benefit of his newly-discovered doctrinal emphases, he pronounced that these published sermons contained 'a great many dark, indigested and inconsistent passages, together with a sinful *Exclusion* of the Work of the *Holy Spirit*, in the Doctrine of *Invitation* to come to Christ; insisting more upon the Act of *coming*, than upon *creating* Grace, in the *Operation of God* upon the *Comer*.' He embraced his volte-face: 'I love to see that Book now and then, ... as an encouraging *Evidence* of my *Growth* afterwards in the *Mystery of Christ*. Besides, all those Errors I have long since, through the Lord's humbling, emptying, and teaching Me otherwise, *repented* of, and grieved for at the Heart, and do thro' that *same* Grace alone, avoid them, and such like Blemishes of the *Gospel*, in my later *Preaching* and *Printing*.' Now, his original passion reignited, he set about reforming the Reformation. He reclaimed his profound experience: '*my Knowledge in the Mystery of Christ* (for this was the *Ground* of my Conversion to Christ)', followed the revelatory light which broke in on his soul, saw the superstition and tradition inherited from the fathers, and repudiated all he had revered and regarded as infallible.<sup>25</sup>

This complex conglomeration in Hussey's life propelled him into the new territory of hyper-Calvinism. Having despised and rejected orthodoxy, wholeheartedly embraced antinomianism, and become convinced of his prophetic mission and special if not unique usefulness, he put himself into an ideal position to contrive a brave new brand of theology. He did not deny any major Calvinistic doctrines, but manipulated them by making distinctions, shifting emphases, making deductions and utilising logic in such a way as to create and justify this new system, pseudo-Calvinism as Fuller often called it.<sup>26</sup> The following study explores how he did this, allowing him to speak for himself as much as possible. The first part (3:1-5) sifts his theology through the grid of

<sup>25</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 122, Preface [v], Introduction 6-9, 313, 633-634, 904; *God's Operations*, 341.

<sup>26</sup> 'Memoir, Fuller', *BM* (July 1815), 267.

his own hyper-Calvinist distinctions; the second (4:1-3) examines important theological influences on him; the third (5:1-4) inspects his attempt to align no-offer theology with major Calvinistic doctrines. Part 1 finishes with an analysis of Hussey's hyper-Calvinism, and a section on scholarly opinion.

As far as I am aware, there is no detailed examination of Hussey's writings available, which may be partly due to the style of his writing. He called Williams's book 'unintelligible',<sup>27</sup> but his own convoluted writing is very difficult to follow, sometimes unfathomable. His thoughts are densely portrayed, not necessarily sequential or logically presented. The tightly-packed text is unrelieved by clearly-marked headings. His 1706 book contains forty-seven chapters but no contents page listing them; this has been remedied in his 1707 thirteen-chapter book. Primitive Publications reprinted this latter book in 1973, but it is heavily edited and abridged, with five chapters entirely omitted. It is from this edition Sell quotes in his two-page summary of Hussey's theology.<sup>28</sup> Supralapsarian Press have made both books available online, 'complete and unabridged',<sup>29</sup> and produced a 2015 edition of his 1707 book.<sup>30</sup>

Hussey believed the difference between his new insights and 'the Natural Arminianism' prevalent among preachers depended on 'clear Distinguishings',<sup>31</sup> and in his last book he elaborated on these, introducing the idea of separating things hitherto considered harmonious. The method used here is to utilise these distinctions as headings in order to filter and organise evidence through them. This will be repeated in the chapter on Gill, who used these and some other distinctions, demonstrating how Gill adopted and developed Hussey's thinking.

### 3 Rationale for rejecting gospel offers

Hussey's rediscovery of his original vision of the supremacy of God's eternal decrees and the foundational nature of the covenant of redemption governing the elects' temporal salvation, radically altered his view about offering Christ

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<sup>27</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, Preface [vii] (unnumbered).

<sup>28</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 53-53, 117.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.supralapsarian.com/Books.html>

<sup>30</sup> <https://mountzionpbc.org/Duty%20Faith/hussey-gods-operation-of-grace-mastere-MZ.pdf>

<sup>31</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 'To Ministers', v.

and grace to sinners. He was now convinced of the futility of offers and their incompatibility with God's sovereignty. His final book was written specifically to refute '1. *Offers of grace*. 2. *Invitation of sinners to Christ*. 3. *Exhortation to sinners*.' (These were the same three points John Beart confronted Hussey with after reading his previous book (pt 2,2.2 below).) Hussey's aim was to 'rectify the Mistaken Doctrine about *Offers of Grace*, and to advance the true Doctrine of *Free Grace-Operations* working on the *Elect* of God, ... To *disprove* them, and Overthrow the Scheme ... as an *Anti-Evangelical* Form of *Corrupting the Word of God*.' Hussey believed offers exclude saving grace and rob the Spirit of his effectual operations. That they are 'an Open Contradiction' of the '*First Principles*' of the orthodox, namely particular election and universal inability to do any spiritual good. That they appeal to human strength and bypass the necessity of a new birth. That the Spirit is not working internally as Christ is offered in the gospel, and the orthodox have no reason to expect him to, even in the elect themselves. He rationalised all this because offers are not the means by which the Spirit works faith in the heart, being irreconcilable with God's way of imputing righteousness which cannot be offered but is given.<sup>32</sup> He believed 'pressing' a soul to come to Christ demonstrates unskilful and ignorant preaching from those 'unacquainted with the *full Provisions* that have been made by the *Everlasting Love of the Father*.'<sup>33</sup>

The following five sections combine multiple quotes and précis extracted from Hussey's two books, demonstrating his reliance on the crucial hyper-Calvinistic principle of separating and distinguishing. Hussey was convinced that only recognition and implementation of these distinctions will stop ministers 'blunderingly and blindly' exhorting sinners, '*as sinners*', to believe in Christ and to repent of sin, as 'their Duty'; when in fact their only duty is 'natural Repentance and moral *Reformation*' which will not save them but may lengthen '*their Temporal Tranquillity*'.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 1-2,15,11-13,160.

<sup>33</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 142-143

<sup>34</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 448.



### 3.1 The distinction between preaching and offering

This was Hussey's first and crucial distinction: 'Ministers are not to *offer the Salvation*, but to *Preach the Gospel of the Kingdom* to all Sinners that come within the *Meeting-House*.' Salvation is 'inclosed in the good News' to be disposed by God's operation, but never offered by the minister. 'Preaching of Christ doth not lie in Tendering, but in Proclaiming the Glad Tidings. It lies in *Shewing, Telling, Declaring, &c. the Things of the Kingdom of God*. These are the proper Acts of our Ministry.' Hussey realised this was radical teaching, and accepted that a paradigm shift was required in the way the gospel is preached:

Our own *Common Way* of Preaching must *fall*, and a quite Different *Method* of Preaching must be *establish'd*. It's therefore *Reformation* I have always pleaded for in the Matter: And there's need of it now more abundantly, to rectify the *Anti-Evangelick* Exhortations that grow almost every where in Vogue, patronizing *Free-Will-Applications* ... .

He ascribed this 'common way' of offering Christ with exhortations to repentance and faith to preachers' failure to make scriptural distinctions, 'injudiciously' 'huddling' things together which should be separated, all because they neglect to closely study the scriptures.<sup>35</sup> If they want to see their churches grow, he wrote, 'you must be taught of God to *overthrow* almost all you have been doing since you began your *Publick Work*,' and stop suspending God's love on the sinner's faith, exalting that over God's everlasting love to his elect, 'as if God's Love was Born out of our *Faith*, and not our Faith born out of *God's Love!*' Pressing '*unrenewed Sinners*' to faith can only interfere with God's sovereign operation and block the '*free course*' of '*the Supernatural Gospel*'.<sup>36</sup>

For Hussey, preaching achieves two distinct purposes. First, 'the Doctrine and Salvation *Both* are to be Preach'd as the joint *Means* of Faith and Comfort to the *Elect* of God,' as God puts his divine stamp on his preordained means of converting souls. Simultaneously under the same preaching, as a separate means, the non-elect hear the doctrine and either accept it, to their betterment

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<sup>35</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 98,81,408-409.

<sup>36</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 136,143,131,135.

in this life, or reject it. Thus when the minister preaches the gospel, he uses Christ's means,

But when he degenerates into his Offers, Christ leaves him to sound forth a dead *Letter*. Men whose Principle is to offer Christ, do without doubt Presumptuously take upon them a Way of dispensing the Word, which Christ hath never Instituted.

Offers, exhortations and appeals 'fall short of *Preaching* the Gospel', because they imply a human response is possible, when according to Hussey it is not. He explained that scripture has 'an Elegant Variety of Expression' for preaching, including speaking, teaching, showing, telling, declaring. 'But never once in all this *Variety* of Phrase do the Scriptures call Preaching the Gospel by the *other* Names and Phrases, of *offering*, *proffering*, *propounding* and *Tendering Grace*, Christ, Salvation and Glad Tidings.' Moreover, God will not bless such a gospel of 'Indiscriminate *Proffers*' with success, for it is a 'Dead, Heavy and Mixture-way of Preaching', contradicting grace and overthrowing election. It upholds 'a Way of Preaching which God hath never Promised to Bless', by '*Offering* Special Grace to Sinners' rather than magnifying 'the Great *Power* of God in all their Sermons; which Power Works freely by Gift, and can by no Means be *Offer'd*.' Successful preaching 'must shew how the Gospel is *hid* to some, ... while it is freely given to Others to *know the Mysteries of the Kingdom of God*, and to believe on Christ's Name. ... *Offers* of Grace are Promiscuous, but Bestowments of Grace are discriminate.'<sup>37</sup>

Hussey's practice was to posit 'pleas' from objectors to his teaching, which he would then answer. One such was that 'We ought to Preach Christ' irrespective of whether our hearers are elect or non-elect. Hussey rejected this objection as 'Darkness', because it ignores the covenant God has made with his chosen. The gospel is hidden to the lost. Therefore we should certainly concern ourselves who we preach Christ to, he insisted, for how can Christ be offered to the non-elect who can never be converted?<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 41-42, 17, 3, 218-220.

<sup>38</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 283-285.

This was Hussey's burden: that preachers would understand these crucial distinctions, avoiding confusion between elect and non-elect, allowing God's grace and power to work freely through discriminating preaching.

Hussey wrote a chapter specifically to disprove that preaching contains offers of salvation to sinners, presenting eight arguments and various sub-arguments, briefly summarised here. First, the apostles' 'Practice was to *Preach* Christ, not to *Offer* him'. Second, they were ordained to this practice. Third, examples of such preachers who did not offer were Noah, Solomon and Paul. Fourth, there are no texts to prove that preaching and offering are the same thing. Fifth, the '*Flattery of Offers*' compares unfavourably to 'the Faithfulness of *Preaching*', in that 'an *Offer* entices a Natural Man into a Conceit of *Self-Ability*'. Sixth, the Latin *oblatio* is of a different nature to preaching, being 'distant' and not a '*Home-Act*' like preaching in which sinners are either wholly (if elect) or partially (if non-elect) worked on. Besides, Hussey pointed out, some aspects of doctrine defy being offered, such as 'the Points of *Sovereignty* or Absolute Grace, *Irresistibleness*, *Discrimination*, *Passiveness* &c; ... for Men cannot pretend to *offer* a Sinner these Pieces of Grace, They being Points of *Operation*, and not of *Offers*.' Some of the non-elect reject these things, and their anger glorifies God; while others '*receive* it in the Lump' but 'with an *External Faith*' which is unsaving, being devoid of God's operation. In these the Spirit by his '*Common Operation*' works a '*Common Faith*', whereas in 'God's Chosen' he effectively and distinguishingly works both doctrine *and* salvation to produce the '*Faith of God's Elect*'. Hussey's seventh argument was that while preaching exalts God's sovereignty, 'Glad Tidings' being conveyed to the elect, offering does the opposite. Why? Because offering Christ makes Jehovah's great name 'abject and *Precarious*'; it takes his name in vain, and perverts his message. Turning sovereign operations into 'servile' offers '*debases* Majesty'. Finally, preaching has 'a Passive *Efficacy*' but offers require '*Strength* to lay hold of Christ'; thus 'they rob Free Grace.' Preaching the gospel reveals glory; 'But an Offer, tho' it be an Open Act of propounding Christ to the Soul, reveals nothing of Christ.' It hides the gospel and its mystery:

While Men therefore are making *Offers* of an Unreveal'd and unseen Christ, let them not think it is *Preaching* the Gospel in the Salvation and Glory thereof at all.

Preaching offers simply gives false hope to the unconverted, ‘as if *Believing on the Lord Jesus Christ* was an Act of the Soul before a Man is *born of the Spirit*’. Offers are powerless to free the sinner from the powerful bonds of Satan. Thus Hussey argued that Scripture never joins preaching and offers, they are entirely foreign to each other.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.2 The noncorrespondence between effectual grace and offers

In his second distinction, Hussey argued against the Reformed belief that the Spirit works with the preaching to enable sinners to close with the offer of Christ in the gospel. In fact he taught the opposite, that at the very point where the gospel is applied and sinners are invited to come to Christ, the Spirit withdraws leaving nothing but the preacher’s voice (the *Sound* of the Man!’), and the congregation is left ‘empty’. He emphatically denied that grace can be offered. It can only be given.<sup>40</sup>

Hussey wrote a chapter as ‘a direct Confutation of this *vain Confidence*’ that the Spirit works with such preachers: it is ‘an *Error* injuriously vented to the Dishonour of Free-Grace!’, a corrupt principle which dishonours the Spirit and his work. He advanced six arguments to prove this, brief extracts of which are here presented. Because God has not appointed nor Christ commanded ‘the *Propounding* of the Gospel, to be the *Means* to work his Grace’, the Spirit will not work alongside offers or proposals, nor fill up an offer of grace with his own presence, nor accompany such a pretence to effect a saving change in a sinner. He only works ‘according to the *Fore-Ordination* of God the Father, ... and so makes it *efficacious* to an elect Sinner of the Auditory, and to the Elect alone’. He comes in ‘Inward Power’ and operates upon the sinner to provide the ‘Internal Ability to close with Christ’. He must show the initiative in coming to the sinner, not *vice versa*:

For if a Sinner lay hold of Christ before the Spirit lay Hold of Him, he receives *the Spirit of Life* afterwards *by the Work of the Law*, and not by *the Hearing of Faith*.

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<sup>39</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, ch2:14-38.

<sup>40</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 140,545.

As the Spirit cannot be offered, taught Hussey, neither can Christ. 'I have *Christ* by God's Donation antecedently to my having the *Spirit* of Christ ... and I have the *Spirit* antecedently to my having the *Faith* which the Spirit works in me.' To Hussey this showed the absurdity of offers. The Spirit is an '*Indwelling Principle* ... above nature' beyond pleas and invitations. Further, Hussey argued, the Spirit's operation must be subject to 'the *Imputation of the Righteousness of God* to the elect in Christ'. Imputed righteousness has already removed 'the Obstacles in the way of God's Mercy' and *on this basis* the Spirit 'works *Faith*' in the elect. 'This Inward Ability or Power comes *upon* us, it can't be *proffer'd* to us,' and the Spirit '*cannot* honourably Work' without Christ's imputation. Preaching of God's righteousness is the Spirit's 'Chariot ... in which he *rides* to take Possession of the Sinner', but all this 'Sinks and Dies' when offers are preached. For they challenge the Spirit's management of salvation as wrought out in eternity by the Father and Son. In scripture, Hussey contended, 'we shall find that the Lord *Works* sensibleness upon Sinners, instead of bidding 'em *be sensible*. ... The Gospel speaks of a *Translation out of Darkness*, and that Men are passively *brought* out of it. There is no Exhortation given 'em to *endeavour* to come out of it. The Nature of it lies above all *Creature-Endeavours*.' Offers are asking 'more than *Sinners* can do. More than *Preachers* can do. More than any *Exhortation* in the Scripture speakes of.' Hussey underlined the impossibility of sinners reaching out to God, of the uncalled opening their hearts to Christ, of 'the Spiritually Deaf and Uncircumcised' spiritually hearing. 'If any Man say, it's his *Duty*: I say so *too*. But this don't *cure* him. *Exhortation* to such an Act as this will never *help* him, it's no Fit or appointed Means.'<sup>41</sup>

Hussey was not promoting duty-faith with these last words, but rather saying that salvation has nothing to do with duty or response to commands, and therefore offers and invitations are ineffective, anticipating *The Modern Question* thirty years before its time.

### 3.3 The nonequivalence of gift and offer

Hussey's third principal point was to disprove any correspondence between the offer and the gift of grace. 'Offerers', as he called them, make 'this Foolish

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<sup>41</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, ch3:39-65; 441-442.

Assertion ... that a *Gift* and an *Offer* are Both One!’ typically confusing things that differ. An offer ‘falls short of a Gift’: it may be spurned or refused; it requires human action and therefore implies conditionality. Naaman offered Elisha a gift, which he declined (II Kings 5:15-16), for example. ‘The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him’ (I Cor 2:14); they can only be spiritually discerned. But ‘a *Gift* is Effectual, it finds Acceptance’ and the recipient becomes the possessor. In the gospel, God has gifted his Son and the Spirit by ‘an effectual Conveyance’, exclusively God’s initiative and operation, plainly distinguished from ‘Ineffectual’ offers. As to God’s gifts, Hussey propounded a quadruple distinction: *for*, *unto*, *upon*, *into*. First, gifts are *for* the elect, first received by Christ as their head, then accepted by themselves as members. Second, the elect were given *unto* Christ ‘by an Act of God within himself from Everlasting’. ‘And yet Ministers come with their *Propounding the Offer*,’ wrote Hussey, ‘and tell Sinners the *Offer* of God is Eternal Life, ... *pouring out Foolishness*, and *Changing the Truth of God into a Lie!*’ Also the Spirit, truth, grace and privilege are given *unto* the Elect. This should be encouragement enough for all faithful ministers to ‘Preach the *Absolute Gospel*, and throw away *their Offers*’ and ‘*If’s*’, for Christ will own the preaching of ‘the pure and Unmixed Gospel’. Third, the gift of Christ’s righteousness is *upon* the elect of God, who are ‘Universally *Passive* under it. There is not One of the whole Number that *concurs* the least unto it.’ Finally, gifts are worked *into* the nature of the recipient, whereas it is the nature of an offer to come from without.<sup>42</sup>

Hussey strove to prove the distinction between offer and gift, because he did not believe the gift could be offered, but only supernaturally bestowed. Quite simply, because God ‘hath not given him to be a *Saviour* to any except the Body ... you don’t *offer Salvation* to Sinners.’<sup>43</sup>

### 3.4 The dissimilarity between doctrine and salvation

Having presented his three major distinctions, the next four chapters of Hussey’s book disproving offers addressed what he called ‘the Grand and Puzling

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<sup>42</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, ch4:65-90; 94.

<sup>43</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 96.

Question' of how to preach Christ in the gospel without offering him. In chapter 5 he presented '*One General Resolution*', which is the subject of this section. Three more chapters followed containing many more resolutions, some 'distinct', and twenty 'particular'.<sup>44</sup> These are variations on a theme, such as preaching the gospel compatibly with election-union, preaching by Christ in his procuring the conveyance of redemption, preaching through Christ not merely concerning him, and so on. Hussey knew ministers would balk at the separation of gospel preaching and gospel offers. He claimed he had explained this sufficiently with his disproof of offers, the Spirit's refusal to work with offers, and the superiority of gifts over offers. But now he provides this fourth distinction to explain how to preach without offering: the divorce of doctrine and salvation.<sup>45</sup>

Hussey instructed, 'We must Preach the *Doctrine* of Salvation to all Sinners openly within the hearing: And must Preach *Salvation* included in the Doctrine to the Elect alone, hid among them. But as to a *Propounding* of the *Offer* either of Doctrine or Salvation, it's a Form of *Man's Device*, and because of the *Evil Nature* of it, ... we must do it unto Neither.' The doctrine must be preached to everyone, elect and non-elect: 'Men must Preach *the Word of God*, and *the Testimony* held,' fulfilling the command to evangelise or preach the gospel 'whoeresoever there is an Opportunity to utter *the joyful Sound*'. As the 'External Revelation' or 'Report' and the '*Doctrine* of the Cross of Christ' is preached, 'Salvation is brought to the Elect alone.' This is solely through God's powerful operation, for '*Offers* of Grace are not appointed of God to effect the Conversion of the Elect.' Hussey also said that 'all the World must hear of Christ's Greatness ... tho' they can never enjoy the *Salvation*, nor believe into *Christ's Person*.' This requires skilful discriminatory preaching: 'know how to Preach the Gospel to Sinners, that even the *Non-Elect* may believe to the *Testimony* of Jesus, without *Offers* of Grace to them.' Hussey stressed the absurdity of inappropriately offering what does not belong to people, such as to '*Offer Christ for a Priest to all Sinners* without Distinction', which only raises 'Secret Hopes of Salvation'. Rather, 'Preach the Gospel of the *Kingdom* to them: *Exalt Christ*.' But 'do not Preach the Gospel of the *Blood* of Christ to them. For

<sup>44</sup> Note: Toon (*Emergence*, 81-82) only lists the final twenty of these resolutions listed in chs 7-8.

<sup>45</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, ch5:90-94.

that is a *Blessing* of the Kingdom, and to be given to none but to them to whom it is *prepared*.' As John the Baptist preached repentance to all, and Paul preached forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ, so 'the Doctrine is to be Preach'd to all,' in fulfilment of Christ's commission to his disciples to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. But, Hussey insisted, this does not include offers, for the Spirit's intention was that 'their *Words* not their *Offers*' should go to the ends of the world. Preach, advised Hussey, 'in a *General Extent*, ... making known the *Doctrine*'. This doctrine has a twofold reaction in the non-elect: some reject it while others receive it. Ministers must 'tell sinners', wrote Hussey, 'how Dreadful it is to be Refusers of the *Doctrine* or Report of Christ,' must tell them 'that God is the *Master* of his *own Grace*,' must preach that 'the *Operation of Power* under the Doctrine' effectually calls God's elect. And if they reject this, God's justice is glorified, and the gospel vindicated. Sometimes it has what he called 'a *Commissionated Power*' enabling them to accept it notionally with their faculties, without it having a '*Special, Influential Power* to close in Savingly'. There are '*temporal Advantages*' to the non-elect. It maintains orthodoxy and a general belief in the record of the gospel. In outwardly bowing to it, non-elect sinners can be '*Providentially* helpful to the Elect', for which God will reward them with 'good Allowances for the *present Life*'. Hussey had been at 'some Pains' to show how to preach the doctrine without offering it, how only then it reaches '*God's true End*' of 'saving with a *Special Salvation* all the Elect of God; and on the other Hand, securing the *Common Advantages of Providence*, which attend the Doctrine in a way of *Common Good*.' The Spirit 'goes along with this Distinguishing Gospel, because it is *Truth*. But he never goes along with most Men's Sermonizing, because it's *Flattery* and Falshood.' To this end Hussey urged ministers to look out for God's operations, and 'not entertain a Fruitless *Philanthropy*', or a longing for all men individually to experience salvation. 'We ought to have a Fervent Love for Christ's Body, but not a fond Love for the *Members of a Harlot*.' 'If you knew how to Preach as you ought,' he wrote, 'you would never offer Christ more, nor expect to see Captives in Sin *releas'd* out of the Condition they are in by *Proposals*.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, ch5:90-129; 332.



In his reply to one of ‘sundry Pleas’ against his teaching, Hussey used Paul’s sermon in Acts 13:38: ‘Through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins,’ to reiterate his distinction between doctrine and salvation. ‘The *Doctrine* of Forgiveness Preach’d to a mix’d Auditory is one Thing, and the *Benefit of Forgiveness* which the Elect obtain in their own Consciences at Believing, is another Thing.’ Paul ‘Preach’d the *Doctrine* to them, without offering the *Blessing* of Forgiveness at all. This was *convey’d* to the Elect under the imputation of the Righteousness of God, and *the rest* heard the Doctrine preach’d and were *blinded*.’ ‘The way to convert the Elect’, wrote Hussey, ‘is not to *Offer* the Doctrine, but to exalt the *Power* in the Doctrine.’<sup>47</sup>

We have not analysed his many other resolutions of the question ‘How to preach without offering?’ but his thirteenth of the last twenty particular resolutions seems to adequately represent them all: ‘We ought to Preach the Gospel so as it riseth higher than any *Natural*, Unconverted, *Notional* Man in the World can either *receive* it by a *Practical* closing with it, or carry it in the *Pulpit* towards such a Reception of it in the *Pews*.’ In other words, the gospel must be preached so that it is beyond the reach of any sinner to receive it or any preacher to enable such reception.<sup>48</sup>

### 3.5 The disjunction between faith and coming, and distinctions of faith

Hussey was committed to the invalidity of inviting sinners to come to Christ. He insisted invitations of grace are ‘a *wrong* and unskilful Way of *Application*’, and God views this ‘notoriously Crooked’ method with ‘Severity’ because it is ‘very injurious to the Wise *Revelation* of Grace’ that propitiation was effected exclusively for the elect, a people distinct from the world. An important aspect of this was to prove that coming to Christ had no reference to saving faith.<sup>49</sup> This separation of faith and coming was especially poignant given his early clear understanding of their relationship.

Hussey argued that Jesus’ summons ‘Come unto me’ (eg Matthew 11:28, John 5:40) is not ‘an Invitation to *Saving Faith*’, any more than the rest Jesus

<sup>47</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 301-303,196.

<sup>48</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 233.

<sup>49</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 347-348,376; *Glory*, 140.

promises refers to salvation. It is merely a call to the physical act of coming, an invitation to the multitude to come from '*their Cities into the wilderness*' to hear Jesus, to 'the Dissatisfied restless Enquirers' to discover the 'Doctrinal Conviction' of '*where, and who is Messiah?*' Such coming is attended with a promise of blessing. This 'come', insisted Hussey, is to be interpreted the same as '*all Other Comes in the New Testament*' namely as '*a Natural and Local Act*'. For 'it lay in their *Natural* Power to come to Christ there, to his *Human Nature*, with their *Legs*; but it lay not in their Power' to come in a '*Spiritual Sense*'. He did admit that occasionally 'come' can be interpreted to signify believing, as in John 6:35,37,44-45,65; 7:37-38: these instances referring to '*the Father's Gift* must be *Spiritual* and Supernatural Believing, or *Saving* faith'. Apart from these references in John, he declared, 'I scarce know Another *Parallel* for *Spiritual* Coming.' Thus Hussey distinguished coming and faith. There is '*Natural Coming*', a physical act. And there is '*Spiritual Coming*', a mental act. The former being '*Loco-motion*' not '*Faith's Motion*', '*Place-coming*, and not a *Believing Coming*'. After Christ's ascension the invitation to come naturally 'appears no longer' because he is not here. True faith consists of 'motion faith' in which the heart is drawn up to Christ in heaven by God's supernatural operation, and this is why, according to Hussey, the word 'come' should not be used 'as a Form of Invitation' in gospel preaching. For the nature of saving faith means that any form of invitation is entirely inappropriate:

Invitations to *come and see*, Invitations to come and hear, Invitations to come as *Guests* to Gospel Truths, ... are all vastly *distinguish'd* from Invitations to Christ in *Saving Faith*, as Men pretend they make, when they Preach the Gospel.

Hussey clearly distinguished invitation and operation: '*Invitation* carries me to Means, *Operation* carries me to Christ.' Once invitation has brought people to church, 'coming' out their houses and villages to attend preaching where they hear useful instruction, 'all *Invitation*' must cease. For under the same means of grace, the Holy Spirit '*inwardly falls* on the Elect of God, converts them by Effectual Power, and in Sovereign Wisdom passeth by *the Rest*, and leaves them to *Themselves*.' Hussey summarised his logic:

How can I invite Sinners to come *into* the Person of Christ: For Faith is a Spiritual Motion into his Person. So how can I invite them *into* Regeneration,

as to say, into the *Mystery* and *Experience* of it. I must *invite* them to come often by a Natural Act *to* the Gospel, but must not *deceive* them to invite them to come *into* the Gospel: That's not put into my *Commission*, but is reserv'd to the Peculiar Honour of the *Holy Ghost in his own Operation*.<sup>50</sup>

Naturally Hussey often distinguished between two types of faith and repentance. He did not write a separate chapter about this, but it can be found throughout his writings, as the following evidence demonstrates. For 'God's Chosen' the doctrine and salvation combine, and they receive the '*Faith of God's Elect*', 'a special Gift of the Father in bestowing his Christ and Salvation on them'. But Hussey described another kind of faith and repentance, such as the kind the Spirit intended under John the Baptist's ministry. This was '*such* a Repentance and Faith, as was consistent with the *Day*,' sufficient to work 'Reformation of Manners' and 'consistent with a State of Unregeneracy'. Under the same preaching which produces saving faith, 'a *Common Operation* of the Spirit worketh a *Common Faith* in the Non-Elect,' 'a *Kind* of Believing, which is short of *Saving Faith*'. 'A Convenient, appointed Number of the *Non-Elect* believe with a *Temporary Faith*, a *Rational Faith*, an *External Faith*,' as they receive the 'Common *Doctrine* of the Gospel, *that Jesus Christ died for sinners; that they are Sinners*; and the like', entitling them to 'the Common Salvation concerning Christ in the Doctrine'. These 'meer *Doctrinal* Receivers' who only demonstrate '*Outward Acceptance* of the Notion of the Gospel' can only produce '*natural* Repentance', '*Naturally-Reasonable* Faith, distinct from a *Spiritual* and Supernatural Believing', '*Humane* Faith', 'outer-court faith' as opposed to 'inner-court faith'. Clearly Hussey's desire was to create the widest-possible divergence between these two types of faith: 'A *moral* Persuasion of the Truth falls short of *the Faith of God's Elect*.' This '*Orthodox* Persuasion' may be worked up by words, arguments and reason, but it is 'corrupt Faith', because it does not come from God (Galatians 5:8). It falls short because its origin is not divine: whereas the elect's interest in the 'special Doctrines' comes 'by *another* means, ... the Non-Elect have no *Right* to 'em by *any* means at all, except only to the *Cortex*, the Cluster, the Shell and Common Rind of their Life in the Orthodox Notion and Doctrine: That's all.' Hence Hussey dismissed '*commands* to Believe' as 'Dead and *Useless*', reducing the nature of faith to 'a Low, Moral Sort of Faith' which 'never goes out of a Man's Self to fasten on the *Promise*'. To sum

<sup>50</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, ch11:348-367,372-382; also *Glory*, 447,139.

up: 'Natural and Rational Repentance and Faith ... is very *distinct*' from 'Gospel-Faith and Repentance' which is 'of a higher *Species ... Transcendent, Exalted, Spiritual, Supernatural, wrought and rais'd* in Men according to the *Spirit* of the Gospel'.<sup>51</sup>

### Analysis of Hussey's distinctions

Hussey's teaching may have been opaque, disorganised, repetitive and sometimes contradictory, but it was ruthless. It required radical reinterpretation and sharp distinctions, which in one form or another have been embraced by all who followed him, and remain distinctive of hyper-Calvinism to this day. His intended purpose was to restrict and discriminate by 'limiting our Message'.<sup>52</sup> It severed what had always belonged together: preaching and invitation, gospel and salvation, the Spirit and preaching, offer and gift, coming and faith. All his artificial distinctions served one purpose: to prove the impotence and impropriety of gospel offers, invitations and exhortations, which he called the 'Old Way of mingling Things that are and must be distinguish'd'.<sup>53</sup> With these distinctions he dismantled the bridge between the Saviour and sinners, presenting Christ in an objective and descriptive sense only, available exclusively to an elite group. Crucial to Hussey's hyper-Calvinism was his reassessment of preaching and faith. In his first book he spoke of the '*gracious invitation*, a Come that is full of Grace and Love', requiring 'a believing close' with the offer and 'an obedient accepting' of the gospel.<sup>54</sup> This understanding reflected the simplicity and integrity of faith as clarified by Calvin, who spoke of leaning and resting on Christ as revealed in the gospel, receiving him 'as he is offered by the Father', having 'a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ';<sup>55</sup> and the Westminster Confession, which describes faith's 'principal acts' as 'accepting, receiving, and resting upon Christ alone'.<sup>56</sup> After renouncing

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<sup>51</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 22-23, 139-140, 390-392, 355-356, 143, 114, 154, 149, 397.393 etc

<sup>52</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 647.

<sup>53</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 376.

<sup>54</sup> Hussey, *Gospel-Feast*, 325, 364.

<sup>55</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.2.6-7.

<sup>56</sup> Westminster Confession 14.2; Larger + Shorter Catechisms Q72+Q86.

his first book, Hussey was particularly sensitive to the idea of ‘coming’, and thoroughly disdained the connection between coming and faith, thus creating a further distinction within faith itself. He invented another lower kind of faith, of the non-saving sort, and external belief in notional doctrine concerning Christ, compatible with physical coming to church; and he distinguished this from supernatural spiritual faith, special salvation conveyed to the elect by God’s Spirit. Thus he supplanted the gospel imperative of faith and repentance for tremulous waiting on God’s operation to carry the soul to Christ; and by insisting that conversion is a passive experience, he thwarted any endeavour on the part of the dispirited sinner.<sup>57</sup>

The next two sections delve further into Hussey’s thinking, first considering significant theological influences which drove him (4:1-3), and then the Calvinistic doctrines which he exploited in order to develop his brand of hyper-Calvinist theology (5:1-4). Again, his writings are extensively quoted and précised within the narrative.

## 4 Influences on Hussey

### 4.1 Antinomianism

There is no doubt that antinomianism with its perspective of free grace provided the ideal medium for launching Hussey into hyper-Calvinism. He was well acquainted with and influenced by the antinomian Tobias Crisp’s writings, whose doctrines helped to inform or confirm his hyper-Calvinism, particularly those on eternal union and justification, and on faith.<sup>58</sup>

It was not uncommon for Anglican and nonconformist authors to place the Revolution of 1688-1689 in the framework of prophetic eschatology.<sup>59</sup> But Hussey’s interpretation of apocalyptic prophecy took this to curious lengths. He explained that following the death and resurrection of the two witnesses (Revelation 11:3-12) in England in 1687, ‘a notable *Epocha* of Revelation-Time’ began with the mystical vision of the seventh angel pouring out his vial

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<sup>57</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 374,442.

<sup>58</sup> eg Crisp, *Christ Alone*, 1:89-93, 2:107-108,234-242. Crisp’s influence is discussed in ch4 on Gill.

<sup>59</sup> Johnston, ‘Revelation’, *Historical Journal* (June 2005), 353-356,369 etc.

accompanied by ‘a great voice out of the Temple of Heaven from the Throne of the Glory-Man, IT IS DONE: All is done in Christ Jesus before Believing.’ This was followed by seismic disturbances (Revelation 16:17-18). Hussey drew a parallel between this vision and the reprinting of Crisp’s sermons, and also between the disturbances which followed both. According to Hussey, Crisp ‘substantially proved, that *‘tis done; Iniquity is laid upon Christ: And Pardon fully settled and done in Christ.*’ And he interpreted Baxter’s ‘thunderclap’ of public condemnation in Pinner’s Hall against Crisp’s antinomianism in this context: ‘*Thunders of Hell and Damnation have rattled from Dissenting-Pulpits against them since, so these ‘Deserters of the Faith ... by their Unbelieving Voices ... and angry Thunders awing the People, have drown’d the Report of the 7<sup>th</sup> Angel.*’ The essential proclamation of the angel and Crisp was identical: ‘IT IS DONE.’ These words encapsulated the essence of antinomianism to Hussey. And thus he linked them both together, calling the antinomian upsurge ‘the *Vial-Reformation*’. ‘What *Thunderings* have there been these last *Fourteen* Years to beat down this Belief, ever since the first *Thunder-Clap* of this Nature in *Pinner’s-Hall*? What *Lightnings* in the Church?’ Time now for more LIGHTNINGS to come forth after them.’ Time for ‘the Advance of a *Spiritual Reformation*’. Hussey believed this new Reformation expressed the seventh angel’s message, the significant epoch of antinomian doctrine. He was on a mission, fully persuaded God had uniquely prepared him for this role, and that this new ‘vial Reformation’ would be more successful than the old ‘Trumpet-Reformation’ which fizzled out with ‘Carnal Controversie’ (probably a reference to the sixteenth-century Protestant Reformation). He foresaw ‘daily Discoveries of the Everlasting, despised Gospel’. He foresaw the ‘*Anti-Everlasting Men*’ (by which he meant those who offered the gospel) coming ‘down into the *Dust*’ for their preaching of ‘Proposals’ dependent on ‘*Suspension and Uncertainty*’, of ‘Offers’ to those who are willing, ‘*Gospel-Performances*’ and other ‘*Absurdities*’. This gospel removes duty, removes the requirement to respond to the gospel in faith: ‘All is done in Christ Jesus *before Believing*.’ Instead it pronounces ‘It is done,’ all framed and finished in God’s decree before time began. He declared,

We always took it, that it was *still to do*, Salvation suspended *absolutely*, till we *Conditionally* believed. But here comes out a brave *Antinomian*-Gospel, and says 'tis *done. Done!*'<sup>60</sup>

This vision of antinomianism intoxicated Hussey, and had a lasting impact on him. He credited 'the Power of this *Antinomian* Gospel' for flooding him with light and sounding the jubilee in his soul. He revelled in 'the *Everlasting Love* of the *Father* towards the *Elect* in his Son ... the *Foundation, Cause, Spring, Motive* and *Covenant* that secures all' including his holiness and happiness. He believed antinomianism provided a conduit for the Spirit's discriminatory and '*Particular Efficacy*', with its 'Scripture-Distinctions' to restrict the message. He bemoaned the confusion of the church age which had obscured the gospel light of Jesus' words: '*Seventeen Hundred Years* ago the way of Conversion was by *drawing*. *No Man can come unto Me, except the Father ... draw him.*' But now, Hussey claimed, since the days of Arminianism, Pelagianism, Popery and other schemes, the situation is reversed; and *now* no one comes to Christ without *driving*: 'driving into the *Duties* of the Gospel' to partake of its privileges, 'driving them to fulfil the *Conditions of the Covenant*'. Driving not drawing. He believed it was this driving that had led to the overthrow of 'all *Order* and *Settlements of Father, Son* and *Spirit* from *Everlasting* to the *Elect!*' to the confusion of the church. He confidently declared, 'But I will tell you an *Antinomian* doctrine, and give it to you for *Truth*, Christ is both able and willing to save such of the *Elect* as yet do *not* come unto him.' This is 'the *Glory* of his *Sovereignty* who saith, *I will and you shall*'. He does not wait for them to be willing. He comes to them in their darkness, while they make no move towards him, nor understand, nor think of him. But 'blind *Arminianism*', the great enemy of antinomianism, reverses this order: it encourages sinners to come to Christ, who is able and willing to save them.<sup>61</sup> As this light broke in upon Hussey, it removed his fear and unwillingness, and strengthened him to break with tradition received from the fathers and embrace antinomian doctrine.

It seems clear that antinomianism's impact on Hussey lay in its strong emphasis on God's sovereignty in salvation to the exclusion of human involvement. It was a protest against human duties, performances and activity, whether preacher in

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<sup>60</sup> All quotes from Hussey, *Glory*, title-page, 209-210.

<sup>61</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 123-124, 647, 150, 632-634.

offering or hearer in responding. It emphasised the passivity of salvation. He happily professed himself a '*Gospel-Antinomian*', 'a strict *Antinomian* ... dead to the law', for 'There is some *Orthodox* Sense in which a Man *may*, and in which he *must* be an Antinomian;' although he insisted he was a '*Godly Antinomian*' who abhorred libertinism. The widespread opposition and fear of antinomianism did not perturb Hussey: it simply made him value it the more and redouble his love for '*Free Grace!*'<sup>62</sup>

As we saw in the previous chapter (pt5.2) the Congregational ministers in their Declaration identified refusal to offer Christ in the gospel as a major tenet of antinomianism. Their Opposition to this Tenth Error began as follows:

**Our Opposition.**

That tho Men want Ability to Believe Savingly, yet it's the Duty of Gospel Ministers to make the Offer, and *Testifie* unto them, That whoever Believes and Repents, shall be Saved; and that it's the Peoples Duty to make use of their Natural Faculties, with such External Means and Workings of the Spirit, as God Affords them, that they may Believe, Repent, and be Saved.<sup>63</sup>

Hussey referred to this in both books, outraged at the Declaration's Opposition to antinomianism's rejection of offers. He claimed the Declaration was 'a Scandal upon the very *Gospel* by an *Anti-Gospel*'. It was 'a *Total Exclusion* of the Grace that must save, in a Piece of *Robbery* committed upon the Holy Ghost, by taking away his *effectual* Operations'. Faithful preaching, observing 'Scripture-Distinctions in limiting our Message, and *discriminating* our Doctrine', giving everyone their 'Proper Portion', is branded antinomianism, he said. But this 'Declaration of the *pretended* Congregational' (he himself was one) was advocating Arminianism, offering grace with 'artful' preaching, inviting sinners to improve the means of grace for their salvation, promiscuously inviting '*Dogs to eat of the Children's Bread*', using '*Universal Grace* to buoy up all the Sons of *Adam* with a Hope', trying to do the impossible and make crooked things straight. Such ministers, Hussey insisted, will never prosper.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 504-505, 581-582.

<sup>63</sup> *Declaration*, 41-42.

<sup>64</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 10-12; Hussey, *Glory*, 647-649.



## 4.2 Eternal union and eternal justification

Another major tenet of antinomianism, recognised in the Congregational Declaration as the First Error (ch1,pt5.2),<sup>65</sup> is that justification does not follow faith but is a manifestation or perception in the elects' consciences of God's eternal decree of justification. Crisp, Davis and Gill taught that active or proper justification is God's decree; passive or improper justification is its application to believers' consciences.<sup>66</sup>

Part of the reason for Hussey's second book was to demonstrate 'the Mystery of the Elect and their *Union* in Christ Jesus *before the Foundation of the World*; proving that their *Free Grace-Union* according to God's *Ancient Settlements* was never ... *destroy'd* by their Subordinate Nature-Fall in *Adam*.' His theology on union in Christ before faith, which he attributed to his antinomianism, necessarily precluded offers and invitations. He reasoned that because union is an eternal creative act, it must precede the human act of faith. He felt this so strongly that he claimed anti-antinomians and '*Anti-Union-Men*' who taught otherwise 'shake the very Foundations of the *Christian Religion*' because they reverse God's ordered operations. He insisted on the impossibility that the soul should respond to God by 'idle' invitation, when it 'must *feel* the Motion from Union'. He argued faith is but the realisation of one's secret interest in God through election, before the world existed, and pressing duties or offers on the unregenerate is antithetical to this: 'our *Anti-Union Men* are in the Bottom of their Thoughts I fear ... *Anti-Election Men*.' There must be '*Honest Antinomian-Union before Faith*. All Interest in Christ is *passive*, it begins with *Election-Interest*, goes on to *Redemption-Interest*, comes home to *Regeneration-Interest*.'<sup>67</sup>

Similarly Hussey argued for '*Justification before Faith*': 'if the Sinner must *not* come to Christ in a *sinful State*, he must come (if he comes at all) after the *State* is alter'd. ... *Guilt* of the whole Elect Person is absolutely remov'd in the *Union* and *Justification* antecedently to *coming*,' so 'the Soul comes to Christ in

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<sup>65</sup> Declaration, 7,12-18.

<sup>66</sup> see Crisp, *Christ Alone*, 1:91-92 Gill's note†; also Davis, *Vindication*, 7.

<sup>67</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, title-page,143-145,652,602, also 385,629.

a *Justify'd State*.' He accused 'most of our *Worthy Divines*' of reversing this order: setting faith, a person's act, before justification, God's act. Consequently they 'mould and fashion' the gospel to suit, saying 'you must *believe first* and come to Christ for Pardon, and then when you have *clos'd* with him upon *Gospel-Offers*, ... then God *begins* to pardon and justify you and not before.' Hussey proclaimed, 'Here's a Way of Justification indeed! This is such a *Presumptuous* coming to Christ, that 'tis the ready way for the Soul to be *turn'd off* and not pardon'd at all.'<sup>68</sup>

Hussey's logic was simple: because God gave the elect to Christ in eternity through union and justification, Christ is given to them in time,<sup>69</sup> therefore offering salvation to those who do not have this secret relationship is both ineffective and deceitful.

### 4.3 Arminianism

Congregational minister John Hunt, son of William Hunt the ejected minister of Sutton, Cambridgeshire, wrote a book in 1704 on the *Glory and Excellency of Christ* which was the occasion of Hussey's second book, the title of which mimicked Hunt's, and in which he mercilessly berated Hunt for his Arminianism. Part of Hunt's title, for example, referred to the Rose of Sharon, an image of Christ. Hussey repeatedly sneered at this, once writing, 'more like a stalk of *Hemlock*'.<sup>70</sup> One of his '*Disswaders*' had urged him that if he had to expose 'any weak Passages' in Hunt's book, 'it would be better and more regular to write unto him in a Spirit of Love than to appear in *Print*.' But Hussey brushed off this advice: 'Some of the Errors in Mr. *Hunt's* Book have been particularly complain'd of to Me by *Brethren of our Congregation* I watch over, and their complaints have not been without *Reason*; much of the Doctrine in his Book which He takes for *Gospel*, being for the *Destruction* of Grace, cannot be for the *Edification* of the Gracious, nor for the Conversion of the Ungracious. Now if *our* People apprehend these Errors, why not *other* People?'<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 443-444, 387-388, 555, 782-785.

<sup>69</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 628-629.

<sup>70</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 546; see 888-901.

<sup>71</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 679-680.

Hussey believed '*Arminianism* is the Universal *Nature* of Mankind. It is by Nature every Body's *Principle*.' He himself confessed 'I find it as Natural in *Me* to be an *Arminian*, as it is to *breathe*.' This, and his conviction that it 'makes Use of the *Offer* to uphold the Doctrine of *General Redemption*', propelled him to 'Preach the Gospel so as to *beat down Arminianism*'. For '*Offers* of Christ to unregenerate Sinners are fitted to Creature-*Co-Operation*, and Creature *Concurrence*; and so to *Arminianism*.'<sup>72</sup> He saw it as the arch-enemy of his system of theology because it imploded his fixed decretal structure by making Christ available to everyone. In giving all sinners hope of salvation, and failing to distinguish between 'elect sinners' and all the rest, he believed it was a 'Drugg ... devoid of the Powerful and Healing Principles of the *Gospel* thro' the Operations of *Father, Son* and *Spirit*'. (Hussey adopted the term elect sinners,<sup>73</sup> as had Davis,<sup>74</sup> suggesting that the warrant of faith depends on election rather than sinnership.) Hussey compared 'blind *Arminianism*' unfavourably with antinomianism, criticising Hunt's teaching that 'Christ is able and willing to save all that *come* unto him.' This turned Hussey's doctrine on its head, and he called it 'poor Encouragement'. Sinners, he argued, do not come to Christ. He comes to them. He is 'able and willing to save the Elect of God'. Antinomianism exalts election and God's operations in the sinner; Arminianism exalts faith and the sinner's actions towards God. Antinomianism says the sinner is cleansed *before* faith. Arminianism, that the sinner is cleansed *after* faith; indeed Hunt's 'strange Position', as Hussey called it, was 'encouraging the Poor Sinner to believe, because *he can never be too Filthy to go to Christ by Faith*.' Arminian exhortations depend on '*Creature-Acts*', he claimed, warning sinners of dying out of Christ, exhorting them to surrender to him, receive, flee to, come to, believe on, him (all Reformed synonyms of faith). To Hussey all this was futile: 'Why, if born again, How can they die out of Christ? If not born again, How can they perform the Acts he exhorts them to?' '*Arminians* lay all the Stress upon *Outwards*, as *Offers of Grace, Tenders of Salvation, Wooings and Beseachings of Sinners*,' on the urgency of repenting before it is too late. This kind of 'unskilful' preaching fails to distinguish between the elect 'whose Opportunities are secured to their Effectual Conversion to Christ, and *the rest* who have no

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<sup>72</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 198,209.

<sup>73</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 170,589,597,428,442,597,635 etc.

<sup>74</sup> Davis, *Truth*, 10; *Vindication* 7,16,18,22,23 etc.

Opportunities *to believe and be saved.*' This Arminian way of frightening people of being separated from Christ for ever Hussey termed a shameful lie the Spirit will never honour, for the minister 'chides' those 'whom the Lord knows to be the *Non-Elect*, ... *to believe in Jesus Christ.*'<sup>75</sup>

These words of Hussey's lie at the heart of his hyper-Calvinism and compel his hatred of Arminianism, for Hussey could see no desire within God for the salvation of any but his own elect. In one revealing passage he concocted a plea for offers (*Plea* 37) in which the petitioner suggested offering can be carried to 'Three Extrems': 1) a promiscuous offer implies the offerer desires the salvation of everyone who hears it. This is *universal grace*. 2) An act is required to secure the possession or enjoyment of what is offered, making the offer conditional, and therefore not a gift. This is the *covenant of works*. 3) An offer implies that the recipients 'have Power to accept', and it is their choice. This is *free will*. 'An *Arminian* need desire no more,' the petitioner concluded, 'but none of these Things are necessarily imply'd in the Nature of Offers, nor are own'd by the Orthodox who use this Term.' Hussey's unsatisfactorily short and vague answer to this plea simply stated all offers, whether '*New Offers, Evangelical Offers, Ministerial Offers, Free Offers, Effectual Offers &c.*' are all '*disguised Daughters of one and the same Mother Arminianism*'.<sup>76</sup>

Like antinomianism, Arminianism was a loose term, frequently used pejoratively towards those who espoused the Canons of Dort's emphasis on the universal sufficiency of the atonement. It was and continues to be used by hyper-Calvinists against mainstream Calvinists (ch1,pt4.2). It seems probable therefore that Hussey inaccurately labelled Hunt Arminian, confusing his zeal to invite sinners to Christ with his belief in their ability to do so: 'an *Offer of Grace* is most suited to ... the Spirit of the *Arminians* than to the Spirit of the *Gospel*,'<sup>77</sup> he wrote. Doubtless it was more convenient for Hussey to identify the enemy as Arminianism. In fact he need not have looked further than the old received Calvinism he had originally embraced, which was comfortable with election *and* the free offer, with particular redemption *and* universal invitations, with human

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<sup>75</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 532,530,634-635,508-510,611,629-630.

<sup>76</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 337-338.

<sup>77</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 200, also 13-14.

inability *and* the imperative of faith. Hunt was not the enemy of Calvinism when he preached so as to ‘compel them to come in’ (Luke 14:23); nor was Spurgeon who when preaching on this same command recorded the unparalleled opposition to his sermon: ‘The violent, rigid school of Hyper-Calvinists said that the discourse was Arminian and unsound.’<sup>78</sup> It was the fatalism of Hussey and his followers in pressing predestination rather than pressing sinners to Christ that caused a ‘contrary extream’, according to Richard Baxter:

*Arminianism* rose from mens prophane abuse of the Doctrine of Election, saying, If I am elected, I shall be saved, whatever I do; and when God will give me grace, I shall have it; and till then, it is not in him that willeth or runneth.<sup>79</sup>

What hyper-Calvinists like Hussey perceived as their chief enemy Baxter identified as an over-reaction to their tendency to minimise human responsibility by stressing God’s eternal decrees. In truth hyper-Calvinists’ enemy lay much closer to home than Arminians with their free offer—it lay in Calvinists with theirs.<sup>80</sup>

## 5 Incompatibility of Reformed doctrines and offers

Hussey needed to justify his radical new theology by aligning it with major Reformed doctrines, and this section provides evidence of how he attempted to demonstrate that election, special grace, particular redemption and human inability were at variance with gospel offers.

### 5.1 Election

Nowhere was this truer than in the doctrine of election, which Hussey overwhelmingly found antithetical to offers of grace, as his deterministic description of it illustrates: ‘*Absolute Election*, the Work of God the Father, ... as to a certain Number of Persons defined and limited in the purpose of God, which can neither be increased nor diminished, not one more to be chosen in, after all

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<sup>78</sup> Spurgeon, Sermon 227, see Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 2:225.

<sup>79</sup> Baxter, *Apology*, 226.

<sup>80</sup> For more on Arminianism, see Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 113-118.

your Motives to *get an Interest in Christ*, or One in to be struck out.’<sup>81</sup> He created such a disjunction between election and offers that it governed both his own thinking and his judgment of others, and he was dismissive of anyone who claimed to believe election but still invited sinners to Christ:

They own a *Particular Election* only to Salvation. What have They to do then to make *Universal Offers* of Salvation?

‘Some who pretend to hold Election, do it but *faintly*; for they insist not upon Election-*Union*, or the Election of Grace.’ Otherwise they would see that being chosen in Christ includes justification and all other graces *before* believing, that it is ‘the Root of all the other Unions’.<sup>82</sup> He accused them of pitting their own wisdom against God’s, of compromising the infallibility of election, that ‘Glorious Article’, jeopardising God’s ‘Choice of his own settled Number in *Christ*’ by ‘shamefully’ appealing to ‘the *Congregation*’s Human Endeavours to accept’ offers of salvation and sneak in the back door. He declared,

This Notion of the *Offers of Grace* is no way suited to the Firm Belief of the Doctrine of an *Election*, and *Non-Election* of Persons, to obtain, and not obtain Mercy.

Offer doctrine is ‘utterly repugnant to the Notion of a *Non-election* of some’, he wrote. It is ‘the *Arminian Strain*’ to conflate vessels of mercy (elect) and vessels of wrath (non-elect) instead of distinguishing them. For they ‘preach and write, just as if they believ’d there were no *Non-Elect*, or else had a *Hope* and *Aim* to *Save* them’. ‘I am sure they can never firmly believe *Election* ... to go and Preach *Offers* of Grace as They do.’ Hussey only saw unresolvable incompatibility between election and offers, creating ‘*Invincible Impediments*’ which he illustrated as holding out his hand with money to ‘a *Poor Prisoner* that looks thro’ a *Grate*, and begs, but can’t *come near me*; he sees what I offer,’ but cannot reach it. With this illustration Hussey accused gospel offers of tantalising and tormenting sinners because they ignored the reality of non-availability through non-election.<sup>83</sup> He also believed it impugned God’s integrity: ‘The Lord

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<sup>81</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 657.

<sup>82</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 13,130-131.

<sup>83</sup> Hussey *Glory*, 545-546,607.

never *Offers Grace* to those whom he never *intends Grace*, because he can't act fallaciously,<sup>84</sup> or 'deceitfully'.<sup>85</sup>

The dominance of election in Hussey's theology governed not only his restricted gospel presentation, but also how he viewed people. He was asked (*Plea* 3), 'When you pray for the Conversion of Hearers, of Children, of Servants, How do you consider them?' In other words, Do you think of them as people needing salvation, or in terms of their election status? Hussey's answer was that he did not pray for anyone's conversion irrespective of their election; for unless the Spirit's converting power and the Father's electing grace align, such a prayer is misguided. 'Natural' prayer for the '*Supernatural Mercy*' of conversion is conflicting, according to Hussey: 'Let *Another* reconcile this with the Foundations of the *Christian Religion*, for I cannot. ... For can any be converted to what he is not *elected*? ... What, if I pray naturally in my *own Spirit*, do I think now under the Gospel that in my *natural* Praying the *Spirit maketh Intercession in me*? No.' He insisted that such an unsupported prayer will never prevail with God, any more than Abraham's would have done for his son Ishmael. Therefore 'if I pray for *Conversion*, I pray for none but such as are *chosen* to Conversion.'<sup>86</sup> Thus Hussey's perspective on predestination effectively ruled out intercessory prayer, even for his own family and congregation.

Hussey had an intricate and speculative view of election descending in order of '*Distinct Unions*', his purpose being 'to show how the *Elect* are never chang'd' from their original '*Election-Union*', being the eternal transaction among the persons of the Trinity as coequal agents, a deep and 'Fundamental Mystery'. The following table simplifies and condenses his theory.<sup>87</sup>

**Table 3 Hussey's 'distinct unions'**

	instigator		name of union	description of union
1	God choosing	1	elective	'high comprehending union, choosing in Christ to absolute, glorious and unspotted holiness'

<sup>84</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 154.

<sup>85</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 125 (abridged 1973 edition),

<sup>86</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 284-289.

<sup>87</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 562-565.

	founding	2	constitutive/donative	'founding and forelaying end and means, bringing his choice into consistence in Christ'
2	Christ	1	federal	're-stipulating, or engaging, that not one of those given him by the Father shall be lost; ... the result of election-grace and settlement, as it passes under distinct articles between God and Christ'
		2	representative	'representing and comprehending' those given him by the Father
		3	apprehending	the natural and supernatural motion from head to members
3	Holy Ghost distinctly	1	obligatory	obliging himself to Father and Son to make the whole mystery effectual 'by a pursuing application', knitting himself to the elect
		2	influential	descending on the elect in Christ's righteousness, 'at the moment of and under Christ's apprehending act'
	applicatory unions of conveyance	1	transitive	'influencing by implantation', translating from one stock to another 'by the first stirring and awakening work', before the soul's consent
		2	vital/regeneration/new creature	'influencing by an active principle of life or quickening', providing power to the new-born soul
		3	manifestative	influencing to experience and taste God's love, making things plain; beginning of belief
		4	mystical/spiritual	influencing us to an assurance of God's love, reinforcing evidence of union
		5	believing/conjugal	working 'motion, trust and cleaving', heart-work and union of will, joining to Christ by the person's consent

Hussey intended this 'Scheme of the Unions' to demonstrate which unions precede faith and which do not, and that the elect 'are never *alienated* from' Christ; and also to disprove 'Two Dangerous Notions against the Grace of God, and depending One upon Another. 1. *No Union before Faith*. ... 2. It's Cousin-German Error, that the Elect *did once belong to the Family of Hell*.' This chosen group were eternally secure and sure of redemption despite themselves. By virtue of eternal election, 'before they had *Faith* given them', before the manifestation of their mystical union, they were always called sheep, always God's children, always the Lord's people. And as such, 'as the Objects of



Electing Love, view'd and consider'd apart', above and beyond conditions, propositions or offers.<sup>88</sup>

Further informing his doctrine of election was Hussey's supralapsarianism, which he adopted 'to magnifie Grace':

God would therefore ordain, after and under his *predestinating us to the Adoption of Children by Jesus Christ unto Himself* upon the bottom of *Election-Union* in Christ Jesus, that these Creatures should fall, and out of the Miserable *Fall* rise by Grace the Happiest Creatures that ever came into God's Thoughts.

This supralapsarian scheme of 'a Glory *settled*, and then thro' Gradual Steps and Advances a Glory to be *enjoy'd!*' was a 'Quickning Doctrine' to Hussey. It was essential to his hyper-Calvinism, that faith received 'what was a *certain* Thing before it'. That everything was settled and secured before the world began or people existed, that the Fall did not interfere with the elect's standing in Christ, and time was simply a means of bringing these ancient settlements to consummation, the space between everlasting love in eternity past with 'the *secret* Glory of Christ' and its ultimate breaking out in 'the *open* Glory' of eternity to come. This conditioned Hussey's view of God, and controlled his understanding of gospel offers, which introduce '*Suspension* and Uncertainty'. He clearly felt that any loose ends, such as 'whosoever', clashed with eternal decrees, and offering Christ opened the shocking possibility of an intersection between the two discrete systems, as if one could 'hook in some Souls ... and nevertheless prevail upon them to *enter in*' when Christ has denied them entrance, or 'Mar the *Everlasting* Settlements' by adding to the number.<sup>89</sup>

A distinctive feature entangling and consolidating Hussey's supralapsarianism was his doctrine of the God-Man, which developed from his doctrine of predestination, inspired to some extent by Thomas Goodwin, as he admitted himself.<sup>90</sup> Hussey regarded his '*Divine Revelation*' of 'the Glory-Man standing in God *before the Foundation of the World!*' as highly significant, claiming the Spirit had not even led 'our Leaders, into this *Marvellous Light* of Christ'. He did

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<sup>88</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 565,567,570,575,577,654.

<sup>89</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 536,(111-112),162,546,170,209, 622,156.

<sup>90</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, Preface v.

not doubt that ‘the Son of God in his Personal Relation in God’s *Nature*, is from the Days of Eternity without Beginning,’ but his understanding of the mediator’s human nature is ambiguous: ‘the Son of God in God’s *Covenant* is *the Wisdom of God* from Everlasting in *another* Sense, that is, *adoptive* and consequent, and hath some Beginning from God.’ Here Hussey finely distinguished Christ’s eternity and his everlastingness. His vision of the ‘Glory-Man’ was essential to understanding the mystery: ‘The *Trinity* is not to be studied or known, but as we mingle the Doctrine of *Christ* with that High and Glorious Study, and bring along with us the *Wisdom-Mediator*, as the *Human Nature* of Christ had a *secret way* to stand in God, and so was the *Glory-Man* from the Days of Everlasting, to be between God and all his future Works!’ So ‘in the Everlasting Counsel of Settlements ... the *Covenant-Man*’ entered a ‘*Marriage-Deed* of Settlement, ... Consequently, *Christ* and the *Church* were Both mystically *One Person* in God’s Covenant, long before Adam.’<sup>91</sup>

What is clear is that Hussey safeguarded election so that its impregnability rendered offers of salvation conditional upon faith and repentance absurd.

## 5.2 Discriminating grace / effectual calling

Given Hussey’s doctrine of supralapsarian election, associated doctrines became ways and means of executing God’s decrees. For example, the ‘*Covenant* with Christ’ had ‘*subordinate* Purposes’ in ‘ordering’ the Fall, to demonstrate God’s grace to his elect who ‘never fell from ... Grace and Glory in *Adam*’ in his sight. Whereas the non-elect only ever existed in Adam, and therefore ‘they lost all in him,’ the elect were preserved. Nevertheless ‘the Obstacles of her *Lapse*’ required removal in order to reopen communication, and this required ‘all sorts of Grace’: grace of ransom, reconciliation, of renovation and access, ‘and so open all the Passages of Love, which the Fall had stopped up’. This concept was so important to Hussey that he contrasted this ‘Beautiful Doctrine of *Christ*’ that the non-elect fell irredeemably but the elect ‘within the Bounds of Effectual

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<sup>91</sup> Eg Hussey, *Glory*, 90,93,75-76,86,161; *God’s Operations*, 120-123,146; for more see Toon, *Emergence*, 76-79; Toon, ‘Growth’, *EQ* (1967), 23-29 .

Restoration', with 'the Black Doctrine of *Calvin*' that the elect 'in an Unconverted State do belong to the *Family of Hell*'.<sup>92</sup>

Hussey strenuously distinguished between sinners and the elect, and the grace they both receive. 'For God hath appointed the Effectual Gift of special Grace to the Elect.' And this special grace is conveyed by God's own operation, therefore offering it is a 'special Absurdity' because it traverses distinctions. For all offers are 'made up of common Grace'. And 'aliens' will never receive effectual grace or 'a *vital* Call': 'he calls none so, except *the Seed of Christ*, the *Secret* adopted ones of the Father.' Hussey was scathing of preachers who ignore this distinction, because in treating elect and non-elect the same they interfere with God's operations, and they abuse the elect by withholding God's gift from them, forcing them to receive nothing more than the non-elect under their ministry, or at least to wait longer for God's special operation. 'Must the Elect sit still, whose Portion lies in *Special* Grace, while you Preach *Common* Grace to Sinners?'<sup>93</sup>

Hussey insisted that the Arminian method of telling sinners 'that now whilst the Day of Grace lasts God is *offering*, and *tendring* and *woing* them with Grace,' is a direct affront and 'inconsistent' with the doctrines of '*Determinate, Everlasting and Unchangeable Election*' and effectual grace. If the Arminian really believes that conversion is 'an inward and *Spiritual* Turning of the Heart unto the Lord; How can this be effected, if the *Holy Ghost* be shut out?' Of what use is encouraging sinners 'if the *Spirit* frowns, withdraws, ceases to co-operate with the *Ministry* of the Word, in the most Evangelical of *Doctrinal* Encouragements? For being a *Sovereign* and Free Agent, he hath his *Limitations* in the Covenant of *Operation* ... and will *blow* when and *where he lists*.' For this reason Hussey said encouraging sinners to believe is Arminian, and 'a Proud and *Presumptuous* Exhortation of the *Creature*, to go and do the *Spirit's* Work', excluding him in favour of 'Creature-Actives'. He said the only appropriate ministerial encouragement is to exhort 'the Impotent ... to *wait* under it, till the *Good Spirit* of the Lord hath wrought Grace' in their hearts. He was convinced of the mutual exclusivity of special grace and the gospel offer: 'How can I

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<sup>92</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 171-173, 533-534.

<sup>93</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 139, 446, 153-154.

stedfastly believe *Particular Grace*, and lodg'd in the *Holy Ghosts* hands to bestow it on none but the *Elect*, when I offer this Grace to all within the Sound?'<sup>94</sup>

Hussey's implication of God's unwillingness to save misrepresents the tenor of scripture, such as Romans 10:13-15 where Paul guarantees that everyone who calls on the Lord will be saved, and that preachers are essential links in that chain of salvation. Hussey's doctrine demonstrated conflict between the preacher encouraging sinners to come to Christ and the Spirit who is limited by eternal decree to call only the elect. He asked, 'How can the People not effectually called open ... the Heart to Christ? How can They Hear Spiritually who are Spiritually Deaf and Uncircumcised, and *cannot hearken?*' Hussey's answer was that those 'who are not effectually called under an *Operation* of the Spirit *by the Word*' cannot but resist, and no amount of offering or exhorting will ever help them.<sup>95</sup>

Determined to rule out any human participation in salvation, Hussey attempted to prove from two New Testament examples that offers of Christ to unregenerate sinners and effectual grace are incompatible. This '*preventing* and Effectual Grace took hold of *Mary*,' he said, causing her to make the choice that Martha failed to make, because she was 'a *Child* of Electing Love'. Again, Paul's response to the Philippian jailor to believe on Jesus, following his desperate plea, was not random but 'clearly founded upon a *Two-fold* Evidence, 1. Upon a Miraculous Spirit of Discerning that the Holy Ghost was at the *Root* of the Jaylor's Convictions. 2. Upon the Mighty Attestation of Heaven to an Apostolical, *Wonder-working* Ministry.' Hussey claimed Paul was not making a general '*Direction* or Command to *Saving Faith*', but directing someone he knew was elect. Such discernment is needed in all ministers, he said.<sup>96</sup> Where there is no special grace, Hussey wrote, 'There may be a moral Persuasion wrought in Men by Words, or by Arguments and Reasons propos'd unto them, to gain an

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<sup>94</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 607,713-714,546.

<sup>95</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 442.

<sup>96</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 331,410-412.

*Orthodox Persuasion of Truth*,’ but this is ‘corrupt Faith’, not the result of effectual calling, and ‘falls short of *the Faith of God’s Elect*’.<sup>97</sup>

Hussey rejected *Plea 3* for the use of arguments or moral suasion to appeal to men as reasonable creatures. He believed that gospel grace bypasses and is unrelated to human reason, nature and arguments: ‘Effectual Grace doth not work upon Men as Reasonable Creatures, ... but upon Men as the *Elect* of God. Grace comes not upon Men as *Qualify’d with Reason*, &c. but as chosen of God.’<sup>98</sup> Hussey’s hyper-Calvinistic teaching of two kinds of grace resulting in two kinds of faith was contrary to the Reformed understanding of conversion: a change ‘carried on in a rational way’, a holistic renewal where ‘grace spreads and diffuses itself’ throughout the soul, instilling ‘a *principle* within, closing with the *command* without, and moving the soul freely and spontaneously to duty’.<sup>99</sup> The Catechisms affirm that effectual calling is the Spirit’s work whereby ‘he doth *persuade* and enable us to embrace Jesus Christ, freely offered to us in the gospel.’<sup>100</sup>

### 5.3 Particular redemption

Hussey’s unerring belief in particular redemption compelled his conflict with offering Christ to all, for ‘how can he be a *Priest* to all, if he hath not *died* for all as an Expiatory, *Atoning Sacrifice*?’<sup>101</sup>

He complained that the Congregational Declaration’s Tenth antinomian Error appealed to the Arminian ‘Article of *Universal Redemption*’, as he called it,<sup>102</sup> in order to prove that ministers ‘*ought to propound the offers of Salvation unto all those to whom God calls them to preach, seriously inviting them to improve the Means of Grace, that they may be saved*’. By precisely quoting the Error, only omitting the ‘not’, he directly linked Arminianism and gospel offers; whereas

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<sup>97</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 154.

<sup>98</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 284,289.

<sup>99</sup> eg Flavel, ‘Preparations’, *Works*, 6:32-35; Charnock, ‘Regeneration’, *Works*, 3:231; Burgess, *Vindiciæ Legis*, 98-99.

<sup>100</sup> Shorter Catechism Q31; Larger Catechism Q67.

<sup>101</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 98.

<sup>102</sup> ‘Arminian Articles’, Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:546.

Antinomianism demands they ‘**ought not** to propound’ offers.<sup>103</sup> No ministers would prosper, he said, who make promiscuous invitations, inviting the uninvited, upholding ‘the meer Dream of a *Universal Redemption*’. This kind of deceitful preaching is Arminian, and is done ‘*to please Men*’. To Hussey it was clear: if we abandon discriminating grace, we are left with universal redemption. This is because all that are ‘*particularly* redeemed are inseparably united’, and the rest ‘*never belong’d* to him’, so any pleading to close with Christ is pointless. Hussey’s determination to use particular redemption to disprove offers forced him into strange explanations and questionable reasoning, such as his condemnation of the Declaration as ‘an *Anti-Gospel*’ because it would not restrict scripture’s ‘*everys*’, ‘*alls*’ and ‘*everyones*’. Hebrews 2:9 for example states that Jesus tasted death for *everyone*, but Hussey called it ‘the Restrained every’.<sup>104</sup> The idea as stated in the Canons that Christ’s death ‘is of infinite worth and value, abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world’<sup>105</sup> was sadly not acceptable to Hussey.

Throughout his works, Hussey limited the benefits of Christ’s death to the elect, as the following examples show. ‘For tho’ he be an Infinite Person, he hath by the Covenant paid but a *Limited Ransom*.’ Again, ‘’tis absolute Redemption, *Eph.1.7*. not Redemptibility, or Redeemableness. So Remission, *Mark.26.38*. not Remissibility. ’Tis the *Forgiveness of Sins*, *Col.2.14*. not the Forgiveableness of Sins. ’Tis Reconciliation, *Dan.9.24*. 2 Cor.5.18,19. not Reconciliability or Reconcileableness. ’Tis Justification ... not Justificability. All proves there could be no *Impetration* of these Things beyond the Bounds of their *Efficacious Application*.’ Christ’s blood, he insisted, was ‘*intentionally* shed in an *Absolute* way’ for specific persons, and as such ‘*efficaciously* apply’d to these’. ‘Why should Men think then that God would suffer the Merits of Christ to *run wast*’? Thus, Hussey wrote, even though it is branded Antinomianism, ‘we preach the Gospel faithfully, *discriminately*, and leave it in the *Spirit’s* Hand to carry it to

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<sup>103</sup> Declaration, 10,41.

<sup>104</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 648-649,672.

<sup>105</sup> Canons, 2.3: Schaff, *Creeds*, 3:586.

the *particularly Redeemed* with a *Particular Efficacy*, ... and we don't offer Christ to all.'<sup>106</sup>

#### 5.4 Human impotency

Hussey firmly believed that the 'Universal or *Promiscuous* Propounding of the Offer of Salvation' is a direct contradiction of the '*First Principles* of the Gospel', particularly election and human inability. 'The Orthodox', he wrote, 'confess a Natural Disability in all Men to all *Spiritual* Good. What have They then to do to propound *Salvation*, which is a *Spiritual* Good in the *Object*, and requires a *Spiritual Act* of the Faculty, where yet they don't insist upon a *change* of Nature?' Hussey's point was that offers appeal to and emphasise human ability: '*Offers* are fitted to *Creature-Power*, to Self Strength,' for they 'do not so clearly argue the *Necessity* of a New Birth, ... as they do argue a *Necessity* of *closing* with Christ and accepting him, whether a man *be* born, or be *not* born from above.' Their Arminianism implies that those 'in the Flesh *can* please God', when in fact they cannot. Hussey wrote a list of what he called '*Arminian Exhortations* in *Anti-Arminian Writers*', which all 'exhort sinners, as sinners, to do that which belongs to the very *passive* work of Grace, contrary to all Divine Revelation', and thereby 'have wofully deviated from the true *Original*, almost throughout Divinity'. The eighth of these 'Arminian' exhortations was to appeal to a person's impotency as reason to seek God: '1. *Be sensible of your Condition*. 2. *Mourn over it to God*. 3. *Acknowledge the Debt*. 4. *Confess your Impotency*. 5. *Beg Pardon and Grace*.' These are unscriptural exhortations, Hussey insisted, for all these things are beyond the power of sinners to perform. They are revealed by the Spirit, not worked up by men.<sup>107</sup>

This explains Hussey's frequent criticism of 'Creature-Acts', duties and performances, or any human response to God in the gospel.<sup>108</sup> He believed the Spirit turns the elect's hearts to the Lord, like prodigals returning to their Father; but the non-elect who were never with the Father, cannot return to him. He warned 'Zealous, Well-meaning *Brethren*' to avoid 'the Customary

<sup>106</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 353,660n\*-661,641,653n\*,647-648.

<sup>107</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 13-14,204,437-438,441-442.

<sup>108</sup> eg Hussey, *Glory*, 403,706,714;110,395,631; *God's Operations*, 166-168,177-179.

Mistake of *pressing* Sinners to come to Christ' because '*Disinterested* Sinners are evermore *Dead* Sinners'; and the result of such pressing is 'faith which is *born of the Flesh*', 'but a *dead Faith*', and very common in the church. Those who insist on 'the *Applicatory* Part of Preaching', in which they 'bid Sinners come to Christ', impose on souls 'the Task of Coming', but Hussey advised they would be far wiser to preach election to them than encourage what he termed 'their own *Palsy-Acts* of Faith to build Christ on for their Help'. This '*worldly Policy ... of pressing, and pulling, and taking* in almost after any fashion', is an unscriptural emphasis on faith which has the opposite effect and drives the Spirit away. He insisted, 'It is under Efficacy of *Doctrine*, and not the Force of your *Press* that the Soul is drawn to Christ.' He drew a parallel with Jesus' parable mentioned above (4.3) in which, after the original invitees declined, the servant is told to 'go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city,' looking for the poor, maimed, halt and blind to invite to his master's banquet. He was ordered 'Compel them to come in, that my house may be filled' (Luke 14:21-23). But Hussey directly contradicted that: 'You need **not** therefore come forth into *the Streets and Lanes of the City*, ... and drown the *Report* with your Imprudent *Motives*, and your eager *Presses*, The Holy Ghost from *Christ* has effectually done it.'<sup>109</sup>

Consistent with his theological emphases, Hussey taught that we can produce nothing Godward, but faith springs from eternal union: 'if Faith be not *given* me from the Fountain of *Election-Grace*, Faith is impossible.' Moreover election has 'provided *the Faith of God's elect* to be in *God's Time*'. Therefore exhortations to believe are vain, the 'Miserable Consolation' of loading people with 'a *Spiritual Burden* to Spiritual Work, the Work of *Faith*'. It is like forcing them to make bricks without straw, he said. For 'God gives an *Impotency* to believe ... before he gives the Power to *believe*. He doth this partly that the soul may feel the vanity of *Deceitful Preachers*, who make *Moral Doing* to be so hard, and *Faith* to be the easie Point.' But in reality faith is 'the hard knotty Point'. Accordingly Hussey would say to those 'under *Spiritual Burdens*':

There is a *certain Election* of Grace, and then, Soul, why not a Lot for *Thee*?  
Wait under the Gospel by *Natural* Acts, and see how the Lot will devolve,

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<sup>109</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 713,136-141.



and fall in a *Supernatural Distribution*, to make that Faith shortly *easy* to Thee which is now perhaps *impossible*.<sup>110</sup>

His advice to those labouring under a sense of sin was to was to attend church, wait for the Spirit's whisper, hope that the lottery will fall in their favour. It is disquieting but unsurprising that Hussey did not advise them to pray for mercy while they waited, for that is a spiritual good of which he claimed men are incapable. Prayer would be improving the means of grace, which is contrary to antinomianism. Prayer would be to 'make use of their Natural Faculties, with such External Means and Workings of the Spirit, as God Affords them, that they may Believe, Repent, and be Saved' which was the Declaration's tenth Opposition to antinomianism.<sup>111</sup> Hussey was scandalised at Hunt's exhortations to sinners that they should beg God to give them an interest in Christ, which he pressed home with powerful motives, one of which was that unless we are found in Christ 'God will accept of no Service from you, or Performances done by you.'<sup>112</sup> Hussey called this Hunt's '*Seventh* Errour against Election', and denounced such conceit. If not elect, he has no interest in you, and no amount of praying or begging will procure it.

What Interest in Christ is it that ever rose out of begging God to *interest* the Sinner in his Son Jesus Christ? Why must we pray to God for that which is not to be *askt*, but hath been *already granted*?

Hussey accused Hunt of bypassing 'God's *Ancient*, and the *Passive* way'. Hunt was encouraging '*prayer and mourning*' and other similar duties, but this is to 'pull Christ down' to them, when they should be waiting for Christ to discover himself to them. '*Unexperienced strangers*', as he called them, no matter how they 'plead' or 'howl' to God, will not be praying in the Spirit, and therefore their prayers are 'presumptuous'. The Spirit must '*open the Eyes* to behold Jesus Christ *Spiritually*, before the Soul could come to God in *Prayer* by him, as the *Mediator*'. His proof that faith must precede prayer was Romans 10:14: '*For how shall they call on Him, in whom they have not believed?*' Yet he ignored the preceding verse: 'Whomsoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Significantly, it appears that Hussey disparaged prayer altogether, not

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<sup>110</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 144,637-639.

<sup>111</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 11; *Declaration*, 41-42.

<sup>112</sup> Hunt, *Treasury*, 195-196.

only for sinners, but for saints too: ‘’tis a rare Thing for any Saint on Earth to get above a *Dead, Sleepy Prayer*, if all the Prayers he makes in the Body were to be laid together! ... I see my *Prayings* confused, wandering, *Distracted Prayers*!’<sup>113</sup>

This is an extraordinary thing for a minister to write, but it is entirely consistent with his hyper-Calvinism, for he could not really believe that prayer would change any of God’s eternal settlements, or influence him to any degree.

Sufficient evidence has been provided to demonstrate that Hussey deemed salvation beyond anyone’s grasp, because ‘none devoid of Grace can come in their Sins to Christ.’<sup>114</sup> But this attitude was in fact the opposite of basic Reformed understanding. Calvin spoke of how readily man allows inability to lead to complacency, when actually powerlessness should make him ‘aspire to a good of which he is empty, to a freedom of which he has been deprived’.<sup>115</sup> Fuller later challenged the strong phrase ‘dead in sins’ being turned into a comprehensive excuse for inactivity, whereas in fact this inability does not lessen accountability: ‘to be dead *in sin* is to be *sinfully* dead.’ He also warned of the dangers of waiting when the clear command is to ‘come’.<sup>116</sup> Hussey misunderstood faith as a virtue or work which people produce, and therefore a threat to Christ. In fact the opposite is true. Charnock, the man through whom Hussey claimed conversion, in the discourse which Hussey found so life-changing, wrote: ‘Faith is the condition in the covenant of grace; death required on Christ’s part, faith required on man’s part.’<sup>117</sup> John Flavel elucidated that within the covenant of grace, conditions are not used in the meritorious sense. Rather a condition refers to ‘an act required of us in point of duty, to a blessing consequent by virtue of a promise’. It has no intrinsic worth, but it is antecedent to the benefit of the promise, the benefit being suspended until the condition is performed:

And such a *condition of salvation* we assert *faith* to be in the new covenant grant; that is to say, the grant of salvation by God in the gospel-covenant is

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<sup>113</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 603-604, 235, 238, 253, 240-241.

<sup>114</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 434.

<sup>115</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 2:2.1

<sup>116</sup> Fuller, ‘Antinomianism’, *Works* 4:161-164, esp 162n†, 151.

<sup>117</sup> Charnock, ‘Reconciliation’, *Works*, 3:374.

suspended from all men, till they believe, and is due by promise, not merit, to them as soon as they do truly believe.<sup>118</sup>

These few examples of Reformed theologians' thinking demonstrate how significantly they differed from Hussey in their attitude to the implications of human inability. They encouraged human response to God's command, while embracing God's concurrent provision of strength to enable that response. As Burgess explained: 'All the good things we do, they are the works of the Lord: not that God beleeveeth or repenteth in us, but he worketh those actions in us efficiently, which we doe formally and vitally.'<sup>119</sup>

## 6 Analysis of Hussey's hyper-Calvinism

The heady combination of Hussey's intense conversion experience, revelatory light into eternal Trinitarian covenants and settlements, conviction of his major role in the seventh vial reformation, extensive reading and condemnation of multiple theologians: all convinced him he was set apart to communicate his unique vision despite it being at odds with orthodox theology. He adopted a combative stance as he introduced new doctrine, demonstrating little self-doubt, humility, teachableness, or respect for fellow theologians. The conviction of his special mission was so intoxicating that he was confident of divine aegis. He also expected, even welcomed, persecution and clamour following his disclosures, in prophetic alignment with the seventh angel's message and the antinomian reformation.

The radicalised Hussey abandoned his liberal position, rejected his earlier preaching and book, espoused antinomianism, and projected it further into a new system which reset scripture's orientation. His audacious logic drew out the negative implications of election, irresistible grace, limited atonement and human inability in order to deny God's gracious offers and stifle evangelism. It is clear from his writings that his fixation with eternity and ancient glory and sovereign decrees forced him into viewing the entire time-state as a temporary suspension of glory existing solely for the ingathering of the elect, 'the chosen

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<sup>118</sup> Flavel, 'Reply', *Works*, 6:348-349.

<sup>119</sup> Burgess, *Vindiciæ Legis*, 87.

generation' who are hidden in the world.<sup>120</sup> Within the context he created, and with his energetic commitment and logical perspective, the result was inevitable. His conclusions were entirely consistent with his new viewpoint, and provided a compelling rationalistic argument that offering salvation to all and sundry when only a defined number had been chosen to receive it, is counter-productive and misleading.

Those whom he dismissed within mainstream Calvinism had proved that it is possible to embrace both God's sovereignty and his universal call as a sincere reflection of his love and desire for the salvation of all, including for example James Durham whose extensive reading and eclectic quoting did not compromise his Calvinism.<sup>121</sup> Hussey's unremitting hatred of what he termed 'Arminianism' as inimical to free grace betrayed his unwillingness to process paradox, embrace antinomy, or recognise the mystery of divine and human concordance. This included that of prayer which to Hussey threatened eternally-fixed categories, and could therefore only be effective if it aligned with them. It also included the imperative of evangelism, which to Hussey usurped the Spirit's initiative. He established the hyper-Calvinistic principles of two kinds of grace, resulting in two kinds of faith: moral persuasion or corrupt faith, and the faith of God's elect. He introduced the concept that faith cannot be a duty. He created disjunctions and disunity between harmonious doctrines, denying the simplicity of scripture's invitations because his understanding of decretal mystery created an impossible tension. Slinging his hook back into the far reaches of eternity before he or the world itself existed, anchoring it deep within God's hidden decrees and counsels, he only saw incongruence between the fixed irrevocability of two discrete parallel streams of humanity and the dangerous conditionality of offering Christ in the gospel. Based on this irreconcilable cleavage Hussey constructed his antithesis between elect and non-elect, rooted in double predestination: 'a whole World distinct from that other *whole World* which *lies* evermore *in Wickedness*'.<sup>122</sup> This cleavage apparently drawn by God's decrees may be simple; but creating an antithetical relationship between the categories of election and reprobation is problematic, for not only is double predestination

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<sup>120</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 106

<sup>121</sup> see MacLean, *Durham*, esp 83-84.

<sup>122</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 348.

what Henry Stob calls ‘a complex theological construct’ with an unclear biblical basis, but the terms elect and reprobate are orientated to God’s secret counsels and unidentifiable to us. A more tolerant view sees the antithesis not between elect and reprobate but between grace and sin, between God and Satan, between two cities, two worlds, evidenced in the lives of both Christians and non-Christians. This antithesis, ‘the unrelenting battle between two spiritual principles’, impacts all humankind.<sup>123</sup>

Hussey’s contextualisation of election within the supralapsarian scheme encouraged a harsh view of God and fostered an animosity and dissociation between God and humanity. He forged an impregnable system which viewed offers of grace as gross human interference with the Spirit’s operations in the elect revealing their eternal union and justification, interference which the Spirit resisted. In his quest for rationalistic and logical thinking, he failed to engage with the overwhelming biblical emphasis on the duty to respond to God’s reconciling love in Christ. Claiming to be God’s ambassador, he misrepresented him. He had no comfort for sinners, no warnings, no alluring invitations. His only advice was to hope they were lucky in the lottery of election (or ‘*Partition of the Blessings* settled in the *Everlasting Will of the Most High*’ as he would phrase it.<sup>124</sup>)

Disturbing and sensational as Hussey’s rejection of offers, invitations and applicatory preaching is, it is merely the conspicuous necessary outcome of his hyper-Calvinism. Behind it lay his hubristic interest in things God has hidden from human beings. ‘Human curiosity’, warned Calvin, ‘renders the discussion of predestination, already somewhat difficult of itself, very confusing and even dangerous. ... If allowed, it will leave no secret to God that it will not search out and unravel.’<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Thanks to Mouw, *He Shines*, 24-26; Stob, ‘Observations’, *Perspectives*, 244-247, 251; Dooyeweerd, *Roots*, 3-4.

<sup>124</sup> Hussey, *Glory*, 639, 210.

<sup>125</sup> Calvin, *Institutes*, 3.21.1.

## 7 Scholarly opinion on Hussey's theology

Toon wrote, 'Few Christians, or even students of theology, have heard the name of Joseph Hussey.'<sup>126</sup> Toon himself contributed more than anyone else, devoting thirteen pages of his book to him, significantly more than he wrote on Gill and Brine. Thus several historians have relied on Toon's research rather than on primary sources. Sheehan, who believed Hussey's influence was insignificant, criticised Toon for giving Hussey 'a large place in his book', citing it as an example of scholarly misrepresentation of hyper-Calvinism.<sup>127</sup> Sheehan's observation appears not to be widely shared.

Toon believed Hussey holds a critical position in the creation of Hyper-Calvinism in England. He confirmed the evangelistic nature of his first book, followed by his long search for truth which ended in the birth of hyper-Calvinism. Toon believed his new 'strange theology' can be understood through the lens of three distinctive features: supralapsarianism, God-Man Christology, and irresistible grace. His 'over-Fall' or supralapsarian scheme, which was not taught in Reformed Confessions or Catechisms, emphasises that prior to the Fall God did everything necessary for salvation. Toon wrote: 'Into this supralapsarianism Hussey introduces his 'God-Man', or 'Wisdom-Mediator' Christology, and from the resulting system deduces the doctrine that Christ must only be offered in preaching to the elect.' Toon noted that 'Hussey regarded his own vision of the glory of Christ in the decrees of God as the most important revelation which God had given to him.' In turn Toon devoted significant space to Hussey's Christology.<sup>128</sup> Under Toon's third heading, he observed that though Hussey could have claimed that some Reformed theologians taught supralapsarianism, and that his Christology was similar to Goodwin's, 'he could claim no support from earlier writers for his view that only the elect are to be invited to accept the grace of God.' Toon wrote, 'This latter doctrine is a logical development from the two previous doctrines. It is a step which previous writers had not dared to take in the face of those passages of Scripture' which teach not only that the gospel must be preached to all the world but also that men must be invited to

<sup>126</sup> Toon, 'Hussey', *FGR* (Winter 1966-1967) 221.

<sup>127</sup> Sheehan, 'Presentation', *Foundations* (May 1982) 29n3.

<sup>128</sup> For more detail on his Christology see Toon, *Emergence*, 75-79, Toon, 'Hussey', *FGR* (Winter 1966-1967) 225-230; Toon, 'Growth', *EQ*, (Jan-Mar 1967) 25-27.

respond to its message. Toon summarised Hussey's three basic reasons for rejecting the free offer: 1) to preach Christ is scriptural, but to offer him is not; 2) offers cannot effect salvation, irresistible grace alone makes Christians; 3) gifts that accompany saving faith are only intended for the elect and should not be offered to everyone. Much of Toon's summary is occupied by quoting Hussey's twenty particular resolutions to the question of how to preach without offering. Oddly he ignores his major resolution to this question together with several further resolutions (3.4 above), all of which precede the last twenty. Some other historians have proved their reliance on Toon by doing the same.<sup>129</sup> Toon made the following observations concerning Hussey: his doctrines of eternal justification, assurance ('the Spirit whispering "you are elect"') and atonement were 'virtually identical with those of Tobias Crisp', necessary corollaries of supralapsarian predestination and irresistible grace. His theology becomes meaningful in his historical context of third-generation Puritan Calvinism, when rationalism and latitudinarianism were making inroads. His doctrine of the God-Man was intended to preserve against Socinian and Arian errors, and rule out all human schemes of salvation. His doctrine of God's gracious operations but no offers of grace was intended to save the gospel from Arminianism and Pelagianism. His insistence on the Bible's spiritual truth being only discoverable by evangelical reason was intended to protect from Deism and natural reason. Thus, Toon concluded, Hussey's was 'a reactionary theology into which the spirit of his age has entered'. Rejecting 'the various errors and heresies of his day, he adopted an extreme Reformed position, so extreme that it merits the title of "Hyper-Calvinism", since with its doctrine of no offers of grace and its supralapsarianism it rose well above (or sunk beneath) the theology of Calvin and of the orthodox Reformed Puritan divines.' Hussey, according to Toon, 'fell prey' to both rejecting the rationalism of his day *and* absorbing it. He applied strict logic to biblical doctrines, deducing from eternal election and irresistible grace that Christ should not be indiscriminately offered.<sup>130</sup> This summary of Hussey's theology explains his motivation for his various emphases but not the relationship between them.

<sup>129</sup> Eg Middleton, 'John Love', *SRSJH* (2018), 92; Howson, *Question of Orthodoxy*, PhD, 181-182.

<sup>130</sup> Summary from Toon, *Emergence*, 79-83, 147; Toon, 'Hussey', *FGR* (Winter 1966-1967) 230-232.

Daniel includes an informative section in his PhD on Hussey's 'pre-existerianism' which spread within some hyper-Calvinistic circles. He explains it relies heavily upon supralapsarianism and emphasis on God's imminent acts. He usefully enhances its relevance to hyper-Calvinism by linking it to the following tendencies: pushing back into eternity as much from time as possible, removing all saving acts from connection with mankind, limiting Christ's union and interest with mankind in general, claiming that Christ suffered only in his human nature, not in his divine. Daniel comments on Hussey's 'abrupt' rejection of offers, even denying any success in his early ministry; 'success came, he felt, when he began "preaching grace" rather than "offering grace".' He wrote his final book at the end of the Neonomian controversy, and associated the word 'offer' with libertinism, although he fully accepted that the non-offer position was antinomian. Nevertheless Hussey felt he was 'firmly within orthodox Reformed tradition', even claiming support from the Synod of Dort. Daniel is at pains to emphasise that although Hussey's 'actual break with "offer theology" came suddenly', the preparation for his theology was anything but sudden. It was not that he felt 'offer' assumed a different meaning; rather 'his own theology took on new forms' which he was convinced were but the logical extension of the views of earlier High Calvinists which demanded the conclusion Hussey reached. 'They themselves did not explicitly reach that conclusion, but Hussey felt that the time had come for a consistent development of Reformed theology in this direction.'<sup>131</sup> Daniel makes an important point here, confirming the compulsive and personal nature of Hussey's mission, and his deep-seated conviction he was part of something bigger than himself.

Sell mentions Hussey briefly, writing two pages on him, quoting from the 1973 abridged version of his 1707 book. He commented that with Hussey's move to Congregationalism 'he became unusually circumspect in the terms he employed in preaching,' especially concerned that "'offering' the gospel might imply an innate ability' in fallen man to accept it. Sell wrote that Hussey distinguished between preaching and offering, one of his objections being that offers 'undermine the necessity of imputation', for as ministers proclaim the doctrine,

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<sup>131</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 250-260, esp 257, 365-366 (quoting Hussey, *Glory*, 61-62, 411 3<sup>rd</sup> ed 1792), 401.



God gives salvation to his elect through the Spirit's operation. Sell understood Hussey was consciously 'securing the gospel against Arminian erosion'.<sup>132</sup>

Historian Walter Wilson wrote of Hussey that he was probably unaware of the full consequences of his preaching. He would not persuade sinners to heed the calls of the gospel or make any application to them at all, 'lest he should despoil God of the honour of their conversion'. He had a strong desire 'to secure to the Holy Spirit the sole glory of converting and sanctifying the souls of the elect'. But Wilson stressed that other preachers who do apply the gospel to their hearers 'are equally zealous to preserve the glory to God'.<sup>133</sup>

The ecclesiastical historian Nuttall mentions Hussey several times from that perspective. Regarding his theology, Nuttall described it as 'the middle term in the progression from Crispianism or Davisism to 'the modern question''. He drew out 'the negative implications of Davisism', concerned with the theological tenet that God offers grace exclusively to the elect, whereas the Modern Question, 'while consequential on Hussey's position, related rather to psychology', the anthropocentric issue of whether anyone but the elect have the power and therefore duty to believe.<sup>134</sup> Nuttall judged Hussey's 1707 book as 'the origin of a supralapsarian Calvinism which took election and predestination so seriously as to prohibit evangelical preaching as useless, and indeed arrogant, human interference with the sovereignty and mystery of God's grace.'<sup>135</sup> Despite this assessment, Nuttall makes an interesting point when he writes that Hussey's position 'is often regarded as repulsive and self-defeating, a prime cause, even, of the Older Dissent's decay; but it could arise from genuine pastoral concern.' He quotes from Hussey: 'I am for going upon Fundamental *Efficacies* and *Assurances*, and not making all the main Things of the Gospel *doubtful*.' Nuttall also notes that 'Presbyterianism grew more openly rationalist, Congregationalism more stridently Calvinist. Even if we think that Hussey

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<sup>132</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 53-54.

<sup>133</sup> Wilson, *History*, 4:416-419.

<sup>134</sup> Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965) 114.

<sup>135</sup> Nuttall, 'Calvinism', *BQ* (Oct 1968), 422.

reacted too sharply, he deserves credit for perceiving the way things were going.’<sup>136</sup>

Roy Middleton has written a lengthy and interesting history of Hussey. In the context of theological turmoil, controversy and doubt, Hussey eventually ‘came to embrace a pronounced and far-reaching Supralapsarianism which outworked itself in two main areas:’ his views of Christ’s pre-existent humanity, and more influentially, his denial of the free offer to which he added several antinomian tenets. Middleton refers to Hussey’s twenty propositions describing his beliefs concerning true gospel preaching.<sup>137</sup>

Howson explains how ‘the High Calvinists became more rigid with some espousing what came to be called ultra-Calvinism or hyper-Calvinism.’ Specifically ‘hyper-Calvinism was born in the person and writings of Joseph Hussey,’ and Howson summarises his teaching with four different characteristics: supralapsarian predestination, eternal justification, subjective assurance of election, and rejection of gospel offers. Howson relies heavily on Toon, even listing the same twenty propositions of how to preach without offering.<sup>138</sup>

Oliver in his PhD on Particular Baptist history notes Hussey’s denial of the gospel offer to unbelievers, rooted in his doctrine of predestination and irresistible grace, ‘was a radical break with the Calvinism of the Confessions of Westminster, Savoy and 1689’.<sup>139</sup> In a historical survey on hyper-Calvinism, he writes that Hussey’s 1707 book was ‘the first systematic exposition of Hyper-Calvinism’. In it Hussey taught that preaching must not include offering Christ, that the Spirit does not work through the offer to enable salvation, and that an offer of grace is not a gift of grace. He believed that by preaching doctrine to everyone and the gift of salvation included in it to the elect, they would be

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<sup>136</sup> Nuttall, ‘Cambridge Nonconformity’, *JURCHS* (April 1977), 255-257, quote from Hussey, *Glory*, 381.

<sup>137</sup> Middleton, ‘John Love’, *SRSJH* (2018), 78-95, esp 90-93.

<sup>138</sup> Howson, *Question of Orthodoxy*, PhD, 179-182.

<sup>139</sup> Oliver, ‘Emergence’, PhD, 22.

‘discovered by the powerful application of the truth’. Hussey ‘was convinced that his scheme honoured God and humbled the sinner’.<sup>140</sup>

Robert Seymour in his PhD on Gill briefly summarised Hussey’s theology. He specifically noted Hussey’s ‘sharp distinction’ between offer and gift, and how offering Christ to sinners falsely implies universal redemption and ability to receive or reject him. Hussey taught that God effects the elect’s conversion not by offers but by his own operation; for ‘offers are but propositions which have no binding power or guaranteed consequences; operations, on the other hand, are active principles which work toward their ordained ends without any possibility of frustration.’ Thus any attempt to awaken the sinner’s conscience is both impertinent and superfluous, for God will irresistibly save whom he has elected; and that number is ‘unalterably determined by God’. Seymour noted that Hussey would reply both ‘yes’ and ‘no’ to whether the gospel is to be preached, based on his distinction between preaching doctrine and salvation. It is permissible to preach doctrine, but not permissible to ‘propound salvation’. Through the doctrine all hearers ‘will become informed’ about God’s workings whether they are among the elect or non-elect; thus God’s purpose is achieved: the elect will become recipients of ‘special grace’, while its denial to the non-elect glorifies his justice.<sup>141</sup> Seymour’s succinct summary of Hussey’s theology highlighted its basis on distinctions.

Sheehan describes hyper-Calvinists’ antipathy to offers because it implies ability to choose, and is contradictory to limited atonement and predestination. He writes, ‘Joseph Hussey spends much of his tedious book repeating in one hundred and one ways the same basic objection to the word ‘offer’.’ He argues that preaching is proclaiming Christ but not offering him.<sup>142</sup>

Finally, Ella attempts to distance Hussey and Gill. In a highly-critical review of Oliver’s book, he calls Hussey ‘an alleged Hyper-Calvinist, ... an Arminian who

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<sup>140</sup> Oliver, ‘Survey’, *Foundations* (Nov 1981) 9-10.

<sup>141</sup> Seymour, ‘Gill’, PhD, 51-53.

<sup>142</sup> Sheehan, ‘Presentation’, *Foundations* (May 1982), 32-33.

adopted a more Calvinistic stand late in life'.<sup>143</sup> In his own book on Gill, he claims that while Toon in his 'novel little book' is confident that Gill followed Hussey closely, in fact 'there is very little evidence to show that Gill was influenced by Hussey in any way.'<sup>144</sup>

## Part 2 Hussey's influence

It would not have been surprising if Hussey's radical but unsophisticated theology failed to thrive. He missed out on leadership, according to Daniel because of his 'awkward literary style and some dubious Christological views', his writing being 'a grammarian's nightmare' and his use of tautology 'extreme'.<sup>145</sup> Fuller, who despite long struggles under hyper-Calvinism tended to be gracious to its advocates, wrote that Hussey 'though in some respects a great man, was, nevertheless, possessed of that warm turn of mind, which frequently misleads even the greatest of men, especially in defending a favourite sentiment'.<sup>146</sup> The influential London Congregational minister Abraham Taylor's verdict was less tactful. In 1739 during the Modern Question controversy he wrote of Hussey's 'operation-doctrine, in opposition to the offer-doctrine': 'This odd fancy was started above thirty years since, by a gentleman of a great deal of rambling learning, but of a confused head, as appears from his writings, some parts of which, I will venture to say, no person ever really understood: he was a person of real piety, but discover'd so much pride and wrath in his writings and conduct, that it is hard to account for ... .' Nevertheless Taylor admitted that some people 'of an odd turn of mind' reckoned his writings 'a most wonderful discovery', and hailed him as 'the greatest light that had been since the apostles days'.<sup>147</sup>

As Hussey walked audaciously through a door which was already ajar, the scene was set for him. Or, to use Toon's metaphor, the seeds were sown, which when

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<sup>143</sup> Ella, Review: Oliver, *History, New Focus* (Oct 2006) <https://go-newfocus.co.uk/resources/app/category/reviews/article/history-of-the-english-calvinistic-baptists>

<sup>144</sup> Ella, *Gill*, 264,319n54

<sup>145</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 9,61,62n49.

<sup>146</sup> Fuller, 'Defence', *Works* 1:177n.

<sup>147</sup> Taylor, *Address*, 14.

watered by him, grew into ‘an even more rigid form of Calvinism, Hyper-Calvinism’.<sup>148</sup> His books did sell, being reprinted several times, though usually abridged,<sup>149</sup> his ideas did take root, and a network of associations developed, notably in Northamptonshire, London and the North. His crude and somewhat-rudimentary style was honed, and his ideas developed and expanded, but little of what he said germane to hyper-Calvinism was abandoned. Toon wrote of the depth and width of his influence: ‘He holds a strategic position as the chief architect of the hyper-Calvinism which has seriously affected the history of many Strict and Particular Baptist churches as well as some Independent churches.’<sup>150</sup> ‘Hussey’s views were widespread and moulded many people, including the Baptist John Skepp’ who took them into the Particular Baptists where they thrived and were dominant for many years, Naylor wrote.<sup>151</sup> ‘His teaching proved attractive to beleaguered Dissenters,’ and spread among Baptists, writes Oliver.<sup>152</sup> Hayden notes that while Skepp, Brine and Gill did not produce a treatise defending their no-offer position, ‘it was one which they all shared, and it had its common root in the specific writings of Hussey.’<sup>153</sup> Sell writes of his theology being ‘felt especially keenly amongst the English Particular Baptists’.<sup>154</sup> J W Morris, Fuller’s biographer, notes the popularity of Hussey’s writings at the time of Fuller’s conversion many years later.<sup>155</sup> John Stevens, who wrote a book against Fuller, aligned himself with the early hyper-Calvinists including Brine and Gill. He particularly appealed to ‘the great Mr. Joseph Hussey’ and his teaching regarding preaching ‘the *doctrine* and witness’.<sup>156</sup> Haykin notes how Hussey’s 1707 book was ‘the definitive High Calvinist text’ on the issue of how the gospel should be preached: a declaration of God’s free grace, but not an offer of it; and how the influential hyper-Calvinist John Collett Ryland recommended its perusal. Interestingly Haykin also mentions that John Newton did not share

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<sup>148</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 66.

<sup>149</sup> *Glory*: 1761, 1790, 1822, 1836, 1844, 1846; *God’s Operations*: 3<sup>rd</sup> ed 1792, 4<sup>th</sup> ed 1851; (see Toon, *Emergence*, 148).

<sup>150</sup> Toon, ‘Hussey’, *FGR* (Winter 1966-1967) 221.

<sup>151</sup> Naylor, *Picking up a Pin*, 152; *Calvinism*, 181.

<sup>152</sup> Oliver, *History*, 9.

<sup>153</sup> Hayden, ‘Evangelical Calvinism’, PhD, 335-336.

<sup>154</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 54.

<sup>155</sup> Morris, *Memoirs*, 263.

<sup>156</sup> Stevens, *Help for True Disciples*, 94-95.

‘Ryland’s delight in Hussey’ partly due to his speculative supralapsarianism. Newton told Ryland’s son that he found Hussey’s book unedifying, ‘more bones than meat’ and ‘seasoned with much of an angry and self-important spirit’.<sup>157</sup> This all proves that into the next century in Particular Baptist circles and among their ministers Hussey was read, revered and quoted. His final book was ‘the definitive exposition of “non-offer” theology’ and, considers Daniel, ‘his arguments have been used ever since by other Hypers.’ Specifically ‘numerous Hyper-Calvinists have appealed not only to Hussey’s *Operations* but even to the very title of the book to substantiate their claims that we can preach but not offer.’ While other systems failed, like Deism which did not survive beyond the early 1800s, hyper-Calvinism did not: ‘Though there have been several varieties of Hyper-Calvinism since Hussey, the Hyperist system has continued to the present day basically intact,’ Daniel correctly observes.<sup>158</sup> Currently the defining doctrine of hyper-Calvinism remains the same as Hussey argued for in 1707: rejection of gospel offers. Sheehan however strikes a different note; he believes Hussey’s importance is overrated: ‘His actual influence among modern hyper-calvinists is negligible and his views are rejected by prominent modern hyper-calvinists.’<sup>159</sup>

There was opposition to Hussey’s doctrine, although we only appear to have one example in print. He was well aware he was criticised for striking at ‘the *Ministry* of wise, great and learned Men’ who far excelled him, but he insisted ‘I am not *afraid* of Men, nor their *Reproaches*, nor afraid of their *Hatred*, nor afraid of their *standing aloof* from me, as if the Poor Creatures were afraid of *catching the Plague* in coming near me, so little have they of Christ.’ Particularly his teaching on invitations being to ‘*Natural* and *Local* coming to the *Means of Grace*’ rather than to ‘the Act of *Saving Faith*’ was ‘hotly contended in SOME Pulpits’ during winter 1706-1707 following the summer printing of his second book, containing what he called ‘Truth broken out’. But he remained impervious, convinced he was being ‘*ridiculed* by the Ignorant Zealot’.<sup>160</sup> He recorded and answered many ‘pleas’ against his theology, although whether they

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<sup>157</sup> Haykin, *One Heart*, 71,81.

<sup>158</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 401,408n55, 415n105.

<sup>159</sup> Sheehan, ‘Presentation’, *Foundations* (May 1982) 37n3.

<sup>160</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 90,97,354-355.

were genuine or rhetoric we do not know. One of these was that Thomas Cole, a respected Congregational minister, used the phrase ‘offers of Christ’ yet was ‘very far from Arminianism’. Hussey responded in character, that ‘*Human Authority*’ is not our standard: ‘we are not to follow *Paul* Himself further than He hath followed Christ,’ nor Calvin or Cole.<sup>161</sup>

It would be thirty years before hyper-Calvinism was officially confronted in writing, and during those thirty silent years Hussey’s influence was spreading far and wide. The rest of the chapter will briefly note the most influential ministers impacted by Hussey’s teaching, and finish with the only theologian of whom we are aware who within Hussey’s lifetime openly challenged his hyper-Calvinism.

## 1 Hussey’s followers

Hussey had ‘a direct doctrinal influence’ upon three men: Stockell, Bentley and Skepp.<sup>162</sup> They were all closely associated with him, converted under his ministry, imbibed his theology, and later went on to become London ministers themselves. The fourth follower of Hussey mentioned in this section is Lewis Wayman, who was active in the Modern Question controversy.

### 1.1 Samuel Stockell 1704-1753

Samuel Stockell wrote of his experience when Hussey came to London. ‘When I sat under a *Law-Ministry*, I was in continual Ups and Downs, and could never arrive at any *Certainty* about my State; but, when the Lord was pleased to bring me under the *clear Light* of the *Gospel*, by the *Ministry* of his Servant, Mr. *Joseph Hussey*, I was brought to live a more *comfortable* Life.’<sup>163</sup> Against both Hussey’s and his church’s advice, he entered the ministry, his first charge at twenty-six being assistant to Samuel Harris in Goodman’s-fields, during which time he wrote a confession of faith.<sup>164</sup> Stockell quickly fell out with Harris and left to set up on his own. After several more disagreements and changes, he eventually settled in Red Cross Street, Cripplegate, opposite Daniel William’s

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<sup>161</sup> Hussey, *God’s Operations*, 292-293, referring to Cole, *Discourse of Regeneration, Faith and Repentance* (1689).

<sup>162</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 84-85.

<sup>163</sup> Stockell, *Glory*, 280.

<sup>164</sup> Stockell, *Confession*.

newly-opened library, and ministered there from 1728 to 1750. His church was never acknowledged by the body of dissenting ministers, who retained doubts concerning his character and conduct. Nevertheless Stockell attracted crowds, for he had a gift for public oratory despite lacking education and theological training.<sup>165</sup> He was an attentive disciple of Hussey and embraced his theology, the title of his influential book *The Redeemer's Glory Unveil'd* mirroring Hussey's. He openly confessed the 'despised, but powerful, *Antinomian* Gospel' and '*everlasting Love*'.<sup>166</sup> He shared Hussey's view of eternal justification or 'conscience-justification', which does not require the assistance of 'sinful *Faith*' to 'give it an additional Value'. He taught that properly God does not forgive sins, for he cannot pardon debts which are already paid,<sup>167</sup> reflecting the antinomian belief that the elect were never guilty.<sup>168</sup> He further developed Hussey's doctrine of the pre-existence of Christ's human soul, or pre-existerianism, a theory in turn adopted by the Particular Baptist minister John Stevens (1776-1847), himself a hyper-Calvinist. This controversy over eternal generation or sonship resulted in a painful split in the Particular Baptists in the nineteenth century, the scars of which remain to this day. This led to the formation of the Gospel Standard Strict Baptists who strongly adhered to Christ's eternal sonship against both Hussey and Stockell, but 'ironically became, and still are, the chief defenders of Hussey's "no-offer" doctrine in England'.<sup>169</sup> Importantly Stockell strenuously denied any offers, exhortations or application of the gospel to sinners. He took it upon himself 'to correct the *Ministers*', explaining what should and should not be preached.<sup>170</sup> He imitated Hussey's method of writing, including his habit of raising objections to his own teaching and then answering them; he was assertive in his statements and combative to those with whom he disagreed.

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<sup>165</sup> Wilson, *History*, 3:311-313; Nuttall, 'Calvinism', *BQ* (Oct 1968) 423; Toon, *Emergence*, 44,84-85,149; Toon, 'Stockell', *FGR* (Spring 1967).

<sup>166</sup> Stockell, *Glory*, 125,131,127,246 etc.

<sup>167</sup> Stockell, *Glory*, 146-158.

<sup>168</sup> Crisp, *Christ Alone*, 2:2-3,234-235.

<sup>169</sup> Toon, 'Growth', *EQ* (Jan-Mar 1967) 26-29, esp 28-29; Toon, *Emergence*, 149-150; Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 248-258. More details: Paul, *Historical Sketch*, esp chs 3-4, 24-78.

<sup>170</sup> Stockell, *Glory*, 224-226.



Stockell levelled the charge of Arminianism against those who, while claiming to preach ‘*free and efficacious Grace*’, apply Christ in their sermons, and encourage sinners to pray for the Spirit. They are exhorting ‘Men in a State of Nature to do what is entirely out of their Power,’ which Stockell claimed was ‘*Tantalizing*’ and ‘*Mocking*’ souls. He said that Jesus’ offer of rest to the heavy-laden (Matthew 11:28-29) was no more an invitation to sinners than Job 1:1: ‘There was a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job.’ Only sinners with the first principles of spiritual life, ‘quickened’ and aware of their ‘exceeding sinfulness’, ‘*living saints*’, can come to Christ. He accused those who preach gospel offers *and* election of blaspheming God, and charging him with the deceit and mockery of offering something he never intended to give. His response to the objection that rejection of offers overthrows the gospel was:

If to deny *Offers* of Christ and Grace to Sinners, as *dead in Trespasses and Sins*, is to deny the whole Scheme of the Gospel, then, I deny it; but I deny, that the Scheme of the Gospel is *Offers* of Christ and Salvation; nay, I affirm, that there is not in the Gospel of Jesus Christ one *Offer* to Sinners, *dead in Sin*, or any Thing like it; *i.e.* there are no Invitations, Calls, or Exhortations to Sinners to perform any Thing out of their Power; Sinners, as such, are not exhorted to *come* to Christ, to *believe* in him, or to *taste* the Delights of the heavenly World.

This must be one of the most explicit denials of offers ever written, to the extent Stockell was prepared to jettison the gospel rather than admit it contained offers. He refused to hold necessary and intrinsic tension, and accused those who did of perjuring themselves. He emphatically declared: ‘Two Opposites can never be true in the same Sense; for I say again, that the Doctrines of *particular Election*, *Justification*, and *Vocation*, and *universal Offers* of Grace can never be reconciled.’<sup>171</sup> He was convinced that God at the creation designed the ends of all things, either happiness or misery for the human race, and it would impeach his power and wisdom if those ends were frustrated by human choice.<sup>172</sup> This form of rationalistic argument used by Hussey and other hyper-Calvinists brought scripture to the bar of human reason,

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<sup>171</sup> Stockell, *Glory*, ch 6:224-242.

<sup>172</sup> Stockell, *Scripture*, 35-36.

and made deductions which denied clear principles such as gospel offers and eternal generation.

Stockell confessed to being ‘somewhat bold’ in his view on offers, and hoped for leniency, but wondered if people might say, ‘How can you expect any kind or tender Treatment, when you have dipped your Pen in Gall, and with the greatest Bitterness have wrote against all the *faithful Ministers* of Jesus Christ, whom you have treated reproachfully and set yourself up to be their *Dictator*.’<sup>173</sup> This demonstrates more self-awareness than his master Hussey.

Toon has written an informative article on Stockell’s modification of Hussey’s Christology which he fitted into Hussey’s supralapsarian scheme, and its influence on the Strict Baptists.<sup>174</sup> Nuttall emphasises that Stockell’s book ‘had, and continues to have, great influence’ among Strict Baptist churches.<sup>175</sup> Wilson recorded that Stockell was fluent and bold and became popular with his followers. ‘He was a great admirer and imitator of Hussey; but possessed neither his learning nor consequence. Like his master, he was a very high Calvinist; and drank deep into the sentiments of Crisp.’<sup>176</sup> Stockell was one of the major London channels through whom Hussey’s influence spread, both in his rejection of offers and his Christology, although Gill<sup>177</sup> and Brine<sup>178</sup> both resisted any deviation from orthodoxy in the latter.

## 1.2 William Bentley 1699-1751

Bentley was also converted under Hussey’s ministry, having known him from childhood and regarded him as his spiritual father. It is likely he followed Hussey from Cambridge to London, where he was elected a deacon. As Hussey’s Cambridge church experienced ‘unhappy divisions’ and in-fighting, although Wayman insisted it was *after* not during Hussey’s ‘blessed ministry’ there,<sup>179</sup> so

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<sup>173</sup> Stockell, *Glory*, 288-289.

<sup>174</sup> Toon, ‘Stockell’, *FGR* (Spring 1967).

<sup>175</sup> Nuttall, ‘Calvinism’, *BQ* (Oct 1968) 423; Ryland, *Fuller*, 31.

<sup>176</sup> Wilson, *History*, 3:311

<sup>177</sup> See Oliver, *History*, 11 for details.

<sup>178</sup> Brine, *Proper Eternity*, in refutation of Hussey and Stockell.

<sup>179</sup> Wayman, *Further Enquiry*, 147; Nutter, *Story*, 81-82.

his London congregation experienced discontent and ‘uneasiness’, and some of them ‘had hard Thoughts of him’. This continued till his death, then ‘greatly increased’, until all attempts at harmony failed and the church separated. The majority met in Turners’ Hall, Billingsgate, without a minister; and Bentley became their leader, then took on the preaching role in 1729, eventually becoming their pastor in a private ordination. They grew in number, and in 1740 moved to a larger premises in Crispin Street, Spitalfields, where Bentley preached till his death. The remainder of Hussey’s congregation scattered.<sup>180</sup>

Like Stockell’s, Bentley’s church was not recognised by the Congregationalists, but he wrote a defensive book justifying himself, his ministerial call and his church. He was not insensible, he said, that they held ‘some Doctrines which Sister-Churches do not approve of’, but he only mentioned eternal justification, supralapsarianism, and antinomianism for which they suffered ‘Contempt’. He omitted to mention their rejection of gospel offers, which may have been their biggest concern. We see Hussey’s influence in Bentley’s devaluation of human responsibility: he spoke of the Spirit’s powerful energy and effectual operations overcoming ‘the poor stubborn Sinner’, and how ‘we press Sinners to wait upon God in his Appointments, telling them that it is their Duty to wait as at the Pool of *Bethesda*; for there is the pouring out of Blessings.’<sup>181</sup> This is a common hyper-Calvinistic euphemism referring to the custom of sick folk lying at the pool waiting for the angelic stirring of the water (John 5:1-7); one man lay waiting for thirty-eight years. Fuller exposed this hyper-Calvinism: scripture abounds with commands to sinners, but those ministers who declare people’s duty is to wait rather than obey are ‘aiding and abetting in their self-deception. The unconverted who attend the means of grace, generally persuade themselves, and wish to persuade others, that they would gladly be converted ... if it were but in their power. They imagine themselves to be waiting at the pool for the moving of the water, and, therefore, feel no guilt on account of their present state of mind.’<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> Bentley, *The Lord*, vi,35,4-7,14,19-20,25,31-32; Wilson, *History*, 1:146-148, 4:408; Middleton, ‘John Love’, *SRSHJ* (2018), 99-114.

<sup>181</sup> Bentley, *The Lord*, ‘Dedication’ iii-iv, ‘To the Reader’ xii-xiv.

<sup>182</sup> Fuller, ‘Gospel Worthy’, *Works* 1:42, ‘Defence’, 1:227-228; see also Crawford, *Mysteries*, Lecture 9, 279-281.

Bentley highly esteemed Hussey, together with the ‘great Truths, which the Lord led him into’ communicated through pulpit and press. He wrote an account of Hussey’s dying words over six days, in order to demonstrate how the doctrines he held supported him in life and death. Hussey had no regrets. On being asked how he felt regarding his doctrine, Hussey answered, ‘I am in the firm and full Persuasion of all those Truths I have preached, and die in the firm Belief of them all,’ later thanking God for ‘the Success of the Gospel at Cambridge and London’. After his death Bentley wrote,

There fell a great Man in *Israel*: One to whom the Lord imparted much of his Mind, and whom the Lord made eminently useful in his Work. O what a Spirit was there found in him! What Light, what Zeal, what Faith and Faithfulness was found in him! How did God lead him to honour Father, Son, and Spirit; and to debase the Creature, and stain the Glory of all Flesh!<sup>183</sup>

### 1.3 John Skepp 1675-1721 and Lewis Wayman ?-1764

John Skepp’s influence on hyper-Calvinistic theology was highly significant, and as such the next chapter is devoted to him.

Hussey’s fellow Congregationalist Lewis Wayman was one of Davis’s protégés, who was recognised as having preaching gifts and became an itinerant preacher. In 1718 he became minister of the Kimbolton church founded by Davis in 1693. He remained there for forty-six years until his death, when he was briefly succeeded by John Martin, a disciple of Gill’s. Although a Congregationalist, he was ‘almost idolized by the Baptists’, according to Ivimey.<sup>184</sup> Toon informs us that Hussey was ‘highly respected by the Kimbolton church since he preached there on several occasions’, including the funeral sermon for Wayman’s predecessor Richard Bailey. Wayman particularly venerated Hussey, and ‘the way in which he quoted from and defended’ Hussey’s two influential books ‘shows that he had carefully absorbed them and accepted the essentials of the dogma.’<sup>185</sup> He proved the profound impact Hussey and others such as Gill and Brine had upon him by taking up their mantle and robustly defending their theology during the Modern Question controversy in two books, the first

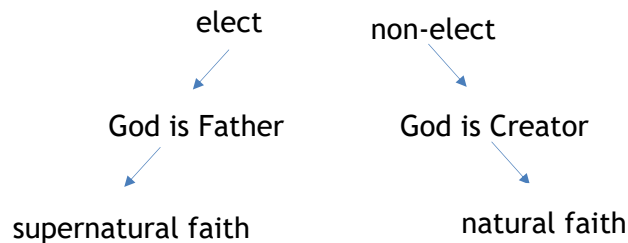
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<sup>183</sup> Bentley, *The Lord*, 4, Dedication vi-vii, 34, 36, 39

<sup>184</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:270.

<sup>185</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 95-96; For more see Nuttall, ‘Northamptonshire’ *JTS* (April 1965) 110-119; Oliver, ‘Survey’, *Foundations* (Nov 1981) 10; Naylor, *Calvinism*, 170-171.

responding to Matthias Maurice who had succeeded Davis as minister in Wayman's own home congregation, the second to Abraham Taylor, his London colleague. His theology revolved around two sorts of people to whom God stands in a different relation, and who each produce a different type of faith:



**Figure 4 Wayman's logic**

The duty of sinners is to exercise legal repentance and to believe the theory of the gospel with natural or external faith, but it is not their duty to exercise special saving faith. It is impossible for sinful men to produce this, its principle being implanted in the elects' souls by God's sovereign dispensation. Wayman wrote,

Unconverted sinners are not under condemnation for not believing Christ is theirs; or, for not believing any thing more than the report of the gospel; because there is no foundation in the word of God, for them to believe more.

Consequent on these distinctions, he also denied any offers of grace in the gospel. He taught like Hussey that ministers should preach the gospel without offers, invitations or commands, for it is not the duty of unconverted sinners to receive and possess Christ for themselves.<sup>186</sup>

Wayman's first book has recently been reproduced on 'The Baptist Particular' website under the title 'Duty Faith Dissected and Discarded'.<sup>187</sup>

<sup>186</sup> Wayman, *Further Enquiry*, eg 17,48,143; Wayman, *Defence*, 74.

<sup>187</sup> 'Duty Faith', *AHB* (Jan 2024), <https://www.baptists.net/history/2024/01/duty-faith-dissected-and-discarded/>

## 2 Challenge to Hussey: John Beart 1673-1716

The only public challenge to Hussey's theology of which we are aware was from John Beart, Congregational minister in St Edmund's-Bury, who responded to his ministerial colleague's 1706 book without delay. He wished to defend both the doctrine of justification by faith over against eternal justification, and the indefinite offer of Christ in gospel preaching. He knew Hussey's recent book had already 'been the Subject of much Discourse', and he strongly disapproved 'the Manner of his handling Mr. Hunt'. 'Should Jesus Christ', he observed, 'be as strict and severe with Him, in every Word and Phrase, as He has been with his Brother, I am apt to think, He must retract much more than his *Gospel-Feast*.' This was an allusion to Hussey's renunciation of his first book. 'His opposition to the Systems is not managed with that Deference and Regard to the Judgment of so many Godly, Grave and Learned Authors as it ought,' wrote Beart. He accused Hussey of overstepping boundaries and occasioning error in his doctrine of the human pre-existence of Christ. Though he loved and valued Hussey, it was his 'great Grief' that he had not used his talents otherwise, and that there was not more 'Meekness, Humility, and Love in the whole Work!' As it was he felt compelled to caution the reader, to 'weigh well what he reads, to Pray hard, and search the Scriptures, that He may discern what is to be approved, and what not.'<sup>188</sup> A brief summary follows of this Calvinistic minister's challenge to Hussey's theology, although in the first section on eternal justification he does not specifically name him.

### 2.1 Eternal justification

In his Preface, Beart owned that some respected men have written in defence of eternal justification, but others have '*under the Countenance of Great Names*', without properly understanding their meaning, 'unadvisedly' decided to teach it to others, not really knowing what they are saying. They have failed to balance '*the Doctrines of Grace with other necessary Points*' such as the danger of sin and necessity of good works, and have decried confession of sin, asking pardon and self-examination, as legalism. In despising the doctrine received by Protestant churches since the Reformation, 'over-valuing their own Light' and

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<sup>188</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, Preface v-viii, 42.

undervaluing ministers and Christians as having a dark and legal spirit, they have misled many good people.<sup>189</sup>

It was his study, Beart wrote, ‘to avoid Extreame’, and he apprehended eternal justification to be such. He explained that it confuses the decree with its temporal or transient outworking. There was indeed ‘a Grant of Justification made to Christ on the Behalf of the Elect from Eternity’. That was the platform or scheme, the idea and fore-view of God, but in its order it is executed as a real and proper act in time ‘according to the Pattern of those Eternal Thoughts’. Beart affirmed the Imputation of Adam’s sin to every single person *in time* which shows we ‘*need a true and real Justification in Time*’. He warned that God’s secret will not to impute sin or to discharge from it, must not be confounded with non-imputation or justification, because it preceded Christ’s death and is therefore not a fruit of it. God might will to justify, nevertheless as law-giver he cannot justify but by his Son’s blood. Justification is a ‘Redemption-Benefit’. Imminent acts of God proceed by external rule, he explained, but they do not become complete without their object. ‘A Sentence of Absolution in a Judiciary way, declaring a Man Just and Righteous in CHRIST, is more than a manifesting an Antecedent Justification. It is an Actual Release, Discharge and setting at Liberty.’ Similarly union is a transient act: this is ‘an Implantation into Christ, as the Scion is engrafted into the Stock, at the Instant of Believing’. And ‘Justification follows our *Union* with Christ,’ just as ‘God makes Covenant with Souls at Believing in their own Persons.’ Tellingly Beart referred to ‘elect unbelievers’ rather than ‘elect sinners’, the language of many hyper-Calvinists, and of ‘final unbelievers’. This subtle difference of emphasis lays the onus on faith rather than election. As Beart said, we only know our election by being found in the way of holiness, and we only know forgiveness of sins by the exercise of faith and repentance: ‘Men may not flatter themselves that they are Justify’d or shall be Saved without Faith.’<sup>190</sup>

Beart issued a stern warning: ‘when Men think that this is the highest Attainment of Gospel-Light’—to believe we were justified from eternity, and consequently there is no charge or imputation of sin in time, no *real* justification but only a

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<sup>189</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, Preface i-iii.

<sup>190</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, Sect 1, ch1:1-14, ch2:24, ch3:27-31,40.

*manifestation* of what was already complete—‘really this is a mighty unsafe, unwarrantable Way of stating Things.’ It has two implications: that sinners ‘are only to persuade themselves that they were Justify’d *before*’, and ministers have only ‘to persuade Men that their State is good while Unconverted, and that they are Justify’d and Pardon’d already’, all of which is ‘certainly a wrong and dangerous Way of directing the Exercise of Faith in poor Souls’. Beart saw precisely how this doctrine enables hyper-Calvinism by removing the need for warnings:

We ought not to endeavour to prevent Convictions, Awakenings, Fleeing for Refuge, and closing with Christ as miserable condemned Sinners; but to promote them by setting forth the Misery and Danger of a Faln State, and of continuing and dying Christless.<sup>191</sup>

It is noteworthy that such was Beart’s concern regarding eternal justification he had written in 1704 to Richard Davis, one of its early propagators. In his letter he told of a controversy in his church where a preacher had embraced this doctrine, together with its theological implications particularly antinomianism. Perhaps Beart was being tactical in asking Davis to publicly denounce the doctrine, given his influence and ‘integrity’. Davis answered lengthily, appealing to the mystery of the same persons at the same time standing in relation to two common heads, so justification is before faith and at faith, although not in the same manner, and therefore not contradictory. Nevertheless he did not retract his position.<sup>192</sup>

## 2.2 Offers, invitations and exhortations

Beart wrote this section of his book specifically in response to Hussey’s *Glory of Christ Unveil’d* ‘wherein he opposeth the Offering of Christ to Sinners in the Gospel, and by Consequence, all Invitations of Sinners to Christ, and Exhortations to believe’. So seriously did Beart take this that he ‘thought it necessary to appear in Defence’ of the truth, even though they were both ministers in the same denomination and Hussey was Beart’s senior in both ministry and years. He records how ‘exceedingly offended’ Hussey is with their denomination’s 1699 *Declaration* denouncing rejection of offers of salvation as

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<sup>191</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, Sect 1, ch1:18.

<sup>192</sup> Maurice, *Monuments*, Beart’s letter 78-81; Davis’s reply 82-97.



an antinomian error, and laments: 'I wish he had shewn more of a Christian Temper, and had treated those he opposed (at least) as Brethren.' Hussey had issued a challenge: 'Let me see what *Congregational Minister* in the Kingdom ... will stand by this *Arminian* Position.'<sup>193</sup> Beart was rising to this challenge, determined to prove gospel offers are biblical, not Arminian. He subdivided this section into three points: offers, invitations and exhortations, which are briefly summarised below. He was not to know that it was precisely these '*Three Points*' around which Hussey was to organise his next book, in order 'to rectify the Mistaken Doctrine about *Offers of Grace*, and to advance the true Doctrine of *Free Grace-Operations* working on the *Elect* of God'.<sup>194</sup>

### *offers of Christ*

First Beart explained that 'the Essence of the Gospel *doth not lie* in an Offer of Christ.' It includes an offer, because the Spirit works through the offer to effect his will. But 'the Essence thereof is Free Promise, Free Grace and Free Gift.' He went on to define the gospel offer: '*It is the Proposing and setting forth of Jesus Christ for Acceptance.*' This means it is 1) a declaration concerning Christ, 2) a publishing of God's revealed will and command that men should freely believe on or accept him, 3) that they may freely do so, and 4) that they who do so will be saved. Declaration → command + promise. 'Here', Beart said, 'is the Offer of Salvation,' something he had thought was 'self-evident, ... the current Language of the greatest *Anti-Arminians*'. Citing numerous texts as proof, Beart explained that the gospel is not good news if there is no offer or invitation or encouragement to accept Christ. This is for everyone, for 'whosoever believes'. No term or warrant such as election status is required; the free offer of Christ is the soul's only warrant for receiving him. Moreover faith is 'an immediate Duty', otherwise 'Unbelief is not an immediate Sin.' 'Some choose Christ. ... Some refuse Him, ... and are accountable for so doing.' In a pointed reference to Hussey's now-rescinded first book, Beart emphasised the offer is an invitation to a feast.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, 43-44, citing Hussey, *Glory*, 648.

<sup>194</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 1, first paragraph.

<sup>195</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, Sect 2, ch1:44-50.

Next Beart gathered up and addressed all Hussey's objections to the free offer, and one by one proved them inconsistent with scripture. He asserted that offers are to sinners as sinners, election or non-election being entirely immaterial; they are not prejudicial to particular redemption, the Spirit's work or God's gift; they do not exalt 'creature power' or human endeavour. (Here Beart exposed Hussey's 'lame' simile of the prisoner longing for the gift. Hussey's prisoner was willing but unable, whereas the poor sinner is unable because he is unwilling.) He addressed Hussey's deep objection to conditions: the 'conditional form' of proposing Christ and salvation 'runs thro' the whole Scripture': *if you believe you will be saved* etc. However there is no condition of receiving him: he is freely given, and freely taken.<sup>196</sup>

### ***invitations to Christ***

Beart addressed Hussey's various artificial distinctions between preaching and offering, preaching and doctrine, coming and faith. There are two parts to preaching, he taught: 1) a *declaration* of God's reconciliation, and 2) an *invitation* to accept it. He refuted Hussey's 'local coming' and 'outward attendance', insisting that 'Coming is Believing.' Christ invited sinners to come to him in faith, and the preacher can invite souls to come boldly to him 'for Life, for Grace, for Strength, for every thing'.<sup>197</sup>

### ***exhortations to sinners***

Beart insisted that gospel preaching should contain exhortations to sinners. Using numerous texts he proved that exhortations are scriptural, that dependence on the Spirit does not preclude them, and that 'Faith and Repentance are the Spirit's Work, *Believing* and *Repenting* are *our* Acts. ... Hence it is that Men are exhorted to Believe and repent, as that which is their *Duty*, tho' they have no *Strength* thereto,' for it is the preacher's responsibility 'to make Men see their Need of Christ'. Contrary to Hussey's teaching Beart affirmed the duty of prayer: 'It is certainly the Duty of all to Pray, as well as joyn therein with others.' 'Sinners ought to endeavour to Believe and to Repent and Turn to God by Christ, and to Pray for Help therein.' Beart believed that the Spirit works with men's natural faculties to seek God, therefore 'Men are altogether inexcusable in not

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<sup>196</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, Sect 2, ch1:51-56.

<sup>197</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, Sect 2, ch2:57-60.

stirring up themselves, and enquiring after the Way of Salvation.’ Moreover, Beart continued his answer to Hussey, motives should be used to enforce invitations and exhortations. We may use arguments with God in prayer, and use arguments with men in preaching. Preachers ‘must lay aside the Consideration of God’s secret Decrees’ and persuade people, for ‘who knows but God may be entreated?’ Two kinds of motives may be used for such persuasion, Beart recommended, the one positive, the other negative. The first uses messages of allurement, drawing and encouragement to invite and entice rebellious people to Christ. ‘The forsaking is not the Condition of the Pardon, but the Pardon is an Allurement to the forsaking.’ This is a highly-effective method. The second motive Beart suggested utilises messages of awakening, suited to rouse souls out of security. These convince of sin, warn of the danger of unbelief, of judgment and of neglecting salvation. Beart finished by saying, ‘The Grace and Love of Christ is the most Noble Theme in Divinity,’ and the main work of preaching is to bring good news and publish salvation for the people: ‘For then they will not say, *Here was nothing for Sinners*, as is the usual Talk, unless they hear a Covenant of Works.’<sup>198</sup> He was referring here to common complaints that sinners were ignored during preaching in favour of ‘the elect’.

As he set out to do, Beart successfully contended against Hussey that offers of salvation are not Arminian but scriptural. Little is known of him, although Toon wrote a short summary of his book. He noted, ‘In his doctrines of justification and the free tender of Christ, Beart was repeating what men like Ames, Owen and Goodwin had often said in the previous century.’<sup>199</sup> Writing eighty years later Fuller noted Hussey was the first person to lay the foundation for denial of duty-faith, and that Beart in this book ‘has given as fair and as candid an account of his writings as could well be given’.<sup>200</sup> He had sent a copy to a friend commending its ‘good sense and good divinity.’<sup>201</sup> Beart’s writing has echoes of the 1645 *Marrow of Modern Divinity* which was so effective against hyper-Calvinism in Scotland. It took the gospel into the open market away from select groups qualified to believe, for ‘God the Father, as he is in his Son Jesus Christ,

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<sup>198</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, Sect 2, ch3:60-71.

<sup>199</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 84.

<sup>200</sup> Fuller, ‘Defence’, *Works* 1:177n.

<sup>201</sup> Whelan, *Baptist Autographs*, 329, Letter 250, c1784, probably to JW Morris of Clipston.

moved with nothing but with his free love to mankind lost, hath made a deed of gift and grant unto them all.’ This is the authentic gospel offer, therefore ‘Go and tell every man without exception, that here is good news for him; Christ is dead for him; and if he will take him, and accept of his righteousness, he shall have him.’<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless Beart’s book would have been unnecessary were it not for Hussey’s new no-offer doctrine, for he simply and consistently maintained the Reformed view which existed long before Hussey wrote and against which he so strongly contended. Sadly Hussey did not heed Beart’s challenge, and the same year published another book explicitly against gospel offers, invitations and exhortations.

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<sup>202</sup> Fisher, *Marrow*, 1:170,173-174.

## Chapter three

### The three Johns: John Skepp 1675-1721

Having explored Hussey's writings, the thesis moves on to consider the three Johns: Skepp, Gill and Brine. Unlike Hussey they were not Congregationalist, nor did they write a specific defence of their no-offer system; but they embraced his theology, and it informed their own thinking, writing and preaching. Skepp was arguably Hussey's most influential follower because he conveyed hyper-Calvinism into the Particular Baptist denomination, where it flourished.

#### 1 Profile

Skepp grew up in Hussey's church, who recorded this about him in his diary: 'John Skep of Little Wilburn, Miller, he rent himself off at last from the Church (in Cambridge), and turned Anabaptist preacher, yet was a Lad converted throughly to Christ under my Preaching; he spake on Soul-work clearly and was admitted into the Church with much Satisfaction. After all this, he had repented of his sin and is returned, and Liberty given him to Preach as a Gifted Brother at Wittelsea. And last of all is dismissed to be the Pastor of an Anabaptist Church in London'.<sup>1</sup> From Hussey's account, it seems Skepp pressed himself into the ministry with neither Hussey's nor the church's consent, indeed against their united opinions. Skepp's London church was Curriers' Hall, Cripplegate, founded by Hanserd Knollys. This strategic Particular Baptist congregation had been vacant for years since its minister David Crosley's scandalous behaviour had become public in 1708,<sup>2</sup> followed by protracted legal proceedings which nearly split the congregation and endangered the entire Baptist community.<sup>3</sup> Skepp was succeeded by William Morton, then in 1730 by John Brine, but by the turn of the century the dwindling congregation removed to smaller premises.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cited in Toon, 'Skepp and Gill', *FGR* (Summer 1967) 318; Toon, *Emergence*, 85.

<sup>2</sup> (also Crossley); see Hunter, *Rise*, 280-281, 78-79; Glass, 'Baptist Beginnings', *BQ* (Oct 1926) 180-181; Toon, *Emergence*, 152n1. Dunan-Page, 'Writings', *BQ* (2014) 273-277, 280-281.

<sup>3</sup> Dunan-Page, 'Letters', *Debating*, 74-87.

<sup>4</sup> history of Curriers' Hall: Wilson, *History*, 2:559-584; Ivimey, *History*, 3:360-373.

Skepp remained in Cripplegate for about ten years until his death in 1721, where the church minutes reveal he was a faithful pastor ensuring the maintenance of good discipline. While he was there two new ministries began in London: one was his former minister Hussey, now sixty years old, and the other was twenty-two-year-old John Gill. How much Skepp and Hussey communicated we do not know; but despite the twenty-two-year age gap, Skepp and Gill developed a close though short-lived friendship. Skepp took a leading part in Particular Baptist affairs, which included supporting Gill during the controversy around the beginning of his London ministry, presiding at his ordination when others had declined, and facilitating his invitation to membership of the exclusive Particular Baptist society, despite opposition.<sup>5</sup> Skepp also encouraged Gill to gain proficiency in the original languages, as he himself had successfully done despite his lack of education, and on his untimely death the year following Gill's ordination, Gill bought his extensive and valuable library, putting Skepp's Hebrew and rabbinical books to full use in his Old Testament commentaries and polemical treatises. In 1724-1725 Gill was allocated £17.10s (perhaps over £3000 now) from the Particular Baptist Fund for educational purchases, which he probably used to buy Skepp's books.<sup>6</sup>

Skepp's only book *Divine Energy: or the Efficacious Operations of the Spirit* was posthumously published in 1722 as a compilation of sermons, the title similar to Hussey's 1707 book. Twenty-nine years later Gill republished this book, revised and helpfully divided into chapters for easier reading. He also included a Recommendatory Preface in which he praised Skepp without reserve and 'heartily' recommended his book for its important subject matter, in which is clearly demonstrated 'the necessity of almighty power and invincible and efficacious grace being exerted in the conversion of a sinner', together with 'the mistakes about conversion and faith, ... the insufficiency of *moral suasion*', and man's passivity in conversion.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> White, 'Gill', *BQ* (April 1967), 77-80.

<sup>6</sup> For more see Wilson, *History*, 2:572-574, 4:216; Ivimey, *History*, 3:363-366; Toon, *Emergence*, 97-98; Toon, 'Skepp and Gill', *FGR* (Summer 1967) 317-318; Middleton, 'John Love', *SRSHJ* (2018), 95-96; Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 56.

<sup>7</sup> Gill, 'Recommendatory Preface', Skepp, *Divine Energy*, xii-xv.

Skepp had another admirer in Anne Dutton,<sup>8</sup> the influential author who after professing conversion under John Hunt, came across Hussey's *Glory of Christ*, written specifically against the Arminianism of her spiritual father. This book was a great blessing for her 'further Instruction, Confirmation and Consolation', wherein she discovered gospel doctrines 'open'd in such a glorious Light'.<sup>9</sup> Later like Skepp she turned Baptist and joined his London congregation. She found in him, recognised and recorded as 'antinomian',<sup>10</sup> a soul-mate, describing him thus: 'a Man of deep Judgment; and superadded to this, he had *Quickness* of Thought, *Aptness* of Expression, *suitable* Affection, and a most *agreeable* Delivery, every way suited to engage the Attention of an Auditory: And the Corronis of all was, that wonderful *Power* which attended his Ministry, both for the Quickning of the Saints, and the Conversion of Sinners.' 'Under *his* Ministry,' Dutton continued, 'I was as it were put to School, to learn again those Truths, in a *greater* Light and Glory, which I had some *blessed* Knowledge of before.'<sup>11</sup> Dutton continued to promote the hyper-Calvinism of Hussey and Skepp through her own prolific and popular books, poems, letters and advice.<sup>12</sup>

## 2 Skepp's hyper-Calvinism

Skepp's book was revised for the third time in 1815 nearly one hundred years after his death by James Upton, Baptist minister in Blackfriars, in an attempt to defend and publicise Skepp's form of Calvinism. He included a letter of approval from Cripplegate's six deacons who wrote, 'We think this small work the best of the kind we have yet read, and worthy of being better known.'<sup>13</sup>

In his Dedication Skepp reminded his congregation of their beginnings: 'Your foundation, as to gospel-order, was skilfully and successfully laid' by Hanserd Knollys, 'and your walls were not only reared but beautified, by ... Robert Steed. These two were the chief master-builders, by whose blessed ministry you were built, and continued, upon the foundation of the prophets and apostles.' In view

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<sup>8</sup> For more see Stein, 'Dutton', *Church History* (Dec 1975), 485-491.

<sup>9</sup> Dutton, *Narration*, Preface iii.

<sup>10</sup> 'Salters' Hall', *TBHS* (April 1917), 181.

<sup>11</sup> Dutton, *Brief Account*, Part II, 11.

<sup>12</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 149.

<sup>13</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, Preface v.

of this, they did not need ‘to have the foundation laid again, as though the first was faulty, or you gone off from it. I both hope and pray, that none will ever be permitted, by God, or you, nor your survivors, so much as to attempt to lay among you any other foundation ...’<sup>14</sup> These words of Skepp’s suggest he was aligning himself and his doctrine with Knollys and Steed, and warning his congregation not to depart from it. Ivimey quoted these words, and in a long footnote clearly emphasised the doctrinal distance between Skepp and Knollys: ‘If Mr. Skepp meant to intimate that Mr. Knollys was of the sentiments propagated in the work on “Divine Energy,” respecting the non-invitations of the gospel to the unconverted, nothing could have been more erroneous. Mr. Knollys was one of those ministers who, as Mr. Skepp expresses it, used an Arminian dialect in addressing the unconverted.’<sup>15</sup> Ivimey then cited Knollys inviting sinners to open their hearts to receive Christ as Saviour.<sup>16</sup> Howson agrees that Skepp in his Dedication ‘implicates Knollys in his theology’, and ‘clearly links Knollys, whose teaching he seeks to emulate, with the eighteenth-century Baptist hyper-Calvinists’. However Howson provides seven theological tenets of high Calvinism to which Knollys did adhere, and two primary distinctives of hyper-Calvinism (denial of gospel offers and of duty faith) and one secondary distinctive (eternal justification), all characteristic of Hussey, Skepp, Gill and Brine, to which he did not.<sup>17</sup> Thus both he and Ivimey make a clear divide between Skepp’s and Knollys’s theology, despite Skepp’s attempt to align them.

The book is the result of Skepp’s ‘hearing and reading of so much slight and contempt thrown upon’ the Spirit’s work and office; the current trend, ‘by a set of pretended rationalists’ who court popularity and disparage the Spirit, being ‘another Gospel’ requiring ‘another sort of Bible’. He considered it his duty to emphasise the Spirit’s irresistible energy in regeneration, and in so doing to strip all creature-power and the futility of moral suasion to effect conversion, the whole exercise ‘being an antidote against the Pelagian error’.<sup>18</sup> In fact most of Skepp’s book, over three hundred pages, is a treatise on total depravity causing

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<sup>14</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, Dedication x.

<sup>15</sup> Eg Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 62.

<sup>16</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:364-365n\*, citing Knollys, *The World*, 48 etc.

<sup>17</sup> Howson, ‘Question of Orthodoxy’, PhD, 157-186, 188-205.

<sup>18</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, title, Dedication viii-x.



such insurmountable hindrances to salvation that only omnipotence can effect a cure, the sinner being as impotent to believe as the preacher to persuade. His book requires scrutiny as the only expression of the hyper-Calvinism he imbibed from Hussey, and in this study his reasoning has been extracted and presented as a synopsis under five headings (2.1 to 2.5). The first two detail Skepp's explanation of the nature of true conversion and saving faith: what it is not, and what it is. The third summarises his views on the insufficiency of moral suasion, and the fourth, the requirement of human passivity in conversion. The final section recaps his teaching on the rarity of conversion and hindrances to it. This is followed with an analysis of his hyper-Calvinism, and the chapter finishes with some scholarly and historical interaction with Skepp's writings.

## **2.1 What conversion and faith are not**

### ***five mistakes about conversion***

Skepp taught there were many 'mistakes' about conversion, but restricted himself to the five 'most material', similar but different experiences which are easily confused with it. The first is improvement in performance of moral duties, 'nature, dressed up with a little negative righteousness'; the second, trusting in a sober Christian life with no 'saving change'; and the third, opponents of free grace being suddenly changed and becoming zealous defenders of the truth, having 'sound doctrinal faith' but being devoid of God's power. The fourth mistake is confusing moral reformation for conversion; and the fifth is privileged and religiously-educated children of Christian families, who although never experiencing 'thorough conviction' or 'real true conversion' are accepted as Christians: 'such lovely creatures' are no better than foolish virgins.<sup>19</sup> These five mistaken ideas about conversion, according to Skepp, show how easily people can substitute other notions for the thing itself.

### ***three objections raised and answered***

Skepp interrupted himself to address three concerns or 'objections' this teaching might already raise in people's minds. The first was that he was making the way 'much straiter and narrower than it needs to be', particularly regarding acceptance into church membership and communion. To this he responded

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<sup>19</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch2:14-29.

robustly. This objection betrays ignorance of ‘the proper materials of a true gospel-church, ... composed only of living, spiritual stones’ (a further reference to Knollys’ ‘foundation’). He argued that whereas an open profession of faith in Christ used to be ‘thought a sufficient test’ for church membership, it is no longer enough for detecting ‘true believers and sound converts in this our day’. All kinds of people who give ‘ground of suspicion’ of being unregenerate are welcomed into communion by simply owning Jesus to be Christ; consequently the church has become ‘a sort of Noah’s Ark, or rather a Babel of confusion’. This ‘new scheme’ of admitting people on face value without questioning ‘their supposed Christianity’ fails to safeguard the church against blasphemous heresies. The second objection people may raise was that all who profess the faith should be accepted unless and until they fall into error or scandal. Skepp’s characteristically-stout response was that professors must be scrutinised and examined for evidence of ‘a special sanctifying and saving work of the Spirit, through the Divine efficacy of the word upon the heart’, not admitted into fellowship ‘before we<sup>20</sup> form a scripture-judgment of the saving faith and conversion of such persons’. The final potential concern was, Who are we to judge when Jesus taught that the tree is known by its fruit (Luke 6:44)? In answer Skepp warned that despite this truth, if a tree is ‘well cultivated and improved, it may bear that which hath a near resemblance to the spiritual fruits, and produce of saving grace.’ Such fruits as ‘sobriety, justice, mercy, truth and charity ... spring from moral principles improved by grace, but are not saving-grace itself,’ often being found in people who never experienced God’s power and grace. Therefore, Skepp insisted, the distinguishing fruits of which Jesus spoke refer not to Christians’ good works as evidence of grace but to ‘the doctrines men teach’ and how they are received.<sup>21</sup>

### ***two mistakes about faith***

Skepp continued by outlining two ‘mistakes’ which may deceive people into thinking they or others have the nature and properties of true saving faith when they do not. First, when assent to truth is judged sufficient evidence of faith that it entitles one to Christian benefits and privileges. This belief may be in God, and in Jesus as the Messiah and Saviour. Belief in doctrinal truths is not a

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<sup>20</sup> (my emphasis) Presumably the church leadership? Skepp does not question their fallibility.

<sup>21</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch2:29-37.

test of inward Christianity or true faith, and assent to them though necessary is not the faith that saves. Second, when assurance, or persuasion of faith, is mistaken for the real thing, as if saving faith were nothing more than being ‘fully sure and positive’ of one’s election, redemption, adoption and justification. ‘True justifying faith is something distinct from assurance.’<sup>22</sup>

## 2.2 What conversion and faith are

### *conversion*

Skepp identified two parts to genuine conversion. First, the principle from whence it flows: a new nature, new heart and new spirit, wrought at the time of effectual calling, in the new birth. Second, the active part of conversion, which manifests itself to God and man in the soul’s abhorrence of, grieving for, and forsaking sin.<sup>23</sup>

### *saving faith, distinguished from ‘other sorts’*

Skepp was at pains to stress ‘the nature and peculiar acts of true saving faith, as it specifically differs from all other sorts, which are common both to devils, and *almost Christians*.’ True faith is ‘spiritual, and from above’, it belongs exclusively to God’s elect, it comes by hearing the gospel, is ‘a firm persuasion, and dependance on the word of promise’, seated in the heart and will. It must be distinguished from ‘other sorts of faith’, such as ‘bare assent, or credit given to the word, ... seated only in the understanding and judgment’, and from ‘moral rational faith, which is our reasonable duty’, arising only from the force of God’s truth upon the natural intellect, ‘common to men as men, and also to devils as intellectual beings.’<sup>24</sup>

### *five distinct acts or degrees of faith*

Skepp wished to separate faith’s various synonyms such as looking to, seeing, coming to, believing etc, into five distinct steps or ‘ways of faith’s dealing with Christ’. First, seated in the understanding, it is both ‘visive power’, and assent to God’s word (this latter being common to ‘other sorts of faith’). Second, operating in the faculty of reason or judgment, faith is persuasion. Third, it is an

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<sup>22</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch2:37-40.

<sup>23</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch2:40-44.

<sup>24</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch2:44-46.

act of the affections: the soul's spiritual motion towards its object, 'coming to Christ' as the scripture calls it. Faith's fourth step is receiving Christ. The final step is an act of the will: the soul commits to him in 'marriage-union', believing, trusting, relying. This step must be distinguished, Skepp noted, from 'spiritual vital union, which is the Spirit's act'.<sup>25</sup>

### ***two inferences and self-examination***

Skepp closed his discourse on conversion and faith with two inferences. The first was, 'If there are so many great mistakes about conversion and saving faith, then we may hence infer, that few persons, comparatively, among the professors of Christianity ever attain to it.' Secondly, he inferred that 'many proud, carnal, conceited professors and preachers will one day meet with a sad disappointment,' when instead of Christ welcoming them to heaven they will be consigned to hell. In view of this, Skepp urged his readers to stringent self-examination, probing how one became a Christian, or church member; how one got onto the narrow way: whether it was through the strait gate or by unlawful means; and questioning, If this is the nature of genuine conversion and faith, 'what of this exceeding greatness of Almighty power have I felt?'<sup>26</sup>

## **2.3 Insufficiency of moral suasion**

### ***five reasons***

Skepp went on to demonstrate the 'weakness and insufficiency of moral suasion' to effect conversion or faith. This is the influence exerted by arguments, motives, appeals, encouragements and entreaties, including the persuasive power of God's promises, mercy and patience, and also his severity and justice. The reason Skepp believed this was useless was because it appeals to 'any remaining power or ability in fallen man', and he attempted to prove this ineffectiveness with five assertions.

First, Skepp defined moral suasion:

An endeavour, by proper methods and arguments, to persuade a man, in a natural unrenewed state, not only to break off and forsake his evil courses

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<sup>25</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch2:47-54.

<sup>26</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch2:55-56.

of sin and folly, but also closely to adhere unto the practice of moral and religious duties; or to put forth his power, and use his utmost endeavour to convert himself, and become a new man, and to live according to the strict rules of the gospel; which require repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus, with a constant perseverance therein.

These ‘exhortations and arguments’, he explained, may be drawn from God and his nature, from his authority over us, from his promises and threatenings. But Skepp dismissed it all as ‘playing the orator, and using the art of persuasion to the best advantage in preaching’ to achieve what is necessary for salvation. This method is ‘not only deficient but culpable’, based as it is on the ‘old mistake’ that God requires no more of man than he is able to perform. The contrary is true, Skepp said. Persuasion is powerless to change the human heart, which ‘remains polluted and unclean’. Only almighty invincible power can overcome the difficulties, remove the obstructions, and quicken the spiritually dead.<sup>27</sup>

Skepp’s second assertion was that although God sometimes does use exhortations and arguments in the word and ministry, backed with encouragement and sharp reproofs, ‘he always superadds the efficacious power of his Spirit and grace’ to quicken and renew ‘elect sinners’ (a phrase Skepp shared with other hyper-Calvinists<sup>28</sup>). In a convoluted passage, Skepp wrote, ‘I do not say the gospel itself, strictly considered in its own nature, is compounded of these; no, it is nothing but the blessed news, and glad tidings of a salvation that is all of grace: these, then, are a sort of adjuncts, or necessary concomitants’ relating to ‘some part of man’s duty’, and therefore ‘not to be discarded’ altogether. Nevertheless Skepp was uneasy about their use: ‘I think few handle these so usefully and distinctly, as to keep themselves and others clear from Arminianism, in its notion of the creature’s power and liberty of will to do all that is required of a sinner by the gospel-ministry; and though they may not design this, yet the ignorant and unskilful part of their auditory perceive no difference’ between Calvinism and Arminianism. This had happened to Skepp himself when he was young. He had learned the Assembly’s Catechism, Confessions of Faith and doctrinal Articles of the Reformed churches with all their arguments against Arminians, and then was ‘stumbled at Arminian

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<sup>27</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch3:56-60

<sup>28</sup> Eg Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 70,84,272,277,278.

discourses, from such who were accounted strict Calvinists'. He could not understand how Calvinists could preach for an hour 'in the Arminian dialect', not mentioning the Spirit's work throughout, then throw in a few words at the end of their sermons about human inability and the need to earnestly beg for divine assistance. Skepp's assertion was that 'although there are exhortations, commands, and arguments, used to excite to this or the other duty; yet, besides these, there is a provision made, by way of covenant, for some.' In other words, commands are all very well for temporary reformation, but they are ineffective for salvation. For that God works in quite another way, according to a different principle, 'absolute and free, and not clogged with any conditions'.<sup>29</sup>

Third, Skepp demonstrated God's contrasting dealings between elect and non-elect. God may externally argue with and exhort the non-elect, but because he does not simultaneously exert his 'exceeding great and efficacious power upon their hearts, to enlighten, renew, and turn them to himself', it is doomed to failure, for he leaves 'the success wholly to depend upon a corrupt, depraved and evil-disposed will'. But with his elect God does not rely on 'common awakenings and convictions'. He uses exhortations *and* power, and this potent mix is designed to succeed.<sup>30</sup>

Skepp continued to demonstrate moral suasion's weakness, as, fourth, God 'justly upbraids' the sinner for neglecting to heed his exhortations and reproofs, and despising his grace, whilst he remains 'deaf to their misery and distress'. But 'the same ministry is made powerful and efficacious unto some.' Nevertheless we are not to imagine, cautioned Skepp, that when God promises his people a clean heart, he means with 'his concurrence and assistance in *their* making it new and clean'. His intention is not to assist them, as if by his help they can turn to him. He concluded, 'If God only helps our sincere endeavours in conversion and faith, ... then it is man that doth them, and not God.'<sup>31</sup>

Skepp's final argument was 'that there are such lets and hinderances, both within and without, that stand in the way of a sinner's conversion to God, as

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<sup>29</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch3:60-64

<sup>30</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch3:65-71

<sup>31</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch3:71-78.

render it wholly impracticable and impossible, without the concurrence of his efficacious grace and omnipotence.’ Typically of Skepp, he itemised four of these obstacles. First, mankind is not only ‘guilty and vile’ but helpless and unable to will and perform what is good, this impotency being particularised in diverse metaphors and analogies. He has no desire for spiritual liberty but loves serving sin. Therefore moral suasion is as useless as commanding a disabled man, “‘Rise up, do your best, and God will assist you.” This is the import and genuine language of moral suasion, and as far as it can go; and yet this is the helpless, lifeless way of preaching and reasoning now in vogue with our high and mighty rationalists, and doctors of free-will, and ... among some others, who profess to know better, and to have experienced something more ... .’ Skepp’s frustration was obvious:

And sure I am, that moral suasion may much sooner and easier cure all the lunatics or distempered heads in Bedlam, than it can quicken and convert one dead sinner.

Skepp’s second ‘and far greater obstacle’ in the way of sinners’ conversion is inbred enmity, perverseness and rebellion. The will is incapable of receiving spiritual things, seeing them as foolish, weak and absurd. This concupiscence ‘is too potent and prevalent to be mastered and removed by moral arguments, though accompanied with the greatest resolutions and utmost endeavours’. Skepp averred that neither Noah, whose ministry ‘lay altogether in moral suasion’, nor Ezekiel the ‘golden mouthed orator’, nor John the Baptist’s calls for humiliation, mourning and repentance, not even ‘the Messiah’s more gladsome doctrine of spiritual freedom and redemption, attended with the promise of life eternal, ... had any saving efficacy or influence’ on the hearers. Skepp’s third hindrance to conversion is sin’s dominion, whose reigning coercive power enslaves the heart, will and affections to bodily and mental lusts. His final hindrance is Satan’s universal ‘hold, possession and influence’, evinced as conqueror over captive souls, god to be worshipped, and ‘invisible diabolic spirit’, slipping seductively into the heart and mouth without consent or knowledge.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch3:78-157.

All of which, together with further subheadings, points, examples and protracted details and proofs covering over 100 pages, explain the complete lack of anything within mankind to which any moral suasion, command, offer or call could appeal, during which Skepp curiously invoked his nemesis Arminius who made precisely the same point in few words: 'In the state of apostacy and sin, he is disabled of himself, and by himself, to think, will, or do any thing truly good; and stands in need of the renovating and regenerating power of God in Christ by his Spirit.'<sup>33</sup>

## 2.4 Human passivity

It was important to Skepp's theology to stress the soul's passivity 'both in and after conversion'. To demonstrate this he categorised four specific areas of passivity under the Spirit's work, the first of which consists of five separate steps.

First, the soul is passive in receiving the Holy Spirit, who apprehends and convicts the elect under the gospel, seizing and arresting them. These are not the common transitory convictions of a distant Spirit on the general congregation, but strong and specific convictions where the Spirit 'secretly and powerfully' possesses the heart. The soul 'is wholly passive, and is wrought upon without his consent, nay, contrary to his present inclination'. Skepp explained that this process involves five 'distinct steps' of conviction or law-work in which the man is 'a patient' under God's mighty hand. First, the soul is given 'a repeated survey of its past and present sinful life'. The terrors of the law reveal innumerable sins and short-comings which 'continually haunt and affright him'. The second step Skepp elucidated is 'an astonishing conviction and sight of his own vileness and guiltiness before God' together with deserved vengeance, producing 'the wracking, griping pains of an awakened guilty conscience'. This, he warned, is 'but legal sorrow', and 'if not prevented, would sink the sinner down into deep despair and death eternal, as it often doth in the reprobates: who being left to themselves, either fall into despair or a phrensy, under which delirium they are oft suffered to lay violent hands upon themselves, as many a professor has done.' 'Thrice happy' therefore are they who the Spirit leads out

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<sup>33</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 123-124.



of this ‘bondage-state’. Skepp’s third step is ‘a humbling view of the corruption and uncleanness of his nature as filthy, depraved, perverse, and deceitful’, appearing like a ‘monstrous hydra’. The fourth step Skepp revealed is a conviction of the soul’s ‘real impotency and disability to perform’ anything good or acceptable toward God, covering the sinner ‘in self-abhorrence and shame’. Skepp’s final step is a conviction of the soul’s need of faith, both as ‘necessary moral duty’ and ‘gospel-justifying saving faith’, together with the ‘damnable nature’ of unbelief, and ‘man’s real impotency and inability to believe aright’. Most, on hearing of this necessity, underestimate faith as being an ‘easy or cheap thing’, he claimed. In fact it is a principle to be found only in the new-born, wrought exclusively by the energy or operation of God, requiring the same power as raised Jesus from the dead. Skepp reinforced his gruelling message by quoting at length from St Augustine and Thomas Goodwin, both of whom underwent extraordinary levels of conviction and self-abhorrence.<sup>34</sup>

The second instance of the Spirit’s work ‘in which the soul is wholly passive’, according to Skepp, is in the ‘hidden and mysterious’ act of quickening into union with Christ, in which it is apprehended and joined to him ‘before ever there is the least principle of life or gracious disposition’. For union must precede life and any act such as faith, love and new obedience. The third instance Skepp mentioned is regeneration, which is performed by the Spirit alone. Jesus taught Nicodemus, a man must be born of water and the Spirit, in both of which we are ‘as passive as the clay in the hand of the potter’. Skepp’s fourth example of passivity is in the soul’s first and repeated spiritual activity towards God. The Spirit directs, manages, preserves and regulates the soul, like ‘the mainspring in a watch’. Without this influence, the soul cannot ‘put forth so much as one vital spiritual act of faith or repentance’. Similarly a backslidden soul has no power to repent; it ‘must be asked, waited for, and expected in God’s own way and time’. For ‘Sanctification is a passive work wrought upon us’ by the Spirit.<sup>35</sup>

Skepp wrote a further two chapters showing ‘the absolute Necessity of the exertion of Almighty Power, and invincible and efficacious Grace’ in conversion,

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<sup>34</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch5:206-238.

<sup>35</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch5:238-256, also 295.

which he proved from scripture texts, and also by evidence of scriptural conversions. They reiterated what he had already laboriously demonstrated: that the sinful, fallen, blind, dark and lost nature of human beings means that 'neither calling, commanding, nor moral suasion will suffice nor prevail.'<sup>36</sup>

## 2.5 Rarity of conversion

Finally Skepp applied his teaching with some inferences and cautions. He restressed the difficult and rare nature of conversion, given the 'exceeding greatness of power' required to save a soul. It is not 'a small matter' or an 'easy requirement' because there is no 'power in the subject to perform what is called for':

Let a soul ... but once attempt to believe, by laying firm hold of the promise of mercy, free and full pardon and justification to life, as it is held forth in Christ Jesus ministerially, and then let him tell me whether it is so easy a matter to believe and keep fast hold in spite of all this opposition and discouragement.<sup>37</sup>

Only God can give a new heart and work 'a special saving change', and this is a rare thing, Hussey insisted; among the many who profess it, 'sound true converts are but few.' In view of this, Skepp pressed his readers to self-examination, closely to ascertain whether their soul-work was genuine, whether long-time hearers had experienced God's operations and power. He provided many examples of searching questions they should be asking themselves: Had they been 'pricked to the heart', 'mortally wounded' and 'truly humbled', come under 'anguish of conscience', felt the hammer blows of God's word, been exposed by the 'sharp two-edged sword'? Or had they only performed self-surgery, inflicting 'skin-deep' wounds? For 'common convictions are but slight wounds' which only bleed for a time, soon healed. If the power is so great, what efficacy has it had? What fruits are being produced? Skepp cautioned those who had experienced the power not to be hardened again, for many have begun well, but becoming 'swallowed up in sin, they have quite lost their profession'. He advised, 'Take care who and what you hear; corrupt doctrine is like leaven, it

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<sup>36</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch6:256-278, ch7:278-302.

<sup>37</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 227.

will sour the man.’ He warned against ‘deceivers’ who preach falsehood, and directed them to ‘beg a gospel-ministry’.<sup>38</sup>

Inexplicably in the midst of all these terrifying warnings, Skepp inserted some particular words which appear to be at odds with his harsh teaching. Addressing ‘young ones’ in his church who had abandoned their credible profession, embraced ‘vicious company’ and become engulfed in sin, he wrote, ‘I still believe “the foundation of the Lord stands sure,” he will bring them back again; but it will be with broken bones.’<sup>39</sup> It is probable that Skepp demonstrated this contradictory statement that they would pull through despite godless living and apostasy because he was emotionally conflicted concerning loved youngsters in his own congregation, maybe even his own children. Baptist historian Joseph Ivimey specifically referred to this passage, observing that ‘in his care to avoid Scylla, he runs upon Charybdis; and rather than be suspected by them of holding the Arminian notion of the self-determining power of the will in conversion, he encourages them to conclude’ that, despite their return to sinful ways, their once having demonstrated God’s work in their souls ‘was sufficient evidence of their being the elect’. Ivimey wrote, ‘A conclusion this so diametrically opposed to the design of the gospel, and to the effects of the *Divine energy* upon the heart, that it is infinitely more to be dreaded, than to be suspected of using an Arminian dialect.’<sup>40</sup>

### 3 Analysis of Skepp’s hyper-Calvinism

Although Skepp derived his hyper-Calvinism directly from Hussey, he presented it quite differently. Where Hussey was impassioned and unconventional, Skepp was cautious, negative and introspective. Nevertheless despite his different emphases and conservative outlook, his conclusions were similar. In his way Skepp was as radical and contradictory as Hussey. His ‘divine energy’ was Hussey’s ‘God’s operations’. His determination not to interfere with the Spirit’s work in salvation led him to avoid exhortations and refuse offers of salvation, like Hussey. Most of his book contains interminable arguments and proofs of

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<sup>38</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, ch7:302-318.

<sup>39</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 314.

<sup>40</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:266-267.

what was already generally accepted, especially among his audience. He catalogued numerous problems and difficulties, but not once did he deal with the dilemma created by his own hyper-Calvinism of how to preach Christ to the unconverted, or provide practical advice on how to preach the Bible's many exhortations and invitations which appeal to human duty. He could not reconcile the imperative to believe with human inability. He hid behind the exceeding greatness of God's power and the Spirit's divine energy, allowing his exaggerated emphasis of it to eclipse human responsibility whether the preacher's duty to offer Christ or the sinner's to accept him. Having absorbed Hussey's hyper-Calvinism, he was unable or reticent to work through all its implications.

Like Hussey his theology relied on distinctions. He distinguished two types of people with two types of faith. He described moral rational faith which is reasonable duty, and the supernatural gift of faith to the elect. Unlike Hussey he refrained from openly attacking the propriety of gospel offers. In fact his use of the words 'offer' and 'invitation' are conspicuous by their absence, both being used once only, the former in a disparaging way.<sup>41</sup> He diminished these exhortations and commands as non-essential appendages, 'adjuncts', not really part of the gospel. Practically he did not accept moral suasion was the correct or appropriate medium to awaken sinners, because it is futile unless God superadds his efficacious power to his own elect. He considered ministers mishandled such exhortations and arguments, slipping into Arminianism when applying them and confusing their congregations. Yet Skepp failed to provide any guidance as to how to use them correctly, principally because although he could not deny their existence he believed they threatened God's prerogative, slighted the Spirit and robbed him of his role. Those parts of scripture were an embarrassment to him. Although he called the gospel 'blessed news and glad tidings',<sup>42</sup> by removing the link of invitations his gospel became inaccessible, as if to say, 'The gospel is only good news if you are elect.' Skepp's convoluted attempts to explain away these 'adjuncts' resulted in one-sided, heavy-handed and depressing theology.

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<sup>41</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 82,61.

<sup>42</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 61.

Skepp's major premise was mankind's profound weakness, impotence and inability to respond to God, and therefore the futility of persuasion and commands to do so. Calling 'dead or disabled' souls to Christ is 'no more than a dead and helpless exhortation', he said. It has no power or authority behind it. It is an 'ineffectual', 'lifeless' and 'spiritless' offer.<sup>43</sup> Yet his own former denomination had already identified this as the antinomian error of not offering Christ on the grounds of human inability to accept him. Its Declaration's response was that 'it's the People Duty to make use of their Natural Faculties, with such External Means and Workings of the Spirit, as God Affords them, that they may Believe, Repent, and be Saved.'<sup>44</sup> Beart, probably known to Skepp, had echoed this in his challenge to Hussey, as we have already seen (ch2,pt2.2): that 'Inability to Perform without the Spirit's Operation' is no ground for not exhorting men to salvation. 'Sinners', he wrote, 'ought to use their utmost Endeavours' to repent and turn to God, praying for help therein. He also stressed the use of arguments and persuasion.<sup>45</sup> This teaching was dismissed by Skepp, who regarded any form of persuasion, whether positive promises or negative threatenings on the preacher's part or endeavour on the sinner's part, as Arminian. Sadly he allowed his intense focus on the necessity of divine energy to eclipse any human involvement in salvation, advocating total passivity on the part of the sinner, and never calling for faith and repentance from his congregation. Johan Blaauwendraad, of the *Gereformeerde Gemeenten* in the Netherlands, addresses this precise issue in his book *Salvation has become Complicated*. Referring to Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus which Skepp used to prove the soul's passivity, Blaauwendraad simplifies 'the relationship between regeneration and faith', such a thorny issue for hyper-Calvinists. They are two sides of the same coin (John 3:3 and 3:16): 'To be born again is ... the reverse side of the command to believe. ... You and I are not commanded to be regenerated, but rather, to repent and believe.' 'It is ours to believe; it is the Lord's to create us anew. He will not believe for us, neither are we to do the regenerating work for Him.'<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 81-82.

<sup>44</sup> *Congregational Declaration*, 42.

<sup>45</sup> Beart, *Vindication*, 62-63, 66, 68-71.

<sup>46</sup> Blaauwendraad, *Salvation*, 15-16.

Part of Skepp's title is *An Antidote against the Pelagian Error*. Like Hussey, he turned Arminianism into the bogey-man, to be avoided at all costs, with 'its notion of the creature's power and liberty of will' enabling a sinner to respond to the gospel.<sup>47</sup> They both identified offering Christ with Arminianism, as exposed by Beart in response to Hussey's 1706 book. So while much of Skepp's theology appeared to conform with Calvinistic orthodoxy, and few (including Arminius) would argue with him on such fundamental issues as human inability or the necessity of divine energy, his determination *not* to appear Arminian (according to his false definition) paralysed him and obliterated any motivation for evangelical gospel preaching. He was far more concerned that 'ignorant and unskilful' congregations might not discern the finer points between Arminianism and Calvinism than to present Christ freely offered in the gospel. Yet surprisingly it was Arminius he appealed to in order to defend his position, quoting his 'noble declaration' concerning free will, human inability and the need of God's regenerating power.<sup>48</sup>

The thrust of Skepp's theology is negative, as evidenced from the significantly higher proportion of pages describing what things are *not* rather than what they are. Consequently it is discouraging, limiting and enervating. His disproportionate concentration on sin, law-work, harrowing steps required prior to conversion, prevalence of counterfeit grace, deception of self and others, scarcity of true faith, impossibility of natural man perceiving spiritual things, ease of falling away: all emphasise the obstacles and disadvantages blocking the way. He may as well have articulated, 'Your profession of faith is probably spurious, but you lack the requisite power to remedy the situation.' Having effectively removed well-meant invitations and offers, he could provide no encouragement to sinners. His disjunction between command and power reflected this. 'Beg a gospel-ministry,' he wrote, for only that 'is effectual for the conversion of poor sinners.' But was *this* a gospel-ministry? He meant that a gospel-ministry was the channel for the Spirit's energy in saving the elect, not that it opened the way for every sinner to come to Christ. He cautioned against being given 'falsehood for truth'.<sup>49</sup> Was *he* faithfully representing God's heart of

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<sup>47</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 62.

<sup>48</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 62,123-124.

<sup>49</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 317,316.

love for sinners? Or was he piling up difficulties on their escape route? Spurgeon spoke of how the magistrates maintained all roads leading to the ancient Jewish cities of refuge, analogous of Christ, to ensure they were well signposted and obstacle-free. 'It is needful', he preached, 'that very often the ministers of Christ should survey this road, lest there should be any stumbling-blocks in the path of the poor sinner.' And even with their 'most scrupulous care', the sinner will still make obstacles enough for himself.<sup>50</sup> The confusion, difficulties and obfuscation Skepp substituted for the simplicity of the gospel is characteristic of hyper-Calvinism today, as it fences and restricts preaching to protect God's operations from any human participation.

Hussey's revolutionary theological emphases are evident in Skepp's regulating and complicating the parameters for church admittance. Skepp drew a fine line between the 'near resemblance' of 'fruits that spring from moral principles improved by grace' and saving grace itself.<sup>51</sup> And many of the descriptions he gave of legal soul-work were common to elect and non-elect, only becoming effectual in those who experience superadded power. This clearly had negative implications for both leaders and congregation. Among the leaders it fostered an attitude of censoriousness, suspicion and control. Rather than the innocent-until-proven-guilty approach which had hitherto prevailed, Skepp encouraged a vigilante-style church leadership to smoke out with rigorous testing all counterfeit or 'almost Christians' that would spoil the church by their admittance. He discounted New Testament guidelines for a viable profession of Christianity because he believed things were had become more complicated in the eighteenth century. No longer could anyone's profession of faith be trusted, but signs of the Spirit's special work and evidence of his divine efficacy and operations must be probed. But this in turn was subject to fallibility of judgment and peer pressure: who possesses that level of discernment? and who dare wield such power? Its impact on the congregation would be significant too. Rather than fostering an attitude of confidence in God, such theology and practice would lead to unhealthy feelings of guilt and anxiety. They might, for example, dread the powerful leadership panel, be reticent to apply for membership for fear of

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<sup>50</sup> Deuteronomy 19:1-13; Joshua 20. Spurgeon, Sermon 293. For parallel between cities and Christ: Taylor, *Saving Faith*, 232-236.

<sup>51</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 35.

rejection, experience doubt concerning the genuineness of their profession, worry about insufficient preparatory work, or be preoccupied with their election status. The rigorous self-examination Skepp encouraged was largely self-defeating, there being no definitive test of whether a person has experienced the appropriate level of divine power, or undergone sufficient conviction, or feels suitable depths of weakness and self-loathing. He employed colourful feverish language to describe the profound convictions prior to and necessary for salvation, even though these themselves could be counterfeit. This preoccupation with traumatic, exhausting and intense pre-conversion experiences does not reflect the norm, and is atypical of biblical examples. Thus hyper-Calvinistic preaching heightens negative emotions and encourages introspection.

#### 4 Skepp's influence

Writing of the early history of the Baptists, Ivimey quotes from a 1675 letter from thirteen London ministers including Kiffin and Knollys (ch1,pt5.2), in which they stressed the universal duty of faith, as the model adopted by Benjamin Keach, Gill's predecessor, John Bunyan, John Piggott, and many others. But by the early 1700s 'the manner of preaching the gospel, by some of the Baptist ministers, to unconverted sinners, had been greatly altered.' Ivimey identified Skepp as the first of these, having 'fully imbibed the scheme of doctrine advocated by his pastor', particularly Hussey's 1707 book written expressly against all offers of grace. Introducing his '*non-invitation, non-application* scheme' into the Baptists, he became the source of 'a river that has plentifully watered our churches'. Referring to Skepp, his successor Brine, and Gill, Ivimey wrote, 'It naturally followed, that their opinion produced a very powerful influence among the Baptist Ministers, and gave the tone to their preaching.'<sup>52</sup> Toon wrote that 'Skepp stands ... in the history of dogma, as the connecting link between Hussey's theology and the Hyper-Calvinism of many Particular Baptists throughout the eighteenth century.'<sup>53</sup> Nuttall calls him Gill and Brine's 'common inspirer'.<sup>54</sup> Daniel agrees that Hussey and Skepp 'provided the direction' for Gill

<sup>52</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:259-262,267,272-273; for letter see 1:417-420.

<sup>53</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 88-89.

<sup>54</sup> Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965), 117.



and Brine’, and Skepp’s book ‘was to exert great influence on succeeding generations’.<sup>55</sup> In the context of ‘the general religious decline’ of the early and mid-eighteenth century, Murdina Macdonald writes of the ‘different solutions to the problem’ offered by Edward Wallin of Maze Pond and Skepp. Wallin sought to revitalise believers by modified behaviour, for example not trading on Sundays, whereas Skepp turned to doctrinal issues. He fought Arminianism and rationalism by presenting ‘an exaggerated form of Calvinism. ... It would be Skepp’s solution and not Wallin’s that would prevail among London Calvinistic Baptists of the eighteenth century.’ Macdonald notes that Skepp’s doctrine represented ‘the middle term in the progression from the positive and expansionist Calvinism of Knollys, Kiffin and Keach to the high Calvinism’ of Gill and Brine.<sup>56</sup> Roberts calls Skepp’s book ‘the first apologetic for High Calvinism published in [the eighteenth] century by a Baptist pastor in the capital’, heralding the ministries of ‘like-minded men’ such as Gill and Brine. Roberts writes of these ‘forceful thinkers’ such as Skepp: ‘initially as the High Calvinists were left unchallenged by their own denominational brethren, they were either reflecting most Baptists views or were too overpowering to be challenged by less capable men.’ He posits that when hyper-Calvinism came into the Particular Baptists through Skepp, they were ‘at the nadir of health and growth’, and ‘that period of decline may have created a desire and need for a theology to explain the disappearance of conversion and to ease the mandate for evangelism. Such a rationalistic theological system as High Calvinism influenced some pastors to be less evangelistic and to concentrate on instructing those already in the faith.’<sup>57</sup> This perspective sees hyper-Calvinism rationalising and adjusting to the decline rather than being partially responsible for it, which is an interesting consideration. Perhaps both are true.

## 5 Scholarly opinion on Skepp’s theology

Ivimey, in the same passage quoted above, pointed out Skepp’s inconsistency in accusing ministers of Arminianism in their use of exhortations, arguments, reasoning etc, when he himself said they were not to be discarded from

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<sup>55</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 7,18-19.

<sup>56</sup> Macdonald, *London Calvinistic Baptists*, 116,139-149,299.

<sup>57</sup> Roberts, *Continuity and Change*, 36-37,42.

preaching. Doubtless Skepp's intention was to protect the Spirit's work in converting the elect, Ivimey allowed, but questioned Skepp's modesty in being 'so certain' that the Assembly of Divines and the compilers of all the Reformed Creeds 'were all Arminians and Semi-pelagians'. Moreover 'because Mr. Skepp could not reconcile the difficulties of total depravity and human accountability,' he concluded that 'the Divine command is not to be obeyed.' Such was Skepp's fear of improperly applying exhortations, and of confusing Calvinism and Arminianism, 'he neglected *applications* of the promises and threatenings of the gospel to unconverted sinners altogether; and rather left them to infer they had no share in the blessings of a gospel ministry.' Ivimey's sense of indignation at Skepp's book, 'written to prove what no *Calvinist* ever doubted, that DIVINE ENERGY is absolutely necessary' led him to dedicate six pages in his *History* to reviewing it.<sup>58</sup>

Ella, who lists Skepp along with Gill and Brine as part of 'a grand display of faithful men of God' produced by the Particular Baptists, writes that 'the historian Ivimey, though always ready to criticize Hyper-Calvinists, gives a very positive picture of Skepp, calling him an 'excellent servant of Christ', emphasizing that many were converted and edified under his ministry.'<sup>59</sup> In a short historical passage on Skepp, Ivimey does indeed write that despite Hussey's opposition to his going into the ministry for whatever 'irregularity of conduct' Skepp manifested, 'he became an excellent servant of Christ.' He makes clear however that this is not his own opinion: 'This assertion is founded upon the following testimony of Dr. Gill to his character,' and Ivimey goes on to quote from Gill's Recommendatory Preface in his 1751 reprint of Skepp's book (cited above). Ivimey also deliberately distances Knollys' and Skepp's theology, Knollys using what Skepp called 'Arminian dialect' (also cited above).<sup>60</sup> This is therefore a dishonest representation of Ivimey's judgment of Skepp, which as we have seen, was not complimentary.

Toon confirmed the title and contents of Skepp's book bear witness to Hussey's influence, and repeat his 'excessive emphasis on irresistible grace'. He

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<sup>58</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:264-267.

<sup>59</sup> Ella, *Gill*, 129,259.

<sup>60</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:363-364.

considered Skepp's doctrine of conversion under three headings. First, as to its nature, Skepp made confession and church membership in the 1720s more complicated than in apostolic times, due to the invasion of many erroneous theological systems. Second, as to moral suasion, Toon noted Skepp's belief that 'it was so easy' to fall into Arminianism when pressing men to repent. 'He felt that if preachers were to realise the great obstacles' in the way of salvation, they would not address sinners as if they had power to accept God's grace. But 'in his fear ... Skepp displayed the same frame of mind as Hussey had expressed. He made sure that he completely avoided Arminian tendencies and, in doing so, lost sight of the fact that the Bible provides many examples of prophets and preachers who call men to turn to God without first giving long explanations as to the necessary work of the Spirit in the heart, mind and will.' Third, as to the Spirit's energy, Toon identified Skepp's emphasis on human passivity, preparatory work, and the Spirit's influence, using Augustine and Goodwin as models of true conversion. Toon pointed out that while the orthodox seventeenth-century Puritans would have generally agreed, they would have reinforced the equal importance of God's sovereignty in conversion with the preacher calling his hearers to faith. Skepp 'betrayed the fact that Hussey had influenced him in his emphasis that 'moral suasion' by preachers was of no use. He did not believe that the preacher should beseech his hearers to be reconciled with God and should invite them to partake of the grace of Christ.' This was why he wrote his book, to expose such 'Pelagian error', but in so doing 'Skepp went to the opposite extreme and became just as guilty as Pelagians and Arminians in neglecting the 'tension' of biblical doctrine.' Orthodox Calvinism, Toon asserted, maintains the tension between irresistible grace in regeneration and the duty of preachers to beseech everyone to be reconciled to God, exemplified in Murray's paper *The Free Offer of the Gospel*.<sup>61</sup>

Howson is interested in Skepp because of his link with Knollys through Cripplegate. He defined Skepp as 'the eighteenth-century Particular Baptist father of hyper-Calvinism'; and like Ivimey who 'defends Knollys against any association with Skepp's hyper-Calvinism', he draws a strong line between

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<sup>61</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 85-88; Toon, 'Skepp and Gill', *FGR* (Summer 1967) 319. (Ref to Murray, 'Free Offer', *Collected Writings* 4:113-132, committee report to 15<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of OPC, Minutes 1948, Appendix 51-63).

Knollys' free gospel invitations and 'Skepp's "no offer" theology'. Howson's summary of Skepp's theology relies on Toon's, but he emphasises Toon's last point of the Spirit's energy. He provides two lengthy quotations from Skepp, writing, 'From these passages Skepp's hyper-Calvinism is evident, particularly because of his emphasis on the exceeding greatness of God's efficacious grace to convert the sinner as well as the sinner's impotence to accept the Gospel and the preacher's impotence to persuade the sinner to receive Christ as Saviour. Irresistible grace was a tenet of High Calvinism,' Howson summarised, 'but Skepp's emphasis on it far exceeds that of the High Calvinists.' And in turn 'Hussey's and Skepp's hyper-Calvinism was disseminated in Particular Baptist circles' by Gill and Brine.<sup>62</sup>

Daniel writes of Hussey's convert Skepp that he 'agreed with Hussey on all essential points', was 'rather unoriginal', yet he was the author who had 'the most personal influence on Gill'. He also wrote that 'Skepp rejected the notion of the free offer but stated that "God, in the Gospel, requires no more of man than he is able, if he will but put forth himself in an earnest and sincere manner, to perform".' From this he draws the conclusion that 'Skepp here shows more liberality than most Hyper-Calvinists, as often in his book.'<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately Daniel based this opinion on misreading Skepp's words. In fact Skepp was saying the opposite. He was not endorsing the concept that God only requires of us what we are able to give, as Daniel states. He was condemning it as a popular 'corrupt notion' which springs from the method of moral suasion which is 'not only deficient but culpable', based as it is on the 'old mistake' that God requires no more of man than he is able to perform, 'the contrary of which will, I trust, be sufficiently manifest throughout this work'.<sup>64</sup> And indeed it is, the whole tenor of Skepp's book being to demonstrate the impossibility and futility of any human endeavour towards God.

Seymour wrote of how Skepp followed Hussey's reasoning that if Christ died exclusively for the elect, 'it was wrong to invite all men to repent and to believe in Him.' He wrote his book to prove that divine energy alone is all that is

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<sup>62</sup> Howson, 'Question of Orthodoxy', PhD, 7,159-160,182-185.

<sup>63</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 6,44,420.

<sup>64</sup> Skepp, *Divine Energy*, 59,303.

necessary to renew the sinner's heart, who remains passive throughout, incapable of helping himself in any way. Seymour wrote, 'Skepp's fear of Arminianism and Pelagianism paralyzed his preaching. He was so careful (lest he awaken the conscience of the unconverted and thus despoil God of the sole glory) that he cautiously avoided any exhortations and consistently refused to make any offer of salvation to unbelievers.' He was the 'first Baptist minister to adopt this extreme form of Calvinism', and he introduced it to other Baptist ministers. He was therefore largely responsible for 'extinguishing evangelical zeal among Particular Baptists and for inaugurating his preaching technique of simply expounding doctrine'. Other ministers before him such as Keach and Stinton, just as committed to Calvinist theology, 'had freely addressed the unconverted', Seymour observed.<sup>65</sup> Naylor wrote that Skepp's 'approach redefined and reduced conversion to an act of God in which the elect sinner did nothing. Certainly, he was not to be urged to undertake a positive and radical action like actually repenting of sin.' His attitude was that 'the believer is required to do nothing because he can do nothing,' which, as Naylor suggested, poses the question 'does moral inability cancel out responsibility?'<sup>66</sup> Finally Macdonald interestingly comments that Skepp's theology 'was hardly an encouragement to the work of conversion'. Though his book was a clear reaction to the current attack on Calvinism, 'in effect Skepp provided a respectable theological justification for the absence of conversion in the churches.'<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 54-55.

<sup>66</sup> Naylor, *Picking up a Pin*, 152-153; *Calvinism*, 176, 178

<sup>67</sup> Macdonald, *London Calvinistic Baptists*, 299.

## Chapter four

### The three Johns: John Gill 1697-1771

Unlike the other early hyper-Calvinists, the high-profile theologian John Gill has been the subject of much literature and research, but this chapter is strictly confined to examining his contribution to hyper-Calvinism.

#### 1 Profile

Gill was born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, into a Particular Baptist church recently separated from the local dissenting congregation. It was known as the Little Meeting; in 1782 Andrew Fuller became their pastor. Gill possessed a remarkable thirst for knowledge. From a child of five or six throughout his life, and especially after his formal schooling finished at eleven, he endeavoured to educate himself in all forms of literature. He boasted to Taylor of his extensive knowledge of the original languages, the classics, Jewish literature, numerous writers and historians, even reading *Virgil* at nine.<sup>1</sup> As soon as he publicly professed faith at nineteen, he began preaching and was recognised as possessing ministerial gifts. He was also noticed by some London Baptists, particularly John Noble, minister in Tallow Chandlers' Hall, who nominated Gill for generous support from the Baptist Fund, and also facilitated his move to Higham Ferrers to assist its minister John Davis. Davis later transferred to a Baptist split of Hussey's Cambridge church in 1721, through whom Gill came to form associations with Hussey's ministry.<sup>2</sup> Noble recommended him to London, and in 1719 Gill was called to the prominent Horsleydown Particular Baptist congregation following the sudden early death of Benjamin Stinton. This was a well-taught and reputable church, founded by Benjamin Keach of whom Spurgeon, who commenced his ministry there in 1854, said, 'He preserved the balance in his preaching, and was never a member of that exclusive school which deems it to be unsound to persuade men to repent and believe.'<sup>3</sup> Similarly Stinton, Keach's successor and son-in-law, was also 'a consistent Calvinist; steering clear of Arminianism on the one hand, and Antinomianism on the

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<sup>1</sup> Gill, *Necessity*, 36-37.

<sup>2</sup> Nutter, *Story*, 82-83; Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965), 116.

<sup>3</sup> Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 24.

other.’<sup>4</sup> He established the Baptist Fund, and exercised ‘a deliberate policy of bridge building both within the London Baptist community and also farther afield’. Sadly his ‘catholick spirit’ and cultivation of harmony amongst Christians<sup>5</sup> would not be seen again in the congregation for many years, which moved to Carter Lane in 1757, then New Park Street and finally Metropolitan Tabernacle, the last two occupied by Spurgeon.<sup>6</sup>

Horsleydown was acrimoniously divided over Gill’s call, many dissatisfied with the manner of election, particularly the unconstitutional female vote. Several reasons for this opposition have been suggested, including his youth, ‘certain points in his manner’,<sup>7</sup> self-confidence (‘Mr. Gill might become a usefull man, if it should please God to keep him humble’<sup>8</sup>), and his high Calvinism.<sup>9</sup> According to an early biographer the opposition was ‘chiefly because of his evangelical way of preaching’,<sup>10</sup> although this opinion was unelaborated. Nevertheless despite such evidence of division, the opposition of all the deacons, and his group being regarded as schismatic, Gill demonstrated ‘unwavering conviction’ and accepted the call. In October 1719 he and his followers declared themselves the church at Horsleydown lately under Rev Stinton, and they all signed Keach’s 1697 Covenant as proof they were not erring from its constitution. He was eventually ordained in March 1720 with Skepp and Noble the principal speakers, united in their opposition to the gospel offer; but hostility with the London Baptist community continued, and had it not been for Skepp he might never have been accepted. In 1720 William Arnold was called to the section of the Horsleydown congregation who had refused Gill’s pastorate, now meeting in Unicorn Yard, but relationships between the two congregations remained unresolved. There were also tensions in Gill’s church, and in May 1723 Thomas Crosby, deacon, treasurer and Gill’s staunchest supporter, withdrew along with several others to rejoin

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<sup>4</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:412-413.

<sup>5</sup> White, ‘Crosby (I)’, *BQ* (Oct 1965) 156-158.

<sup>6</sup> For more on Gill: Wilson, *History*, 4:213-224; Ivimey, *History*, 3:158n\*, 413, 430-461; Bogue, *History*, 4:464-468; Gill, *Collection*, ‘Summary’ ix-xxv; Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, ch4; Rippon, *Memoir*, 1-11; Oliver, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 7-12; Seymour, ‘Gill’, PhD, 27-36.

<sup>7</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:307-308.

<sup>8</sup> Oliver, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 14, quoting Crosby, *Journal*, 143.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *English Baptists*, 44.

<sup>10</sup> Gill, *Collection*, ‘Summary’ 1:xv.

their old congregation; seven months later they were formally excommunicated by Gill. In 1729 a suggested merger between Gill's and Skepp's now-pastorless Cripplegate congregations failed to materialise due to difficulties, and Brine was called there the following year. Also Gill persuaded his church to replace Keach's Covenant and his *Articles of Faith* which he had endorsed ten years earlier, and in 1729 wrote his own *Declaration of Faith and Practice*, inserting a handwritten copy in the church-book.<sup>11</sup> This was an important 'example of an early privately-published Calvinistic Confession'.<sup>12</sup>

Gill's forceful personality, his lengthy ministry (fifty-one years) and prolific writing, impressive scholarship and indefatigable industry, his long-running weekly lectures (twenty-seven years) and formidable polemics, all contributed to his influence both within and beyond London. His books became the standard for orthodox interpretation across his denomination. He exercised stern authority in his church and dispensed advice throughout, his influence increased by the numerous ordination and funeral services at which he officiated.<sup>13</sup> One such example is James Fall, member of Gill's church. In 1753 he was called to a nearby congregation after preaching there for six months, but the Board refused to dismiss him or comply with his request for ordination. He was ordained in 1754, died two years later, and for more than forty years Little Alie Street was 'debarred from all intercourse with the whole denomination'. William Shenston eventually became its minister, and condemned this 'priestly domination'.<sup>14</sup> Gill resolutely refused advice to appoint a younger ministerial assistant, saying there was no scriptural authority for it ('I should not like a co-pastor to hang about my neck, nor an assistant to be dangling at my heels'<sup>15</sup>), and this despite his intense workload, his dwindling membership, and his inability with declining years to fulfil all his engagements, living as he did in a rural retreat. Ivimey noted that

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<sup>11</sup> For more see Ivimey, *History*, 3:416-420, 513; Wilson, *History*, 4:212-213, 215-216; Rippon, *Memoir*, 12-19; Oliver, 'Gill', *Life and Thought*, 12-20; Spurgeon, *Metropolitan Tabernacle*, 38-38; White 'Gill', *BQ* (April 1967) 72-88; White, 'Crosby (I)', *BQ* (Oct 1965), 159-168; White 'Crosby, II', *BQ* (Jan 1966) 219-220; Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 37-50; Macdonald, *London Calvinistic Baptists*, 301-310.

<sup>12</sup> Price, 'Gill's Confession', *BQ* (Oct 1929), 366.

<sup>13</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:308.

<sup>14</sup> 'Baptist Board Minutes': entries: Jan 1753, March, June 1754, *TBHS* (1918) 73-75, 114-115; Mann, 'Calendar', Letter 176, 26 Nov 1830, *BQ* (Oct 1934) 180-181. Fall's story: Fall Sr, *Sermon*, Preface iii-vi, Account 23-28.

<sup>15</sup> Rippon, *Memoir*, 130-131.



despite his long ministry his congregation was ‘less numerous by far’ than in Keach’s time, and only raised up three ministers, ‘a proof of the declining zeal of its members’.<sup>16</sup> To this day he is revered by Strict and Gospel Standard Baptists, who claim him as their own: ‘Without doubt he was the greatest Baptist theologian, and his commentary on the whole Bible was a remarkable work and had enormous influence.’<sup>17</sup>

## 2 Observations about Gill’s hyper-Calvinism

Before embarking on an analysis of Gill’s hyper-Calvinism, this section observes various trends, friendships and other practical indicators of his theology.

### 2.1 Style of preaching and writing

Gill did not write a treatise against gospel offers like Hussey, nor was he as frequently forthright in their denial as Brine, Stockell, Wayman and other hyper-Calvinists. Nevertheless his rejection of invitations and duty-faith is clearly woven into his theology throughout his written works, and there are several examples of his denial being as overt as Hussey’s and others’. His convictions were certainly no weaker than theirs, but his hyper-Calvinism and that of many others has been more easily discernible in omission than inclusion, in attitude than words. ‘This phenomenon is nothing new in Reformed circles and has always been tolerated,’ the 1924 Synod of the Christian Reformed Church noted when discussing the denial of common grace and particularly Hoeksema’s ‘*insufficient* Gospel-preaching’ with its ‘*one-sided* emphasis on the eternal counsel of God’. They recognised that ‘In our congregations we have a kind of preaching which is for believers and spiritually mature but nothing for the unbeliever. ... It is the kind of preaching in which the invitation *is missing*.’<sup>18</sup> Nettles, a defender of Gill, has criticised Ivimey, Fuller’s friend, for inferring many things from Gill’s silence rather than direct statements.<sup>19</sup> It is difficult not to infer from silence however when scripture’s gospel invitations are loud and clear. Murray helpfully identified two different reactions from deep persuasion

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<sup>16</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:450-452.

<sup>17</sup> Ramsbottom, ‘Gospel Standard’, <http://www.gospelstandard.org.uk/About-Us-2>

<sup>18</sup> Synod 1924, CRC, 121-123 (my emphasis).

<sup>19</sup> Nettles, *By His Grace*, 86.

of particularism together with revulsion of Arminianism: the first is total abandonment of evangelism, or at least denial of gospel offers; the second is ‘a conspicuous awkwardness and lack of spontaneity in the preaching of the free offer’. Both are hyper-Calvinism, and find their root in what Murray called in his seminal Report to the Orthodox Presbyterian Church on the free offer ‘the real point in dispute ... whether it can properly be said that God *desires* the salvation of all men’. Any doubts that God is not simply offering salvation but delighting in sinners’ compliance therewith, inevitably result in restraint, inability to reconcile doctrines, lack of free unfettered offers of Christ to sinners, and failure to appeal urgently and passionately for exercise of faith and repentance.<sup>20</sup> Spurgeon, a stranger to such restraints, said Gill’s manner of address to sinners, followed for many years by many ministers, was unlikely to be useful: ‘he cramped himself, and was therefore straitened where there was no Scriptural reason for being so.’<sup>21</sup>

However, Gill’s voluminous works contain plenty of evidence of his strong tendencies towards hyper-Calvinism. Wilson wrote that he preached competent sermons and wrote meticulous theology in defence of Calvinism, but ‘in one point he differed from most of his brethren. It was not his practice to address unconverted sinners, nor to enforce the invitations of the gospel.’<sup>22</sup> Instead he ‘satisfied himself with declaring their guilt and doom, and the necessity of a change of heart’.<sup>23</sup> Both Gill’s and Brine’s sermons displayed considerable talent, and ‘correct abstract delineation of the doctrines of grace,

but as to any appeals being made to the consciences either of sinners or saints, or warnings and exhortations to believers ... they are very deficient, indeed almost totally destitute.’<sup>24</sup>

This practice on Gill’s part was intentional. As we shall see, he insisted that gospel preaching is to be proclamatory and declaratory, and should contain

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<sup>20</sup> Murray, ‘Message’, and ‘Free Offer’, *Collected Writings* 1:131-132, 4:113-114 (latter article: OPC Minutes 1948, Appendix 51-63).

<sup>21</sup> Spurgeon, *Autobiography*, 1:308.

<sup>22</sup> Wilson, *History*, 4:221-222.

<sup>23</sup> Cramp, *Baptist History*, 443.

<sup>24</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 4:22.

neither free and indiscriminate offers of salvation, nor commands, exhortations and invitations to repent and believe.

## 2.2 Choice of friends and authors

Gill's hyper-Calvinism was also indicated by his rapport with and commendation of those who shared his views. Erroll Hulse wrote regarding his life, works, and preferences in literature, 'He mingled exclusively with high Calvinists and you will look in vain for references to men at lower Calvinistic levels.'<sup>25</sup> This section looks at a few examples of this.

The young Gill was befriended by Richard Davis, the erstwhile London schoolmaster who now ministered in Rothwell, who lived nearby and mentored Gill as he grew up. Toon suggests he may have stayed in Davis's house for this purpose.<sup>26</sup> In 1748, despite his public conviction for exclusive psalmody, Gill wrote the preface to the seventh edition of Davis's *Hymns*, wishing to honour the memory of one who helped both in his education and 'spiritual and eternal welfare'. He praised Davis's 'very powerful and evangelical Ministrations', his Barnabas-like qualities, his 'unblemished life and conversation,' despite being traduced as antinomian. However he added the following significant words:

I have only one thing more to observe, that whereas the phrase of *offering Christ and Grace*, is sometimes used in these Hymns, which may be **offensive** to some persons; and which the worthy Author was led to the use of, partly thro' custom, it not having been at the writing of them objected to, and partly thro' his affectionate concern and zeal for gaining upon souls, and encouraging them to come to Christ; I can affirm upon good and sufficient Testimony, that Mr. Davis, before his death, changed his mind in this matter, and disused the phrase, as being **improper**, and as being **too bold and free**, for a minister of Christ to make use of.<sup>27</sup>

Gill did not alter any words himself, but advised substituting more eligible phrases for those 'who think proper'. His statement reveals several points relating to his own hyper-Calvinism. First, his sympathies lay with those who find gospel offers 'offensive'. Second, he regarded offering Christ a 'custom', as yet

<sup>25</sup> Hulse, 'Baptist Heirs', *RT* (Spring 1970), 13. *Reformation Today* replaced *Strict Baptist* magazine *Christian's Pathway* (1897-1969).

<sup>26</sup> Toon, *Emergence*, 97.

<sup>27</sup> Gill, 'Preface': Davis, *Hymns*, iii,v (my emphases).

unchallenged in the unenlightened 1690s, that is, before Hussey's revolutionary teaching. Third, he made a telling connection between the free offer, love for souls, and encouragement to come to Christ, the inverse of which is all too clear. Fourth, he believed gospel offers should be rejected because of their impropriety, unsuitably bold and presumptuous for Christ's ministers to employ.

Gill enjoyed a close friendship with John Skepp who exerted a strong influence on him and who, having learned his theology from Hussey, united the three in their hyper-Calvinistic rejection of gospel offers. Seymour notes how, as Gill succeeded Keach and Stinton in Horsleydown, 'the preaching tradition of that church definitely changed. Very early in his ministry, Gill patterned his preaching after that of John Skepp and accepted his theological point of view regarding evangelism.' He was 'undoubtedly, the person who most influenced Gill's theology'. He 'kindled Gill's desire' for extensive knowledge of Hebrew and Rabbinical literature, showing him the importance of studying them for a better understanding of biblical concepts and customs.<sup>28</sup> And after his death Gill's honouring him by republishing his book was a clear statement of his identification with Skepp's theology,<sup>29</sup> the title of which alone described Skepp's theological stance.<sup>30</sup> In his Recommendatory Preface Gill praised Skepp warmly for his character, many talents and natural abilities, his diligence and industry, his 'warm and lively' gospel preaching, his zealous defence of doctrines, and successful ministry. He was 'personally and intimately known by me, and his memory precious to me', he wrote.<sup>31</sup>

Gill's Kettering home church favoured hyper-Calvinism and approved of Joseph Hussey,<sup>32</sup> and clearly Gill was familiar with and influenced by Hussey's theology, quoting from his large 1706 book.<sup>33</sup> Oliver refers to the dominance of what he calls 'the Hyper-Calvinism of the Hussey-Gill type', and of how via Skepp Hussey 'profoundly influenced' Gill's attitude to the gospel offer.<sup>34</sup> They were both

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<sup>28</sup> Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 54-56.

<sup>29</sup> Oliver, *History*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 78.

<sup>31</sup> Gill, 'Recommendatory Preface': Skepp, *Divine Energy*, xii-xv.

<sup>32</sup> Whitley, *Calvinism*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Eg Gill, *Justification*, 34; *Trinity*, 181.

<sup>34</sup> Oliver, 'Survey', *Foundations* (Nov 1981), 13; 'Emergence', PhD, 26.

ordained in neighbouring London churches at the beginning of 1720, Hussey remaining there till he died six years later. Gill continued to care for the Cambridge Baptists, the split from Hussey's church, perhaps repaying something of what he owed to Hussey.<sup>35</sup> Gill presided at Board meetings where a member of Hussey's church came up for discussion several times, for example.<sup>36</sup> When a critic challenged Gill concerning Hussey and Crisp: 'these modern Divines, whose Scheme so directly opposeth what is contained in sacred Writ,' asking whose opinion was safest to follow, Paul's or Hussey's? the holy scripture or Crisp's writings?<sup>37</sup> Gill leapt to Crisp's and Hussey's defence:

Nor can I pass by his rude treatment of Dr. *Crisp* and Mr. *Hussey* ... when they were both, in their day and generation, men of great piety and learning, of long standing, and much usefulness in the church of Christ; whose name and memory will be dear and precious to the saints, when this writer, and his pamphlet, will be remember'd no more.<sup>38</sup>

Throughout their lives Gill and Brine remained close and developed a strong partnership, their friendship enhanced by 'a perfect congeniality of views upon religious subjects'.<sup>39</sup> Gill praised Brine's 'natural and acquired abilities, his great understanding, clear light, and sound judgment in the doctrines of the gospel, and the great and deep things of God:—Of his zeal, skill and courage in vindicating important truths, published by him to the world'.<sup>40</sup>

Widely read as he was, Gill was particular in his choice of theologians he quoted for corroboration. The roots of his theology lay behind Hussey and Skepp to a source common to all three, namely the continental school of covenant theology, which Seymour describes as a system evolved 'to uphold God's absolute sovereignty', and Daniel that antinomianism and hyper-Calvinism were extensions of federalism.<sup>41</sup> He had a very high regard for Herman Witsius, Dutchman John Cocceius' disciple, who introduced covenant theology or

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<sup>35</sup> Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965), 116.

<sup>36</sup> 'Baptist Board Minutes', *TBHS* (July 1916), 102,104-105,111n14.

<sup>37</sup> Anon, *Some Doctrines*, 24-25,39.

<sup>38</sup> Gill, *Truth Defended*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Wilson, *History*, 2:575.

<sup>40</sup> Gill, *Collection*, 1:591-592n.

<sup>41</sup> For more see Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 57-58; Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, ch5 esp 218-239.

federalism to England through his 1762 English translation *Oeconomy of the Covenants*, the prefatory recommendation of which both Gill and Brine signed, extolling his ‘particularly solid judgment’ and ‘evangelical spirituality’. Gill regarded Witsius, and others of that school like Johannes Hoornebeck, as theological authorities. He frequently quoted Witsius, paying deference to his judgment, and lavishing praise on him as ‘very learned’, ‘judicious’, ‘famous’, ‘excellent’, ‘celebrated’, ‘great’ etc.<sup>42</sup> Gill often used William Twisse, Puritan high Calvinist, to support his theology, calling him ‘that famous Supralapsarian’,<sup>43</sup> together with John Owen, a strong defender of limited atonement, and Thomas Goodwin. Crisp was a favourite of Gill’s, and in 1755 he controversially edited his sermons adding memoirs and explanatory notes, particularly defending Crisp’s antinomianism and his doctrine of eternal justification and union, in long footnotes. Gill’s editing and republishing of what Nuttall calls ‘the fateful sermons by Tobias Crisp’<sup>44</sup> can only be interpreted as provocative, for as was observed in Spurgeon’s *Sword and Trowel*, Crisp’s writings ‘aided the mischief’ caused by hyper-Calvinism.<sup>45</sup> Seymour notes that in Gill’s ongoing controversy with Taylor, the stigma of antinomianism clung to Gill, and in reprinting Crisp ‘Gill did himself irreparable harm’.<sup>46</sup> When the Modern Question controversy concerning the duty of faith was at its height, Gill was making his own position clear by prefacing Davis’s *Hymns* and republishing Skepp and Crisp.

There is significance too in whom Gill did *not* validate. He referred to Calvin far more sparingly. He ignored Jonathan Edwards: ‘a strong Calvinist who supported active evangelism’ would have been an enigma to Gill. Similarly he disregarded John Bunyan: Gill would consider he compromised on the extent of the atonement. Other Puritans like Samuel Rutherford and John Flavel he barely mentioned.<sup>47</sup> Gill did not accredit the Evangelical Revival. Generally he and

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<sup>42</sup> Eg Gill, *Body* 1:300,309; Gill’s notes\*, Crisp, *Christ Alone*, 1:15-16,86,90,190,269,271. For more on covenant theology: Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 218-239; Seymour ‘Gill’, PhD, 57-58; Murray, ‘Covenant Theology’, *Collected Writings*, 4:216-240.

<sup>43</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 157.

<sup>44</sup> Nuttall, ‘Northamptonshire’, *JTS* (April 1965) 118.

<sup>45</sup> Schindler, ‘1689’, *S+T* (1889) 600-601.

<sup>46</sup> Seymour, ‘Gill’, PhD, 80-81.

<sup>47</sup> Thanks to Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 45-47.

other Particular Baptists regarded it with suspicion, considering the evangelists Arminian. Gill's engagement with John Wesley was solely polemical, and he never referred to the Calvinistic evangelist George Whitefield, who publicly preached on nearby commons.<sup>48</sup> 'Gill's disinterest in evangelism is seen in the fact that while he was preoccupied with learning ... he did not bestir himself to go and hear Whitefield who was preaching to thousands within easy walking distance,' confirmed Hulse.<sup>49</sup> Despite Nettles' unconvincing attempt to prove that Gill worthily demonstrated 'the central concerns and zeal of the Great Awakening', and that he and Whitefield 'did not differ in any essential theological category', that their beliefs and preaching were identical, that their differences lay merely in 'personality and gifts',<sup>50</sup> in fact there was a fundamental and wide divergence between them. 'Stark', Rathel calls it.<sup>51</sup> A difference which continues to this day, with the Gospel Standard Baptists admitting they find it 'a mystery' that God bypassed their forebears in the Evangelical Revival, and used ministers from 'the state Church of England' instead.<sup>52</sup>

### 2.3 Introduction to Gill's no-offer theology

Although hyper-Calvinism's most obvious expression is rejection of the gospel offer, what lies behind this requires careful analysis. What actually justifies it in the minds of theologians or preachers? What doctrines do they over- or underemphasise, or even distort, in order to reach this conclusion? Before delving deeper into Gill's hyper-Calvinism, this short introduction looks at some possible factors which compelled his rejection of offers.

One of the clues to Gill's hyper-Calvinism was his early replacement of Keach's *Articles and Covenant* with his own *Declaration*, the significance of which lay more in what he omitted than what he retained. He shortened Keach's thirty-

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<sup>48</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 368,371-373; Ivimey, *History*, 3:279-280.

<sup>49</sup> Hulse, 'Baptist Heirs', *RT* (Spring 1970), 13. *Reformation Today* replaced *Strict Baptist magazine Christian's Pathway* (1897-1969).

<sup>50</sup> Nettles, 'Gill', *Life and Thought*, 169-170.

<sup>51</sup> Rathel, 'Gill and hyper-Calvinism', *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 25.

<sup>52</sup> Philpot, 'Whitefield', *GS* (Jan 2014) 24n\*.

nine articles to twelve ‘tautly phrased’ ones.<sup>53</sup> By removing references and avoiding statements on subjects he would soon openly reject, he cleverly facilitated ‘the acceptance of new teachings’. He ‘opened the way for several departures from that historic Reformed Christianity which had been reflected in the *Second London Confession of Faith* (1677/1689) of the Particular Baptists as well as in Keach’s *Confession*’, Oliver observed.<sup>54</sup> One significant change of Gill’s which directly reflected his hyper-Calvinism was to expunge all references to the gospel offer, as tabled below. Other changes will be noted in similar format throughout the chapter, such as his unorthodox views on justification which he published the following year.

**Table 4 Comparison of Articles 1**

Keach’s Articles	12 Of effectual Calling	‘the Spirit ... doth perswade and enable us to imbrace Jesus Christ freely, as he is offered in the Gospel.’ <sup>55</sup>
1689 Confession	7.2 Of God’s Covenant 10.2 Of Effectual Calling	‘wherein he freely offereth unto Sinners, Life and Salvation by Jesus Christ ...’  ‘the Creature ... is thereby enabled to answer this call, and to embrace the Grace offered and conveyed in it ...’ <sup>56</sup>
Gill’s Declaration		<i>all references expunged</i>

It is worth observing how harshly Gill chided Wesley for apparently doing the same with his church’s seventh Article on predestination as Gill had done with Keach’s covenant: ‘This is an article agreeable to the Scripture; an article of his own church; an article which he as a true son of the church, has treacherously departed from; an article which Mr. *Wesley* must have *subscribed* and *sworn* to; an article which will stare him in the face as long as *subscriptions* and *oaths* stand for any thing with him.’<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> White, ‘Gill’, *BQ* (April 1967) 87-88.

<sup>54</sup> Oliver, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 19-20.

<sup>55</sup> Keach, *Articles*, 11-12.

<sup>56</sup> Second London Confession

<sup>57</sup> Gill, *Predestination*, 15-16.



One of the reasons for Gill's reluctance to exhort sinners to believe and repent is rooted in his preoccupation with the divine decrees, the integrity of which he felt was compromised by the indiscriminate offer of the gospel. Gill taught that predestination 'consists of two parts, *election* and *reprobation*; the one is a predestination unto life, the other unto death.' Both are 'immutable decrees of God'. Both have similar properties: they are 'eternal', 'free and sovereign', 'immutable and irrevocable'.<sup>58</sup> He believed both election and reprobation are 'actual', being 'immanent acts in God', and 'that the predestination of men, either to life or death, is personal: that the objects of either branch of predestination are alike, ... that love and hatred are the real springs and source of predestination in its respective branches.'<sup>59</sup> Seymour notes, 'The attribute which Gill associated most closely with God's sovereign will was His immutability.' This emphasis 'seems to lead to a rigid determinism'. Not only does it deprive man of freedom, but 'even God, whom Gill insisted is perfectly free, appears to be a prisoner to His own decrees.' Gill, Seymour wrote, 'made no apology for the decree of pre-damnation. He did not regard it as simply the accidental consequence of election, as did Calvin.'<sup>60</sup> Although he could be ambivalent about supralapsarianism,<sup>61</sup> he robustly defended it when accused of it,<sup>62</sup> and he made another significant change in his *Declaration* away from Keach's deliberately-infralapsarian wording. He also repositioned his article on election at the beginning, whereas Keach had followed Calvin's example and placed his towards the end.

**Table 5 Comparison of Articles 2**

Keach's Articles	32 Of Election	'God ... decreed and ordained ... some of the lost Sons and Daughters of <i>Adam</i> , unto eternal Life; and ... others are left or passed by under a Decree of Preterition.' <sup>63</sup>
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<sup>58</sup> Gill, *Predestination*, 9-10,17-20,30; Gill, *Body*, 1:289-290; Gill, *Cause*, 149-163.

<sup>59</sup> Gill, *Truth Defended*, 55; Gill, *Cause*, 82; Gill, *Predestination*, 30.

<sup>60</sup> Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 161-162,164.

<sup>61</sup> eg Gill, *Body*, 1:267-270.

<sup>62</sup> Gill, *Truth Defended*, 3-20.

<sup>63</sup> Keach, *Articles*, 32.

1689 Confession	3.3 Of God's Decree	'By the decree of God ... some men and Angels, are predestinated, or fore-ordained to Eternal Life, through Jesus Christ; ... others being left to act in their sin to their just condemnation ...'
Gill's Declaration	3	'Before the world began, God did elect a certain number of men unto everlasting salvation; ... and all spiritual blessings provided for them; as also their persons, with all their grace and glory, were put into the hands of Christ, and made his care and charge.' <sup>64</sup>

Gill's supralapsarian and predestinarian interpretations together with his quest for logical cohesion are at odds with the delicate wording of the Westminster Confession. Theodore Jansma observes, 'Although the Confession is so explicit and consistent in maintaining the sovereignty of God, yet it is most careful and zealous to guard against any human deductions that would do violence to some other Scriptural truth that we cannot bring into logical harmony with it.'<sup>65</sup> Specifically the Confession eschews Gill's language of symmetrical double predestination, or *praedestinatio gemina*, where election and reprobation are 'positive, coordinate decrees of God'.<sup>66</sup> Donald Macleod emphasised the Confession 'avoids altogether the word *reprobation*'; and carefully distinguishes 'between its two components, *preterition* and *condemnation*'. The first is sovereign, the second judicial.

- 1) The rest of mankind God was pleased, ... for the glory of His sovereign power over His creatures, to pass by ;
- 2) and to ordain them to dishonour and wrath, for their sin, to the praise of His glorious justice.<sup>67</sup>

(So important was the differentiation between these two components, that in the original Confession 'a semi-colon was needed to mark two distinct and different acts.'<sup>68</sup> In later editions this has been dropped for a comma, or even no punctuation at all.<sup>69</sup>) Macleod continued, 'The Confession thus signals a basic

<sup>64</sup> Gill, *Declaration*, 4.

<sup>65</sup> Jansma, 'Westminster Confession', *Presbyterian Guardian* (Jan 1942), 11.

<sup>66</sup> Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek*, 233-235, 292.

<sup>67</sup> Westminster Confession, 1937 edition, 3.7 (my highlight and numbers).

<sup>68</sup> Westminster Confession, 1937 edition, 96n19.

<sup>69</sup> eg *Westminster Confession in Modern English*: <http://epcoga.wpengine.com/wp-content/uploads/Files/1-Who-We-Are/B-About-The-EPC/WCF-ModernEnglish.pdf>

*asymmetry* in the doctrine of predestination. The divine decree does not sustain the same relation to the destiny of the unsaved as it does to the destiny of the saved. In the case of the saved, God's action is creative and dynamic. It is directly causative' and personal, while operating consistently with individual freedom of choice. 'In the case of the unsaved ... God's action is privative: one of not-doing. He does not regenerate,' or give them faith, or unite them to Christ. Neither is he in any sense the author of their sin.<sup>70</sup> Heinrich Heppe wrote, 'It is rightly said that we are saved because of election; but it cannot with equal fitness be said that certain are damned because of reprobation. Election is the positive *principium* of salvation, but reprobation strictly speaking is not a principle but the removal of a principle.'<sup>71</sup> Murray applauds the Confession's 'precision of thought and expression' and its 'finesse of formulation' concerning predestination. 'We are reminded that there is no direct or esoteric way of discovering God's secret counsel,' wrote Murray. 'Human thought must go upstream.'<sup>72</sup> Westminster delegate Anthony Burgess warned that the doctrine 'is not to be agitated in a verbal and contentious way', and that election and reprobation do 'not infringe those universal promises and invitations'. He emphasised how scripture 'positively asserts' eternal election *and* 'peremptory' commands for the use of means, that both these 'stand together', and 'the difficulty of reconciling them' should never make anyone 'deny either'.<sup>73</sup>

A pivotal impetus behind Gill's hyper-Calvinism was his controlling desire to minimise human involvement in salvation, and as Rathel explains in his paper on Gill's doctrine of the covenant, 'This intention profoundly shaped his presentation of the covenant of redemption.' He offered 'significant innovation' to it, involving three aspects, as he pursued 'his no-offer position with vigor'.<sup>74</sup> The first two are introduced here: collapsing the covenant of grace, and incorporating the Spirit, into the covenant of redemption. The third, eternal union and justification, is considered later (3.8). First, Gill absorbed or subsumed the covenant of grace which has both unconditional and conditional

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<sup>70</sup> Macleod, 'Torrance', *EQ* (Jan-Mar 2000) 59-60 (my italics); also Cunningham, *Historical Theology*, 2:429-430.

<sup>71</sup> Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 180-181.

<sup>72</sup> Murray, 'Theology', *Collected Writings* 4:250-251.

<sup>73</sup> Burgess, *Spiritual Refining*, 643-647.

<sup>74</sup> Rathel, 'Gill and Redemption', *JRT* (Jan 2018), 382,379-380,393.

qualities into the covenant of redemption which is solely unconditional. The traditional understanding is that the covenant of redemption, or *pactum salutis*, is the pretemporal, intratrinitarian agreement to redeem the elect, part of God's eternal decrees. It enables and is foundational to the covenant of grace, which is temporal, between God and humanity (or specifically defined as the elect by some<sup>75</sup>), and consists of two parts: an offer and promise on God's part, a response on sinners'.<sup>76</sup> The Westminster Confession defines the first unconditional part thus: God 'freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ', immediately followed by the condition: 'requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved' (7.3), identically worded in the 1689 Baptist Confession (7.2).

<b>covenant of redemption</b>	eternal, intratrinitarian
<b>covenant of grace</b>	temporal    →    God:    offer + promise ↘    sinners: response

**Figure 5 Covenants of redemption and grace**

The idea of conditionality in the covenant of grace is problematic among some in the Reformed community, largely due to reaction against Arminianism, but Berkhof confirmed that 'it would seem to be perfectly proper to speak of a condition in connection with the covenant of grace,' the Bible clearly indicating that entrance into covenant life is 'conditioned on faith'.<sup>77</sup> Gill, inured to doctrinal antinomianism and no-offer theology from his youth, found this concept of contingency, or any requirement on our part to obtain the blessings of the covenant, conflicting. The qualification according to him was election, not faith or repentance, and being assured of this was the realisation that one was eternally in the covenant. Gill found a strong advocate of this position in Crisp, who in his sermon entitled 'The new covenant of free grace' described it as 'without any conditions whatsoever on man's part'. Gill, who liberally sprinkled his edition of Crisp's sermons with approving footnotes, did so at this statement: 'What some call conditions of the covenant, as faith, repentance, and obedience, are no other than parts or blessings of it.' It could not be an *everlasting* covenant if it contains conditions, continued Crisp. 'The whole

<sup>75</sup> eg Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 270.

<sup>76</sup> see Murray, *Covenant*, 5-8.

<sup>77</sup> Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 281.

performance of the covenant lies only upon God himself; ... there is not one bond, or obligation, upon man to the fulfilling of the covenant, or partaking of the benefits of it.' Crisp directly stated, 'Faith is not the condition of the covenant,' for 'our act of believing is a work,' and the covenant 'doth not depend upon a work'. Gill endorsed this too, confirming that faith is God's operation, a blessing of the covenant, not a condition of entrance into it. He further endorsed Crisp's teaching that 'justification is an act of Christ, it is not an act of faith.' In this 'passive receiving of Christ', he is 'received without any hands'.<sup>78</sup> Clearly, although Crisp called it the covenant of free grace, he was referring to the eternal covenant of redemption. John Saltmarsh taught similarly: 'If you suppose that God takes in any part of your *faith*, *repentance*, or *new obedience* ... as a ground upon which he *justifies* or *forgives* you, you are clear against the *Word*.' For 'Christ hath beleevved perfectly,' repented perfectly, sorrowed for sin perfectly, obeyed, mortified sin—all perfectly. So 'we are to beleeve our *repentance* true in him, who hath *repented* for us ... our *new obedience* true in *him*, who hath *obeyed* for us.'<sup>79</sup> As we saw earlier (ch1,pt4.6) Steele roots antinomianism in this, that God 'performs for men the obedience which they ought to perform'. A creed in which 'I must not do any duty for my own salvation.' A covenant 'having no condition on my part. It is a paid up, non-forfeitable, eternal-life insurance policy. Since the new covenant is not properly made with us, but with Christ for us, the conditions, repentance, faith, and obedience, are not on our side, but on Christ's side, who repented, believed, and obeyed, in such a way as to relieve us from these unpleasant acts.'<sup>80</sup>

In order to achieve his aim of radically minimising human involvement in salvation, Gill changed the shape of the covenants. He added one and removed one. He wrote extendedly of the council and covenant of God, which although 'generally blended together by divines', he distinguished. According to him, the 'council of peace' was preparatory to the covenant. It was 'that eternal transaction between God and Christ' expressed by Paul in II Corinthians 5:19: 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself.' 'By the world is meant the elect of God,' Gill clarified. God in Christ was 'consulting, contriving, and

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<sup>78</sup> Crisp, *Christ Alone*, 1:86-87,90-91,106; Gill's notes\* 86,90,91.

<sup>79</sup> Saltmarsh, *Free-Grace*, 82-85.

<sup>80</sup> Steele, *Antinomianism*, 39,35-36.

planning the scheme' of achieving the peace and atonement of the elect. [Note that Gill arbitrarily uplifts this verse on reconciliation into the context of eternal decrees, confining it to the elect.] The covenant of grace or 'federal transaction', also called the covenant of redemption, which followed, 'adjusted and settled' everything that was advised and contrived in the council of peace. This, Gill taught, was 'a proper covenant, consisting of stipulation and restipulation' between Father and Son, with the elect represented in Christ. 'Such a covenant, properly speaking, cannot be made between God and man; for what can man restipulate with God?' Gill believed a covenant which relies on negotiation between God and men lacks the necessary properties of a covenant and therefore he dispensed with it, subsuming it into the eternal 'absolute and unconditional' covenant of redemption. 'Some divines', Gill explained, 'make them distinct covenants; the covenant of redemption, they say, was made with Christ in eternity; the covenant of grace with the elect ... in time; but this is very wrongly said; there is but one covenant of grace, and not two.' He insisted 'there can be no foundation for such a distinction,' for this one covenant 'secured in that eternal compact' everything that is needed. 'Christ's work, and the Spirit's grace, supersede all conditions in the covenant, respecting men; since they provide for every thing that can be thought of, that is required or is wanting.' Specifically 'repentance and faith are not terms and conditions of the covenant, but are free grace-gifts.' Covenant blessings 'are not suspended on any conditions to be performed; they do not wait for any, but take place without them.'<sup>81</sup> Thus Gill's integration of the two covenants allowed him 'to achieve the antinomian aim of denying any form of conditionality'.<sup>82</sup> His removal of their distinctions, writes Thomas Ascol, 'results in the inevitable tendency to collapse salvation history back into eternity—an error which seventeenth century federalism diligently seeks to avoid'.<sup>83</sup>

Gill further reconstructed the *pactum salutis* to minimise human engagement in salvation. Traditionally it had focused only on the Father and Son's involvement. Haykin explains that in not explicitly including the Spirit it 'allowed the elect to be involved in their conversion'. They could not cooperate in the covenant, but

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<sup>81</sup> Gill, *Body*, 1:306-318,330,364-365.

<sup>82</sup> Rathel, 'Gill and Redemption', *JRT* (Jan 2018), 385.

<sup>83</sup> Ascol, 'Doctrine of Grace', PhD, 77.

as the Spirit in time made this plan a reality, their conversion ‘did not take place without the exercise of their faith and the commitment of their will’. But Gill’s ‘distinctly Trinitarian perspective’ of the covenant with his explicit inclusion of the Spirit was consistent with his monergistic view of salvation, removing any possibility of synergism and the human response to divine grace.<sup>84</sup> Gill taught that the Spirit approved of and gave his assent to all the blessings given to the elect in the eternal covenant, such as justification, adoption and pardon, and in due course takes them and shows them to the interested parties; and without his energy and power working faith in them they would not receive them.<sup>85</sup> Rathel states that Gill’s construction of the covenant of redemption was already ‘original’ and ‘controversial’, but his deliberate move of incorporating the Spirit into the covenant of redemption ‘offers yet more innovation’. In his scheme, salvation occurred *completely* and actually within the eternal covenant, but ‘he still had to address the question of how the elect become aware of their justified status in time’. By including the Spirit in the covenant he was able to create a bridge ‘between this eternal salvation and the temporal existence of the elect on earth’.<sup>86</sup>

Gill thus created a circular argument whose source and denouement reside exclusively in God without reference to the subjects’ duty or accountability:

The reason why some do not believe is, because they are none of Christ’s sheep; they were not chosen in him, nor justified through him ...  
the reason why others believe is, because they are ordained to eternal life, have a justifying righteousness provided for them ...  
the reason why any are justified, is not because they have faith;  
but the reason why they have faith, is because they are justified.<sup>87</sup>

Practically, this perspective played out in rejecting both the necessity and duty of faith and repentance. Normally Gill restricted his rebuttals concerning offers and exhortations to ‘Arminians’ (as he called them) who freely applied them to sinners, but in one rare passage he expanded this to include Calvinists, his

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<sup>84</sup> Haykin, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, 9-12, <https://credomag.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Hyper-Calvinism-and-the-theology-of-John-Gill.pdf> referencing Muller, ‘Spirit and Covenant’, *Foundations* (Jan-Mar 1981), 10-12.

<sup>85</sup> Gill, *Body*, 1:357-361 .

<sup>86</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and Redemption’, *JRT* (Jan 2018) 391-392.

<sup>87</sup> Gill, *Body*, 1:298-299; Gill, *Justification*, 39-40.

divergence with whom becomes clear as he reveals his hyper-Calvinism. ‘It is intimated,’ he wrote concerning God’s promise of free pardon to the wicked upon repentance (Isaiah 55:7), ‘that such who are in the Calvinistical way of thinking, say, that God promises pardon and life to the non-elect, on condition of their faith and repentance: and it is asked, “How can a God of truth and sincerity be said to promise to them pardon and salvation, seriously and in good earnest, who are, by his own act of preterition, infallibly and unfrustrably excluded from it?”’ Gill’s response was:

Who the men are that say so, I do not know, and must leave them to defend their own positions, ... for my own part, I utterly deny that there is any promise of pardon made to the non-elect at all, not on any condition whatever. The promise of pardon is ... made to none but to such who are in that covenant, in which the non-elect have no share; ... the blessing of it only belongs to such for whom Christ died, ... and these are the elect of God only.

The only reason the gospel declaration is ever ‘made in indefinite terms’, Gill concluded, is because ‘God does in his own time, give faith and repentance’ to interested parties, namely his own elect.<sup>88</sup> Writing of Gill’s doctrine of the covenant, Seymour concluded that the transaction ‘seems coldly legalistic and mechanical’, and his explanation ‘reads far more like a description of the grinding wheels of the gods than of the everlasting love of God in Jesus Christ’.<sup>89</sup>

This section has looked at some of Gill’s thinking and innovations which lay behind, and informed his rejection of, gospel offers. Undoubtedly, as Rathel confirms, his approach ‘allowed him to espouse a sophisticated form of no-offer Calvinism’, which marks ‘a clear departure from the broader Reformed tradition’.<sup>90</sup> The next section will examine evidence of this. It will repeat the methodology used with Hussey, sifting Gill’s theology through the grid of some major distinctions he adopted in order to disprove general offers and duty-faith, and channel saving grace to the elect. The similarity in reasoning and content with Hussey will become apparent. Although some of these emphases and

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<sup>88</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 21.

<sup>89</sup> Seymour, ‘Gill’, PhD, 171.

<sup>90</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and Redemption’, *JRT* (Jan 2018) 393-394.



distinctions are not necessarily unique to hyper-Calvinism, they are never used except by hyper-Calvinists to the ends for which Gill used them.

In order to demonstrate how profoundly Gill influenced Strict and Particular Baptists, and continues to govern current Gospel Standard and associated Strict Baptist churches, their Articles will be inserted at the end of each of Gill's distinctions where relevant. These Articles clearly demonstrate deeply-systemic hyper-Calvinism within a denomination with seventy-nine UK and seven overseas churches,<sup>91</sup> together with Strict and Particular Baptist chapels outwith the Gospel Standard list,<sup>92</sup> and their *Gospel Standard* magazine published monthly since 1835. Gospel Standard Articles of Faith are enrolled in Chancery, meaning they have been incorporated into the Trust Deeds of all churches by legal procedures, and require signature of all church members on admittance.<sup>93</sup> Comments will also be inserted from various Gospel Standard representatives including J H Gosden (1882-1964), editor of the *Gospel Standard* for twenty-nine years, and G D Buss, minister and current editor of the *Gospel Standard*, and his co-author J A Watts. Between them they have written two books to defend and provide insight into their Articles. Occasional observations from Jared Smith are also inserted, representing Strict and Particular Baptists and modern hyper-Calvinism.<sup>94</sup>

### 3 Examination of Gill's hyper-Calvinism

#### 3.1 Distinction between gospel preaching and offering

This was both Hussey's and Gill's major distinction: that preaching is a proclamation of the doctrine of the gospel but does not include offering Christ to anyone, elect or non-elect. Gill divorced gospel from general grace, commands and application, so it became 'pure declaration'.<sup>95</sup> He claimed Christ himself made the same distinction: 'Christ did not offer or tender the blessings of grace

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<sup>91</sup> Current list available from <https://www.gospelstandard.org.uk/>

<sup>92</sup> eg Bethesda Strict Baptist Church, Kensington (Strict and Particular).

<sup>93</sup> *Articles*, Preface 5.

<sup>94</sup> Director, Association of Historic Baptists <https://www.baptists.net/history/about/>

<sup>95</sup> Gill, *Body*, 2:241.

to any, much less to them in general; but as a preacher of the Gospel, published the truths of it to all.’<sup>96</sup>

Gill’s reasoning for restricting the gospel was rooted in and logically progressed from his theological emphases identified in the previous section. He explained that ‘the gospel revelation is either external or internal,’ and described the composition of the former thus:

The external revelation is by the word, and the ministry of it; which respecting Christ, lies in these things,  
that he is really and properly God, and truly man;  
that he is the Son of God, and the Mediator between God and men;  
that he is the Messiah, who is actually come in the flesh;  
that he died and rose again the third day;  
is ascended into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God, and will come a second time to judge the world in righteousness;  
and that by his obedience, sufferings, and death, he is become the Saviour of sinners, and that none can be saved but by him.

All these truths about Jesus form general, not particular, revelation, Gill said. Hence their proclamation only obliges hearers to external, not internal, faith, to ‘historical faith, or bare assent to the truth of the said propositions’. That is to say, it does not oblige them ‘to believe that Christ is *their* Redeemer and Saviour, and that he died for *them* particularly’. The gospel only becomes internal revelation when the Spirit particularly begets special saving faith in his elect.<sup>97</sup> (More of Gill’s faith distinctions in 3.5.)

This is vital to understanding Gill’s hyper-Calvinism: that the gospel’s purpose is to proclaim, declare and publish propositional truths concerning Christ, and to enable the Spirit to ingather the elect; but its purpose is not to offer Christ indiscriminately or encourage faith and repentance by bringing God and sinners within reach of each other. Hearers are obliged to believe that Jesus is ‘the Saviour of sinners’ in a theoretical sense, but not that he is *their* Saviour in a personal sense.

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<sup>96</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 88.

<sup>97</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 31-32 (my italics).

It is important to state at this point that Gill requires careful reading to avoid misinterpretation. Projecting one's own understanding of 'preaching' and 'gospel' and 'sinner' into Gill's can cause confusion, because Gill's interpretation of these terms depends on his own categories. Also, his use of scripture to support this interpretation can be misleading, elucidated in the following example:

The gospel declaration is indefinitely made, *Whosoever believeth shall be saved*: but though the Gospel is preached or published to all men, yet God no where bids all men to save themselves; nor does he anywhere invite, encourage, or, by his messengers, entreat all men to *be reconciled to him*.

Gill clarified this statement with two examples where the apostles *appeared on face value* to be promiscuously exhorting to salvation, but according to him were specifically addressing Christians. The first was Peter's sermon (Acts 2) after Pentecost, in which Gill claimed Peter was exhorting and encouraging 'three thousand converts'. The second was Paul's entreaty (II Cor 5:20) to be reconciled to God, which he claimed referred to members of the Corinthian church. (Hussey also went to great lengths to interpret this passage the same way.<sup>98</sup>) Neither of these groups were 'ever thought to be placed under any absolute decree of reprobation', Gill claimed.<sup>99</sup> But in truth Gill's proof that exhortation, invitations and pleadings are never addressed indiscriminately cannot be substantiated from these two examples. In the first, Peter addressed a large crowd, bewildered and perplexed by the events of Pentecost. After hearing Peter's explanation and his command for repentance, accompanied by warnings and pleadings to save themselves, 'about three thousand' of them responded to his call and accepted his message. This is quite another situation than Gill's claim that the entire crowd of three thousand were *already* converted. In the second instant, Paul's passionate entreaty for reconciliation with God could not refer to the Corinthian believers because they were *already* reconciled. In both instances, the apostles were pleading for sinners *as sinners*, irrespective of election or reprobation, to be saved.

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<sup>98</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 340-343.

<sup>99</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 152-153.

Gill pressed home this distinction frequently. For example, he explained why it is called ‘the gospel of salvation’: not because it offers salvation to everyone, but ‘because it gives an account of Christ, the author of salvation’, of his appointment, mission and performance; and because it describes the persons who share in this salvation: ‘sensible sinners’ whose salvation is certain, because the gospel reveals and applies it to them.<sup>100</sup> Gill also explained that by Titus 2:11—‘the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men’—‘we are not to understand the grace which lies in his own heart, or his free love, favour, and good-will to any of the sons of men through Christ.’ Rather it means ‘the grace which lies in the Gospel’, the doctrine bringing the news of salvation ‘to the ears of men’ in its ‘external ministration’. And, Gill continued, ‘By *all men*’ is not meant individuals, but ‘all sorts of men ... high and low, rich and poor,’ etc. He said it was ‘a manifest falsehood, that the apostles tendered the saving grace of God to all men, without exception; whereas they tendered it to none, but preached the Gospel to all.’ And in this they were following Christ’s example of proclaiming truth without offering grace.<sup>101</sup> Gill was convinced universal gospel offers could only be argued from universal redemption, and duly responded to Wesley’s quoting multiple texts for the universality of Christ’s atonement, ‘even for those that finally perish’:<sup>102</sup> ‘There is not one text of Scripture in the whole bible’ that says that Christ died for all men, or that God is willing that all should be saved. This resolute belief in limited atonement informed his distinction between preaching and offering:

The gospel is indeed ordered to be preached to *every creature* to whom it is sent and comes; ... And that there are universal offers of grace and salvation made to all men, I utterly deny; nay, I deny they are made to any; no, not to God’s elect; grace and salvation are provided for them in the everlasting covenant, procured for them by Christ, published and revealed in the gospel and applied by the Spirit; much less are they made to others; ... Let the patrons of universal offers defend themselves from this objection; I have nothing to do with it.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Gill, *Body*, 2:42.

<sup>101</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 52-53,88.

<sup>102</sup> Wesley, *Predestination*, eg 15-16.

<sup>103</sup> Gill, *Predestination*, 23-24,28.

Between 1737 and 1739 Samuel Bourn, under the name ‘Consistent Christian’, wrote two books in the form of a Dialogue between a Baptist and a Church-Man, occasioned by a newly-opened Baptist church in Birmingham which he accused of ‘Reviving old *Calvinistical* Doctrines, and spreading *Antinomian*, and other *Errors*’.<sup>104</sup> It is Gill’s answers to these which is of interest. In the first, Bourn objected that the Baptists talk of free grace, but their ‘dark Scheme’ obscures it, representing him as ‘*cruel and unmerciful, ... deceitful and insincere*’:

You make God the greatest of all Cheats when he offers to Sinners a Salvation *never purchased* for them, and which he has absolutely decreed never to give them: And when he offers it *upon Conditions* they cannot comply with, without *irresistible Grace*, and he has decreed never to give them that Grace: And when he threatens a *heavier Damnation* to them if they do not believe and obey the Gospel, which he knows they cannot do.<sup>105</sup>

Gill’s answer to these charges reveals his hyper-Calvinism. He did not reply by insisting that the gospel must be offered despite any apparent paradox. Rather he avoided the force of Bourn’s arguments by denying God makes any offers:

Salvation is not offered at all by God, upon any condition whatsoever, to any of the sons of men; no, not to the elect: they are chosen to it; ... much less to the non elect, or to all mankind; and consequently this doctrine, or God, according to it, is not chargeable with *delusion* and *insult*.

He challenged the author ‘to prove any such offers’, and if he can, ‘I own, I must be obliged to think again.’ There is no comfort, Gill wrote, in God’s universal love and general offers of mercy, under which ‘a man may be lost and damned. ... Whereas, according to the particular scheme, God chuses some peremptorily to eternal salvation,’ calls them effectually and brings them safely to glory.<sup>106</sup>

Bourn’s second dialogue interacted with Gill’s response, dismayed that the Baptist leaders say ‘there is NOT ONE OFFER of salvation in the whole Bible.’ ‘I used to think’, Bourn wrote, ‘that the whole Bible was one standing Offer of Mercy to a guilty World. I always thought the Son of God and his Apostles were

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<sup>104</sup> For history, see Oliver, ‘Gill’, *British Particular Baptists*, 4:136-137.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Consistent Christian’, *Dialogue* 1:17-19,22.

<sup>106</sup> Gill, *Answer* 1:29-31,40.

sent with *glad Tidings* to Men, Offers of Pardon, upon Repentance.’ He went on to decry Gill's system,

This is the Scheme which represents the *Holy Scriptures* as the most equivocal and deceitful Book in the World; which, tho’ filled, from first to last, with the loudest Calls, the kindest Invitations, the freest Promises, the vastest Incouragements; yet as having not one sincere Offer of real Mercy through the whole; and as making those seemingly kind and gracious Declarations to Thousands and Millions, who are aforehand decreed to Damnation.

This scheme rewrites scripture, said Bourn; for example: ‘*God would have all men to be saved, 1 Tim ii:4*. If by ALL is meant only a *few* of every Kind, it would have been a more true Saying, *God would have all Men to be damned*.’ This scheme deprives a person of all power to any spiritually good actions, therefore ‘to what Purpose are Exhortations and Persuasions to Impossibilities?’ ‘To what Purpose are the *Scriptures to be read*, if the *Elect* have no Concern with the Threatnings, nor the *Non-Elect* with the Promises, and *neither* of them with the Calls, Requirements, and Exhortations there?’ Bourn concluded, the Baptist ‘Preachers and Writers are consistent with themselves, and their Scheme; but very inconsistent with all the dictates of Reason, our Ideas of God, and the whole System of the Gospel’.<sup>107</sup> Bourn here exposed a major vulnerability in hyper-Calvinism: given its belief in the arbitrary decree to elect and reprobate a fixed number (Gill: ‘God chooses his favourites, without respect to any thing in them,’<sup>108</sup>) of what benefit are offers and invitations?

In Gill’s answer to Bourn’s second dialogue he severed any connection between gospel preaching and offers of salvation. He turned Bourn’s words, that the hyper-Calvinist scheme was ‘inconsistent with all the dictates of reason’, back on him, and accused Bourn’s own system of being inconsistent with reason:

for how **irrational** is it, for ministers to stand offering Christ, and salvation by him to man, when, on the one hand, they have neither power nor right to give; and, on the other hand, the persons they offer to, have neither power nor will to receive?

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<sup>107</sup> ‘Consistent Christian’, *Dialogue* 2:49-62(52n†).

<sup>108</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 153.

He roundly rejected Bourn's claim that the whole Bible is an offer of mercy: 'What! the *whole* bible?' The Bible is divided into two parts, he said: historical, which 'is surely no offer of mercy to a guilty world'; and doctrinal, which is distinguished into law and gospel. The law is 'the ministration of condemnation and death to a guilty world': no offer there. That only leaves the gospel:

but the gospel is a declaration of salvation already wrought out by Christ, and not an offer of it on conditions to be performed by man. The ministers of the gospel are sent to *preach the gospel to every creature*; that is, not to offer, but to preach Christ and salvation by him; to publish peace and pardon as things already obtained by him.

So Gill's disquieting answer to Bourn was that *none* of the Bible offers mercy to sinners. Gospel ministers, he contended, are '*criers or heralds*', their business 'to proclaim aloud, to publish facts, to declare things that are done, and not to offer them to be done on conditions.' No surprise then that Gill confirmed of this gospel, the whole system of which is about proclaiming not offering:

It is so far from being good news to unconverted sinners, that it is disputed, despised, hated and abhorred by them; just as it is by this *Dialogue-writer*. There is no doctrine of the gospel that is really comfortable and truly delightful to a man in a state of nature.<sup>109</sup>

Martin, member in Gill's congregation and later Particular Baptist minister who opposed Fuller, concurred:

Sinners, in my opinion, are more frequently converted, and believers more commonly edified, by a narrative of facts concerning Jesus Christ, and by a clear, and connected statement of the doctrines of grace, and blessings of the gospel, than by all the exhortations and expostulations that ever were invented.

When some ministers begin to exhort, I begin to be alarmed.<sup>110</sup>

In 1876 there was discussion between *The Christian Standard* (founded in 1866, still extant) and the Strict Baptist magazine *Earthen Vessel* concerning preaching to the unconverted. The former accused the Strict Baptists of not making 'a full and free offer of salvation to all classes of sinners'. 'This witness is true,' responded the Baptists, 'we do not "offer salvation," because it is not ours to

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<sup>109</sup> Gill, *Answer*, 2:20-22.

<sup>110</sup> Martin, *Thoughts*, 3:62-63.

offer.’ The common mistake into which the *Christian Standard* editor and many others have fallen, they continued, ‘is to regard the terms “preaching the Gospel” and “offering salvation” as equivalent terms or synonymes for each other. ... The preaching of the Gospel is a *Testimony* and not an *Amnesty*, nor a choice left to the individual. It is *not* the offer of pardon to rebels ... .’<sup>111</sup> This dissociation between preaching and offering, along with the implications of ignoring it, remains enshrined in the Gospel Standard Articles, grounded, like Gill’s, on human inability and special redemption.

**Table 6 Gospel Standard Articles 1**

<b>Article 29</b> Indiscriminate offers of grace denied	While we believe that the Gospel is to be <i>preached</i> in or proclaimed to all the world, as in Mark 16:15, we deny <i>offers</i> of grace; that is to say, that the gospel is to be <i>offered</i> indiscriminately to all.
<b>Article 33</b> Preaching to the unconverted	Therefore, that for ministers in the present day to address unconverted persons, or indiscriminately all in a mixed congregation, calling upon them to savingly repent, believe, and receive Christ, or perform any other acts dependent upon the new creative power of the Holy Ghost, is, on the one hand, <b>to imply creature power</b> , and, on the other, <b>to deny the doctrine of special redemption</b> . <sup>112</sup>

Gospel Standard representatives explain that Article 29 affirms ‘there is a fundamental difference between *preaching* (or proclaiming) the gospel and *offering* it. The word “offer” is never used respecting the Gospel in the Bible,’ whereas the word ‘preach’ is used numerous times. ‘There is a vast difference between *preaching* the gospel in a mixed congregation, and *offering* Christ and salvation *indiscriminately* to all,’ wrote Gosden. ‘We believe that offers of grace, thrown out indiscriminately as if salvation depended upon the creature’s acceptance, imply serious error. We seek to discharge our commission by proclaiming God’s character as Creator, Lawgiver, Judge and Saviour.’<sup>113</sup> The representatives also explain that Article 33 is one of the Added Articles, intended to further circumscribe gospel presentation and ensure unconverted

<sup>111</sup> Wale, ‘Preaching’, *EV* (Nov 1876), 332; also Winters, ‘Strict Baptists’ *EV* (Oct 1876), 305-307; Hearson, ‘Letter’, *EV* (Nov 1876), 348.

<sup>112</sup> GS Articles, 37,40 (*italics original, bold added*).

<sup>113</sup> Watts, *Goodly Heritage*, 58; Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 133,137.



persons are never ‘directly called upon to repent, receive and close in with Christ; being told that unless they do so they must perish’. For such preaching 1) indicates inherent power, 2) infringes God’s sovereignty, Christ’s teaching and the Spirit’s prerogative, and 3) denies eternal election and special redemption. ‘Exhortations addressed immediately and nakedly to the dead’ will not be honoured by God. This underlines, they say, the need for what ministers of a previous generation called ‘discrimination in the ministry’, and consequently the gospel must not be presented ‘in such a way as to give the hearers the impression that salvation is available to all’.<sup>114</sup> Broome extolled Gill’s clarity that the gospel is preaching Christ crucified without offering him. He claimed, ‘Hypercalvinism is a false epithet ... used by offer ministers to describe those who truly preach the gospel and do not exceed the divine commandment, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel.”’<sup>115</sup> Benjamin Ramsbottom in his 2014 New Year Address complained of his denomination’s stigmatisation as hyper-Calvinists for refusing to offer Christ, by those who claim the free offer is the gospel’s essence. But ‘we always understood that the essence of the gospel is Christ and Him crucified,’ not offering him.<sup>116</sup> Smith’s sixty-fifth Article reads: ‘I believe it is the duty of the church to fully and freely preach the gospel to all sinners, but that it should not be presumptuously and falsely offered.’<sup>117</sup> These examples illustrate how Gill’s hyper-Calvinistic teaching in distinguishing preaching from offering has been vigorously maintained from his time until the present.

### 3.2 Distinction between sensible and dead sinners

Like Hussey and other hyper-Calvinists after him, Gill governed his thinking with the ‘complex theological construct’ of double predestination, and on this immutable division he based his antithesis between elect and reprobate.<sup>118</sup> The impossibility of compromising these categories was central to Gill’s no-offer system, driving him to distinguish sinners into two types, and to provide

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<sup>114</sup> Watts, *Goodly Heritage*, 69-70; Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 150, 152.

<sup>115</sup> Broome, *Gill*, 4, 9 (already quoted in Introduction, but repeated here due to its relevance).

<sup>116</sup> Ramsbottom ‘Address’, *GS* (Jan 2014) 2.

<sup>117</sup> Smith, ‘My Articles’, *AHB* (8 May 2019) <https://www.baptists.net/history/2019/05/my-articles-of-faith/>

<sup>118</sup> see my Hussey analysis ch2 pt1.6, quote: Stob, ‘Observations’, *Perspectives*, 244-247, 251.

alternative explanations for those texts previously understood to address sinners generally. He rationalised scripture's invitations to repentance and faith, channelling them to refer exclusively to the regenerate, or 'sensible sinners'. His system could not tolerate anything else:

The promise of pardon is not made to any, no not to the elect, upon a condition to be performed by them; it is an absolute unconditional one ... And, it is so far from being made upon a condition to the non-elect, that it is not made to them at all, the promise of pardon being a new covenant one, reaches to no more than to those who are in that covenant, and they are only the elect of God, and much less upon a condition rendered impossible by the act of preterition.

Gill believed this unconditionality not only maintains predestination's discrete categories, but also eliminates offers of grace, thus disproving the Arminian charge that 'tenders of the gospel to reprobates must be false and hypocritical':

The gospel is not tendered to the elect, but is *the power of God unto salvation* to them. The grace of God is bestowed upon them, applied to them, and wrought in them, but not offered. And as for the non-elect, grace is neither offered to them, nor bestowed on them, and therefore there can be no falsehood or hypocrisy, dissimulation or guile, nothing ludicrous or delusory in the divine conduct towards them, or anything which disproves God's act of preterition or reprobation.<sup>119</sup>

Time and again Gill neutralised texts which he believed contradicted his system. His interpretation of Isaiah 55:7, a clear promise of mercy and pardon *conditional on the wicked* repenting and returning to the Lord, is a case in point. Gill denied that Isaiah could have meant that repentance is a condition of obtaining mercy, because 'the promise of pardon is free, absolute, and unconditional, not depending on *any condition whatever* to be performed by men.' Therefore, according to Gill's theology, Isaiah had to be referring to regenerate not wicked people, for 'I utterly deny that there is any promise of pardon made to the non-elect at all, not on any condition whatever.' The whole idea of conditionality profoundly disturbed Gill: 'If this covenant is tendered, upon the conditions of faith and repentance, to all to whom the gospel is vouchsafed, how can it be said to be *established* in the blood of Jesus? It must

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<sup>119</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 155-156.

be very precarious and uncertain.’<sup>120</sup> Thus, he said, it is ‘mistaken and false’ to assert that faith and repentance are conditions of the covenant, when they are its blessings. ‘Hence true faith is called *the faith of God’s elect*,’ and is the reason why one believes and another does not.<sup>121</sup>

Gill’s predestinarian categories of elect and reprobate materialised temporally into the categories of sensible sinners and dead sinners, the first always special, the second always hopeless, and this distinction always governs hyper-Calvinism. It divides and restricts gospel preaching, for sinners are never considered as *sinners*. Gill justified this distinction by rooting it in God’s attitude: there is never ‘any real enmity in the heart of God to elect sinners; this is inconsistent with his everlasting and unchangeable love towards them,’ he wrote. But dead sinners are ‘irreconcilable’ [wording which, unlike ‘unreconciled’, suggests no possibility of reconciliation] and ‘christless sinners’ for whom no satisfaction was made.<sup>122</sup> Although Gill’s denial of offers encompassed both categories of sinner, on occasion he said that sensible sinners should be encouraged and exhorted to believe and repent, energised by particular redemption. For example, in an ordination sermon Gill advised the new minister: ‘Souls **sensible of sin and danger**, and who are crying out, *What shall we do to be saved?* you are to observe and point out CHRIST the tree of life unto them ... . Your work is to lead men, **under a sense of sin and guilt**, to the blood of CHRIST ... and in his name you are to preach the forgiveness of [sins] **to them**.’<sup>123</sup> But dead sinners or reprobates should not be encouraged or exhorted to believe and repent. ‘I know of no exhortations to dead sinners, to return and live, in a spiritual manner.’ And again, ‘I do not find that any such are exhorted to believe in Christ for salvation; but as sensible of it, as the jailor was. ... Besides, such who have believed already, and do know that Christ has died for them, and that they are of the number of God’s elect, may be rationally exhorted.’<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 20-21 (my italics), 184.

<sup>121</sup> Gill, *Faith*, 15-16.

<sup>122</sup> Gill, *Christ’s Satisfaction*, 13, 11, 37.

<sup>123</sup> Gill, *Cherubim*, 16 (italics original, bold added).

<sup>124</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 172, 164.

Who did Gill mean by sensible sinners? For he produced creative exegesis to prove that expansive sweeping invitations actually apply exclusively to such. Of the invitation for *everyone* who is thirsty to come and drink, and the poor to come and buy freely (Isaiah 55:1), for example, Gill restricted it to those with the following qualifications (listed separately for effect):

These words are no call, invitation, or offer of grace to dead sinners, since they are spoken to such who were *thirsty*, that is, who, in a spiritual sense, were

- thirsting after pardon of sin,
  - a justifying righteousness,
  - and salvation by Christ;
  - after a greater knowledge of him,
  - communion with him,
  - conformity to him,
  - and enjoyment of him in his ordinances,
- which supposes them to be spiritually alive; for such who are dead in sin, thirst not after the grace of God, but the lusts of the flesh; they mind and savour the things of the flesh, and not the things of the Spirit;
- only new-born babes,
  - or such who are born again,
  - are quickened and made alive,
  - desire Christ, his grace, and *the sincere milk of the word*, ...
  - who are *poor in spirit*, and sensible of their spiritual poverty.

Isaiah addressed such people who have received ‘the quickening influences of the Spirit’. Other texts are ‘represented’ to be ‘offers of grace’ by Arminians, like Isaiah 1:18-19, Luke 13:3, John 3:16, 8:24, but likewise ‘they do not express any power or ability in unconverted persons to come to Christ, seeing they are not directed to such.’ Similarly Gill denied the command to seek the Lord while he may be found and call on him while he is near (Isaiah 55:6) is a gracious invitation to ‘enjoy the favour of God’. Rather it is ‘an exhortation to public worship’, physically meeting on the seventh day of the week for the Jews or the first day for Christians.<sup>125</sup> Referring to John 3:16 and other examples of John’s use of ‘the whole world’, Gill said, ‘It is most manifest that the word *world*, used by the apostle John when speaking of redemption and salvation by Christ, is always used in a limited and restrained sense, and signifies some persons only.’<sup>126</sup> It may be clearly observed that Gill did not engage with the major part

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<sup>125</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 19-20; also Gill, *Predestination*, 22-24.

<sup>126</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 64-66

of these verses. Even when he occasionally relented somewhat and directly encouraged ‘poor sinners’ to implore Christ’s grace and venture on him, he circumscribed this by the obligatory qualification of awareness of sin’s pervasiveness throughout ‘thy nature, and in every power and faculty of thy soul’. Then ‘I dare say he’ll not reject thee.’<sup>127</sup> This early funeral sermon has been used as an example of Gill pleading with sinners to come to Christ.

Gill went to convoluted lengths to prove that many of these passages which declare God’s willingness for all to be saved, to offer Christ and to command repentance indiscriminately, are one or a combination of the following. Some such as Mark 16:15-16, John 5:34, Romans 5:18, 10:12-13, I Timothy 2:3-4, James 1:5, II Peter 3:9, I John 4:14, ‘do not respect eternal salvation at all, but the temporal salvation of the *Jews*’, or ‘have nothing to do with salvation’, or ‘speak only of God’s will to save his elect’, or ‘that *Gentiles* as well as *Jews* should be saved’.<sup>128</sup> Others, pronounced Gill, like Ezekiel 18:30 and Acts 3:19 are Jew-specific, and therefore ‘do not contradict the preparation of saving grace for some few only’. Ezekiel’s rousing call to repentance ‘is not to be understood of an evangelical one, which is a *repentance unto life*, and *unto salvation*; but of a national one, for national iniquities, and to prevent national judgments’, such as the Ninevites whose response averted disaster, and to ‘outward reformation of manners’.<sup>129</sup> Yet others like Deuteronomy 5:29, Psalm 81:13, Isaiah 5:4, Luke 13:34 are ‘compassionate enquiries, and vehement desires concerning their civil and temporal welfare’. Some like II Corinthians 5:20 refer to those already converted; and ‘the text so much insisted on’, I Timothy 2:4 (God ‘will have all men to be saved’) means ‘some’ not ‘all’. Yet others like John 3:16 and Revelation 22:17 (‘whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely’) are exclusively ‘for the encouragement and relief of sensible sinners’. And, Gill insisted, I John 3:23 and Acts 17:30 (God ‘commandeth all men everywhere to repent’) ‘only declare God’s will of command ... but not his

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<sup>127</sup> Gill, *Glory*, 38.

<sup>128</sup> Gill, *Predestination*, 22-23.

<sup>129</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 23-24.

intentions, purposes, counsels and decrees concerning what man shall do ... and so in no wise contradict the doctrines of absolute election and reprobation'.<sup>130</sup>

Clearly the only way Gill could harmonise his logic with what Donald Macleod called scripture's 'imperious language' of universal offers<sup>131</sup> was to neutralise these texts by making them exclusively applicable to elect sinners. His interpretation of the command to 'come' as being merely physical attendance at public worship was similar to Hussey's disjunction between coming and faith. His express denial 'that God calls all those to faith and repentance, and conversion, who have a knowledge of the divine will, a sense of sin, a dread of punishment, and some hopes of pardon' because the devils have all but the last of these, and the non-elect may have them all,<sup>132</sup> reflects Skepp's negative emphasis on the prevalence of counterfeit faith, and the difficulty and rarity of true conversion.

Gill's emphasis is enshrined in the Gospel Standard Articles:

**Table 7 Gospel Standard Articles 2**

<b>Article 27</b> The non-elect incapable of receiving grace	We deny that the Holy Spirit ever enlightens the non-elect, to make them capable at all of receiving grace.
<b>Article 34</b> (second part) Preaching of the gospel (exhorting the unregenerate)	And we further believe that we have no Scripture warrant to take the exhortations in the Old Testament intended for the Jews in national covenant with God, and apply them in a spiritual and saving sense to unregenerated men.
<b>Article 32</b> Preaching of the gospel (apostolic uniqueness)	We believe that it would be unsafe, from the brief records we have of the way in which the apostles, under the immediate direction of the Lord, addressed their hearers in certain special cases and circumstances, to derive absolute and universal rules for ministerial addresses in the present day under widely-different circumstances. <sup>133</sup>

Strict and Particular Baptist minister and long-serving editor of *Gospel Standard*, Joseph Philpot, wrote in 1853 of Whitefield's ministry that 'his ardour and zeal led him frequently to stretch the line beyond ... divine truth.' (By this he meant that Whitefield failed to make Gill's distinction between elect sinners with a

<sup>130</sup> Gill, *Cause* 159,155; also Gill, *Predestination*; 23-24,27-28.

<sup>131</sup> Macleod, 'Reformed theology', *Theology in Scotland* (2010), 13.

<sup>132</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 178-179.

<sup>133</sup> GS Articles 36,41,39.

warrant to receive Christ, and dead sinners with none.) Philpot explained, Whitefield preached Jesus ‘more as the Saviour of sinners generally than as the Head of the church, the Saviour of elect sinners’. He also urged the new birth ‘upon the consciences of dead sinners almost as if they could do something towards it. Thus Whitefield would invite, as it is called, sinners to Jesus, meaning by “sinners” not as Hart speaks,

“A sinner is a sacred thing,  
The Holy Ghost has made him so,”

but sinners as such, whether sensible or insensible sinners, whether convinced of sin or still careless and carnal.’<sup>134</sup> Current Gospel Standard spokesmen assert that gospel invitations in scripture ‘are invariably addressed to particular characters or classes of people’. ‘They are not addressed to everyone who merely acknowledges the fact that they are sinners,’ but only to those who have been brought under the Spirit’s deep convictions. Only the wounded can be healed.<sup>135</sup> Gosden commented that it is incongruous that the Spirit would ‘create in the non-elect a disposition or an ability to receive grace, and yet never effectually convey that grace unto eternal salvation’. ‘We definitely reject the theory’, he said, that ‘the common operations’ of the Spirit ‘place any person, elect or non-elect ... in a condition to determine his or her own relationship to God. This is unalterably fixed from everlasting.’<sup>136</sup> Article 32, the first of the Added Articles, was written to cover all possible bases in order to safeguard gospel presentation.<sup>137</sup> In his thirty-eighth Article Smith confirms that God sent his Son ‘into the world, not to give sinners a chance (opportunity) to be saved, but rather, to guarantee the salvation of His elect people’.<sup>138</sup> Thus he identifies with Gill’s distinction between elect and non-elect sinners, in order to disassociate the gospel from the non-elect.

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<sup>134</sup> Philpot, ‘Whitefield’, *GS* (March 2014) 79. (Joseph Hart’s hymn available at [https://hymnary.org/text/when\\_adam\\_by\\_transgression\\_fell](https://hymnary.org/text/when_adam_by_transgression_fell). Originally in Gadsby, *Hymns*, No 38.)

<sup>135</sup> Watts, *Goodly Heritage*, 48-49,69.

<sup>136</sup> Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 136-137.

<sup>137</sup> Sheehan, ‘Presentation’, *Foundations* (May 1982) 33; Watts, *Goodly Heritage*, 65-68; Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 150-152.

<sup>138</sup> Smith, ‘My Articles’, *AHB* (8 May 2019) <https://www.baptists.net/history/2019/05/my-articles-of-faith/>

By contrast Fuller wrote of these texts such as Isaiah 55:1-7 used by hyper-Calvinists to exclude unqualified sinners: 'This is the language of invitation. ... The *thirst* which they are supposed to possess, does not mean a holy desire after spiritual blessings, but the natural desire of happiness which God has implanted in every bosom.' Moreover if we teach sinners that 'a mere attendance on the means of grace' is all God requires of them as their duty, 'we shall be found false witnesses for God, and deceivers of the souls of men.'<sup>139</sup>

### 3.3 No duty to believe: human inability

The fact that Gill avoided direct participation in the Modern Question controversy was no reflection of the strength of his views against duty-faith. His words 'God does not require all men to believe in Christ'<sup>140</sup> run like a vein throughout his teaching. He developed the theory that the type of revelation always determines the level of faith required.

Gill taught that while man has the 'power of performing the external parts of religion', including praying, singing, attending church etc, he 'has neither will nor power to act of himself' relating to his spiritual and eternal welfare. 'Such is the corruption of human nature,' and the disability contracted from it, 'that without the special grace of God he can do nothing spiritually good, and only that which is evil.'<sup>141</sup> Specifically we are incapable of evangelical faith and repentance, having 'lost the power of believing, and are shut up in unbelief', only obliged to believe 'whatever revelation [God] is pleased to make'. To those 'under the gospel dispensation', this is 'external repentance and reformation, and an historical faith in, or assent to, Jesus as the Messiah'. Responding to Daniel Whitby's objections, Gill dismissed any possible contradiction between this 'disability to believe' and Jesus marvelling at either his countrymen's unbelief or the centurion's faith. Similarly, Gill dismissed any contradiction between human inability and the instances of Jesus 'upbraiding persons for their impenitence and unbelief'. These, he insisted, only respected natural unbelief and lack of assent in him as Messiah, and do not disprove the impossibility of

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<sup>139</sup> Fuller, 'Gospel Worthy', *Works* 1:37,39.

<sup>140</sup> eg Gill, *Cause*, 31-32,166.

<sup>141</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 9-10,121 etc.



evangelical repentance.<sup>142</sup> For Whitby had asked why Jesus would marvel at or rebuke them for their failure to do what was impossible?<sup>143</sup>

Gill took this doctrine of impotence and inability further to push through the boundaries into hyper-Calvinism, and justify his no-offer doctrine as profoundly irrational on every level:

It is not consistent with our ideas of God, that he should send ministers to offer salvation to man, to whom he himself never intended to give it, which the ministers have not power to bestow, nor the men to receive.<sup>144</sup>

Here again Gill's interpretation reflected Hussey's, who made the offer and gift nonequivalent, saying the offer was empty because it did not truthfully reflect the gift.

Gill also used the doctrine of human impotence to neutralise commands, lest it be thought a command implies ability to obey it. Addressing God's universal command to repent (Acts 17:30), he wrote, 'Repentance being represented as a command, does not suppose it to be in the power of men, or contradict evangelical repentance, being the free grace gift of God, but only shows the need men stand in of it, and how necessary and requisite it is; and when it is said to be a command to all, this does not destroy its being a special blessing of the covenant of grace to some.' The law does not command repentance, and 'in the gospel, strictly taken, there is no command.'<sup>145</sup> Gill believed it is a hypothetical command only, for evangelical repentance cannot be commanded. His conviction that man is 'wholly incapable' of doing anything spiritually good or reaching out to God enabled him to counter the objection that his scheme rendered many parts of God's word 'vain and absurd', thus:

As for commands and exhortations to regeneration, or promises of pardon to such who regenerate themselves, or threats of death to those who neglect it, or complaints against those who would not do it, I know of none in the whole word of God; what is referred to, only regards an external

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<sup>142</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 166-167.

<sup>143</sup> Whitby, *Discourse*, 168,171.

<sup>144</sup> Gill, *Answer*, 2:20.

<sup>145</sup> Gill, *Exposition*, Acts 17.30 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/acts-17-30.html>

reformation of life and manners, and not regeneration, or the first work of conversion.<sup>146</sup>

At this point we reach the core of Gill's hyper-Calvinism, and in the next few paragraphs we take the opportunity to explore some of its implications and inconsistencies. Perhaps Gill knew he had entrapped himself within his own logical scheme. When accused of misrepresenting God as cruel and deceitful for pretending to offer help to those whom he had decreed not to help, Gill denied that God offers salvation on any condition to anyone.<sup>147</sup> When accused of misrepresenting God as unrighteous for demanding the impossible and then damning people for not achieving it, Gill answered that God would only condemn men for not believing up to the level of revelation they had received. That is, he will not condemn anyone 'for not believing in Christ, of whom they never heard'. Neither will he condemn those who have heard, 'who have had the advantage of a divine revelation', 'for not believing spiritually and savingly in him, or that he died for them, or for not being converted'. Their condemnation will be for disbelieving Jesus is the Messiah, 'not for not believing falsehoods, and for not doing impossibilities'.<sup>148</sup> Gill's two schemes which he used to answer Arminian charges, one denying all offers, the other of proportionality between revelation, belief and condemnation, lack scriptural support. Was his argument fundamentally the same as Arminians, although they both jettisoned different things to prove it?

**Table 8 Comparison between Arminianism and hyper-Calvinism**

	<b>asserts</b>	<b>rejects</b>
<b>Arminianism</b>	universal redemption gospel offers + invitations	predestination
<b>hyper-Calvinism</b>	predestination particular redemption	gospel offers + invitations

<sup>146</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 126.

<sup>147</sup> 'Consistent Christian', *Dialogue*, 1:19; Gill, *Answer*, 1:29.

<sup>148</sup> 'Consistent Christian', *Dialogue*, 1:19,21-22, 2:50,66; Gill, *Answer*, 1:28, 2:19.

Hussey identified Gill's second argument used by Arminians to justify offers of grace, namely: 'if an *Offer* of Grace be not made to a Sinner, *that* Sinner cannot be guilty of, nor condemn'd for *Unbelief*.'<sup>149</sup> Gill's arch-enemy the 'Arminian' Whitby teased out the consequences of limited atonement on the gospel offer. 'Hence it must follow that none of those to whom God never intended Salvation ... are bound to believe in him;' it would be a falsehood if they did. 'Hence it clearly follows that no Man can be condemned hereafter for final Impenitency and Unbelief, ... for surely God commandeth no Man to believe in Christ for Salvation, for whom he never intended Salvation.' He reached Gill's conclusion: 'Hence it will follow that neither the Elect, nor Non-Elect, can rationally be exhorted to believe: not they who are not elected, because *Christ* died not for them; not the Elect' for if they know they are elect they have already believed. The only solution, deduced Whitby, is to 'rationally exhort all Men' that their duty is to believe in Christ for salvation.<sup>150</sup>

Certainly Gill's denial of faith as a universal duty caused major theological problems, because he found himself with the conundrum of God damning the non-elect for something unachievable which was not expected of them. However he tried to resolve these inconsistencies with his hyper-Calvinistic distinctions. If sinners are entirely unable to produce anything good towards God, how can God require them to produce something as good as saving faith as a condition of salvation, and then hold them accountable for the lack of it? Gill's answer was that God does *not* hold men accountable for lack of saving faith. *What then does God hold men accountable for?* Gill's response was that God expects everyone to believe 'the whole of divine revelation', in Old and New testaments, 'which is all comprehended in these words our Lord began his ministry with, *believe the Gospel* (Mark 1:15): not to believe this, is the damning sin of unbelief.' 'This was the sin of the Jews,' and 'the sin of all' who receive the light of external revelation but neglect its truths and despise its evidence.

This sort of unbelief, and not want of special faith in Christ, is the cause of mens damnation. No man will be lost or damned, because he has not this faith; to say that God will damn any man, because he has not this special faith in Christ, is to represent him *as the most cruel of all beings*, as the

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<sup>149</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 275-276.

<sup>150</sup> Whitby, *Discourse*, 158-160.

*Arminians* say we make him to be; to damn a man for that which is solely in his own power to give; for no man can believe in Christ with this sort of faith, unless it be given him of his father; and which yet he determines not to give unto him, as unto all the non-elect; and which man never had in his power to have or exercise, no, not in the state of innocence. Can any man believe, that God will ever damn a man on such an account as this?

Gill's simple refrain was, 'As is the revelation which is made to men, such is the faith that is required of them.' No revelation: no faith. External revelation: external faith. Internal revelation: 'comes with such power and influence upon the mind, as *certainly* to produce a true and living faith in the soul, which *infallibly* issues in eternal life and happiness'.<sup>151</sup>

Two particular questions prompted by Gill's reasoning are now explored. First, his theology that sinners are obliged to produce legal repentance and faith, but not obliged to produce saving faith and repentance, opens him up to the accusation of double standards. He said, 'It may be every man's duty to be holy, and yet God may resolve not to give his grace to some persons to make them holy, without which they cannot be so. Hence it follows, that between God's command of holiness to all men, and his decree to leave some in the want of holiness, *is no contradiction*.'<sup>152</sup> Why did he not use the same argument for saving faith? why did he feel compelled to rescue God *from the contradiction* pointed out by the Arminians of God's command to believe in Christ being impossible to obey? If the first is no contradiction, neither is the second. He vigorously defended God from 'dissimulation and insincerity' between his 'outward call' to natural faith and repentance, and human inability to respond:

it should be observed, that though man by sin has lost his power to comply with the will of God, by an obedience to it; God has not lost his power, right, and authority, to command. Wherefore, when the ministry of the word is slighted, and the gospel-call rejected, it is most righteously resented by the Lord; and such are justly punished with everlasting destruction by him.<sup>153</sup>

If God 'resents' and justly punishes those who do not outwardly comply with his regulations, despite their inability to do so, how much more will his anger be

<sup>151</sup> Gill, *Faith*, 29-32; also Gill, *Cause*, 152-153, 166-167; Gill, *Answer* 2:30-31, 33.

<sup>152</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 157 (my italics).

<sup>153</sup> Gill, *Body*, 2:286.

shown towards those who reject his Son by refusing to believe on him? How does Gill justify the inconsistency of teaching that God will punish the lesser, but not the greater? Why is the second ‘cruel’ but not the first? This exposes the depth and essence of Gill’s hyper-Calvinism, which forced him to defend such obvious inconsistencies despite his logical mind. His refusal to allow his system to be compromised demonstrates how even the most agile intellect cannot afford to distort God’s word. Gill’s dilemma here of course was that he readily accepted the universal duty of legal responsibility, but he resolutely refused to admit the universal duty of believing in Christ for salvation. While he accepted that sinners’ inability to perform their duty to believe God’s word and obey his will (outward obedience) in no way lessened their obligation, accountability and final condemnation, he was happy to accept that sinners’ inability ‘to believe in Christ to the saving of their souls’ relieved them of obligation, accountability and condemnation.<sup>154</sup> The first they should be exhorted to, the second they should not. One of Gill’s challengers spotted this anomaly: ‘The Repentance which Mr. *Gill* allows Sinners may be exhorted to, stands more remote from the Power of the Creature, than the Repentance which he will not admit an Exhortation to.’<sup>155</sup>

The second question is, What of the non-elect who, according to Gill, believe all the truths about Jesus, ‘the whole of divine revelation’, ‘the Gospel-scheme’, demonstrate John the apostle’s criteria for regeneration, that ‘everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God’ (I John 4:2, 5:1), who are ‘able to preach the Gospel clearly and distinctly’?<sup>156</sup> On what grounds will these people be condemned, according to Gill’s own theology? It cannot be because they have no natural faith, for they unquestionably believe. It cannot be because they have no special faith, for no one can be condemned for that. Is it in fact the case that Gill and other hyper-Calvinists have created a false dichotomy, and that there are not two kinds of faiths at all, but only one; that the ‘natural’ faith they call a duty and the faith which is saving are not to be distinguished?

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<sup>154</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 155-158.

<sup>155</sup> Anon, *Some Doctrines*, 137 cf Gill, *Eternal Union*, 89-90.

<sup>156</sup> Gill, *Faith*, 8-12, 29.

Finally, Gill referred to an argument ‘commonly made on our side the question’, a reference to his allegiance to the negative side of the Modern Question, which used Adam to disprove duty-faith. But ‘according to the scheme I proceed upon’, namely that belief is proportionate to revelation, he did not need to fall back on this argument. However he was somewhat confused and self-contradictory over Adam’s pre-fall ability to believe. He said on the one hand that innocent Adam had both power and will to do what was naturally and morally good, and to believe in Christ as the Son of God. ‘His not believing in him as the Mediator, Saviour, and Redeemer, did not arise from any defect of power in him, but from the state, condition, and situation in which he was, and from the nature of the revelation made unto him.’ In other words, the reason he did not believe in Christ as Redeemer was not because he could not but because he did not need to. Once fallen he and his posterity lost the power to believe, and are now paralysed in unbelief, impotent to do any spiritual good.<sup>157</sup> Then on the other hand he resorted to the argument used by Wayman, Brine, John Johnson and other hyper-Calvinists against duty-faith, that Adam *never* had power to exercise faith even in his innocence, therefore no one since has that power, can be expected to produce it, or will be damned for not doing so.<sup>158</sup> This is a significant contradiction on Gill’s part, and perhaps demonstrates how his attitude hardened over the years, the first reference (that Adam had power) in 1737, the second (that he did not) in 1754. Fuller later wrote that Brine and Gill differed on this subject: Brine maintained the argument from Adam’s incapacity to believe, but Gill, ‘when contending with the Arminians, gave it up’. However Fuller only read the first passage, as identified in his footnote\* thus: ‘\**Cause of God and Truth*, Part III.Chap.III.§6.’ He had not read the second, at least when he wrote these words.<sup>159</sup> This point is taken up by Nettles (pt6).

The following Gospel Standard Articles closely reflect Gill’s teaching in this section.

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<sup>157</sup> Gill, *Cause* (published 1737), 9, 166.

<sup>158</sup> Gill *Faith* (published 1754), 30.

<sup>159</sup> Fuller ‘Defence’, *Works*, 1:174-175.

**Table 9 Gospel Standard Articles 3**

<b>Article 10</b> (first part) Spiritual death and spiritual life	We believe that all men are by nature so completely dead in trespasses and sins that they cannot, while in that state, know or feel anything of God in Christ, spiritually, graciously, and savingly.
<b>Article 34</b> (first part) Preaching of the gospel (exhorting the unregenerate)	We believe that any such expressions as convey to the hearers the belief that they possess a certain power to flee to the Saviour, to close in with Christ, to receive Christ, while in an unregenerate state, so that unless they do thus close with Christ, etc., they shall perish, are untrue, and must, therefore, be rejected. <sup>160</sup>

Present-day Gospel Standard representatives demonstrate the likeness between these articles and Gill's theology. Article 10 recognises 'the complete inability of man to contribute anything to his own salvation', and that 'spiritual life' in regeneration 'must precede any acceptable approach unto God'.<sup>161</sup> Article 34 cautions 'against assumption of inherent power', either of 'ministers to enforce', or hearers to perform, spiritual acts. Directly calling upon sinners to repent and believe is misleading, because it implies 'creature-power'. However it *is* everyone's duty to believe the written record of God's word concerning his Son and mankind's fall into sin, 'notwithstanding he is "without strength" to believe either'. Unbelief of this record 'is man's great sin and condemnation'.<sup>162</sup>

By contrast Murray, while fully acknowledging human inability, stoutly rejected any incompatibility between it, 'the appeal for faith, and the assertion of human responsibility in reference to the offer and demand of the gospel'. He saw it not as a hindrance but the precise way in which salvation comes: 'the gospel dovetails our helplessness,' and when convinced of it, God's grace comes with power into our inability.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> GS Articles, 19,41.

<sup>161</sup> Watts, *Goodly Heritage*, 26-27.

<sup>162</sup> Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 150,152.

<sup>163</sup> Murray, 'Inability', *Collected Writings*, 2:87-88.

### 3.4 No duty to believe: distinction between internal and external call

This distinction was used by Gill to further consolidate the polarity between elect and non-elect, and thus strengthen his case against gospel offers. Apart from the universal call by the light of creation and providence to serve and worship the one true God, Gill identified two more specific types of call: external and internal. The external call is by the ministry of the word, the prophets, John the Baptist, Christ, his apostles, and all succeeding ministers. The internal call 'is by the Spirit and grace of God' immediately to the heart. 'These two sometimes go together.'<sup>164</sup>

The external call comes to 'sinners in a state of nature and unregeneracy', and Gill detailed what it is not intended to do:

- it is **not** a call to them to regenerate and convert themselves, of which there is no instance; and which is the pure work of the Spirit of God:
- **nor** to make their peace with God, which they cannot make by any thing they can do; and which is only made by the blood of Christ:
- **nor** to get an interest in Christ, which is not got, but given:
- **nor** to the exercise of evangelical grace, which they have not, and therefore can never exercise:
- **nor** to any spiritual vital acts, which they are incapable of; being natural men and dead in trespasses ...
- **nor** is the gospel ministry an offer of Christ, and of his grace and salvation by him, which are not in the power of the ministers of it to give, nor of carnal men to receive;
- the gospel is **not** an offer, but a preaching of Christ crucified.

Nevertheless Gill believed this call has relevance to 'unregenerate sinners'. It calls them 'to perform the natural duties of religion; to a natural faith, to give credit to divine revelation, to believe the external report of the gospel, ... to repent of sin, ... to pray to God for forgiveness', to pray for daily mercies, to praise God, to attend the means of grace, to read the scriptures, to wait in hope for the inward call. Meanwhile the minister must proclaim their fallen, miserable, lost estate, their incapacity, inability and impotence to do anything spiritually good, 'and the whole to be left to the Spirit of God, to make application of it as he shall think fit.' Gill specified that this call is not universal, is frequently resisted and rejected, but it has its usefulness and serves various

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<sup>164</sup> Gill, *Body*, 2:282-283.



ends, producing reformation through a speculative knowledge of the gospel for civilised behaviour, morality and manners, and those it brings to temporary or notional faith are serviceable by their profession of religion for the gospel and for the elect. The second, inward, type of call, 'is always effectual' and cannot be resisted, because it comes only 'to saints, to such who have a work of grace already begun in them', subjects of a previous work of God's Spirit, to those who are 'labouring under a sense of sin, and under a spirit of bondage', to partake of the blessings of grace, to light, liberty, fellowship, peace, holiness, in Christ. It is always effectual because 'election and vocation are of equal extent', and concern the same subjects. The chosen are called. The called are chosen.<sup>165</sup>

'God does not require all men to believe in Christ.' The type of repentance and belief depends on the type of call received. The external call only requires legal repentance and natural faith, both non-salvific; national repentance, external reformation of manners, outward change of life. 'It will be difficult to prove, that God *anywhere* calls and invites all mankind, and particularly such who are not eventually saved, to spiritual and evangelical repentance.' But the internal call is 'unfrustrable', always accompanied by special grace and divine energy, effecting and enabling evangelical repentance and faith in the elect.<sup>166</sup>

The following Gospel Standard articles endorse this teaching of the effectual and ineffectual call.

**Table 10 Gospel Standard Articles 4**

<b>Article 12</b> (first part) Effectual calling ...	We believe in the effectual calling of all the elect vessels of mercy ... in God's appointed time, and that the work of regeneration, or new birth, is the sovereign work of God, and His work only, the sinner being as passive therein as in his first birth, and previously thereto dead in trespasses and sins. ...
<b>Article 24</b> Gospel invitations	We believe that the invitations of the Gospel, being spirit and life, are intended only for those who have been made by the blessed Spirit to feel their lost state as sinners and their need of Christ as their Saviour, and to repent of and forsake their sins. <sup>167</sup>

<sup>165</sup> Gill, *Body*, 2:283-292.

<sup>166</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 166,155,179-180.

<sup>167</sup> GS Articles, 21,34

Gospel Standard representatives Watts and Buss explain these articles in a way which clearly reflects the hyper-Calvinistic perspective of waiting till God chooses the time to instil faith. They demonstrate that a person is not saved or lost depending on his acceptance or rejection of gospel invitations. Christ knows his elect for whom he died; they will be irresistibly drawn to him, because they have been prepared beforehand. It is not enough to acknowledge that one is a sinner. One must be convicted by the Spirit to know one's weakness and bankruptcy. Ministers' failure to make this important distinction has caused many to be 'healed slightly'. This is why gospel invitations are neither indiscriminate nor promiscuous.<sup>168</sup> As Gosden explained, the invitations and promises are not *intended* for those who never come. 'Would an all-wise and righteous God invite those from whom He withholds the requisite influence of invincible grace to bring them into compliance?' The Holy Spirit precisely fulfils his 'sovereign "appointment," arranged in the eternal counsel of peace', and 'the favoured but unworthy subject of this sovereign operation is not consulted, his concurrence is not sought,' but he is irresistibly drawn with 'invincible exertion' to believe savingly, at 'a period known to God' but not the sinner, as 'our hymnwriter states':

The appointed time rolls on apace,  
Not to *propose*, but *call* by grace;  
To change the heart, renew the will,  
And turn the feet to Zion's hill.<sup>169</sup>

### 3.5 No duty to believe: distinction between special and natural faith

This distinction is unique to hyper-Calvinism, and creates a two-tier system of faith in Christ: natural and supernatural. Hussey introduced it, and Wayman used it to plead against duty-faith during the Modern Question controversy, to remove the culpability of the non-elect for not having 'that faith which is a special fruit of election grace, ... for not having that peculiar gift God never was pleased to bestow on him, ... for not having that work upon his soul God never thought good to work'.<sup>170</sup> Gill was in full agreement with him.

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<sup>168</sup> Watts, *Goodly Heritage*, 48-49.

<sup>169</sup> Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 122,46,39-40, quoting Hymn No 76, Gadsby, *Hymns*, 92.

<sup>170</sup> Wayman, *Defence*, 3.

Gill split faith into various kinds, his justification being that when Paul said ‘*though I have all faith*’ (I Cor 13:2), he meant ‘all sorts of faith’. ‘He means all sorts but one, namely, special faith; for whoever has that, has charity or love.’ There is a faith to work miracles, Gill said. There is historical faith, a faith which the law requires and obliges to, ‘mere assent to a set of propositions as true’. With this sort of temporary faith a person may believe all that is said about Jesus Christ, that he is the true God and eternal life, that he is the Son of God and Saviour of the world, that he became incarnate, suffered, died, was buried, rose and ascended. With this sort of faith a person may believe all the doctrines of the gospel, have an understanding of evangelical things, ‘yet be destitute of the true grace of God’, and ‘not have the root of the matter in him’. Gill appeared to think that the criteria for faith had changed with the passing of time. Back in John the apostle’s day, believing that Jesus is the Christ was proof of regeneration (I John 4:2, 5:1), ‘*whereas now*’ that Christianity is established, such faith could be an accident of birth. *Now* we know better than John: ‘to believe all this is no mark or sign of being born again.’ With this natural temporary faith one may understand evangelical things, prophesy and preach in Christ’s name, ‘attend unto and believe the Gospel-scheme’ but ‘fall short of the true light of special grace’. (This language is similar to Skepp’s, both in questioning biblical criteria for faith, and emphasising how far natural faith can go without being saving.) Thirdly Gill categorised ‘special and spiritual faith, to which salvation is annexed’. It ‘directs and encourages sensible sinners to look to Christ, and believe in him’, assuring them of salvation. Few have this kind of faith, and those that do, receive it from God, for it is the operation of his Spirit: ‘he produces it by his mighty power.’ And ‘this is the true reason why one believes, and another does not; as our Lord says of some, *ye believe not because ye are not of my sheep*.’ Believing is ‘the pure gift of God’, which he gives to one and denies to another. Gill denounced the popular term *saving faith*, ‘since it seems to derogate and detract from the glory of Christ,’ concentrating the mind on the act of faith rather than its object.<sup>171</sup>

These faith distinctions were embedded in Gill’s other distinctions; all were interconnected and mutually dependent. His teaching that ‘the obligation to believe in Christ, and so the faith to which men are obliged, are in proportion,

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<sup>171</sup> Gill, *Faith*, non-saving faith: 7-12, saving faith: 12-18; Gill, *Body*, 2:46.

and according to the nature of the revelation of the Gospel, which obliges them' was foundational. 'There is not a revelation of the Gospel made to all men, and all men are not bound to believe in Christ, much less to believe that Christ died for them.' General revelation 'only requires an historical faith, or bare assent to the truth. ... Such a faith is not saving.' On the other hand, pronounced Gill, 'if the revelation is internal, a special spiritual appropriating faith is the result of it.'<sup>172</sup> He stressed repeatedly that the duty of faith can never exceed the extent of revelation:

As is the revelation which is made to men, such is the faith that is required of them. If there is no revelation made unto them, no faith is required of them; and unbelief, or want of faith in Christ, will not be their damning sin.

So because God gives special faith, 'it is not the want of this faith in the blood of Christ, for the pardon of sins, that is the cause of any man's condemnation and death.' This is why no one can be held accountable for failing to believe what can never be true of them, or failing to produce what is beyond their capacity.<sup>173</sup> Thus Gill absolved the non-elect from the guilt of rejecting the Saviour: 'God never calls persons to evangelical repentance, or requires them to believe in Christ to the saving of their souls, but he gives that special grace, and puts forth that divine energy which enables them to believe and repent. God does not require all men to believe in Christ, and where he does, it is according to the revelation he makes of him.'<sup>174</sup> Logically therefore:

I do not think that any man will be punished for not accepting offered grace, he could not comply with or embrace, for want of further grace, because I do not believe that grace was ever offered to them.<sup>175</sup>

Conversely Gill's contemporary Abraham Taylor described genuine faith as assent to everything scripture says about Christ, as well as consent of the will to receive him as Saviour. Or, 'saving faith is a spiritual representation of Christ in the understanding, and a fiducial trust in him with the will; and the dividing the

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<sup>172</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 31-32.

<sup>173</sup> Gill, *Faith*, 29-32; also Gill, *Answer* 2:30-31, Gill, *Cause*, 158.

<sup>174</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 166.

<sup>175</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 181.

one from the other destroys faith.’<sup>176</sup> Gill’s division of faith did precisely that. He demeaned assent as natural or temporary faith. He exalted special faith as having nothing to do with the sinner’s understanding or will, nor a condition of entry into the covenant, but a direct, inevitable and irresistible result of election. Murray wrote that faith is a judgment of the mind that evidence is sufficient or the object is trustworthy. Since Christian revelation has no extrinsic evidence, scripture being autopistic or self-authenticating, the belief that scripture is the word of God ‘is inseparable from a state of salvation’; yet it is not faith in scripture that saves but faith in Christ.<sup>177</sup>

Gospel Standard spokesman Gosden, clearly influenced by Gill’s distinctions, contrasted the confusion resulting from the indefinite or ‘contingent application of redeeming grace’ with the certainty of the elect’s salvation, determined by divine will. ‘As for such as are non-elect, but participate (as is said) in the “residuum” of merit in Christ’s death because they believe, we know not what are their reactions. ... God save us from a contingent salvation.’<sup>178</sup> He appears to be saying with Gill that even though the non-elect may believe, their faith is not genuine or saving. At the formation of the Metropolitan Association of Strict Baptist Churches in 1871, this appendix was added to Article 6 of its Doctrinal Basis: ‘And that saving faith is not a legal duty but the sovereign and precious gift of God.’ John Hazelton was hereby ensuring that the Association was safeguarded from ‘the pernicious nature of Fullerite heresy’.<sup>179</sup>

### 3.6 No duty to believe: distinction between evangelical and legal repentance

As he had with faith, Gill created a two-tier system of repentance:

It should be observed, that repentance is either evangelical or legal, and this either personal or national. Evangelical repentance is not in the power of a natural man, but is the gift of God’s free grace. Legal repentance may be performed by particular persons, who are destitute of the grace of God,

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<sup>176</sup> Taylor, *Saving Faith*, 168-169, 189-190.

<sup>177</sup> Murray, ‘Faith’, *Collected Writings* 2:237, 241, 254.

<sup>178</sup> Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 31.

<sup>179</sup> Smith, ‘Hazelton’, *AHB* n8 (5 Nov 2015) <https://www.baptists.net/history/2015/11/john-hazelton-what-he-can-teach-us-today/>

and by all the inhabitants of a place, as the Ninevites, who repented externally.

These sharp divisions of repentance reflected the underlying division running through his theology between elect and non-elect. Because he did not believe the latter category could receive general commands to repentance, he reframed these to mean external legal repentance only. His justification was: 'These exhortations do not militate against the absolute election nor particular redemption of some only, since they are not made to all men.' Therefore he was able for example to redirect Peter's command 'Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out' (Acts 3:19) as a reference to 'national sin'. 'The conversion here pressed unto us, is not an internal conversion of the soul to God, which is the work of almighty power,' he wrote, 'but an outward reformation of life.' There are many exhortations with which people are powerless to comply: they 'are required to believe in Christ, to love the Lord with all their heart, to make themselves a new heart and a new spirit, yea, to keep the whole law of God.' Because they are unable to do so, God requires their repentance; although, because Christ did not die for them, such 'repentance would not procure remission of sins', explained Gill. (He actually claimed that neither kind of repentance procures remission of sin, but only Christ's blood.) Nevertheless it might help them enjoy 'temporal good' and reduce 'the aggravation of future punishment' as was the case with the Ninevites.<sup>180</sup> He taught that so far as repentance is 'a duty incumbent on men, it belongs to the law, as all duty does.' But the law gives no encouragement 'that God will receive repenting sinners into his grace and favour'. 'Legal repentance and contrition' produce a sense of wrath and judgment in the sinner, only resulting in 'worldly sorrow, which worketh death'.<sup>181</sup>

There are many instances of Gill redirecting general exhortations to repentance. 'Turn ye at my reproof' (Proverbs 1:23), because it addressed those who were foolish, scornful and ignorant, 'is not to repentance and conversion, but to an attendance to the external ministry of the word'. For its recipients 'had not sufficient grace' to repent. He refuted that this text favoured moral suasion:

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<sup>180</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 34-35.

<sup>181</sup> Gill, *Body*, 2:46-47.

Though the calls, invitations, and messages of God to men, by his ministers, may be sometimes (for they are not always) sufficient inducements to procure an external reformation, an outward repentance; ... yet these are not sufficient of themselves, without powerful grace, to produce true faith in Christ, evangelical repentance towards God, and new spiritual obedience, in life and conversation.

He disabled God's promise of his abundant pardon to *the wicked* and *unrighteous* when they repent (Isaiah 55:7). We have already observed him denying any conditionality in this promise (3.2), but he also removed any possibility of *the wicked* repenting, because 'none can truly forsake sin, or heartily turn to the Lord, but such who are influenced by the Spirit of God.' 'These words contain no promise to dead men,' no promise of pardon to the non-elect. Gill recast the recipients of the invitation from *the wicked* to 'sensible sinners ... oppressed with a sense of sin'. He went even further, to say that they were already regenerate, and therefore this and all other promises of pardon exclusively belong to God's elect. Nevertheless despite this reinterpretation, he insisted that the promise 'is not vain, empty, and delusory'.<sup>182</sup> (This was the charge of Whitby against whom he wrote, who argued of this very text that no promise to make a dead man live can be effective if the man is purely passive: 'To promise therefore, and give no Strength for the Performance; or to promise on an impossible Condition, ... is indeed to promise nothing.' This is to make the infinitely righteous and wise God delusory in his dealings with the sons of men, wrote Whitby.<sup>183</sup>) Gill also neutralised Ezekiel's command, 'Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions' (18:30), writing, 'The *repentance* here exhorted to, is not to be understood of an evangelical one, which is a *repentance unto life*, and *unto salvation*; but of a national one, for national iniquities, and to prevent national judgments.' He explained, 'Now, though there can be no true evangelical repentance without the unfrustrable grace of God, yet there may be a national external repentance without it; as in the case of the Ninevites.' Gill appears to exclude God's grace from legal repentance, although Jonah who witnessed Nineveh's repentance first-hand, *knew* God's grace, mercy, and kindness was its cause (Jonah 4:2). Finally, although examples abound, Gill weakened the apparently-universal 'God

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<sup>182</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 14-15, 20-21 (my italics).

<sup>183</sup> Whitby, *Discourse*, 236-237.

commandeth all men everywhere to repent' (Acts 17:30) with the following tortuous explanation: it does not suppose ability to comply, nor contradict its being a free-grace gift and covenant blessing, nor refer to everyone, 'but only regards the men of the then present age', distinct from those who lived before Christ's coming whom God overlooked and to whom he sent no messages. Gill attempted this explanation: 'But admitting that it has been God's command in all ages, and to all men that they repent; as all men are indeed bound, by the law of nature, to a natural repentance, though all men are not called by the gospel to an evangelical one; yet I see not what conclusions can be formed from hence against either absolute election or particular redemption.'<sup>184</sup> These examples show the lengths to which Gill went to control powerful universal commands and invitations to repentance.

This became one of several controversies between Gill and Taylor, and Gill's response to Taylor makes very clear his distinction between legal and evangelical repentance. Taylor, in two separate Lime Street lectures, warned of 'eager advocates for the doctrine of grace' who 'have done much harm to religion'. They teach that God loves and delights in his elect while still unsaved, that he sees no sin in his people, and that good works are not necessary for salvation. They decry exhortations to repentance as 'legal preaching', calling it 'low and mean stuff', because they 'separate what God has joined together'.<sup>185</sup> Gill responded directly to Taylor's comments, defending those who would not exhort people to repent. According to Gill's categories and distinctions, 'pressing men to duty, can be no other than legal preaching,' for duty always refers to the law, because the law demands obedience. 'We have had a controversy among us lately about preaching Christ, in the latitude and restrictive way' (another reference to the Modern Question perhaps), 'but men may controvert to the end of the world, it can never be proved, that ... pressing men to duty is preaching the gospel, unless it can be thought that good works are Christ, and that the law is gospel.' Gill confirmed that accordingly, law, duty and legal repentance go hand in hand. He accused Taylor of failing to make this all-important distinction when he accused 'antinomians' of condemning exhortations to repentance as 'low and mean stuff, but you do not tell us what

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<sup>184</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 23-24,35.

<sup>185</sup> Lime-St Lectures XII, XI: Taylor, 'Humble Enquiry', 'Vindication', *Defence*, 636-637,594-596.



kind of repentance is meant'. Gill confirmed his sharp distinction between evangelical and legal repentance to Taylor: evangelical repentance is to be found in the elect, springing from divine principles, and therefore not to be spoken lightly of. Exhortations to it are certainly not 'low and mean stuff'. But by contrast, legal repentance is outward confession, external humiliation, inward horror of punishment. It has no connection to 'true evangelical repentance ... and therefore is not to be valued and regarded.' Gill clearly stated his opinion of exhortations to repentance:

Now to exhort to this kind of repentance, or even to evangelical repentance, as within the compass of the power of man's will, and as a condition of the covenant of grace, and a term of acceptance with God, and in order to make peace with God, and gain the divine favour, which you know is the rant of some mens ministry: I say, to exhort to repentance with such views, and on such considerations as these, is low and mean stuff, too mean for, below, and unworthy of a minister of the gospel.<sup>186</sup>

Gospel Standard Baptists fully endorse Gill's distinctions concerning both faith and repentance.

**Table 11 Gospel Standard Articles 5**

<b>Article 26</b> Duty faith and duty repentance denied	We deny duty faith and duty repentance - these terms signifying that it is every man's duty to spiritually and savingly repent and believe. We deny also that there is any capability in man by nature to any spiritual good whatever. So that we reject the doctrine that men in a state of nature should be exhorted to believe in or turn to God. <sup>187</sup>
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Gosden admitted that 'some entertain a wholesome fear of the very term *duty* in relation to God, through its frequent misapplication.' He asked, 'What is every man duty-bound to believe? Surely not that each individual is himself interested in the redemption work of Christ. Man is not called upon to believe a lie.' He stated that under the preaching 'the elect are sought out,' for faith is God's 'peculiar gift' and repentance his 'spiritual grant', and neither can be 'the act of the unregenerate'. He complained, 'We are charged by some with preaching only to the elect, instead of "evangelizing" the world.' 'We are

<sup>186</sup> Gill, *Eternal Union*, 85-90.

<sup>187</sup> GS Articles, 35.

painfully anxious for the success of the gospel; ... But we are equally anxious not to deceive into a false notion of faith,' filling the church with 'nominal believers'. Therefore though we affirm it is man's duty to believe God's word, 'we consider it seriously erroneous to call upon all persons indiscriminately to perform such spiritual acts as repentance and faith' as if they possessed the power to do so.<sup>188</sup> Watts confirmed that man has plenty of duty towards God including keeping the ten commandments; but duty-faith and duty-repentance are unsound doctrines, because they mislead the sinner into thinking he can do the impossible. Indeed he may become so 'devout and earnest that it is often hard to distinguish natural faith from the true work of God upon the soul. But this is one area where the separating work of the ministry is so important.'<sup>189</sup>

One reason Fuller wrote his contribution to the Modern Question was to explode hyper-Calvinistic theories of distinctions in faith and repentance: 'to show ... that all the precepts of the Bible are only the different modes in which we are required to express our love to him; that, instead of its being true, that sinners are obliged to perform duties which have no spirituality in them, there are no such duties to be performed; and that, so far from their being exhorted to every thing excepting what is spiritually good, they are exhorted to nothing else.'<sup>190</sup>

### 3.7 No duty to believe: distinction between law and gospel

Gill's insistence on all duty, including faith and repentance, being legal, relied on his strict distinction between law and gospel:

I am entirely for calling things by their right names; preaching duty, is preaching the law; preaching the free grace of God, and salvation by Christ, is preaching the gospel; to say otherwise, is to turn the gospel into a law, and to blend and confound both together.

He believed 'gospel commands, gospel threatnings, and gospel duties ... are contradictions in terms,' and feared 'this loose and unguarded way of talking, tended to pave the way for *Neonomianism* among us,' causing 'much

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<sup>188</sup> Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 129-133.

<sup>189</sup> Watts, *Goodly Heritage*, 52-53.

<sup>190</sup> Fuller, 'Gospel Worthy', *Works* 1:15, also 9,72-73.

disturbance'.<sup>191</sup> Saving faith, he wrote, is not of the law, neither is the law of faith. '*Faith comes by hearing the word of God*; but by what part of it? not the law but the gospel.' For the law cannot reveal 'or give the least hint concerning' Christ. True faith 'is a blessing of the covenant of grace.'<sup>192</sup> There is nothing in the gospel that looks like a law, wrote Gill, 'it has no commands in it, but all promises; it is a pure declaration of grace and salvation.'<sup>193</sup>

Conversely, Taylor taught that the Spirit has joined law and gospel, and 'vain man' must not separate them. The Spirit employs both law and gospel 'when he works faith in the heart of sinners', and preachers must follow his example: they are 'to tell a person of his duty', and then 'where he must go for strength to perform it'; 'they must awaken and wound by the law, and they must comfort and heal by the Gospel; ... This is rightly to divide the word of truth.' He described those (likely thinking of Gill) who associate duty with 'the odious name of legal preaching', who reject sinners being exhorted to come to Christ in belief and repentance, 'under the pretence of these things being above the power of man; as if sinners were to be treated like brutes, and not like rational creatures.'<sup>194</sup> The year following the London ordinations of both Hussey and Gill, *The Twelve Queries* of the 1721 General Assembly of the Church of Scotland answered the first Query by uniting law and gospel. It confirmed that the law 'must require faith and repentance, as well as it does all other good works.' It warned that 'the teaching that faith and repentance are gospel commands, may yet again open the door to Antinomianism, as it sometimes did already.' 'As to faith and repentance, though ability to exercise them, and acceptance of them, be by the gospel; yet it is evident that they must be regulated by the same law, the transgression of which made them necessary. ... The holy law of God is the rule of our repentance. ... And why faith, when it has God-Mediator, or God-Redeemer, for its object, may not be from the same law as when it had God-Creator, or God-Preserver for its object, we cannot see.'<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Gill, *Eternal Union*, 87-88.

<sup>192</sup> Gill, *Faith*, 14-15.

<sup>193</sup> Gill, *Body*, 2:241.

<sup>194</sup> Taylor, *Saving Faith*, 152-156.

<sup>195</sup> *Twelve Queries*, title, 5,8,10-11.

Gill's sharp separation between law and gospel continues to distinguish Strict Baptists, and is crucial to modern hyper-Calvinism. Smith explains that no sinner can be duty-bound to both covenants simultaneously. Unregenerate sinners are 'held accountable under the terms and promises of the Covenant of Works'. Once the sinner is regenerated, he is released from that covenant and belongs to the covenant of grace. Hence,

The non-elect have absolutely no part in the Covenant of Grace—it is not their duty to believe savingly on Christ, nor is it the duty of the preacher to offer Christ to them. Christ does not represent them, neither has He made provision for them through His Mediatorial work.

According to Smith, these distinctions between the two covenants 'is what ultimately separates' the hyper-Calvinist from the moderate Calvinist. He argues that the central issue around which hyper-Calvinism's rejection of duty-faith and the free offer revolves is not the sinner's inability to believe, but 'the terms and promises of two very different covenants'. The hyper-Calvinist 'rightly recognizes the unregenerate and the regenerate can only be under the terms and promises of one or the other covenant at any given time'. Because moderate Calvinists (Fullerites as Smith calls them) 'assume all sinners are duty-bound to both covenants simultaneously',

they demand duties of the unregenerate that only belong to the regenerate (such as believing on Christ), and then they demand duties of the regenerate that only belong to the unregenerate (such as perfectly obeying God's law).

Thus they 'preach a confused gospel mingled with works and grace', facilitating false conversions on one hand, and the elect returning to the law's bondage on the other.<sup>196</sup> Smith recently wrote endorsing hyper-Calvinism and the Gospel Standard Articles of Faith.<sup>197</sup>

### 3.8 Eternal union and eternal justification: implications for faith

Gill taught that the union of God's elect with himself, their adoption, justification and acceptance were 'eternal, internal and immanent acts in God',

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<sup>196</sup> Smith, 'High-Calvinism', *AHB* (27 April 2016) <http://www.baptists.net/history/2016/04/high-calvinism-fleshing-it-out/>

<sup>197</sup> Smith, 'Gospel Standard Articles', *AHB* (18 July 2022) <http://www.baptists.net/history/2022/07/the-articles-of-faith-of-the-gospel-standard-churches/>

complete, and all ‘of the same date’.<sup>198</sup> His understanding of the covenant of redemption (2.3) impacted and enabled this view, and he robustly defended it, rejecting the traditional understanding of union and justification. It was the linchpin of his hyper-Calvinism, allowing him to form a system controlled entirely by God’s eternal decrees, minimising human agency and emphasising passivity, removing justification from time and the necessity of faith, logically excluding the duty of repentance and faith and the offer of salvation.

### ***eternal union***

Gill taught that this election-union, as he and Hussey both called it, is a conjugal, federal and legal union, which cemented and united the elect to God so they became ‘a part of himself’, enabling them to receive ‘grants of grace ... before the world began’, an indissoluble bond unbroken by their fall in Adam, or actual sins before or after conversion. Their ‘open being in Christ’ is ‘in consequence of a secret being in him from everlasting’.<sup>199</sup> Where Gill differed from traditional understanding, or as he put it, those divines who ‘tread in the common beaten path’, was the timing and nature of that union. ‘It is generally said’, he stated, that the elect ‘are not united to Christ until they believe, and that the bond of union is the Spirit on Christ’s part, and faith on ours.’ But he challenged this and the divines who taught it: ‘This smells so prodigious rank of self, that one may justly suspect that something rotten and nauseous lies at the bottom of it.’ First, Gill argued, the bond of union is *not* the Spirit on Christ’s part. All his work in the hearts of God’s elect is a consequence of their being eternally ‘joined, glued, closely united to Christ’, and the Spirit’s operation ‘is the evidence’, not the bond, of their union to Christ. Second, Gill argued, the bond of union is *not* faith on our part. We cannot be united by faith as an infused principle, because that faith is not ours but God’s gift and operation. Neither can we be united by faith as an act of ours, because that would unite us by a work and not by grace. Besides, Gill contested, unlike love faith lacks bonding qualities: ‘there is nothing in it that is of a cementing and uniting nature; it is not a grace of union, but of communion.’ Gill immediately proceeded to describe faith thus: ‘Faith, indeed, looks to Christ, lays hold on him, embraces him, and cleaves unto him,’ yet he denied this gives it bonding

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<sup>198</sup> Gill, *Body*, 1:290.

<sup>199</sup> Gill, *Body*, 1:290-294.

qualities. This no more unites a person to Christ, he insisted, than a beggar is united to someone from whom he receives alms, (or, as he wrote to his critic who accused him of ‘a flagrant contradiction’, handling a pen unites it to the hand, or embracing unites two people. They remain distinct entities.<sup>200</sup>) Thus he roundly rejected the divines’ claims:

To talk of faith in Christ before union to Christ, Is a most preposterous,  
absurd, and irrational notion.  
Faith is the fruit and effect of union.

Gill continued in his defence. ‘There must be a principle of spiritual life before there can be any faith,’ which simply activates and exercises this life. Union before faith is ‘fitly and fully exemplified’ in Christ’s simile of the vine and branches. ‘Faith’, said Gill, ‘is a fruit of the Spirit, which grows upon the branches’ already attached to the vine. To suggest there could be the fruit of faith before union with Christ, is contrary to Christ’s express words that the branches cannot bear fruit independent of the vine.

Faith does not give us a being in Christ, or unites us to him; it is the fruit, effect, and evidence of our being in Christ, and union to him. ‘Tis true, indeed, that God’s elect don’t know their being in Christ, and union to him, until they believe; then what was before secret is made manifest.

This all explains why Gill believed God everlastingly, unchangeably and invariably loves and delights in his elect ‘while in a state of nature’. If God loved his Son from everlasting, he has loved his elect from everlasting too, regarding them with the same complacency and delight. For, being always in Christ, they were always considered righteous. Despite the objection that the elect before conversion are destitute of faith, without which it is impossible to please God, Gill stressed that both ‘before faith and without it’, the persons of God’s elect may be well pleasing to him.<sup>201</sup>

The preceding views of Gill were written in direct response to Taylor who in his first Lime Street lecture had said that ‘some ignorant enthusiastic preachers insisted ... on eternal union with Christ, and that sin could do a believer no harm,

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<sup>200</sup> Gill, *Truth Defended*, 64-65.

<sup>201</sup> Gill, *Eternal Union*, 7,29-43,45-46,56-57,59-61.

but all wise and thoughtful men abhorred such immoral conceits.’<sup>202</sup> Gill was incensed at Taylor associating this doctrine with antinomianism, accusing him of ‘lameness and impertinence’. He claimed to have ‘carefully perused’ all the antinomian writers ‘with a greedy expectation of frequently meeting with the doctrine of eternal union, in hopes of finding arguments for the confirmation of it, and of receiving more light into it’.<sup>203</sup> There was no doubting Crisp’s views, or their influence on Gill, who liberally quoted him. In a sermon entitled ‘Faith the fruit of union’, Crisp insisted ‘an elect person is united unto Christ before he can believe on him,’ and denied faith is ‘an instrument to unite a soul unto Christ’:

The life of every elect person hath a being in Christ, before he believes; believing, therefore, doth not produce a new life that was not before, only it manifests that which was before, and it makes that life, which was before, an active life.

Faith has no bonding properties, he avowed: there is ‘not such a thing as an uniting, cementing, or knitting power in faith’. Crisp was forced to deny that believing and coming to Christ are the same thing, because coming implies a distance between the sinner and Christ, which would undermine eternal union. As to faith, Crisp said it ‘is nothing else but the echo of the heart, answering the foregoing voice of the Spirit, and word of grace. “Thy sins are forgiven thee,” saith the Spirit; ... my sins are forgiven me, saith faith.’ In a footnote, Gill strongly defended Crisp’s views, warning of ‘the dangerous consequences following the contrary notion’, particularly mentioning Daniel Williams who refuted Crisp’s antinomianism. Gill quoted Witsius and other ‘eminent divines’ who corroborated the doctrine of eternal union.<sup>204</sup>

Gill’s critic mentioned previously (2.2, 3.3), whose book is examined in the following section, exposes Gill’s reasoning regarding faith. What if we are united to Christ by our faith? he asked. ‘Does this tend to lessen the exceeding Grace of God? Does it therefore follow, that we trust to the Act of Faith, for our Justification or Salvation? What, because we put forth the Hand of Faith (which we acknowledge God hath given us) to embrace our dear Saviour ... do we hereby

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<sup>202</sup> Lime-St Lecture II: Taylor, ‘Insufficiency’, *Defence*, 35.

<sup>203</sup> Gill, *Eternal Union*, 3-17.

<sup>204</sup> Crisp, *Christ Alone*, 2:234-236, 242-244, 107-108, Gill 235n\*; (Williams, *Gospel-Truth*, 90-101).

lessen, or any way derogate from the Glory of divine Grace?’ He also criticised Gill’s ‘flagrant Contradiction’ between two consecutive sentences (noted above). He was bemused at ‘how undesignedly this Author’s Pen has infallibly proved the very Doctrine which he so stiffly denies,’ rejecting faith’s uniting qualities in one sentence and proving it in the next. ‘It is an impossible Task’, he wrote, ‘to prove, that what my Hand lays hold of, it is not united to; or, that a cleaving to, and embracing of a beloved Object, is not a joining or uniting Act.’<sup>205</sup>

Whether Gill’s view on eternal union informed his no-offer doctrine or *vice versa*, they were certainly co-dependent, and diverged from the Reformed understanding of faith, as is clearly demonstrated by the following summary of Murray’s writings on faith. ‘Regeneration is the act of God and of God alone. But faith is not the act of God; it is not God who believes in Christ for salvation, it is the sinner. ... It might be said: this is a strange mixture. God alone regenerates. We alone believe. ... But this is precisely the way it is.’ To better understand this Murray explored the *warrant* and *nature* of faith. First, four facts constitute the *warrant* of faith: the universal gospel offer, the unconditional demand, the unfailing promise conditional on faith, and the Saviour’s all-sufficiency. ‘From whatever angle we may view it, it is full, free, and unrestricted.’ God entreats, invites, commands, calls and presents, ‘and he does this to all without distinction or discrimination.’ The gospel confronts everyone with the demand for repentance and faith. It insults God to require more as the warrant for faith, such as ‘additional information’ or ‘some precedent, saving experience’ or personal assurance or introspective preoccupation. ‘All to whom the gospel comes are in the same position as to the opportunity, privilege, and responsibility.’ Murray asserted that the doctrines of election and limited atonement ‘place no fence around the gospel offer’, because ‘the free offer comes from the heart of God’s sovereign will unto salvation’. Second, Murray continued, *the nature of faith* consists of knowledge, assent, and trust. ‘Faith is a whole-souled movement of intelligent, consenting, and confiding self-commitment.’ Faith is knowledge passing into conviction, conviction passing into confidence. It is engagement of person to person. The Reformers’ emphasis was ‘that faith brings the soul into direct contact with’ Christ. Faith unites the sinner

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<sup>205</sup> Anon, *Some Doctrines*, 81-85 cf Gill, *Eternal Union*, 35.



to Christ in the bonds of abiding attachment and entrustment, and this union ensures that Christ's saving power becomes operative in him. Faith is in the sphere of our responsible action. Christ must be offered to lost sinners without 'reserve or restraint'; he 'cannot be brought too near to men in the free overtures of his grace'. Our inability is no excuse, and provides no reason, for unbelief. Faith and repentance, impossible to disentangle, are the conditions of salvation.<sup>206</sup>

At no point is there correspondence between Murray and Gill. There could not be because Gill refused to accept the paradox of the 'strange mixture'. Thus he complicated faith's warrant and changed faith's nature. He kept the sinner at a distance from God rather than bringing him 'into direct contact'. He did not preach the free offer of the gospel because he did not believe faith is the sinner's responsibility. This is reflected in his Articles which replaced Keach's. Note the 1689 Confession includes belief in God's word as part of saving faith, unlike Gill's assessment of it as assent only, temporary faith.

**Table 12 Comparison of Articles 3**

Keach's Articles	13 Of Justification	'It is by Faith that we receive the Atonement, or by which means (as an Instrument) we come to apprehend and receive him, and to have personal Interest in him, ...'
	19 Of Faith and Repentance	'Faith ... is an Instrument whereby we receive, take hold of, and wholly rest upon Jesus Christ, as offered to us in the Gospel. ... no Man can savingly repent, unless he believes in Jesus Christ, ...' <sup>207</sup>
1689 Confession	7.2 Of God's Covenant	'he freely offereth unto Sinners, Life and Salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them Faith in him, that they may be saved;'
	14.2 Of Saving Faith	'By this Faith, a Christian believeth to be true, whatsoever is revealed in the Word,' obeying its commands, fearing its threatenings, embracing its promises, and principally 'accepting, receiving, and resting upon [Christ] alone ...'
Gill's Declaration	8	'The work of regeneration, conversion, sanctification, and faith, is not an act of man's

<sup>206</sup> Murray, *Redemption*, 106-116; Murray 'Faith', *Collected Writings* 2:254-263.

<sup>207</sup> Keach, *Articles*, 12,18.

		free-will and power, but of the mighty, efficacious and irresistible grace of God.’ <sup>208</sup>
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### *eternal justification*

Although this theory has been held by all major antinomians and hyper-Calvinists, as Daniel confirms, Gill was its champion both as to the time of justification (eternal or temporal) and its relation to faith (before or after). Moreover its proponents rarely claim the doctrine is explicitly stated in scripture but inferred from explicitly-stated premises.<sup>209</sup> He appealed to theologians who he claimed shared his view, but he also distanced himself from them by going ‘a step higher’.<sup>210</sup> Gill distinguished justification into ‘active’ and ‘passive’. Active justification is God’s internal, eternal, immanent, abiding decree to justify his elect people. ‘As God’s will to elect, is the election of his people, so his will to justify them, is the justification of them.’ It is ‘wholly without them, entirely resides in the divine mind, and lies in his estimating, accounting, and constituting them righteous’, at the time of the decree. Gill asserted:

No new will can arise in God; God wills nothing in time, but what he willed from eternity; and if it was the eternal will of God not to punish sin in his people, but in his Son, then they were eternally discharged, acquitted from sin, and secured from everlasting wrath ...; and if they were eternally discharged from sin, and freed from punishment, they were eternally justified.

Gill divorced justification not only from time but from faith. ‘Faith is not the cause but an effect of justification.’ Faith is not its cause ‘in any sense’, not its moving, its meritorious, its instrumental cause:

It is no part of, nor any ingredient in it; it is a complete act in the eternal mind of God, without the being or consideration of faith, nor any foresight of it; a man is as much justified before as after it, in the account of God.<sup>211</sup>

Gill identified passive justification as ‘the termination and application of’ active justification to believers’ consciences, being no more ‘than a perception, evidence, and manifestation, of what is properly justification’. This statement

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<sup>208</sup> Gill, *Declaration*, 6.

<sup>209</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 305-306. For more, time:307-317, relation to faith: 318-330.

<sup>210</sup> Gill, *Justification*, 49.

<sup>211</sup> Gill, *Body*, 1:298-306.

of Gill's was corroborating Crisp's teaching that 'Justification is an act of Christ, it is not an act of faith;' faith only serves to declare what is already done. Therefore we should 'take heed we do not over-honour' faith, and give it Christ's reserved prerogative. For although 'faith itself is not sin, ... faith acted by believers is full of sin; ... and how can that which is sinful justify man from sinfulness?' Both men used the text 'Faith is the evidence of things not seen' to argue for eternal justification which must pre-exist the faith of which it is evidence.<sup>212</sup> Gill specified that 'the justification which is by, at, or upon believing, is not properly justification', and therefore the expression 'justified by faith' must be 'understood not in a proper, but in an improper, tropical, or metonymical sense'; in other words, using 'faith' figuratively not literally. For true justification is irrespective of faith, 'that is to say, God does not justify any because they believe in Christ.' It provides the soul with a sense of well-being that one was justified from eternity. Faith 'is of great use for our comfortable apprehension of it', a grace providing enjoyment of peace and happiness. But it has no causal influence upon justification; it merely assures of its pre-existence. Gill denied that faith justifies on the grounds that it is 'an act of ours', a duty which belongs to the law, therefore a work, and a work cannot justify, for no one shall be justified by the deeds of the law. 'Besides', he taught, 'faith is imperfect, it has many deficiencies,' and God will never reckon a partial conformity to the law as righteousness. Hence he wished to correct the 'vulgar' mistake of calling faith 'justifying faith'.<sup>213</sup> Despite this, when defending himself against antinomianism, he insisted 'I no ways set aside, nor in the least oppose, the doctrine of justification by faith; I assert, that there is no knowledge of justification, no comfort from it, nor any claim of interest in it, until a man believes.'<sup>214</sup> The eternally-justified elect 'were at a distance from him with respect to communion, though not with respect to union', and once the Spirit creates the conscious awareness of this union and justification they are brought 'into an open state of favour with him'.<sup>215</sup> Naturally this informed Gill's view on

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<sup>212</sup> Crisp, *Christ Alone*, 1:91-92, Gill, n\*†; Gill, *Justification*, 42-43.

<sup>213</sup> Gill, *Justification*, 12,62-66,19-22.

<sup>214</sup> Gill, *Moral Nature*, 42.

<sup>215</sup> Gill, *Christ's Satisfaction*, 11-12.

what he called ‘the sum and substance of the gospel, ... that is, that God sees no sin in his people.’<sup>216</sup>

Gill’s 1729 *Declaration* proved its significance again when the very next year he published his treatise on eternal justification. He had been preaching and lecturing on the subject for some time, and at the request of subscribers to his Wednesday evening lectures, these sermons were published. Given its revolutionary nature, he made sure to include ‘the testimonies of some great and good men, which I collected and read to you from the pulpit, ... concurring with me in this truth’. The chapter concerning the date of justification, which was ‘the principal reason’ for publishing, occupies over half the book.<sup>217</sup> In his *Declaration* he deliberately removed any previous references in his church’s Articles linking justification with faith, or placing it in a temporal context. He also ‘avoided earlier statements that rejected’ eternal justification. Thus he opened his hearers’ and readers’ minds to the notion of eternal justification, paving the way for its bold vindication in his treatise the following year.<sup>218</sup> Note the first three Confessions’ use of the word **actual(ly)** referring to time. Gill on the other hand believed the word actual was relevant to eternal justification. He wrote, ‘I have carefully avoided calling justification, or union from eternity, actual; though for no other reason than this,’ to prevent anyone imagining the elect had an actual existence at the time of justification. ‘Otherwise ... I believe, eternal justification is actual, as it is an immanent act in God that justifies; and eternal union is actual, as it is an act of God’s everlasting love to his elect, whereby he has knit and united them to himself.’<sup>219</sup>

**Table 13 Comparison of Articles 4**

Keach’s Articles	13 Of Justification Postscript	‘Justification ... when applied to us, we in our own Persons are <b>actually</b> justified,’ ‘ <b>Actual</b> , of all the Elect in Christ on believing;’ <sup>220</sup>
1689 Confession	Of Justification	

<sup>216</sup> Gill, *Eternal Union*, 64.

<sup>217</sup> Gill, *Justification*, Dedication 3-4 .

<sup>218</sup> Oliver, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 19-20.

<sup>219</sup> Gill, *Truth Defended*, 55-56. Note: Daniel reads Gill’s words to mean that justification is decretive not actual, partially quoting him and inserting the word ‘only’: Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 312.

<sup>220</sup> Keach, *Articles*, 12-13, Postscript 37.

	11.2  11.4	‘Faith thus receiving and resting on Christ, and his Righteousness, is the alone instrument of Justification:’  ‘God did from all eternity decree to justifie all the Elect, ... Nevertheless they are not justified personally, untill the Holy Spirit, doth in due time <b>actually</b> apply Christ unto them.’
Westminster Confession of Faith	Of Justification 11.2 11.4	‘Faith ... is the alone instrument of justification;’ ‘God did, from all eternity, decree to justify all the elect ... nevertheless they are not justified, until the Holy Spirit doth in due time <b>actually</b> apply Christ unto them.’
Gill’s Declaration	7	‘The justification of God’s Elect, is only by the righteousness of Christ imputed to them, without the consideration of any works ... done by them;’ <sup>221</sup>

Ivimey stated that this doctrine was not recognised among the Particular Baptists, until Skepp, Gill and Brine, ‘introduced and maintained’ it.<sup>222</sup> In Brine’s own *Defence* of it, he acknowledged, ‘This great doctrine has been fully stated, and strongly defended, by Mr. *Gill*.’<sup>223</sup> Gill argued persuasively and assertively on this controversial subject: ‘What I have now said, I think, perfectly agrees not only with the scriptures of truth, but with what some of the best and soundest divines have said on this subject.’<sup>224</sup> Aware of his endorsing a doctrine strongly associated with doctrinal antinomianism,<sup>225</sup> and also of its divergence from the *Westminster Confession* and other creeds, Gill frequently appealed to Twisse, Pemble, Parker, Goodwin, Ames, Witsius, Maccovius and others for support. Despite his defensive protestations,<sup>226</sup> this doctrine made Gill vulnerable, as his critics were quick to comment.<sup>227</sup> He knew it himself: ‘I have been traduced as an *Antinomian*, for innocently asserting, that the essence of justification lies in the eternal will of God.’ But he claimed that this accusation was ‘mere noise

<sup>221</sup> Gill, *Declaration*, 6.

<sup>222</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:467-468.

<sup>223</sup> Brine, *Defence*, 5.

<sup>224</sup> Gill, *Justification*, 66-67.

<sup>225</sup> Baxter, *Aphorismes*, 173; Berkouwer, *Faith*, 152; Toon, *Emergence*, 28.

<sup>226</sup> eg Gill *Doctrines* 92-93. (For Daniel’s opinion on Gill’s relationship to antinomianism: Daniel, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 171-190.)

<sup>227</sup> see Robison, ‘Legacy’, *BQ* (July 1971) 121.

and stupidity'.<sup>228</sup> Antinomianism is more than denying the law's validity in the believer's life, however. As G C Berkouwer writes, it constantly stresses that God has completed everything with nothing for believers to do, ascribing any activity of theirs as 'a refined form of work-righteousness', an attempt to add to Christ's finished work, as though it were insufficient. He observed that the logic of antinomianism could not find its home in anything temporal, and thus its thinking 'came to rest finally in the doctrine of eternal justification'.<sup>229</sup> Gill did not address or accept this aspect of antinomianism. Well aware of the accepted orthodox view, and that Beart had written specifically against Hussey's views on eternal justification, and the furore surrounding his own views ('such a noise about what I have written on that subject'), Gill robustly defended himself:

I am not the aggressor. ...

When I published my discourses on the doctrine of Justification, I had no design to move a controversy, nor any inclination to one: And have, for almost two years past, bore with patience the declamations of the pulpit, both at *Pinnars-Hall* and elsewhere. ...

I solemnly declare, I have not met with any thing, either in conversation, or from the pulpit, that has given the least conviction of a mistake: And if any of the learned Gentlemen, who have declared against the doctrine of eternal justification, will be pleased to offer any thing to consideration, I shall carefully attend to it; but I hope it will be more to the purpose than their pulpit effusions, otherwise it will be unworthy of my notice.<sup>230</sup>

This doctrine was the ideal scaffold for Gill's various distinctions, and it logically eliminated gospel offers and conditions. We have noted Gill's innovative presentation of the covenant of redemption in which he 'rejected any notion of conditionality' (2.3). By his doctrine of justification and union as eternal acts of God which emphasised human passivity yet further, he ensured that 'any notion of temporality' was also removed, Rathel observes. He radically 'negated the outworking of the divine economy in history and reformulated salvation' to occur entirely within the eternal covenant. This approach 'left no room for human agency, and it severed justification completely from the instrumentality of faith'. The only role he permitted faith was 'simply the existential awareness

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<sup>228</sup> Gill, *Moral Nature*, 41-42.

<sup>229</sup> Berkouwer, *Faith*, 148-150.

<sup>230</sup> Gill, *Eternal Union*, Postscript 94-95.

that one has indeed been eternally justified'.<sup>231</sup> George observed that through Gill's and Brine's work this 'particularly important high-Calvinistic doctrine ... was often used to justify excluding open invitations to believe the gospel'.<sup>232</sup> Ivimey understood that Gill's doctrine of eternal justification directly enabled his denial of the obligation of faith, and 'as a necessary consequence' eliminated the need to offer Christ to anyone.<sup>233</sup> Ivimey's analysis is endorsed by Daniel, who notes Gill's tendency to consider the eternal to be 'definite and actual and real', and the temporal a mere 'shadow and manifestation'.<sup>234</sup> Berkouwer observed that eternal justification as an act of divine sovereignty 'arises from the depths of God's secret life', necessarily freeing it from every human tie: 'Faith is shed of any creative function and retains only what we may call its receptive function.'<sup>235</sup> Or, in Steele's words, 'My faith is simply a waking up to the fact that I have always been saved—a realization of what was done before I had any being.'<sup>236</sup> 'Faith', as Seymour observes, 'is simply the manifestation of an eternal secret.' Because, and this is the hyper-Calvinistic crux of eternal justification, 'If a man believes, this is his certain evidence that he has been chosen by God, but if he has not been chosen, faith is impossible. Nothing a man can do will ever alter the eternal choice.'<sup>237</sup>

Murray affirmed that faith is the antecedent of justification. This was the opposite of Gill's teaching. Even though justification is an act 'of God alone', the human activity of faith is required. It is the 'initial and primary act of faith in Jesus Christ' by which we are united to him and invested with his righteousness. God justifies 'upon the event of faith'. Faith is the 'indispensable instrumentality', the prerequisite of justification.<sup>238</sup> Similarly Flavel in his discourse on antinomianism wrote that saving faith is not 'a persuasion more or less of Christ's love to us, or a manifestation in our consciences of the actual remission of our sins before we had a being; but in receiving Christ as the gospel

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<sup>231</sup> Rathel, 'Gill and Redemption', *JRT* (Jan 2018), 386,390-391,393.

<sup>232</sup> Roberts, 'Fuller', ch3: *Theologians*, 38.

<sup>233</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:272-273.

<sup>234</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 316,314.

<sup>235</sup> Berkouwer, *Faith*, 145.

<sup>236</sup> Steele, *Antinomianism*, 35.

<sup>237</sup> Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 76.

<sup>238</sup> Murray, *Redemption*, 128-130.

offers him for righteousness and life.’<sup>239</sup> Fuller also linked justification before faith to antinomianism: justification does not consist in the purpose of God not to impute sin, he wrote, for ‘it does not belong to the secret, but to the revealed will of God.’ ‘Faith is necessary to justification, and so is repentance to forgiveness. ... As the scriptures pronounce no sinner justified till he believes, so they declare no sin to be forgiven till it is confessed and forsaken.’<sup>240</sup>

### 3.9 Antipathy to Arminianism

‘If there is one thing that characterizes a Hyper-Calvinist,’ wrote Daniel, ‘it is his uncompromising and vehement opposition to Arminianism. ... One is left in no doubt about their personal animosity.’<sup>241</sup> Gill hunted it throughout, according to Spurgeon.<sup>242</sup> It was his nemesis, threatening to invade and topple his entire hyper-Calvinistic scheme, because Arminianism’s unrestricted view of the atonement enabled offers of salvation, which obliged men to believe. Gill’s syllogism could be presented thus:

- 1 Universal redemption and universal offers are inseparable.
- 2 But redemption is not universal; it is particular.
- 3 Therefore universal offers are inadmissible.

But in truth both Gill’s and Arminian reasoning coincided in the incompatibility of particular redemption and general offers. The Arminian solution was to deny particular redemption and offer the gospel; hyper-Calvinism’s was to defend particular redemption and deny offers. This defence is seen in Gill’s circumscribed wording, echoed in Gospel Standard Article 6 (Table 14 below).

Thomas Chalmers thought the doctrine of particular redemption ‘a most unpractical and useless theory’. Its ‘somewhat arithmetical’ comparison between the quantity of Christ’s suffering and the number to be saved is ‘untasteful speculation’. Worse than that, it subtracts from the freeness of the gospel, disabling ministers by restricting Christ’s death to the elect. It abuses

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<sup>239</sup> Flavel, ‘Antinomianism’, *Works* 3:557,564-566.

<sup>240</sup> see Fuller, ‘Antinomianism’, *Works* 4:185-187.

<sup>241</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 113.

<sup>242</sup> Spurgeon, *Commenting*, 9.



the high and hidden topic of predestination and mystifies the clear and accessible message of salvation, when in fact there is nothing in that doctrine to limit or confine the universality of the gospel offer.<sup>243</sup> The ‘Marrow men’ were ‘firm believers’ in particular redemption, explained Macleod, but when it came to the gospel offer, they were ‘unambiguous universalists’.<sup>244</sup>

Gill was compelled to defend God’s sovereignty against encroaching Arminianism with its emphasis on human responsibility. Daniel observes that ‘human responsibility is based upon divine holiness,’ so when attacking Arminianism hyper-Calvinists are essentially ‘pitting one attribute of God against another, as if one needs to make a choice and not accept both’. ‘True Calvinism holds the two complementary doctrines of sovereignty and responsibility in balance, but both of them become monsters when separated from each other.’ Gill along with other hyper-Calvinists denied that Arminianism has any aspect of truth he himself lacked.<sup>245</sup> Because he failed to accept that historic Calvinism was the ideal congruence of consistent particularism with the promiscuous and universal offer of Christ, he mistakenly identified the enemy as Arminianism. He wrote: ‘Arminians frequently argue from an universal offer of the Gospel to an universal redemption; such whose ministrations run in the strain of offers and tenders, would do well to consider this, and deliver themselves from this argument.’<sup>246</sup> Arminians were not the enemy, as Chalmers identified:

The advocates of universal redemption are quite at one with ourselves as to the reception which the universal offer should meet with from all men. It should meet with universal acceptance, and should be pressed, too, on universal acceptance. ...

We agree in respect to the part which man has to do with the question.

We differ in respect to the part which God has to do with the question.

There is not an Arminian or Universalist who contends more zealously than we for the duty of the preacher to urge the offers of the gospel upon every man, and the duty of every man to accept of these offers.<sup>247</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Chalmers, *Institutes*, 2:418-420.

<sup>244</sup> Macleod, ‘Reformed theology’, *Theology in Scotland* (2010), 12-13.

<sup>245</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 116-117.

<sup>246</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 53.

<sup>247</sup> Chalmers, *Institutes*, 2:421-422.

This, coming from Chalmers, was exactly why Daniel only ‘partly’ agreed to Toon’s analysis that Arminianism was the theological system to which hyper-Calvinists showed the greatest animosity. As Daniel correctly wrote, ‘they also greatly oppose those lesser Calvinists who are, from their perspective, semi-Arminian.’<sup>248</sup>

Gill’s *Cause of God and Truth* was his major polemic against Arminianism, answering Daniel Whitby’s *Discourse on the Five Points* in a similar way that Hussey wrote to confute Hunt.<sup>249</sup> Gill repeatedly challenged Whitby on the extent of the atonement. To Whitby’s concern that restricting Christ’s death removed the necessity of preaching the duty of faith,<sup>250</sup> Gill simply answered that none ‘are exhorted to believe in Christ for salvation’ but those who ‘sensible’ sinners, ‘who have believed already, and do know that Christ has died for them, and that they are of the number of God’s elect’.<sup>251</sup> To Whitby’s argument for ‘the Import of all those Texts of Scripture which ... command all Men to believe, and promise Salvation to them upon that Condition’,<sup>252</sup> Gill’s responded:

As for those texts of Scripture, I know of none, that exhort and command all men, all the individuals of human nature, to repent, and believe in Christ for salvation; they can only, at most, concern such persons who are under the gospel dispensation; and, in general, only regard an external repentance and reformation, and an historical faith in, or assent to, Jesus as the Messiah.<sup>253</sup>

At the time of writing, ‘Popery’ was considered the major enemy, but Gill claimed that Arminianism was Popery’s ‘very life and soul’ and should be addressed foremost.<sup>254</sup> He gave it as a major reason for dissenting from the Church of England with its ‘very corrupt’ doctrine. ‘*Arminianism* has generally prevailed; and scarce any thing else than *Arminian* tenets and mere morality are preached, and not Christ and him crucified, and the necessity of faith in him,

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<sup>248</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 115-116 (Toon, *Emergence*, 133).

<sup>249</sup> for more: Seymour, ‘Gill’, PhD, 108-153

<sup>250</sup> Whitby, *Discourse*, 159-160.

<sup>251</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 164.

<sup>252</sup> Whitby, *Discourse*, 165-166.

<sup>253</sup> Gill, *Cause*, 166-167.

<sup>254</sup> Gill, *Cause*, Preface iv.

and salvation by him.’ Therefore he advised departing and seeking elsewhere for spiritual food.<sup>255</sup> We have seen little evidence that Gill himself indiscriminately preached the *necessity* of faith in Christ.

It is fair to conclude that the faithful Arminian, who represents God’s love for mankind and his earnest entreaties for their salvation, exposes Gill’s hyper-Calvinism with its cramped theology placing salvation beyond the reach of ordinary sinners. This is clearly demonstrated by Gosden’s explanation of Article 6 below, which safeguards God’s sovereign decrees from the distinct possibility that a non-elect person might desire salvation.

**Table 14 Comparison of Gill’s Article and Gospel Standard Articles**

Gill’s Declaration 6	‘That eternal Redemption which Christ has obtained by the shedding of his blood is special and particular: that is to say, that it was only intentionally designed for the Elect of God, and Sheep of Christ, who only share the special and peculiar blessings of it.’ <sup>256</sup>
<b>Article 6</b> Particular redemption	We believe that the eternal redemption which Christ has obtained by the shedding of His blood is special and particular; that is to say, that it was intentionally designed only for the Elect of God, the Sheep of Christ, who therefore alone share in the special and peculiar blessings thereof.
<b>Article 25</b> Universal redemption denied	We deny that Christ died for all mankind. <sup>257</sup>

Gosden states that Article 6, the wording of which has been lifted directly from Gill’s Article 6, ‘was formulated in view of the theory of those who, though professing to believe in divine election, asserted that there is a “residuum” of merit in Christ’s death available **for any who, though not elected, are willing to accept salvation:** a theory which makes salvation contingent upon man’s will—the doctrine of Arminianism.’ This idea, he suggests, emboldens ‘the universal-charityist who deems himself wiser and kinder than God’; whereas in fact ‘regeneration is brought undesired, faith and repentance are free gifts,’ to

<sup>255</sup> Gill, *Dissenters*, 5.

<sup>256</sup> Gill, *Declaration*, 6.

<sup>257</sup> *Articles*, 15,35.

the elect. But to the non-elect, no matter how great their desire, salvation is unavailable, and Arminian ‘error ... deludes many into false security’. He goes on to explain, ‘The will to believe does not regulate the extent of redemption, but the extent of redemption (fixed by the will of God) governs the will to believe.’ Upon the hypothesis of indefinite redemption or ‘a promiscuous salvation’ as Gosden called it, ‘the whole Trinity is thrown into confusion,’ and the covenant rendered ‘invalid’.<sup>258</sup>

## 4 Challenges to Gill

There were challenges to Gill’s theology, such as the protests to his doctrine on eternal justification. To most of these he responded robustly. However he was not so quick to engage with those who objected to his manner of preaching which denied gospel offers and exhortations to repent and believe. This section will examine some of these challenges.

### 4.1 Lime Street lectures 1730-1731

A group of Nonconformists including the merchant and philanthropist William Coward (1648-1738) began to meet regularly in the King’s Head Tavern near the Royal Exchange to discuss the decline in orthodox theology. They founded the King’s Head Society, the immediate objective of which was to sponsor a series of lectures to defend evangelical truths, and to this end they selected nine prominent London ministers, all but two of whom were Congregationalists. Each was assigned a topic, and the lectures were held weekly in Lime Street Church from November 1730 until April 1731, and published in 1732. Their second objective was to educate young men for the ministry, for which purpose they established and financed an academy in Deptford, Abraham Taylor being the tutor.<sup>259</sup>

It is interesting that Gill was invited to join the other eight ministers, all of whom would have been aware of his teaching. Perhaps his influence and

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<sup>258</sup> Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 30-31 (my emphasis).

<sup>259</sup> For more see Dixon, ‘King’s Head’, Dissenting Academies Project - Academy Histories <https://www.qmul.ac.uk/sed/religionandliterature/media/centre-for-religion-and-literature-in-english/Academy-Histories.pdf>

prominence rendered it politic. Or perhaps the group wished to expose Gill to classic orthodox Calvinism in the hope he might rethink his emphases. His assigned topic was the resurrection, surely a deliberate choice to exclude any intrusion of hyper-Calvinistic teaching.<sup>260</sup> At times there was clear divergence between orthodox and hyper-Calvinistic teaching, and since Gill attended the lectures and read the manuscripts prior to publication, he would have registered this.

Taylor, one of the lecturers, was quick to detect Gill's hyper-Calvinistic tendencies. Two specific clashes concerning duty-repentance and eternal union have already been recorded in the relevant sections on Gill's theology (3.6, 3.8), both associated with antinomianism. Gill was offended by Taylor's words when he heard the lecture, and had intended requesting him to remove the passage before publication, but to his 'great satisfaction' he had no need since it was omitted from the manuscript. He was angry therefore when it appeared in print, and retaliated by writing a robust defence of eternal union, along with other doctrines, directed specifically to Taylor.<sup>261</sup> He was advised not to write against Taylor, and certainly the charge of antinomianism raised by this book and his recent 1730 book on eternal justification was injurious to him.<sup>262</sup> In 1739 during the Modern Question controversy Taylor was to challenge Gill again about antinomianism and specifically about duty-faith,<sup>263</sup> to which Gill responded the same year, devoting his book almost solely to arguing whether good works are necessary to salvation, but dismissing Taylor's main challenge concerning the duty of preachers to offer Christ and of sinners to believe in him.<sup>264</sup>

Robert Bragge, whose church hosted the lectures, gave four talks on justification. He taught that it is not an immanent act of God. He emphasised the necessity and importance of faith in justification: far more than a manifestation. He dismantled the possibility that a believer may be justified *before* faith. Scripture expressly states '*we are justified by faith*, ... and should

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<sup>260</sup> Toon also makes this observation: 'Lime Street', *EQ* (Jan-Mar 1969) 47.

<sup>261</sup> Gill, *Eternal Union*, 3-44, 45-63, 64-73, 73-85, 85-90.

<sup>262</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 3:202-204n; Rippon, *Memoir*, 29-31; Gill, *Collection*, 'Summary' 1:xix.

<sup>263</sup> Taylor, *Address* (good works, 4-14; duty faith 14-37).

<sup>264</sup> Gill, *Necessity* (good works, 6-34; duty-faith controversy, 5).

men or angels tell us the contrary, we are not to regard them,' he warned.<sup>265</sup> In Gill's recent treatise on eternal justification he had called it an immanent act of God, and dated it in the eternal counsels. On hearing and reading Bragge's lectures, he did not modify these controversial views, despite his solemn declaration to 'carefully attend' to learned gentlemen who declared against them.<sup>266</sup> In fact his friend Brine immediately wrote in defence of eternal justification, accusing Bragge of ignoring arguments in its favour because they were 'too cogent and forcible to admit of a real answer'.<sup>267</sup>

The main area of difference lay in preaching the gospel. As shown by the following examples, the Lime Street lecturers vigorously upheld Calvinistic doctrine, while simultaneously offering Christ as Saviour and commanding the duty of faith and repentance. Gill though, as we have clearly seen, unable to accept this paradoxical mixture, created distinctions within faith and repentance, in order to forge a more satisfactorily-logical system. In one lecture Taylor urged all who take the title 'preachers of Christ': 'We must persuade and press men to look to Christ, as dying for sin, to rely upon him alone for pardon of guilt, and for righteousness to justify them.' In another lecture he distinguished the secret and revealed will of God, stressing that election neither dissolves nor weakens the universal obligation people have to God.<sup>268</sup> John Hurriion gave four lectures<sup>269</sup> on particular redemption. In exposing the objections of universalists that Christ's dying for a determinate number is inconsistent with general calls to believe and repent, Hurriion was in part also exposing hyper-Calvinist objections of the mutual exclusivity of particular redemption and general offers. He declared 'the certain connexion between faith and salvation'. He named three things as the mandate 'for ministers to call all their hearers to believe, and for any of them to hearken to the call': 1) Christ's ability to save everyone who comes to him, 2) God's command that all men believe in Christ, 3) the promise of life to those who believe. 'Upon these grounds, the apostles pressed men to

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<sup>265</sup> Lime-St Lecture VII: Bragge, VII 'Justification', *Defence* 354,384-398.

<sup>266</sup> Gill, *Eternal Union*, Postscript 94-95.

<sup>267</sup> Brine, *Defence*, 5.

<sup>268</sup> Lime-St Lectures XII, XI: Taylor, 'Humble enquiry', 'Vindication', *Defence*, 644-645,596.

<sup>269</sup> Hurriion became very ill and died while writing lectures; Taylor transcribed the fourth from Hurriion's notes.

*believe in Christ.*<sup>270</sup> Again Samuel Wilson lectured on efficacious grace and God's powerful work in souls. Nevertheless, unlike Skepp, Gill and the other hyper-Calvinists, he observed that 'the renewed sinner is a proper subject of moral suasion,' that God deals with him 'in an argumentative way', enabling him 'to compare and judge' things proposed to him, to pursue or avoid, 'to choose, or refuse'. Wilson condemned the attitude that 'without [God's] special grace we can do nothing,' and therefore any 'sincere and serious' endeavours to seek him are rendered 'foolish and unnecessary'. Rather, Wilson affirmed, 'the direction is *Ask, seek and knock*; ... so that it is in a way of duty that we are to expect his presence;' and his promise to meet and bless us, 'to assist and comfort us', is a 'rational and powerful motive to a close adherence to our duty'.<sup>271</sup> Finally John Sladen, Gill's successful neighbour in Horsleydown,<sup>272</sup> lectured on particular election. He addressed the objection that God's design to save only some militates against his general commands, exhortations and wishes for everyone to believe, repent and obey. He denied these commands oppose election though, for God's commands declare his authority which informs our duty, not our strength or ability (a point also made by Wilson<sup>273</sup>). Therefore God's command for everyone to believe and repent is designed 'to convince men of their weakness and inability', and to pray for salvation. Sladen said no one can prove he is non-elect and beyond salvation; 'to prevent therefore any such rash and despairing assertions, the command is promiscuous to believe' with the promise of salvation and life attached. Moreover 'the preaching of the gospel is promiscuous to all, because ministers cannot distinguish between the *elect* and *reprobate*.'

We preach the gospel to all without distinction; we tell sinners of their lost and miserable state, by reason of sin; set Christ before them, as the only Saviour of sinners; exhort them to fly to him for help; to repent of their sins, and to yield obedience ... not knowing who will believe, or gainsay, or what the success of our labour will be. And, while we are thus preaching to all, God lays hold of the heart of one and another.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> Lime-St Lecture V: Hurion, 'Redemption', *Defence* 272-276.

<sup>271</sup> Lime-St Lecture VIII: Wilson, 'Grace', *Defence*, 454-455.

<sup>272</sup> Cleal, *Story*, 47-49.

<sup>273</sup> Lime-St Lecture VIII: Wilson, 'Grace', *Defence* 452.

<sup>274</sup> Lime-St Lecture III: Sladen, 'Election', *Defence*, 128,130-131,134-135.

With these few words Sladen challenged Gill's artificial distinctions between preaching and offer, sensible and dead sinners, legal and evangelical repentance. Moreover he challenged Gill with such unrestricted preaching within the context of particular election.

These examples adequately demonstrate the confrontation between Gill's hyper-Calvinism and reformed theology as declared throughout the Lime Street lectures by his ministerial colleagues, whose particularism was not compromised by God's well-meant offer of salvation, nor inhibited by its full and free declaration and application. Nevertheless Toon observed that the lectures reflected the tendency of many Christians to think the solution to the decline lay in explication of doctrine rather than evangelisation of the world. 'The thought that the best way to defend orthodox Calvinism was to engage in a sustained and wide-reaching evangelism, does not seem to have arisen as a possible alternative' to holding lectures and printing books, he wrote. 'Thus we are not surprised', that in 1739 Joseph Humphries was disciplined by the King's Head Society for the religious meeting he had started after hearing Whitefield preach.<sup>275</sup>

#### **4.2 Some Doctrines in the Superlapsarian Scheme Impartially Examined**

Anon, 1736

This anonymous book, generally attributed to Job Burt of Warwick,<sup>276</sup> fearlessly challenged those who had allowed their speculative 'Schemes of Divinity' ('chimerical Fancies ... deceitful as an *Ignis Fatuus*') to govern their interpretation of God's word: 'Men of the greatest Abilities, and seeming Penetration, have grossly wrested the Scriptures, and have lost themselves and their Adherents, by a too curious Enquiry into deep and unrevealed Mysteries.' The writer believed that their 'Way of stating Election has run them into many false Opinions' and 'unscriptural and shocking Hypotheses and Maxims', and 'this is their Foundation Doctrine, and the very Root from whence all those different Branches grow, which have made up a Set of Principles, that have no evident Footing in the Holy Scriptures; ... supported only by mere Conjectures, and false

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<sup>275</sup> Toon, 'Lime Street', *EQ* (Jan-Mar 1969) 48; 'Humphreys', *Hymnary.org* [https://hymnary.org/person/Humphreys\\_J](https://hymnary.org/person/Humphreys_J)

<sup>276</sup> Rippon, *Memoir*, 48; Gill, *Collection*, Summary 1:xxi.



Ways of reasoning.’ Their scheme, Burt proclaimed, represents God ‘as using absolute Sovereignty’ divorced from his sovereign justice, grace and mercy, rejecting mankind ‘as Creatures only, and not as Sinners’; and most of his book challenges the doctrines of eternal justification and union which have grown ‘from this Root’. It is a substantial book, and engaged with the teachings of Crisp, Hussey and Brine as well as Gill on these subjects, particularly closely with Gill’s book on eternal union which he wrote to refute Taylor. Despite this doctrine being unrevealed and ‘contrary to Reason’, ‘intricate and puzzling’, Burt recognised it was a ‘Link in their Chain’ which must be maintained for the preservation of their whole scheme, or to maintain the superstructure which they had built upon an erroneous foundation. We have already noted this writer’s exposure of Gill’s dichotomy between legal and evangelical repentance (3.3), and his denial that neither the Spirit nor faith is the bond of union between Christ and his people (3.8). Burt was critical of Gill’s writing, saying that he partially quotes texts, omitting parts not conducive to his argument, produces a ‘flagrant Contradiction between two’ consecutive sentences, ‘misapplies’ texts, presents ‘abstruse’ opinions, and ‘tells us some Truth mixed with some Error in the same Page’. Burt said that Gill had written this book ‘on purpose to prove’ that the elect were always united to Christ, and Burt strongly believed that it was ‘absolutely necessary’ for Gill to recant ‘these Errors’ and their implications before Christians accepted it as ‘sound Divinity’.<sup>277</sup>

Burt concluded with compelling warnings regarding gospel preaching. He ‘earnestly’ entreated Gill and others (‘Men of this Scheme’ as he repeatedly called them) to ‘be exceeding cautious’ of misapplying scripture and ‘pretending’ their ideas come from the Spirit, ‘lest hereby they should make themselves highly culpable, and grieve the Holy Spirit, by calling him the Author of their great Mistakes. ... No wonder if he should be provoked thereby, and withdraw from the Churches.’ Burt revealed that this was already happening and many were grieved by it, that ‘conversion-Work is almost stop’d; and how should it be otherwise, when converting Doctrines are laid aside, ... and every Text

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<sup>277</sup> Anon, *Some Doctrines*, 1-4,9-10,74-75,79-80,83-85,88-89,109-110 (justification 10-74; union 74-132).

must be strained to speak their imaginary eternal Truths?’ He was distressed at what he was witnessing:

I have been often afflicted, to hear some Ministers in their preaching use all the Arguments possible **to inform poor sinners that they can’t repent**; which I judge is a wrong Method, and what does not become their Ministry, who are obliged to exhort Sinners to repent in Christ’s name; *Luke xxiv.47.* But I never yet heard any thing in their Preaching that tended this Way; but rather **to inform them what they can’t do**, and what they shall do if elected, not what they must do or perish. But, to my Grief and Surprise, I have heard a learned Preacher in a crowded Assembly say, *Every elect Sinner here shall be called; God will call you all.*

It is likely the ‘learned preacher’ was Gill. ‘This sort of Preaching’, Burt said, ‘rather informs Sinners that to-morrow may do as well, and that they need not be solicitous about Repentance and their Soul’s Conversion; for God will call them in his own time.’ But if they would ‘carefully’ model the kind of preaching Jesus and his apostles employed, demonstrating ‘the Necessity of Repentance and Faith, and the Danger of Impenitency and Unbelief’, they would begin to experience unity among Christians and conversions among sinners, he advised. Burt exposed what Gill called valueless, low and mean, unworthy of gospel ministers, as the very method John the Baptist, Jesus and his followers used, for throughout the ages legal repentance has preceded evangelical repentance, and is required by God ‘as necessary to Forgiveness’. Yet despite Jesus’ example, Gill and others censure those who ‘press the Necessity of Repentance’ as ‘unsound and legal Preachers’. Burt’s book ended with a warning:

That unless such as are employed in that great and important Work of preaching the Gospel, do exhort Sinners to repent, and press the Necessity of it ... and the Necessity of Faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as the atoning Sacrifice; that they cannot justly say, that they are clean from the Blood of all Men, or that they have declared the Counsel of God, **but have for the sake of their own unscriptural Notions wittingly shunned it.** ... And if the Ministers of this Day will alter the Texture of this Gospel, and neglect to preach and testify the Necessity of Repentance towards God, and Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ, (without encouraging their Neglect herein, by telling them, that if they are elected, they shall repent and believe) I am greatly afraid that such Neglects will be at their Peril.<sup>278</sup>

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<sup>278</sup> Anon, *Some Doctrines*, 132-138 (italics original, bold added).

This book was a hard-hitting exposure of Gill and other hyper-Calvinists, and how, rooted in their analysis of God's mind in his eternal decrees, they had built a system of interdependent ideas which critically impacted their gospel preaching. This was witnessed personally by Burt, who regularly heard people being convinced of their inability to repent and believe, relieving them of their responsibility and duty by informing them that election guaranteed the inevitability of salvation. As John Wesley observed of such: 'So, waiting for irresistible grace, he falls faster asleep than ever.'<sup>279</sup>

The same year Gill responded to this challenge, as did Brine who tended to follow him. Gill made many personal accusations against the writer he called a 'wretch' who wrote in a wondering, surprised, trembling, '*hare 'em scare 'em*' kind of way, 'in the utmost disorder and confusion, as if he was thunder-struck, and almost frightened out of his wits', along with various other failings such as being repetitive, unqualified, ignorant and uninformed, pert, rude, disingenuous, and staring 'like a stuck pig'. 'Poor creature! I fear the next news we hear of him will be, that he is quite beside himself.' Gill surmised that given the schemes and opinions Burt found so shocking were printed four years ago (he refers to his 1732 book on eternal union), he should have recovered from his 'frightful apprehensions' by now. He also predicted this 'pamphlet' will be forgotten long after cherished memories of Crisp and Hussey endure.<sup>280</sup> Even Gill's loyal biographer cautiously wrote, 'The stupidity, insolence and impertinence of the man, sometimes provoked Mr GILL to use a little more acrimony and severity than perhaps some might think needful.'<sup>281</sup> Gill provided a long (96 out of 98 pages) and sturdy defence of supralapsarianism, of eternal justification and eternal union, although he insisted that the latter two do not necessarily spring from the former. Significantly and characteristically however he chose *not* to engage with the writer's exposure of his manner of preaching which was so unlike Jesus' and the apostles' who all preached the danger of the unconverted state and the necessity of repentance and faith. He ignored Burt's comment that due to this preaching conversions had all-but ceased in the church. He snubbed him with a negligible mention on the last two pages. He

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<sup>279</sup> Wesley, *Predestination*, 67-68.

<sup>280</sup> Gill, *Truth Defended*, 1-3,7,29,32, 34-37,39-40,42,56,58,75,78 etc.

<sup>281</sup> Gill, *Collection*, 'Summary' 1:xxii.

referred to the author's 'fling or two at the doctrine of repentance', over which he 'seems greatly concerned'. He called Burt's conviction that God requires repentance 'as necessary to Forgiveness'<sup>282</sup> such a 'vile reflection upon the doctrine of forgiveness of sins' that he could not ignore it. His final advice was that 'if he must needs be an author, let him write upon *moral* subjects, against the prevailing vices of the age, ... things he may be better acquainted with, than evangelical truths, or *Supralapsarian* principles.'<sup>283</sup>

### **4.3 Unity among Christian Ministers and People. Recommended in a Letter to Mr. John Gill, A.B., 1746**

An author identifying himself as AB, whom we can assume was male, published a short direct letter to Gill which affords valuable insight into his own spiritual condition under Gill's ministry, and also Gill's attitude towards Whitefield and other Awakening evangelists. Unlike Burt's closely-argued theological challenge, it was an impassioned and personal appeal, here summarised.

AB himself had been 'a known Enemy to Mr. Whitefield and his Proceedings at first', being 'a rigid Dissenter'. He questioned Whitefield's authority to preach because he was not 'call'd to that Work in your prescribed Form'. He 'refus'd to shew the usual Tokens of Veneration' when attending their worship because he thought 'their assembling together as they did, unbecoming the Gospel-Order'. In this AB generally reflected his denomination's prejudice. He partly blamed Gill's own opposition of Whitefield and other ministers on 'the Imprudences of some in your own Congregation, joining the false Intelligence of others'. For AB had heard Whitefield and others maligned with 'unchristian Censures', such as calling them 'Incarnate Devils, Enemies to God, Christ, Religion and human Society'. This, despite the fact that in Gill's and other churches, there were many converts from Whitefield's 'despised Ministry'.

However having attended Whitefield's ministry, AB's attitude changed. Not only did he visit Whitefield's *Tabernacle*, but also his much-criticised field-preaching, which 'tho' uncommon, is not unlawful'. Although he acknowledged Gill was justifiable in his 'resentments' against some Methodist preachers for their

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<sup>282</sup> Anon, *Some Doctrines*, 136.

<sup>283</sup> Gill, *Truth Defended*, 97-98 (supralapsarianism 3-20; justification 20-55; union 55-96).

‘propagating unscriptural Notions’, AB asked him to ‘distinguish between *Methodists* and *Methodists*, as you would have others do so between *Baptists* and *Baptists*’. AB was clearly stirred by Whitefield’s and others’ preaching. He found them to have successfully combined a bold assertion of ‘Discriminating Grace’ with their ‘kind’ addresses to sinners as they ‘pity, weep and pray over’ them. ‘How often have I gone there mourning and doubting, but have come away rejoicing in God!’ He felt ‘great Affection for these Ministers, who have been so instrumental in reviving my drooping Spirits’. Through them God ‘spoke Peace to my Soul, and removed those Doubts and Fears that I laboured under for Years and Years, while I attended your Ministry and others’, he wrote to Gill.

With this new-found liberty and happiness, he was convicted of his former attitude and felt compelled to challenge Gill’s censoriousness. ‘Why should we jar so much about the Shell and Externals of Religion!’ If the Lord has raised these men up and gifted them to preach, owning and blessing their ministry, ‘why should I any longer refuse ’em as Ministers of the Gospel?’ he argued. ‘Who are we, and what are we, to say unto our God, *What dost thou?*’ The ‘proud and silly Distinction of *Reverend* and *Non-reverend*, *Board* and *Non-board* Ministers’ is a bar to unity among those with a ‘common Saviour’, he warned Gill:

Had we a just and lively Sense of the Worth of an immortal Soul, and the dreadful Case of a Christless State, glad should we be in hearing of any pluck’d as Brands from the Burning of Hell, whether in Fields and Commons, or Consecrated Ground; whether in Meeting-houses sanctify’d by a Board, or not; Whether the Instruments were *Conformists*, *Non-Cons* or *Methodists*.

AB knew that Gill was despised by some, revered by others. Some ‘paint you as an infallible Christian and Minister. My own Ears have heard it declared, *’Tis safe to believe any thing, if Mr. G--- believes it.*’ He himself respected Gill as a ‘bold Defender of Truth’. Nevertheless he suggested Gill was resentful that God had not chosen him as ‘the happy Means’ of such widespread blessing, and entreated him not to be like the elder brother in the parable ‘who was angry with his Father in receiving and honouring the sinful younger Brother’. ‘It seems a glaring Truth, that the Lord is bringing down the Pride of Man, who is for directing God in choosing his own Workmen for his own Work; here is a Company of poor Men who speak boldly in the Name of Jesus, and the Hand of the Lord is with them.’

AB accused Gill of ‘unhappily opposing many of the dear Ministers of the Lord Jesus, and so checking the Gospel of the ever-blessed God’.

Finally AB described the low condition in his denomination: ‘Ministers lolling on their Cushions, speaking of the Love of Christ with such Coldness, as if an unpleasing Message!’ along with ‘Indulgence of such an Indifferency in young Men’. ‘May the Lord rouze you,’ he wrote to Gill. He painted a dark picture of general apathy and disharmony among the Particular Baptists, of pride in ‘petty’ distinctions, failure to unite against Popery, of a fashionable lack of personal application of the Saviour, contempt of ministers, of ‘Non-Attendance on the House of God, or our Sleeping and Unconcernedness when we come there’. He finished his letter with a prayer that God would convince Gill of the necessity of unity among his people.<sup>284</sup>

Like Burt who had testified of the decline in conversions, AB provided personal evidence of the decline among the Particular Baptists which he linked with the manner of preaching. No doubt this was uncomfortable reading for Gill. Gill always felt secure answering challenges concerning theological issues, but as already observed he was less comfortable answering those on his gospel preaching. In his letter AB compared Whitefield, who saw no contradiction between discriminating grace and freely offering Christ, with Gill, who used discriminating grace as the reason why the gospel cannot be offered. Gill ignored his letter.<sup>285</sup>

#### **4.4 *Predestination Calmly Considered*, John Wesley, 1752**

In this book Wesley used various arguments to disprove unconditional reprobation, including God’s willingness that all should be saved, his death for all, his justice and sovereignty and the latter not superseding the former, of his love, goodness, wisdom and faithfulness. ‘Unconditional election cannot appear’, insisted Wesley, ‘without the cloven foot of reprobation.’ It means some were damned before they were born: there never was any object for their faith, nothing for them to believe. It means there can be no judgment, for it

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<sup>284</sup> AB, *Unity*, 3-22.

<sup>285</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 372 (mistakenly called BA: 372n36, Bibliography, 865).

removes responsibility and leaves men impelled by an irresistible force. It questions God's sincerity, that he should lament over those whom he had ordained not to save. Wesley endorsed Isaac Watts' 'clear and strong' reasoning on this head: 'It is very hard indeed, to vindicate the *sincerity* of the blessed God or his son, in their universal offers of grace and salvation to men, and their sending ministers with such messages and invitations to accept of mercy, if there be not at least a conditional pardon and salvation provided for them.' Wesley wrote, 'Our blessed Lord does indisputably command and invite *all men every where to repent*. He calleth all. He sends his ambassadors, in his name, *To preach the gospel to every creature*. He himself *preached deliverance to the captives*, without any hint of restriction or limitation.' Against 'a thousand declarations' of God's sincerity, can we suppose that while he is thus inviting the prisoners to freedom, he is 'unalterably determined in himself, never to open the doors for them! ... What kind of sincerity is this?'<sup>286</sup>

The same year Gill responded to Wesley with a treatise on predestination. He denied that Wesley's 'thousand declarations' called God's sincerity into question, for they were either Jew-specific, enquiries after civil welfare, or his will of command rather than his purposes, but were not universal declarations of love. It elicited from Gill one of his most personal and explicit denials of universal offers (3.1), ending with disparaging words on Watts' reasoning.<sup>287</sup>

## 5 Analysis of Gill's hyper-Calvinism

This chapter has engaged with a wide range of Gill's writings in order to discover evidence of hyper-Calvinism, and it has found that with the use of various emphases and distinctions he presented a logical system which magnified divine sovereignty and minimised human agency in salvation, particularly impacting the free gospel offer and the response of repentance and faith.

Gill's theology was not universally accepted; there were clashes between him and some orthodox ministers, and some challenges to his teaching. He did not always reason with the clarity of his opponents, and he showed a distinct

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<sup>286</sup> Wesley, *Predestination*, 9,15-30.

<sup>287</sup> Gill, *Predestination*, 27-28.

reluctance to defend his no-offer policy. When faced with awkward texts displaying universal love, commands or gospel offers, Gill modified or neutralised them in order to accommodate his system, although frequently with flawed and inconsistent reasoning. It is this methodology of justifying his theology by questionable exegesis which has engendered criticism from a range of scholars, both then and now. Spurgeon acknowledged his 'sober sense', except 'when he falls upon a text which is not congenial with his creed, and hacks and hews terribly to bring the word of God into a more systematic shape'.<sup>288</sup> Seymour questioned his 'scholarly integrity': 'he was remarkably astute in extricating a uniform point of view from the Bible which coincided with his theological system in every detail. He also habitually magnified those sections which were most companionable to his thought while carefully wheeling around those that pointed in another direction. His skill in finding obscure meanings in straightforward statements was sometimes nothing short of astonishing.'<sup>289</sup> Clipsham noted the tendency of hyper-Calvinists to evade scripture's plain meaning 'by allowing their exegesis to be governed by doctrinal presuppositions ... . Gill, for instance, went to great lengths to explain away the meaning of "all" wherever it occurs in connection with the universal proclamation of the gospel, and studiously avoided the direct commands and exhortations in the Bible, to repent and believe on Christ...'.<sup>290</sup> Referring to his major polemical work *Cause of God and Truth*, Oliver noted that he 'bursts the limits of sound exegesis to sustain a High Calvinist position',<sup>291</sup> and Bogue that Gill displayed 'an anxiety to support his high scheme at every opportunity, and often betrays its weakness by catching at the shadows of arguments for its defence'.<sup>292</sup> Roger Hayden believes Gill found it easier to assert negative views than clear positive doctrinal statements, sometimes employed biblical references extraneous to his argument, and contradicted his own principle of scripture controlling doctrine by using scripture 'to bolster and substantiate' his own system. He 'simply ignored any Scriptures which challenged his own position

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<sup>288</sup> Spurgeon, *Commenting*, 9.

<sup>289</sup> Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 290.

<sup>290</sup> Clipsham, 'Fuller', pt 1, *BQ* (July 1963) 1:102n11, refs to Gill, *Cause* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed 1772): 42,53,72,317,339.

<sup>291</sup> Oliver, 'Gill', *Life and Thought*, 27.

<sup>292</sup> Bogue, *History*, 4:467.



and became skilful in giving obscure meanings to the most straightforward verses, so they fitted in with his pre-conceived system of thought'.<sup>293</sup> Rathel notes one example of this: Gill made a sharp division between legal and evangelical repentance 'because it allowed him to account for Scripture passages that appear to call all people' to repent and believe. 'Given his denial of Gospel offers and duty-faith, he could not recognise these, 'so he frequently claimed in his polemical writings and even in his biblical commentaries that broad calls to repentance were merely calls for individual or corporate moral reform, not calls pertaining to personal salvation.'<sup>294</sup> Fuller, describing his own struggling ascent out of hyper-Calvinism, wrote of this artificial distinction of Gill's. As he read many scripture passages positively commanding unconverted sinners to repent and believe: 'it appeared to me there must be a most unwarrantable *force* put upon these passages, to make them mean any other repentance and faith than what are connected with salvation.'<sup>295</sup> Gill's contemporary critic Burt also commented how Gill frequently 'forced the Divine Word'. 'If our Author has cited these Scriptures to support his Doctrine,' he wrote, 'then has he most egregiously abused them; but if this was not his Design, then does he as remarkably trifle with his Readers.'<sup>296</sup>

In Northamptonshire Gill was nurtured in an environment of hyper-Calvinism. From childhood it is unlikely he ever encountered any other kind of preaching. Toon wrote, 'He spent the whole of his life deepening and extending his grasp of the principles' he had learned and adopted, namely 'the High Calvinism of Richard Davis, hardened by controversy with Baxterianism and Arminianism, modified through the assimilation of Crispian doctrines, and severely conditioned by the influence of Hussey's "no offers of grace" theology.'<sup>297</sup> He shared the same theological milieu as Fuller, but unlike Fuller he settled comfortably and embraced it. Fuller made himself vulnerable by entertaining doubts concerning his theological principles. He read scripture with new eyes and consciously disencumbered himself from constraints he now saw were unnecessary, expelled

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<sup>293</sup> Hayden, 'Evangelical Calvinism', PhD, 331-333.

<sup>294</sup> Rathel, 'Gill and hyper-Calvinism', *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 19-20n30, refs Gill, *Cause* (1838 ed) 64,66,287,294.

<sup>295</sup> Fuller, *Gospel Worthy* (1785), Preface iii.

<sup>296</sup> Anon, *Some Doctrines*, 121-122.

<sup>297</sup> Toon, 'Skepp and Gill', *FGR* (Summer 1967) 322; Toon, *Emergence*, 99.

prejudice to give scriptures their full force, read missionaries' stories, pondered the *nature* of inability ascribed to fallen men and its impact on duty-faith,<sup>298</sup> conversed with and befriended others with similar misgivings, and slowly they worked their way out of the labyrinth to emerge into gospel freedom.<sup>299</sup> Gill consolidated, barricaded and vigorously defended the doctrinal antinomianism and no-offer theology of his youth, while efficiently executing his desire for tidy harmonisation and symmetry and his conviction that divinity, 'the most noble science', should be systematised, that truths scattered throughout scripture should be gathered and disposed of 'in a regular, orderly method', to show their connection and agreement and also for their 'clear and perspicuous understanding'.<sup>300</sup> This is what made him so effective and influential: his ability to take these principles he had inherited and in which he passionately believed and, as the consummate systematic theologian, clarify muddled rambling thoughts and concepts into forensically-organised and convincingly-authoritative arguments, his superior understanding and abilities enabling him to gather and develop the principles of Hussey, Skepp and others, and transform them into a cohesive sophisticated system. (It was Gill's passion for synthesising truth 'into a single, coherent and satisfying metaphysical system' which Olin Robison believes directly contrasted with the evangelical Baptists who saw truth as an instrument to lead men to God, and who also accepted the pressures of the Enlightenment's rejection of scholasticism in favour of fewer, simple, practically-applied truths.<sup>301</sup>)

Gill interpreted scripture according to the hermeneutic of divine decrees. His consuming vision of discrete decretal categories governed his theology, allowing these eternal irrevocable divisions to dictate time and split the human race into two. Gill and other hyper-Calvinists have created a system which sidesteps the formidable challenge of embracing *both* of scripture's poles *at the same time*, a system which simplifies and streamlines complex paradoxical aspects of theology, the antinomy that Nettles calls 'the congruence of man's helpless

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<sup>298</sup> See Fuller, *Gospel Worthy* (1785), Preface.

<sup>299</sup> Fuller Jr, *Complete Works*, 1:12-13; Ryland, *Fuller*, 25-26.

<sup>300</sup> Gill, *Body*, Introduction 1:ii.

<sup>301</sup> Robison, 'Particular Baptists', DPhil, 35-36; also 'Legacy', *BQ* (July 1971)116 .

responsibility with God's just sovereignty'.<sup>302</sup> On the basis of his construct of the antithesis between elect and non-elect he made sharp distinctions between preaching and offering, internal and external call, special and natural faith, evangelical and legal repentance. On this basis he displayed intolerance of offers, invitations, human response, or any form of conditionality like 'ifs' and 'whens', as introducing something precarious and uncertain into what was eternally fixed and decreed, a breach of this elemental division of humanity, representing some impossible connection between the two streams. These precise points are defining characteristics of Gill's followers, Gospel Standard Baptists, to this day. They recognise scripture's governing principle of 'division and differentiation', whereby in God's sovereign electing will he divided 'one lump into two'. This polarity between the elect ('an infinitesimal fraction of the whole race') and 'the rest' doomed to perdition, is an eternal act of divine separating love, and removes all possibility of a residuum of grace for the non-elect, the uncertainty of indefinite redemption, or salvation dependent on the human will.<sup>303</sup>

This preoccupation with eternity is illustrated in Gill's concept of eternal justification. Berkouwer observed how the doctrine 'minimized what took place in time and threw everything important back into eternity. ... Redemption was locked up so tight in eternity that what happened in time could no longer touch it.' This, he explained, is why the Reformers 'wanted to underline, to put in italics, that the *significance of faith is real* and justification by faith not a mere eye-opener' to a decision made in God's decree 'set in eternal granite'.<sup>304</sup> For example, Gill interpreted the text II Corinthians 5:19, 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself,' not to Jesus' time on earth, but as part of the everlasting council preceding even the covenant of redemption, the eternal transaction where God was consulting, contriving and planning the way to make peace and atonement for the elect.<sup>305</sup> As Ascol puts it, history loses its meaningfulness, and 'becomes little more than a charade'.<sup>306</sup> Or as John Webster

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<sup>302</sup> Nettles, 'Influence', *Eusebeia* (Spring 2008) 97.

<sup>303</sup> Gosden, *Gospel Standard*, 125-128.

<sup>304</sup> Berkouwer, *Faith*, 148,150.

<sup>305</sup> Gill, *Body*, 1:308-310.

<sup>306</sup> Ascol, 'Doctrine of Grace', PhD, 77-79,143-145.

wrote, it makes the outworking of redemption in human history ‘a mere shadow’ of what had already ‘been decided in advance’ within the intratrinitarian counsels.<sup>307</sup> Gill’s theology, from the eternal covenant of redemption, with its blessings sovereignly given and therefore not offerable, to limited specific atonement and profound human inability, successfully trussed everything up in God’s eternal counsels, creating a system which requires no human engagement. This explains why his unconventional and unorthodox interpretation of union and justification was so important to him that he defended it at all costs. It undergirded his hyper-Calvinism. Neither is faith-based or temporal; both are embedded in eternity as immanent acts of God proceeding from election; both remove the requirement for human participation in salvation, justification being ‘wholly without us’.<sup>308</sup> Time becomes merely the arena for the outworking of eternal decrees and decisions, and preaching merely the vehicle whereby the Spirit assures the elect of their covenant privileges.

Gill’s determination to exalt God’s sovereignty and magnify his grace, avoiding any degree of synergism, enabled him to construct a coherent logical system which took ‘the entire economy of salvation up into eternity and has thereby rendered it impervious to the will of the creature.’<sup>309</sup> His reinterpretation of the covenant of redemption was essential to this system. Like Crisp and other doctrinal antinomians, he subsumed the covenant of grace between God and mankind with its unconditional and conditional characteristics into the intratrinitarian eternal covenant of redemption, thereby taking human beings out of the equation, rendering their response invalid. He cemented this by further reinterpreting the covenant of redemption so that salvation occurred entirely within it. By explicitly including the Spirit in that covenant, he removed the exercise of faith and commitment of will as part of conversion. Having removed all traces of conditionality, Gill also removed ‘any notion of temporality’<sup>310</sup> by dating union and justification as eternal divine decrees, thereby severing them from the instrumentality of faith. These significant innovative changes to the covenant of redemption secured Gill’s objective of

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<sup>307</sup> Webster, ‘Will’, *God of Salvation*, 29.

<sup>308</sup> Gill, *Justification*, 52.

<sup>309</sup> Muller, ‘Spirit and Covenant’, *Foundations* (Jan-Mar 1981) 12.

<sup>310</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and Redemption’, *JRT* (Jan 2018), 386.

emphasising human passivity in light of God's sovereign decrees conveying free grace to his elect. Within this context it is easy to see how Gill's polarising theology continued to play out consistently and logically in the form of distinctions and separation, all of which served to strengthen his rejection of the gospel offer. Fundamentally Gill's definition of gospel preaching was proclamation of doctrinal truth without offering Christ. This has two distinct results. Elect or sensible sinners who have been eternally justified receive the gospel as internal revelation through the internal call, in whom the Spirit begets special faith and evangelical repentance. Non-elect or dead sinners who have not been eternally justified hear the gospel as external revelation, and the outward call obliges them to natural faith and legal repentance, or moral reform. Lack of this type of faith warrants damnation, but lack of special faith does not, because that is solely in God's power to give. As Gill frequently said, the type of revelation determines the level of faith or degree of obligation. By creating and superimposing these distinctions to accommodate the antithesis of God loving his elect and hating the reprobate, or at least not loving them, Gill conflated God's will of decree and his will of revelation, using his hidden will as the ground for denial of general gospel offers. Owen propounded another set of distinctions and connections which kept the gospel call intact: 'We must exactly distinguish between man's duty and God's purpose, there being no connexion between them,' particularly in the duty of gospel preachers to 'command and invite all to repent and believe', manifesting the inviolable connection between what is offered and the invitation, between faith and salvation, but *not* the connection of God's counsel and purposes with individuals, for of that the preacher is ignorant.<sup>311</sup>

Gill's major differentiation between preaching and offering reflects his bifurcated theology, where preaching's twofold purpose reflects God's distinguishing decrees. His decretal hermeneutic reinterpreted the nature of preaching, dominated by the categories of election and reprobation. Hence he diminished it to bare declaration, proclamation without invitation. This inevitably enervated the gospel, removing its identity and purpose as '*the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*' (Romans 1:16). Writing particularly with Hoeksema and the 1924 common grace controversy in mind,

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<sup>311</sup> Owen, *Death*, 178.

Berkouwer perceptively explored how a deterministic interpretation of election restricts and weakens gospel preaching. The ‘causal schematic symmetry between election and rejection’ undermines and restrains the gospel’s appealing and dynamic power, making ‘a sharp distinction ... between the particular promise and the general demand’. In this model, he wrote, the presentation of Christ is ‘objective and merely descriptive in character’. Christ may be displayed, there may even be a demand for faith and repentance, but there is no appeal or invitation or offer of grace, no glad tidings for all people. There cannot be because God gives a sincere invitation only to the elect. This does not mean the missionary mandate is ruled out, Berkouwer explained, but the preaching must correspond to the contrast between elect and reprobate, and therefore ‘has a twofold aspect. ... The unity of the message is thus broken by the distinction between light and darkness.’ The impression must be avoided that God bends ‘so deep and so low’ that his intention is really to save. This is the ‘gulf between the command to believe, and that which is never offered but only objectively displayed without an invitation being attached.’ ‘But believe *what*, since grace is not offered to all?’ Berkouwer enquired.<sup>312</sup> ‘Gill’s God was a difficult God to love;’ wrote Seymour, ‘He was stern and fatalistic, and he demanded unquestioning submission to unintelligible decrees.’<sup>313</sup>

Oliver reminds us that the popular view that hyper-Calvinists are never concerned for the salvation of sinners is not always true, and Gill was one of many examples who were. Instances can be produced of him ‘pressing those who were awakened to seek salvation’. But ‘his hyper-Calvinism appears in the absence of direct exhortations and appeals to the unconverted to turn from their sin in repentance and to cast themselves upon Christ.’<sup>314</sup> His categorisation of sinners prevented him from pressing those who were unawakened, those who would never believe because they were non-elect therefore unjustified. Gill claimed the internal call comes only to those who are already recipients of God’s grace, ‘to the “happy few” who have received the certainty of their election by the way of mystical experiences’, as Johannes van den Berg

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<sup>312</sup> Berkouwer, *Election*, 218-222.

<sup>313</sup> Seymour, ‘Gill’, PhD, 311-312.

<sup>314</sup> Oliver, ‘Gill’, *British Particular Baptists*, 4:142.

expresses it.<sup>315</sup> He largely ignored those who lacked this assurance, the unjustified, as having no entitlement or obligation to believe. They were not addressed unless to exhort them to external obedience and morality. They were not warned of their danger or encouraged to apply to Christ for salvation. ‘To suggest that there are certain prerequisites to be fulfilled before one can be addressed with the call of the gospel is very mischievous,’ wrote Roger Nicole.<sup>316</sup> The strict qualifications, conditions and restrictions of Gill’s theology had a significant anthropological impact, leading to confusion and ‘profound introspection’ as Haykin called it.<sup>317</sup> The essence of salvation was removed from faith in Christ as its object to the Spirit’s internal whisper confirming one’s election. If one could only be assured of this, a channel back to eternity was opened. Taylor noted that advising a troubled sinner ‘to go away, and be farther humbled for his sins, we do but run him into a labyrinth of inextricable mazes, for he may ask, How shall I know when I am humbled sufficiently?’<sup>318</sup> Fuller’s hyper-Calvinistic upbringing convinced him that qualifications he lacked were necessary to warrant a sinner to come to Christ, to entitle his belief. He called this notion ‘a bar that kept me back’, and if he had known that *any* sinner might warrantably trust in Christ, he would have believed sooner and not been ‘kept in darkness and despondency by erroneous views of the gospel’ as long as he was.<sup>319</sup> It is not surprising that Gill’s two contemporary critics testified to declining congregational conversions and attendance, to sleepiness and unconcern.

Cursory or superficial reading of Gill easily results in misinterpretation, and such carelessness can seduce the reader into thinking Gill is using general exhortations when in fact he is addressing a specific class of people: the awakened or elect. His understanding of ‘sinners’ does not coincide with the general understanding; he categorised them into dead and sensible. Similarly the reader can assume that what Gill and all other hyper-Calvinists mean by ‘preaching the gospel’ coincides with what is generally understood by that term. In fact it does not. Thus he consistently redirected scripture’s inclusive

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<sup>315</sup> Berg, *Constrained*, 86.

<sup>316</sup> Nicole, ‘Covenant,’ *JETS* (Sept 1995) 405-406.

<sup>317</sup> Haykin, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, 13: <https://credomag.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Hyper-Calvinism-and-the-theology-of-John-Gill.pdf>

<sup>318</sup> Taylor, *Saving Faith*, 81-82.

<sup>319</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 13-14.

invitations exclusively to those with a secret warrant. Gill's perspective forced him into using this warrant to separate elect and reprobate, and then remove the reprobate's accountability. His development of the idea that the type of revelation received directly corresponds to the obligation required was a clear denial of duty-faith and a separation of duty and faith. In fact the gospel knows no distinctions, as Murray confirmed: 'As respects warrant, all to whom the gospel comes are in the same position as to the opportunity, privilege, and responsibility.'<sup>320</sup> Taylor wrote that God 'honours the institution of preaching the Gospel, with making it the instrument in his hand to beget the grace of faith' in the hearts of unbelievers. It is an essential link in the chain of salvation: 'faith comes by hearing, and hearing comes by preaching the word of reconciliation.'<sup>321</sup> Within Gill's context, he saw only the impossibility and irrationality of offering the gospel, that it is actually bad news for all but the elect. The General Assembly's answer to the tenth Query was, 'For although we believe the purchase and application of redemption, to be peculiar to the elect, who were given by the Father to Christ, in the counsel of peace; yet the warrant to receive him, is common to all; ministers ... are authorized and instructed to go to preach the gospel to every creature, *i.e.* to make a full, free, and *unhampered* offer of him, his grace, and righteousness, and salvation, to every rational soul.'<sup>322</sup> Chalmers taught that injudiciously mixing election with the overtures of the gospel 'is the direct road to a darkening of the whole message, and making the application of it impossible'. He said, 'It is not because I know myself to be one of the sheep, or one of the elect, but because I know myself to be one of the world, that I take to myself the calls and promises of the New Testament. ... It is on the stepping-stone of a universal offer that each man reaches and realizes his own particular salvation.'<sup>323</sup>

Gill portrayed a harsh and dispassionate idea of God, with little reflection of his love for humanity, or belief in his desire for the salvation of all: 'it is the will of God to save sinners, at least some of them.'<sup>324</sup> He seemed unable to reconcile

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<sup>320</sup> Murray, 'Faith', *Collected Writings*, 2:257.

<sup>321</sup> Taylor, *Saving Faith*, 139.

<sup>322</sup> *Twelve Queries*, 70 (my emphasis).

<sup>323</sup> Chalmers, *Institutes*, 2:421,423.

<sup>324</sup> Gill, *Christ's Satisfaction*, 10,16.



God's integrity with a well-meant and sincere offer of salvation. It was both illogical and inconsistent with his ideas of God that he should offer salvation to those whom he had not elected, for whom Christ did not die, by ministers powerless to bestow it to people powerless to receive it. Thereby he thought to relieve God from the charge of insincerity and deceit. At the same time he came dangerously close to blaming God for the lack of saving faith, by stipulating that God cannot condemn the non-elect for not having received a gift which he himself determined never to give them. The only way Gill could make logical sense of predestination, particular redemption and human inability was to jettison gospel offers. He had driven himself into a position where they were completely incongruous, and he was prepared to reinterpret texts to maintain his rationalism. His passion for God's sovereign decrees constrained him to constrict the freedom and liberality of God's grace within manageable limits.

Although Gill protested against the accusation of doctrinal antinomianism, he rendered himself vulnerable to the charge of it. Robison correctly observed, 'his own system was a haven for Antinomian interpretations.'<sup>325</sup> Haykin noted this was the case particularly with his doctrine of eternal justification.<sup>326</sup> In fact Gill constructed much of his thought in light of the doctrinal antinomianism and no-offer theology he encountered during his Northamptonshire youth.<sup>327</sup> Not only did he associate himself with and defend Crisp's writings, but his own teaching of antinomianism's pillar doctrines of eternal union and justification, and of God seeing no sin in his people, his strong emphasis on predestination and human passivity, his teaching exemption from the duty of faith despite the command to believe, that lack of saving faith carries no accountability, and his determination to minimise human response and agency in receiving salvation by conflating two covenants into one, losing the temporal covenant of grace within the eternal covenant of redemption—all betray antinomianism.

Despite his defenders' attempts to distance him from others like Hussey, Skepp and Brine, their hyper-Calvinism was essentially the same. They all allowed their

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<sup>325</sup> Robison, 'Legacy', *BQ* (July 1971) 121.

<sup>326</sup> Haykin, 'Hyper-Calvinism', 13: <https://credomag.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Hyper-Calvinism-and-the-theology-of-John-Gill.pdf>

<sup>327</sup> Rathel, 'Gill and Redemption', *JRT* (Jan 2018) 379.

understanding of doctrine to restrict gospel preaching so that Christ was not offered to sinners, neither were they expected to repent and believe. Granted, Gill's scholarly and analytical mind constructed logical, detailed and reasoned theological arguments, making his thoughts and writing more nuanced and sophisticated, but also enabling him to write in a way which could mislead. The evidence in this chapter demonstrates that Gill was in the central stream of hyper-Calvinistic theology, giving cohesion and credence to a system first articulated by Hussey when Gill was nine years old, as witnessed by the term 'Gillism' synonymous with hyper-Calvinism and contrasted to 'Fullerism' synonymous with evangelical Calvinism.<sup>328</sup>

## 6 Debate over Gill's hyper-Calvinism

Recently there has been a resurgence of interest in Gill's theology, particularly scrutiny of the traditional evaluation of his hyper-Calvinism. This trend has already been considered in the context of the complexities surrounding hyper-Calvinism (ch1, pt4.4). Haykin writes for example, 'The matter of Gill's hyper-Calvinism is a controverted issue not easily resolved, in part because scholars disagree on the best way to define hyper-Calvinism.'<sup>329</sup> This ambiguity is evident in the 1997 book celebrating Gill's three-hundredth anniversary, the various contributions to which, Haykin remarks in his Introduction, 'do not arrive at a consensus with regard to the question of Gill's Hyper-Calvinism'.<sup>330</sup> According to Rathel, much of this disagreement originates because historians on both sides of the debate 'have rarely examined Gill on his own terms' in order to discern his theological identity by careful examination, leading to 'inaccurate portrayals of his true convictions'. Arguments for the traditional perspective have often relied on preconceptions concerning genuine Calvinism, found him guilty by association, or contrasted his theology with Calvin's, for example; while those who defend Gill have often failed to interpret his soteriology accurately. Rathel, who submits that Gill's theology was hyper-Calvinistic, concludes that 'recent attempts to argue otherwise remain unpersuasive.'<sup>331</sup> Specifically current surveys

<sup>328</sup> IOTA, 'Annual Meetings', *BM* (June 1820) 240-241; Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 750.

<sup>329</sup> Chute, *Baptist Story*, 69-70.

<sup>330</sup> Haykin, 'Introduction', *Life and Thought*, 6.

<sup>331</sup> Rathel, 'Gill and hyper-Calvinism', *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 11-13, 21-29.

have ‘not adequately explored’ or have incorrectly interpreted the significant innovation Gill made to the covenant of redemption, primarily because of failure to heed his historical context shaped by doctrinal antinomianism and no-offer Calvinism.<sup>332</sup> Oliver agrees with Rathel: ‘Modern attempts to argue that Gill was not a hyper-Calvinist have not been convincing,’ some confusion arising ‘from the popular view that High Calvinists are never concerned for the salvation of sinners’.<sup>333</sup> Peter Morden concurs, and believes Gill’s views are clear enough from his preface to Davis’s *Hymns* alone.<sup>334</sup> Priest also agrees: ‘Attempts to make Gill less the hyper-Calvinist than either Skepp or Brine have been unconvincing.’<sup>335</sup>

Toon accepted the validity of Gill’s hyper-Calvinism because ‘he taught doctrines “above” authentic Calvinism and of which John Calvin would have disapproved.’ Specifically these were eternal justification and eternal adoption, offering the gospel exclusively to the elect, and the duty of the unregenerate to exercise common or natural faith. The scholastic Calvinists Gill favoured typically ‘believed it was valid to treat biblical doctrines like logical premises in philosophy and to deduce from them logical consequences’. Gill followed their reasoning. He deduced eternal justification from God’s decree to justify the elect. Unlike Calvin and most Puritans, but like Hussey, Gill deduced the preacher’s duty not from God’s clear invitations to sinners, but from his partial knowledge of God’s secret decrees of election and reprobation. And he deduced sinners’ duty ‘from the duty of the perfect Adam in the covenant of works’, of whom God did not require saving faith.<sup>336</sup> Toon is right that Gill’s hyper-Calvinism stems from philosophical deduction, but as regards the third point of sinners’ duty deduced from prelapsarian Adam’s, it was Brine and Wayman who developed this theory, although Gill was not averse to it. Gill used other arguments to deny the obligation of saving faith as noted above.

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<sup>332</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and Redemption’, *JRT* (Jan 2018) 377-382.

<sup>333</sup> Oliver, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 29; Oliver, ‘Gill’, *British Particular Baptists*, 4:141-142.

<sup>334</sup> Morden, *Offering Christ*, 14-15.

<sup>335</sup> Priest, ‘Fuller’s Response’, *DBSJ* (Fall 2001), 48n10.

<sup>336</sup> Toon, ‘Skepp and Gill’, *FGR* (Summer 1967) 322-327; Toon, *Emergence*, 129-132.

‘From his earliest published writings onward,’ wrote Daniel, ‘it was evident that Gill was like Hussey in his opposition to free offers and admiration for Tobias Crisp.’<sup>337</sup> In his ‘encyclopaedic’ thesis Daniel produced a ‘resumé of the theology of Hyper-Calvinism’, using Gill, ‘the definitive Hyper-Calvinist’, as his main source because of his ‘unquestioned’ significance in the tradition and his scholarly, extensive and accessible works. He compiled a unique list of those who ‘fall within the perimeters of Hyper-Calvinism either by their own express statements ... or by logical deduction’ headed by Gill as its ‘foremost’ proponent. Daniel defines ‘the vital theme’ of his theology as ‘the sovereignty of divine grace’, emphasised to the minimisation of human responsibility particularly in salvation, springing from ‘the eternal double-decree of the secret will of God in its superiority over the temporal call of the Gospel’. His ‘theology of an essentially impassionate God led to a Supralapsarianism which tended to push back as much as possible into eternity in such a way that the division of election and reprobation governs the relationship between Law and Gospel, producing a strictly limited atonement and restrictions on the Gospel which cannot be found in Calvin’s theology.’<sup>338</sup> Rather than studying Gill to discover evidence of hyper-Calvinism, Daniel has studied hyper-Calvinism through the medium of Gill’s writings. Nevertheless Rathel judges he ‘correctly interprets much of Gill’s thought’.<sup>339</sup>

Ivimey wrote several times of Gill’s manner of preaching devoid of invitations or application to the unconverted. ‘Here are no alarming appeals to the conscience, ... no expostulations to urge them, ... no beseeching them, ... no warnings, ... no exhortation to flee, ... no direction to pray for pardon.’ Gill merely advised them, ‘Attend the means of grace, and may the Lord call you by it in due time.’ Ivimey concluded, ‘If this manner of preaching the gospel be compared with that of Christ and his apostles the discrepancy will obviously appear.’<sup>340</sup> Iain Murray perspicaciously writes, ‘The keystone of Hyper-Calvinistic thinking is clearly to be found in Gill,’ especially in his *Cause* written to refute Arminianism, in which ‘he argues at length that men are not responsible’ for

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<sup>337</sup> Daniel, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 180.

<sup>338</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 37,39,11,757-758,x.

<sup>339</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and hyper-Calvinism’, *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 12n5.

<sup>340</sup> Ivimey, *History* 3:460-461, 272-275, 4:22-25.

coming to Christ with saving faith since they cannot do so without special grace. 'His case is that men are only obligated as far as the "revelation" they receive. ... In accordance with this, Gill claimed that all texts appearing to show a favourable desire on God's part towards all the lost *do not* have any reference to their salvation.'<sup>341</sup> Sell noted the contrast between Gill's assertion of gospel *declaration*, and his underemphasis of the gospel *call*. 'This inhibiting factor led, and was later to lead', he wrote, 'to undue introspection at the expense of Christ-centredness—for if the gospel is for 'sensible sinners' only, I must continually ascertain whether or not I fall into that class with a view to making sure that I have a *warrant* to believe the gospel.'<sup>342</sup> Clipsham observes, 'Both Gill and Brine considered the gospel to be addressed not to sinners *as sinners*, but *as sensible sinners*.' This idea of needing a warrant to believe 'involved a radical re-interpretation of the nature of faith and conversion'.<sup>343</sup> Haykin explores how Gill's doctrine of the covenant of redemption and 'his tenacious commitment' to eternal justification led to his rejection of the free gospel offer.<sup>344</sup> Nevertheless he commends Nettles and Naylor for disputing the oversimplified standard view that he and Brine were responsible for the spiritual leanness of the Calvinistic Baptists.<sup>345</sup> In Seymour's PhD on Gill he emphasises the influence of Hussey and Skepp on the formulation of Gill's theology. Referring to one of his sermons Seymour writes, 'Many theologians, who do not share Gill's hyper-Calvinist system, would find the above sermon extract acceptable as a correct statement of evangelical repentance and saving faith. The difference lies in the application of the statement. Gill would never have consented to urge men to repentance or to offer salvation' for fear of interfering with God's prerogative in saving his elect.<sup>346</sup> Seymour correctly distinguishes between Gill's declaratory words and their personal application to his audience. Robison fairly argued that 'Gill and Brine actually felt that the minister did have an evangelistic responsibility, but that this responsibility was only to the "elect," and that any real evangelistic emphasis was far overshadowed by questions concerning the nature of election.' Therefore 'Gill's theological writings present a

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<sup>341</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon*, 113-114.

<sup>342</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 82.

<sup>343</sup> Clipsham, 'Fuller' pt 1, *BQ* (July 1963) 103.

<sup>344</sup> Haykin, 'Hyper-Calvinism', 5-6,9-16: <https://credomag.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Hyper-Calvinism-and-the-theology-of-John-Gill.pdf>

<sup>345</sup> Haykin, *One Heart*, 19.

<sup>346</sup> Seymour, 'Gill', PhD, 51-58,297 (Gill, *Sermon on death of Samuel Wilson*, 5-6).

formidable argument against open evangelism', stifling it with his 'rigid insistence upon Covenant theology, on election and damnation, and the futility' of the human will in salvation.<sup>347</sup> In White's revealing biographical article on Gill he states that 'his single pastorate ... provided him with a London pulpit from which to oppose his own exalted version of Calvinism to what he considered the doctrinal heterodoxy of his day, whether Arian or Wesleyan.'<sup>348</sup>

Oliver holds Gill in high esteem, and is reluctant to assert his hyper-Calvinism because he believes 'preoccupation with this issue' has caused 'his important contribution to Orthodox Dissent and the Particular Baptist community' to be overlooked. Nevertheless he admits Gill denied the free offer of the gospel contrary to the seventeenth-century historic confessions, making 'his position clear on more than one occasion'. Oliver felt 'compelled to part company' with Gill over his absence of invitations, exhortations and appeals to the unconverted. He also taught eternal justification, 'condemned' by seventeenth-century confessions.<sup>349</sup> Elsewhere he averred, 'Over against the Arminianism, which he feared so much, he asserted a strong Hyper-Calvinism,'<sup>350</sup> the impact of which 'on the Particular Baptist churches as a whole has been disastrous'.<sup>351</sup> In his thesis he wrote of how Gill had been 'profoundly influenced by the non-offer view' of Hussey and Skepp, and by the time of his final publication 'probably few realised how revolutionary his teachings had been, or how far the Particular Baptists had moved since the seventeenth century.' Gill's 1729 *Declaration* for example made significant omissions in readiness for his 'higher Calvinism'. This eclipsed the 1689 Confession: 'the obscurity into which it fell during the eighteenth century, must have owed much to his influence.'<sup>352</sup> Dix wrote of the impact on the nineteenth-century Strict Baptists of Gill's and Brine's propagation of the 'no offers of the gospel, no calls to repentance and faith scheme' over against the 1677 Confession.<sup>353</sup> Wheeler referred to Gill's and other hyper-Calvinists' 'two distinct departures' from Calvin. First was the

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<sup>347</sup> Robison, 'Legacy', *BQ* (July 1971), 118,120.

<sup>348</sup> White, 'Gill', *BQ* (April 1967), 72.

<sup>349</sup> Oliver, 'Gill', *British Particular Baptists*, 4:141-142.

<sup>350</sup> Oliver, 'Survey', *Foundations* (Nov 1981) 11.

<sup>351</sup> Oliver, 'Gill', *Life and Thought*, 49.

<sup>352</sup> Oliver, 'Emergence', PhD, 26-31,92,175. See also Oliver, *History*, 3-11,14-15.

<sup>353</sup> Dix, 'Strict and Particular', PhD, 1-2,

‘disproportionate place’ they gave to reprobation in their writings. This not only placed ‘the total responsibility on the mysterious and inscrutable decision of God’; it also ‘did not do justice ... to the complexities involved’. Second, was the primary place given to predestination, reversing the traditional order between it and justification. ‘With this change the door was opened for the doctrine of predestination to gain a tyrannical dominance and spread a sterilizing influence throughout the Church. Fuller’s attempt to soften the harshness of this doctrine was an effort to rectify the unbalance that existed, ... making room again for the offer of grace to all men.’<sup>354</sup> Sheehan discussed hyper-Calvinistic presentation of the gospel under five headings: the duty of repentance and of faith, the universality of gospel invitations, the culpability of unbelief, and the Spirit striving with sinners. All these are rejected by hyper-Calvinists, and Sheehan references Gill and Styles throughout as evidence for this.<sup>355</sup> Styles was an outspoken hyper-Calvinist who credited Hussey and Gill among others for elucidating ‘the truth of God in this branch of the Gospel’.<sup>356</sup> Howson wrote, ‘There is no doubt that Brine and Gill were High Calvinists but it is also evident from their writings that they went a step further holding to, and emphasizing’ the five distinctives of hyper-Calvinism (ch1,pt1). Howson goes on to provide ample evidence from both Gill’s and Brine’s writing of this.<sup>357</sup> Fuller had a high opinion of both Gill and Brine,<sup>358</sup> calling them ‘great and upright men’ who ‘thought for themselves’.<sup>359</sup> Even though ‘to challenge Gill’s theology in any area would be a risky undertaking’, Fuller did challenge his soteriology, albeit indirectly. Howson has catalogued these references and concluded that Fuller used Gill ‘wisely’, sometimes ‘for his own advantage ... not taking into account all that Gill meant’. Indeed the hyper-Calvinist Button accused Fuller of mistakenly reading Gill when Fuller used him for support.<sup>360</sup> Daniel also questioned Fuller’s accurate reading of Gill.<sup>361</sup> As Fuller read other authors, particularly Bunyan, he began to doubt whether Gill’s system was the truth, and

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<sup>354</sup> Wheeler, ‘Missionary Awakening’, PhD, 205-207.

<sup>355</sup> Sheehan, ‘Presentation’, *Foundations* (May 1982) 30-39.

<sup>356</sup> eg Styles, *Guide*, 61.

<sup>357</sup> Howson, ‘Question of Orthodoxy’, PhD, 188-203.

<sup>358</sup> Morden, *Offering Christ*, 58.

<sup>359</sup> Fuller, ‘Defence’, *Works* 1:175.

<sup>360</sup> Howson, ‘Fuller’s Reading’, *Eusebeia* (Spring 2008) 71-73,75-79,86-87.

<sup>361</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 368.

as he doubted he himself became convicted of his own ‘antisciptural and defective’ preaching, understanding that his new reasoning would profoundly affect his preaching.<sup>362</sup>

Roberts explains that ‘the High Calvinists had constructed a complete defense of the notion that man in essence had no part to play in salvation,’ and Gill and Brine ‘represented the two best-known proponents of non-invitational Calvinism’, unique in their ‘strongly stressed doctrine of personal predestination’. Roberts writes: ‘It was in the doctrine of the eternal justification that Gill and Brine evidently found theological justification for the ‘non-universal’ and restricted offer of the Gospel.’ This view tended ‘to make evangelism an extraneous duty’, for if Christ died only for the elect, and their salvation was already an accomplished fact, and saving faith was a realisation of that fact, ‘then evangelism had become simply the public exhortation of the ‘already redeemed’ to claim and declare their ‘already applied’ salvation. Gill and Brine implied and said as much.’ Consequently, to Gill, ‘vigorous evangelism and the call to repentance in some sense then implied, at the least, lack of faith in God’s covenant of salvation as well as a cheapening of the Gospel generally.’ And on this basis universal offers of grace were repudiated.<sup>363</sup> Macdonald compares Gill, ‘the foremost spokesman for high Calvinism in London’, self-taught, proficient in the biblical languages, with his ‘logical mind’ and obvious fascination with ‘questions of system and doctrine’, with Arnold, his colleague in Unicorn Yard, from a West-country tradition of moderate Calvinism, relatively uneducated, with no literary ambitions, hyper-Calvinism holding no appeal. She suggests he was ‘warm and evangelical’, Gill ‘cool and logical’.<sup>364</sup>

Peter Naylor confirms that ‘among the Baptists of the period, John Gill was without doubt the most prominent exponent of high Calvinism.’ He clarified that hyper-Calvinism is denial ‘that a person insensitive to his sinfulness should ever be summoned to conversion’, resting upon the dogma that fallen humanity is unable to turn from sin to God, and is therefore not required to do so.<sup>365</sup> In a

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<sup>362</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 25-26, 28-30.

<sup>363</sup> Roberts, *Continuity and Change*, 38, 40-41.

<sup>364</sup> Macdonald, *London Calvinistic Baptists*, 319.

<sup>365</sup> Naylor, *Picking up a Pin*, 147.



later publication he changed that dogma to ‘a consideration of Adam prior to the fall’.<sup>366</sup> In his brief study of Gill’s theology he included the following observations. Gill rejected the gospel offer ‘summarily’, and claimed it was declaratory only, the preacher not ‘required to press home the urgency of faith’. Naylor notes Gill’s frequent use of ‘evangelical’ and ‘legal’ repentance as ‘principal instruments’ to resolve the tensions inherent in some passages, for he was ‘dominated by the view that because saving faith is an imposed gift ... it cannot be a demand.’ He observes Gill’s reticence to pray for all men’s salvation ‘collectively’, and also the implications of not offering salvation to those for whom it was not purchased: ‘his words assume that a definite atonement demands this hugely negative conclusion concerning evangelism.’ Naylor remarks that the only way Gill copes with scripture’s general exhortations to repentance is a summons to outward reformation, or legal repentance. He reflects that ‘the underlying rationale’ for Gill’s unwillingness to exhort sinners was ‘that a flat statement of evangelical truth is sufficient in that the good news is in no sense a demand laying an obligation upon its hearers.’ Naylor is clearly uncomfortable with some of Gill’s thought, using such adjectives as ‘puzzling’, ‘surprising’, ‘confusing’, ‘chilling’, ‘complex’, etc. He admitted, ‘it is not easy to pinpoint what he thought about some matters;’ he believes Gill’s logic is ‘impeccable’ but his exegesis sometimes ‘ignores the element of mystery’. Naylor produces a critique of Gill’s doctrine of eternal justification, although he does not link it specifically with his hyper-Calvinism. He summarises Gill’s understanding of the gospel: ‘He frequently allowed himself to be controlled by a quasi-theological system that led him beyond accepted New Testament boundaries,’ but sometimes ‘shed elements of the system to exhibit a normative evangelical Calvinism’.<sup>367</sup> Naylor can appear conflicted and tentative in his appraisal. For example, given Gill’s belief that election is an act of grace which infallibly conveys salvation, Naylor reckoned Gill ‘was absolutely right’ to deny universal offers of grace: ‘So, even if something is to be ‘offered’, let it never be the grace of God. Nevertheless, without denying the churches’ duty to carry the gospel to all men ... , we ask if Gill was not, perhaps, somewhat misleading when he taught that salvation (as distinct from ‘grace’) should never be offered.’ Again, Naylor wrote, ‘That there is good news to be announced to all men was a

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<sup>366</sup> Naylor, *Calvinism*, 169.

<sup>367</sup> Naylor, *Calvinism*, 184-203; also Naylor, *Picking up a Pin*, 165-191.

matter about which Gill entertained absolutely no doubts whatever.’ For though Gill denied ‘the gospel should urge men personally to saving faith in Christ, his interpretation of the ministerial commission was virtually such a call. This is because the obligation Gill placed upon the hearer, even though ... reprobate, amounted to the requirement that he should exercise saving faith.’<sup>368</sup> Naylor’s ambiguity explains why neither camp owns him. Haykin believes he argues ‘along similar lines’ as Nettles.<sup>369</sup> Ella likens him to Oliver and others who believe Gill was hyper-Calvinist.<sup>370</sup>

*Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* confirms Gill’s theology: he was a strong defender of Baptist principles and of ‘what he believed to be orthodox Calvinism against contemporary heterodoxical views on the Trinity, the person of Christ, and the five points of Calvinism. He actually espoused an extreme form of Calvinism,’ teaching eternal justification and adoption of the elect, and an eternal covenant of grace. ‘Believing that an elect person is passive in conversion as well as regeneration, he denied that grace should be free offered to unconverted sinners: it was not his practice to address them or to urge acceptance of the gospel.’ Consequently ‘he was little interested in the evangelical awakening of the eighteenth century, and the influence of Gill and his fellow Hyper-Calvinists explains why this revival was slow in having an effect upon the Particular Baptists.’<sup>371</sup>

Finally Rathel determines that Gill’s primary theological focus was ‘a desire to minimize human agency in the reception of salvation’. This was enabled by his doctrine of eternal justification, which shaped his understanding of two distinctive callings, leading him ‘to deny the legitimacy of Gospel offers and duty faith’. This ‘accords well’ with the theological identity of hyper-Calvinism, placing him well within its territory.<sup>372</sup> Rathel firmly aligns Gill with other hyper-Calvinists: ‘Though Gill did occasionally depart theologically from such thinkers as Crisp, Skepp, and Hussey, the desire controlling his thought was the one on

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<sup>368</sup> Naylor, *Picking up a Pin*, 162,187.

<sup>369</sup> Haykin, *One Heart*, 18-19.

<sup>370</sup> Ella, *Gill*, 151-153.

<sup>371</sup> Freundt, ‘Gill’, *Evangelical Dictionary*, 483.

<sup>372</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and hyper-Calvinism’, *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 11-21,29.

display in their theologies—the minimization of human agency. When he did differ from these theologians, he often did so because he wished to go even further in emphasizing human passivity. This intention profoundly shaped his presentation of the covenant of redemption.’ ‘In the end, one must conclude that Gill’s particular deployment of the covenant of redemption departed not only from the received tradition ... but also from what was found even in the most robust forms of doctrinal antinomianism and high Calvinism.’<sup>373</sup>

Despite all these assessments, some modern theologians have attempted to rescue Gill from the hyper-Calvinist camp and rehabilitate him into evangelical Calvinism, aligning his theology with Fuller’s. This includes a group associated with Southern Baptist Convention’s Founders Ministries, such as Nettles, George and Jonathan White.<sup>374</sup> Ella, who regularly contributes to ‘The Baptist Particular’ and ‘New Focus’ magazine, both of which are hyper-Calvinist online sites,<sup>375</sup> also denies Gill’s hyper-Calvinism but does not seek to align him with Fuller, whose teaching he calls ‘wayward’.<sup>376</sup>

Gill’s most influential defender is the Baptist historian Nettles, who challenges claims of hyper-Calvinistic tendencies within Gill’s ministry. In *By His Grace and for His Glory* he writes, ‘Gill does not pretend that grace is ... offered to all men.’ This denial of the free offer ‘labels him in the eyes of Curt Daniel as a hyper-Calvinist’, but Nettles questions ‘whether that item should be the strategic element ... of hyper-Calvinism. ... This becomes especially debatable when we observe that Gill did not reject the reality of duty-faith and duty-repentance. Rather, all men are called upon and have an obligation to repent and believe.’ He admits Gill’s exposition of the unregenerates’ duties is ‘quite complex’, and some statements would out of context and ‘untempered by any other considerations, ... put Gill undeniably in the hyper-Calvinist camp’. But Gill’s belief ‘that the unsaved have the duty to believe savingly and that ministers must exhort them to this,’ and that ‘refusal to believe savingly

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<sup>373</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and Redemption’, *JRT* (Jan 2018), 382,390.

<sup>374</sup> Priest, ‘Fuller’s Response’, *DBSJ* (Fall 2001), 49n13.

<sup>375</sup> <https://www.baptists.net/history/category/george-ella/> ; <https://go-newfocus.co.uk/about-us/who-are-we>

<sup>376</sup> Ella, Review: Bunyan, *Come and Welcome*, in *New Focus* (Feb 2006) <https://go-newfocus.co.uk/resources/app/category/reviews/article/come-and-welcome-to-jesus-christ>

aggravates guilt,’ extricates him from the charge of hyper-Calvinism.<sup>377</sup> Nettles’ argument is reminiscent of current trends within Engelsma’s Protestant Reformed Church which redefine hyper-Calvinism to include restriction of gospel preaching to the elect and denial of duty-faith, but exclude denial of the well-meant offer.<sup>378</sup> This makes use of Hussey’s and Gill’s vital distinction between preaching and offering, enabling those who preach the gospel without offering Christ to sinners to distance themselves from the charge of hyper-Calvinism (ch1,pt4.2). Nettles claims ‘refusal to use the word *offer* should not be a point of controversy,’ and he himself denies grace can be offered: ‘Grace is purely within the sovereign prerogatives of God. ... An “offer” of grace, therefore, presupposes a redefinition of the word *grace*.’<sup>379</sup> Gill however did deny duty-faith. It appears Nettles has accepted Gill’s distinctions and defends him from within them. He does not provide specific references for his three statements above of Gill’s belief concerning duty-faith, which is unfortunate. This chapter has provided evidence from Gill’s teaching that 1) God does not require all men to believe in Christ, not just those who have no external revelation, but also those who only have the outward ministry unattended by special illumination; 2) it is irrational for ministers to offer Christ when they have no power or right to do so; and 3) God will not damn anyone for not having special faith in Christ because they are powerless to produce it and God has withheld it from them.<sup>380</sup> Nettles misrepresents Gill by claiming that he believed the opposite of these three points. According to Nettles’ own parameters Gill hereby puts himself undeniably in the hyper-Calvinist camp.

There has been criticism of Nettles’ book. Rathel affirms that Nettles ‘takes Gill out of context’, because he has not sufficiently explored his soteriology, failing to probe his framing of salvation as an eternal act of God with minimal human participation, and his distinction between external and internal calling. Most importantly he has not addressed the significance of Gill’s doctrine of eternal justification despite its being ‘a key component of Gill’s theological project’.

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<sup>377</sup> Nettles, *By His Grace*, 79-80,94-97.

<sup>378</sup> PRCA: <http://www.prca.org>, eg Engelsma, *Hyper-Calvinism*, 7-8,15-16; Engelsma, ‘Denial?’, *PRTJ* (April 1990); Blacketer ‘Three Points’, *CTJ* (April 2000).

<sup>379</sup> Nettles, *By His Grace*, 388.

<sup>380</sup> full details above, but see Gill, *Cause*, 166; Gill, *Answer*, 2:20; Gill, *Faith*, 30.

‘This neglect’, Rathel concludes, ‘causes Nettles to misrepresent Gill on the matter of duty-faith,’ for Gill clearly stated that obligation to repent and believe directly correlates to the type of revelation and call received.<sup>381</sup> In Oliver’s review of Nettles’ book, he commented that Nettles’ ‘most surprising conclusion’ is that Gill was not a hyper-Calvinist, for when his writings are considered, ‘the weight of the evidence supports the traditional view that he was.’<sup>382</sup> He writes elsewhere, ‘I felt compelled to disagree with his assessment of Gill’s hyper-Calvinism. I believe that Gill’s hyper-Calvinism did great damage at the time and even more in the hands of lesser men.’<sup>383</sup> Iain Murray agreed that ‘it is hard to see how Nettles’ defence of Gill can be sustained.’<sup>384</sup> In an appendix to his PhD, Oliver revisits Nettles’ reassessment of Gill. He concedes that Gill believed in evangelism, not unusual among hyper-Calvinists, also that Gill was not reluctant to encourage sensible sinners. Crucially ‘the problem of the Hyper-Calvinist is with the duty of those who show *no* interest in the Gospel.’ To understand Gill’s position, his definitions, qualifications and expressions must be understood, Oliver stresses. ‘Gill’s arguments on man’s duty often hinge on the distinction between natural and spiritual responsibilities.’ Gill carefully distinguishes between ‘those who hear the gospel’, who are not obligated to trust Christ as Saviour, and ‘all to whom the gospel revelation comes’, bringing saving faith.<sup>385</sup> Garrett disagrees with Nettles’ ‘elaborate defense of Gill’, contending that ‘Gill’s rejection of “offers” and “tenders” with its implications for preaching’ confirms Gill’s position as a hyper-Calvinist.<sup>386</sup>

In a paper on Fuller, Nettles makes a surprising omission. He speaks of the teaching which ‘began’ with Hussey, was ‘reinforced’ by Wayman, and entered Baptist life through Brine, namely that scripture provides no warrant for unregenerate men to consider faith and repentance to be their duty. His failure to mention Gill’s participation in this crucial aspect of hyper-Calvinism is significant. All the more so because he writes, ‘this precise point handcuffed’

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<sup>381</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and hyper-Calvinism’, *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 22-23; other inconsistencies in Nettles’ understanding of Gill: 24-25.

<sup>382</sup> Oliver, ‘Review’, *Banner of Truth* (May 1987).

<sup>383</sup> Oliver, ‘Gill’, *British Particular Baptists*, 4:142.

<sup>384</sup> Murray, *Spurgeon*, 116n1.

<sup>385</sup> Oliver, ‘Emergence’, PhD, Appendix A (my italics).

<sup>386</sup> Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 99.

Fuller.<sup>387</sup> Yet Fuller synonymised ‘the High Calvinistic system’ with the system of Gill, Brine and others, describing its ‘distinction of duties ... into internal and external, and making the latter only concern the unregenerate’, and its teaching on ‘the duty of sinners, and of ministers in addressing them’.<sup>388</sup>

In an article on Gill and the Evangelical Awakening, Nettles’ attempt to theologically align Gill with Whitefield has already been noted (2.2). Rathel highlights the ‘troubling’ fact of Nettles’ several implications that Gill ‘held to the traditional understanding of justification by faith’ rather than eternal justification.<sup>389</sup> Notably Nettles appears to backtrack on his earlier assessment of Gill’s hyper-Calvinism: ‘Gill differed at several points from identifiable Hyper-Calvinists of the century. There is a central point, however, in which he appears to hold the Hyper-Calvinist view.’ This is Gill’s ‘teaching of the absence of current ability, and thus responsibility, *on the basis of its original absence*’, which Nettles calls ‘the most pivotal theological idea of the Hyper-Calvinist doctrine’. However Gill’s inconsistency on this point (3.3) enables Nettles to equivocate on whether this was sufficient to label Gill a hyper-Calvinist. Thus he concludes that only ‘*theoretically* Gill held that the non-elect were not obligated to evangelical obedience, because the necessity of such obedience did not exist in unfallen humanity’ represented by Adam. He also inserts in a footnote: ‘Although I think the judgment should still be surrounded with cautions and caveats, there **may** be compelling evidence that Gill held to the distinctive Hyper-Calvinist tenet.’<sup>390</sup> Rathel comments, ‘Surprisingly, despite this admission, Nettles remains cautious about labelling Gill a hyper-Calvinist, and he does not retract his earlier claim that Gill affirmed duty faith. He even continues to praise Gill. ... With Nettles, then, readers find a contradictory portrayal of Gill.’<sup>391</sup>

Jonathan White, whose PhD supervisor was Nettles, claims Gill remained within the confines of historic Calvinism, and that evaluations of him as hyper-Calvinist

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<sup>387</sup> Nettles, ‘Influence’, *Eusebeia* (Spring 2008) 101.

<sup>388</sup> Ryland, *Fuller*, 25-26,28.

<sup>389</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and hyper-Calvinism’, *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 23-24.

<sup>390</sup> Nettles, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 169,152-153n60.

<sup>391</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and hyper-Calvinism’, *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 24-25.

are suspect theologically, historically and practically. White contended that although Gill denied the free offer, his view of proclaiming the gospel to all should 'alleviate concerns that Gill is a Hyper-Calvinist'. After all, White claims, the gospel offer 'does not reach to the essence of Hyper-Calvinism' but is only a corollary doctrine. For White this essence is denial of duty-faith 'based on man's original lack of ability to believe the gospel for salvation'. This agrees with Nettles' definition of the essence of hyper-Calvinism. He concludes, the term 'hyper-Calvinism' is not only inappropriate to Gill but 'should be annihilated from historical and theological usage'.<sup>392</sup> White has relied heavily on Nettles in his thesis. His 'unnecessarily limited definition of hyper-Calvinism ... is unhelpful,' according to Rathel. His thesis fails to take into account Gill's motivating doctrine of eternal justification, and his 'passionate' arguments against gospel offers and duty-faith.<sup>393</sup> Steve Weaver, whose thesis supervisor was also Nettles, defends Gill against hyper-Calvinism, claiming he is so characterised because of his 'much needed defense of the doctrines of God's grace'. Weaver concedes he 'wrongly taught' eternal justification, but 'it was never a hindrance to his proclamation of the gospel to sinners. While others would take this teaching to its logical conclusion and fail to preach the gospel promiscuously, Gill was not guilty of this error.'<sup>394</sup> George, in his essay on Gill, exonerates him from 'three distinct issues' on which his hyper-Calvinistic reputation was based. First, by his teaching of eternal justification 'Gill did not intend to exalt so highly the initiative of God in salvation that he preempted the requirements of repentance, faith, and conversion.' George concedes it 'was a perilous teaching', but denies most Particular Baptists followed it. Second, George calls the charge of antinomianism 'spurious'. Third, regarding 'his presumed refusal to preach the gospel promiscuously to the lost', George isolates Gill from 'the true hyper-Calvinists' to whom this applies. 'Recent research has shown that it is inaccurate to lump together indiscriminately Crisp, Hussey, Skepp, Brine, and Gill' (ref to Nettles), and although 'we cannot quite exonerate Gill of all responsibility in the fostering of an atmosphere' which saw forthright mission as a threat to the gospel of grace, George concluded, 'Gill did

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<sup>392</sup> White, 'Gill's Soteriology', PhD, ch7:181-207, 43-44,50,58-60,224-225, Abstract 246.

<sup>393</sup> Rathel, 'Gill and hyper-Calvinism', *JAFS* (Sept 2020) 22n34.

<sup>394</sup> Weaver, 'Ten Baptists', *Credo* (1.11.19) <https://credomag.com/2019/11/ten-baptists-everyone-should-know-john-gill-2/>

not go so far as the real hyper-Calvinists.’<sup>395</sup> In this essay George fails to explore eternal justification’s connection to Gill’s denial of gospel offers and duty-faith. He takes antinomianism at its most basic meaning. Third, he does not accept Gill’s categories, such as ‘sensible’ sinners. Rathel believes ‘George’s strong reliance on Nettles’ caused him to misread Gill, particularly concerning evangelism, and this gives his presentation ‘an unbalanced feel’.<sup>396</sup> Gregory Wills believes many historians have focused on Gill’s ‘distinctives’, such as ‘eternal justification and limited invitations’, thereby missing his true significance. Wills believes ‘his well-known reluctance to urge sinners indiscriminately to place their faith and trust in Christ for salvation’ was because of his didactic rather than exhortatory approach. He references historians Ella, Nettles and George, who ‘have demonstrated that the common assumption that Gill refused to address sinners is mistaken’, clarifying that Gill limited invitations like ‘the Hyper-Calvinistic Baptists’ but ‘held that all who heard the gospel were obligated to repent and believe in Christ’ like ‘Fuller and the “evangelical Calvinists”’. The root of Gill’s ‘ambivalence’ toward the universal gospel appeal was ‘his vision of spiritual Christianity’, according to Wills.<sup>397</sup>

It should be observed that what Nettles and White call hyper-Calvinism’s essence or pivotal idea, namely that the absence of current ability to believe is justified by and based on its original absence in prelapsarian Adam, was never much in evidence in Gill’s writings, if at all in Hussey’s or Skepp’s. It was certainly not pivotal to their hyper-Calvinism, which was grounded in their interpretation of justification and the covenant, and inferred from such doctrines as election, particular redemption and human inability. It did not gain popularity until the Modern Question controversy. So if, in making it the essence of hyper-Calvinism, their intention is to distance Gill from hyper-Calvinism, then they distance Hussey too.

In his 1995 biography of Gill, Ella stoutly defends him against hyper-Calvinism, naming and refuting his ‘traducers’, and commending both Nettles for his putting ‘to flight all accusations of Hyper-Calvinism’ and George for reinstating

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<sup>395</sup> George, ‘Gill’, ch2: *Theologians*, 26-29.

<sup>396</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and hyper-Calvinism’, *JAFS* (Sept 2020), 25-28.

<sup>397</sup> Wills, ‘Fire’, *Life and Thought*, 192,203-205n71,208.



Gill ‘as the great, orthodox, Baptist leader he was’. Ella explains Gill rejects the evangelism of indiscriminate offers that is inevitably accompanied by universal atonement. When the gospel is preached, the Spirit either makes ‘particular sinners, at particular times, and in particular places’ sensible, or he passes them by. ‘This means that even the elect must await their turn before being effectually called. Though there must be universal evangelism, there is no such thing as indiscriminate evangelism. The Holy Spirit is not the Spirit of Higgledy-Piggledy.’ Ella seems to align himself with no-offer theology by querying whether ‘a gospel of salvation proclaimed to all without distinction ... can really be called a gospel of salvation,’ and by calling duty-faith, where every sinner is warranted to trust Christ, ‘highly rationalistic and Pharisaic in origin’. He believed ‘Gill served the Baptist cause in an unparalleled way, ... and provided all evangelicals with a body of divinity second to none.’<sup>398</sup> In *New Focus* articles he similarly argues: ‘the “well-meant” gospel of man to man is a gospel of deceit,’ because ‘all men are not “authorized” to believe.’<sup>399</sup> In his 2001 book on the free offer, he calls the gospel offer position and its adherents including John Murray ‘highly liberal’, and contrasts Gill’s ‘orthodox’ gospel characterised by rejection of gospel offers and duty-faith with their ‘unorthodox’ gospel.<sup>400</sup> Thereby Ella ratifies Gill’s hyper-Calvinism. Rathel confirms that Ella holds convictions similar to Gill’s, and presents Gill as a model for contemporary pastors, ‘hoping that they too will reject Gospel offers and duty faith. The question raised by Ella’s work, then, becomes that of normativity—is the no-offer, no-duty faith position normative, or does it represent a departure from traditional Reformed soteriology and deserve a descriptor such as hyper-Calvinism?’<sup>401</sup> Similarly Oliver calls Ella’s biography of Gill ‘an apologia for High Calvinism’. In seeking to exonerate Gill from hyper-Calvinism, ‘all his examples of Gill’s evangelism are High Calvinist,’ being exhortations to sensible sinners. ‘While orthodox Calvinists have never denied the place of such exhortations, that is not what the debate is all about,’ wrote Oliver.<sup>402</sup> Garrett reflects that

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<sup>398</sup> Ella, *Gill*, 22,25,158-183, esp 173,273,279,269,311n73.

<sup>399</sup> Ella, ‘Responsibilities’, *New Focus* (March 2017) 9-10. See also ‘Counterfeit Gospels’, (July 2022) 10-14 etc.

<sup>400</sup> Ella, *Free Offer*, 30-31,74-75,84,92-93.

<sup>401</sup> Rathel, ‘Gill and hyper-Calvinism’, *JAFS* (Sept 2020), 28-29.

<sup>402</sup> Oliver, ‘Gill’, *Life and Thought*, 8n2, 29n59.

‘Ella’s study is predicated on demonstrating the truth of Gill’s theology and denigrating that of Andrew Fuller.’<sup>403</sup>

Relying heavily on Ella’s interpretation of Gill’s orthodoxy, Clive Jarvis reassesses the parameters, prevalence and influence of hyper-Calvinism and Gill’s association with it. He also agrees with George that Gill’s sermons acquit him from the charge of hyper-Calvinism. Jarvis defends Gill’s evangelism against his critics by indicating the ambiguity of definition around the term ‘offering Christ’. The Whitefield-Wesley revival gave it a whole new context, one of which ‘many Baptists did not approve’; Gill’s issue with ‘offering Christ’ may therefore have been due to his desire for dissociation from its methods. Jarvis concludes Gill was ‘a theological giant’, his life and ministry free from hyper-Calvinism’s negative consequences and restrictions.<sup>404</sup>

These representations of scholarly opinion on both sides of the debate demonstrate varying degrees of perception of Gill’s theology, and reinforce Rathel’s judgment that not all historians have carefully examined or familiarised themselves with Gill’s perspective through his own categories, qualifications and distinctions.

Scholarly debate over Gill’s hyper-Calvinism will doubtless continue, but the fact remains that ‘Gill’s stature with later Hyper-Calvinists is unsurpassed,’<sup>405</sup> and the present-day Strict and Particular Baptists and Gospel Standard Strict Baptists whose Articles of Faith plainly denounce duty-faith and the free gospel offer are proud to call him their ‘principal predecessor’, and to attest his orthodoxy. Addressing an Annual General Meeting of the Gospel Standard Trust, Broome declared, ‘We cannot find amongst our forebears a greater than Dr. Gill. He was sound in all the doctrines of the faith.’ And they include him with other hyper-Calvinists: ‘Hussey, Skepp, Gill, Brine, Huntington are all clearly united around the truths of our Gospel Standard position.’ ‘We are constantly maligned as Hypercalvinists and we need to stand unashamedly in the position where [they] stood firmly.’ ‘Gill is abundantly clear about such things as conditional faith and

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<sup>403</sup> Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 106.

<sup>404</sup> Jarvis, ‘Growth’, PhD, 58-60, 248.

<sup>405</sup> Daniel, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, PhD, 9n1.

the point of justification, and doctrinally stands closely in agreement with our Gospel Standard Articles of Faith; more closely than with the 1689 Particular Baptist Confession of Faith.’ Broome stressed Gill’s clarity regarding gospel preaching and current Gospel Standard solidarity with it: ‘He says ... “The Gospel is not an offer but a preaching of Christ crucified,” and how our heart echoes that.’<sup>406</sup>

The unapologetic hyper-Calvinist Smith both currently and historically also aligns his denomination with Gill’s teaching and is committed to reviving their heritage.<sup>407</sup> He praised the ‘gallant group of Baptist ministers who tenaciously subscribed to a high view of Sovereign Grace’ including Gill, John Kershaw, John Warburton, JC Philpot, James Wells, John Foreman, John Gadsby and others.<sup>408</sup> In describing hyper-Calvinism he questions an article of Ronald Hanko’s<sup>409</sup> exonerating his denomination, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, from hyper-Calvinism because although they reject the well-meant offer, they do not deny duty-faith. Smith says they have formed a sub-group, a ‘hybrid’ of hyper- and moderate Calvinists, because it is inconsistent to reject one and subscribe to the other. ‘The two doctrines actually go hand-in-hand; they are two sides of the same coin.’ ‘The gospel’, writes Smith, ‘is designed for God’s elect people, and it will only be received by them after the new birth,’ according to the terms of the covenant. ‘Only the regenerate sinner ... has been given the warrant or authority to savingly believe on Christ.’ Thus rather than compromising gospel preaching the rejection of duty-faith actually ‘purifies’ it, by ensuring that those unable to believe and repent are not commanded to do so.<sup>410</sup> Smith’s article explains, from within the modern hyper-Calvinist camp, how Gill could not have simultaneously denied the gospel offer and accepted duty-faith, as Nettles claims he did, arguing that the ‘connection between

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<sup>406</sup> Broome, *Gill*, 3-4, 8-9.

<sup>407</sup> see Smith, ‘Introduction’, *AHB* (19 Sept 2021) <http://www.baptists.net/history/2015/04/introduction-4/>

<sup>408</sup> Smith, ‘Hazelton’, *AHB* (5 Nov 2015) <http://www.baptists.net/history/2015/11/john-hazelton-what-he-can-teach-us-today/>

<sup>409</sup> Hanko, ‘Hyper-Calvinism’, *PRCA*: <http://www.prca.org/resources/publications/cr-news/item/803-what-is-hyper-calvinism>

<sup>410</sup> Smith, ‘What is Hyper-Calvinism?’, *AHB* (9 April 2022) <http://www.baptists.net/history/2022/04/what-is-hyper-calvinism/>

“offers” and “duty faith” has no warrant, ... for the issues move within two different spheres.’<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Nettles, *By His Grace*, 390.

## Chapter five

### The three Johns: John Brine 1703-1765

#### 1 Profile

Gill and Brine were kindred spirits, sharing heritage, friendship and theology. Historians, apart from those wishing to distance Gill from hyper-Calvinism,<sup>1</sup> recognise this close association by routinely linking their names. They were born in Kettering, attended the same church, and entered the Particular Baptist ministry. Brine was converted under Gill's preaching, ordained and buried by him. His family was very poor, but being studious and serious he used his time wisely to educate and improve himself. His church called him to the ministry, and after three years' pastorate in Coventry, in a felicitous reunion with his childhood friend and spiritual father, Brine moved to London in 1730 becoming Skepp's successor in Curriers' Hall, Cripplegate, where he remained till his death. It is quite possible this was Gill's recommendation.<sup>2</sup> From there he established himself as preacher, lecturer, writer, theologian, and principal church leader, continuing Gill's Wednesday-evening lectures on his retiral. He had an amiable temperament, free from Skepp's 'ensoriousness', but followed his theology, and has been referred to as 'the hyper-Calvinist champion in London'.<sup>3</sup> Sadly Cripplegate, whose founder Knollys seldom had less than a thousand hearers, 'gradually degenerated in purity of sentiment, and declined in numbers' during Brine's pastorate until it 'dissolved'.<sup>4</sup> Ryland had taken a private census of Baptist churches and discovered that 'this once important church had shrunk to 30 members, the smallest in London.' Trying to discover the reason, he found Brine was going 'into all the unintelligible depths of the supra-lapsarian scheme', and Ryland asked the fifty-two-year-old Brine 'to defend his hyper-Calvinism'.<sup>5</sup> A register taken just after Brine went to London

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<sup>1</sup> Eg George, 'Gill', ch2: *Theologians*, 29; Nettles, *By His Grace*, 30,390-391; Wills, 'Fire', *Life and Thought*, 207.

<sup>2</sup> Toon, 'Brine', *FGR* (Autumn 1965) 559.

<sup>3</sup> Review, Morris, *Three Hundred Years*, *BQ* (1926) 140.

<sup>4</sup> For more on Brine: Ivimey, *History*, 3:268-272,366-373,507-508, Curriers' Hall: 4:321-325; Wilson, *History*, 2:574-579,560; Toon, *Emergence*, 100-102; Nuttall, 'Northamptonshire', *JTS* (April 1965), 117-118.

<sup>5</sup> Mann, 'Calendar': Letter 9, 15 April 1755, *BQ* (Jan 1932) 42.

classifying London Baptist ministers and churches into Antinomian<sup>1</sup>, Calvinist<sup>2</sup>, Arminian<sup>3</sup> or Socinian<sup>4</sup>, registered ‘Brine<sup>1</sup>, Cripplegate’, ‘Gill<sup>1</sup>, Horsleydown’, along with five others also recorded Antinomian.<sup>6</sup>

‘The partnership of Gill and Brine’ effectively united the various strands of hyper-Calvinism: Hussey, through both the Cambridge Baptists and Skepp, Davis, and the Kettering Baptists.<sup>7</sup> They were ‘extremely influential’ particularly in London.<sup>8</sup> Both were eponymous for hyper-Calvinism, as identified by Button for example: in his book refuting Fuller’s *Gospel of Christ*, he wrote that he was ‘ashamed’ of those who hoped this book ‘will cure some of their *Gillism* and *Brinism*’.<sup>9</sup> Brine may have been ‘more extreme than Gill’ in some respects, but Gill endorsed him,<sup>10</sup> and Brine remained within his shadow, respectful of his learning and theological knowledge which he knew excelled his own.<sup>11</sup> Martin, who loved Gill dearly, compared Brine unfavourably to him: ‘Though his sermons were judicious, his delivery was not at all engaging.’<sup>12</sup> Brine was quick to spring to Gill’s defence on at least two occasions. He defended Gill’s controversial book on eternal justification, following Bragge’s lecture on the subject (ch4,4.1). He also defended Gill and himself against Burt (ch4,4.2), who had criticised his response to Bragge,<sup>13</sup> in the same book vindicating ‘that excellent Person’ Crisp, and ‘the learned and great Mr. *Hussey*’.<sup>14</sup> However like Gill, he chose not to address Burt’s final powerful protest against hyper-Calvinistic preaching. By Fuller’s time, Hussey’s, Gill’s and Brine’s writings were held in such veneration ‘that the system of doctrine which they contended for, almost universally prevailed; and *their* works, not the scriptures, became in effect the standard of orthodoxy.’<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Baptist Board Minutes’: *TBHS* (July 1916) 113-114.

<sup>7</sup> Nuttall, ‘Northamptonshire’, *JTS* (April 1965), 118

<sup>8</sup> Oliver, ‘Emergence’, PhD, 35.

<sup>9</sup> Button, *Remarks*, Preface iii.

<sup>10</sup> eg Pittsley, ‘Christ’s Determination’, *Eusebeia* (Spring 2008) 136.

<sup>11</sup> eg Brine, *Remarks*, 10.

<sup>12</sup> Martin, *Account*, 43-44.

<sup>13</sup> Anon, *Some Doctrines*, 55n\*.

<sup>14</sup> Brine, *Remarks*, 16-17.

<sup>15</sup> Morris, *Memoirs*, 263-265.

This examination of Brine's hyper-Calvinism will be general and brief because, apart from his active involvement in the Modern Question controversy, he consolidated rather than broadened the hyper-Calvinistic system.

## 2 Brine's hyper-Calvinism

Aware of the waning of his own and other congregations, Brine believed 'our present Situation ... calls for two Things': to defend the principles of Christianity, and 'to convince Professors of [their] Luke-warmness, Indifferency, and sad Declension.'<sup>16</sup> Doubtless he faithfully fulfilled these two roles, defending the faith in controversies against Arminianism and Baxterianism, rationalism and deism,<sup>17</sup> and demonstrating his care for Christians, informing them that God's grace was 'eternally resolved upon their complete Deliverance from Sin, ... and determined to make them perfectly holy and invariably happy for ever'. But his thoughts or preaching did not reach the unregenerate or unconcerned:

The Doctrine of the Grace of GOD is to be preached, for the Encouragement and Consolation of those who are mourning under a Sense of the Being and Power of Sin in them. They are the only Persons that have a Right to evangelical Consolation. Such who are insensible of their Guiltiness, Pollution and Misery, have no Title to that Consolation, which is provided in the Gospel.<sup>18</sup>

It was this sermon, together with a similar one of Gill's, which distressed Ivimey: 'There are no exhortations to the mortification of sin, nor any intimation that perseverance in holiness was an essential evidence of an interest in the promised blessings of grace. ...' 'The wonder is not', declared Ivimey, 'that the churches did not increase, but that they continued to exist.' For Brine's preaching 'fully accorded' with his predecessor Skepp's: doctrinal, but lacking any application to his congregation. Even in sermons where exhortation to faith and repentance would be considered unavoidable, he avoided them.<sup>19</sup> Historian Wilson concurred

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<sup>16</sup> Brine, *Treatise*, Preface iii-iv.

<sup>17</sup> See Toon, 'Brine', *FGR* (Autumn 1965) 562-563.

<sup>18</sup> Brine, *Sin Reigns Not*, 28-29.

<sup>19</sup> Ivimey, *History*, 4:22-25; 3:268-269,272.

that Brine's sermons were directed to Christians not sinners; 'exhortations to sinners he would consider as legal.'<sup>20</sup>

Brine confronted Isaac Watts with arguments in favour of the limited extent of Christ's death, strongly opposing indiscriminate offers of grace.<sup>21</sup> Preaching in Kettering three years before his death, he dismissed them out of hand as being incompatible with eternal redemption: the specific 'effectual provision' of Christ's death 'cannot *dwindle* into an Offer of Pardon, or a Proposal of Terms of Peace and Reconciliation' between God and sinners.<sup>22</sup> He denied a distinction between the temporal covenant of grace requiring personal entrance through faith, and the eternal covenant of redemption through which grace and faith are communicated to the elect, like Gill collapsing the former into the latter.<sup>23</sup> His understanding was and is a template for all hyper-Calvinists:

The Offer of Christ, or Proposal of him for Acceptance, is not made to Men, as Men, or to Sinners, *merely* as Sinners; but it is made to them as convinced, thirsting, hungry Sinners. ... It supposes not a Power for *spiritual* Acts in *unregenerate* Men, nor affords *any Support* to the Doctrine of a conditional Provision of Salvation for all Mankind. Though Christ is not offered, or proposed for Acceptance to the Elect, *as such*, yet they are the only Persons to whom he is held forth in the Gospel for Acceptance: Because they *only* have Desires after him. ... This Proposal can be made to such *only* who are Objects of Election.

He argued that offering Christ was '*evidently* inconsistent' with God's perfections, because he would be 'disappointed' in his purpose since the great majority do not accept the proposal. If it is not his desire or intention, to what end is the offer made? If it is God's purpose that people *should* embrace the proposal, either they have power to do so, or they have not. If they have, they can believe of themselves, and faith is not a gift. But if they have no power, 'either God will communicate to them an Ability for it, or he will not. If he will, then they shall *certainly* believe.' If he will not, he is offering and designing acceptance of something which he knows is impossible. He concluded:

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<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *History*, 2:577.

<sup>21</sup> Brine, *Certain Efficacy*, 4-145, esp 88-106.

<sup>22</sup> eg Brine, *Glory*, 15-19.

<sup>23</sup> Brine, *Covenant*, esp 7-9, 16-18, 21, 23.



Hence we may plainly see, that a general Tender of Christ, and Grace, and Salvation cannot be made to all who hear the Gospel, much less is such a Tender afforded to those who are Strangers to the Gospel, and are *without Hope and without God in the World*.<sup>24</sup>

Quite simply, to Brine, unregenerate men ‘cannot justly be supposed, to have proper Ground and Warrant to look upon God, as reconciled to them in Christ.’ They ‘have no *open* Claim to Gospel Benefits and Privileges’.<sup>25</sup>

If God **will not** infuse that Principle into the Hearts of the Non-elect, it is **impossible** that they should believe. If he will, then they will certainly believe.<sup>26</sup>

On this ground, Brine taught that though ‘all unregenerate Men will be eternally damned,’ their unregeneracy will not be the cause. He considered it ‘a *most* harsh and severe Idea’ that God would damn men ‘because they have not *heavenly* Principles infused into them, the Infusion of which is a Work proper to God’.<sup>27</sup> In a Skeppian chapter on ‘the Difference between real Conversion and the Semblance of it’ he wrote of how very close the non-elect can come to the reality of grace, evincing a change in both the mind and conduct. There may be legal conviction of sin, knowledge of and pleasure in the gospel, light, conscientiousness and sincerity in the things of God. ‘The Want of a Principle of Grace in the Heart, by which alone a Man can act spiritually, does not necessarily suppose, that whatever such a Person acts of a religious Nature, is performed in an *insincere* and *hypocritical* Manner.’<sup>28</sup>

In his ordination sermon for Ryland, Brine enlarged on the depravity of human nature: ‘Two Things are true of us all in a natural State: One is, that we cannot come to Christ: The other is, that we will not come to him. Say some, *our Cannot consists in a Will-not*; but it is a very great Mistake; they are distinct Things, and not the same. We cannot, as we are destitute of a Principle of Life; and we will not, as we are the Subjects of vicious Habits.’ Our ‘natural Inability’ and ‘Want of Power’ mean ‘we are *dead*, and cannot act spiritually, no, *not in*

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<sup>24</sup> Brine, *Certain Efficacy*, 91-93.

<sup>25</sup> Brine, *Refutation*, 20-21.

<sup>26</sup> Brine, *Some Mistakes*, 35 (my emphases).

<sup>27</sup> Brine, *Certain Efficacy*, 97-98, also 74-75.

<sup>28</sup> Brine, *Treatise*, ch7:172-203

*the least Degree*'.<sup>29</sup> Fuller spoke of how people under preaching which never warns, exhorts, invites or offers, learn to excuse themselves, saying 'We can do nothing. We *desire* to repent and be converted; but it is God only ... that can convert us. All that we can do is to lie in the way, and wait.' He recalled a young man who, when asked if he sought salvation, replied, '*I can do nothing—I am dead.*' Thus 'the strongest phrase used in scripture' to express total depravity, Fuller said, 'was turned into a thorough excuse. Surely to be dead *in sin* is to be *sinfully* dead. And ... to *be dead in sin* is exactly equivalent to being *alive to sin.*'<sup>30</sup>

## 2.1 Brine and the Modern Question controversy

It began in 1737 when Matthias Maurice who was Davis's successor in Rothwell publicly confronted hyper-Calvinism with the question: *Is it the duty of sinners who hear the gospel to believe in Christ?*<sup>31</sup> The controversy lasted seventeen years, as seven authors responded to each other in eleven books. The debate between evangelical Calvinists and hyper-Calvinists brought the issue into the public forum, and it provided important and unique insights into how each side fought to protect their theology concerning the duty of sinners to repent and believe, known as 'duty-faith'. Those who answered affirmatively became known as 'modern Calvinists', even though they were in fact reclaiming orthodoxy.

Although Brine was the most active in this controversy, he represented the hyper-Calvinism of all four:

So persuaded was Skepp that God must have all the glory, and that man could do nothing, that he, like Hussey before him, refused to *offer* the gospel lest it be thought that any but God's Holy Spirit could apply it to the heart, or that sinful man had the moral ability to respond. This was the position which Gill and Brine strenuously defended against the supporters of Matthias Maurice of Rothwell.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Brine, *Solemn Charge*, 15-16.

<sup>30</sup> Fuller, 'Antinomianism', *Works* 4:162-163n†.

<sup>31</sup> Maurice, *Modern Question*, 3.

<sup>32</sup> Sell, *Great Debate*, 78.

Brine answered the Question negatively, contributing two books to the debate: *A Refutation of Arminian Principles* and *Motives to Love and Unity*, responding to Taylor and Alvery Jackson respectively. In his first book Brine contended that because man does not possess power to exercise faith in Christ, it cannot be his duty. He, Wayman and Johnson<sup>33</sup> all used what Nettles called hyper-Calvinism's essence (ch4.6) as proof against duty-faith. Neither Hussey nor Skepp had argued thus, and Gill was ambivalent about it (ch4.3.3). Brine argued that human duty regarding faith and repentance was determined by Adam in his unfallen state. Since Adam was not given power to exercise special faith, the rest of humanity is not given that power either, and therefore is not under obligation to believe. Perfect Adam was obligated to love God and believe the truth: therefore so is fallen man, notwithstanding the Fall renders him incapable of doing so. 'But with Respect to special Faith in Christ, ... the Powers of Man in his perfect State were not fitted and disposed to that Act.' He provided reasons for this theory: 1) Adam was not furnished with unnecessary and useless power to believe. 2) Adam did not meet the criteria for saving faith in Christ, therefore it is not feasible that God gave him ability to exert it. 3) Special faith belongs to the new creation, therefore the power for it does not belong to the law of the first creation. 4) It would be extraordinary if man were given power he could not exercise, then be deprived of that power when it would be necessary and useful. Thus Brine distinguished between external and internal revelation, between legal and evangelical repentance, between common and special faith. Like Gill he linked the type of revelation to the type of faith: 'the Law obliges to the Act of Faith, suited to the Nature of the Revelation of that Object.' He said the law required nothing of perfect Adam, but upon sinning, natural repentance 'became his immediate Duty by the Law'. But 'evangelical Repentance and saving Faith' can never be duties: they are supernaturally given through divine revelation. In fact Brine did not claim originality for this argument. He attributed these four reasons to Arminius: 'The Substance of these Reasons, *Arminius* delivers in his Apology, Article the Nineteenth,'<sup>34</sup> which reads: 'Before

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<sup>33</sup> Wayman, *Further Enquiry*, ch4,51-84; *Defence*, 3,74-75; Johnson, *Faith*, 135-151.

<sup>34</sup> Brine, *Refutation* 4-7,10,19-20,23-24; *Motives*, 19-28.

his fall, Adam had not the power to believe, because there was no necessity for faith; God, therefore, could not require faith from him after the fall.’<sup>35</sup>

*The Twelve Queries* addressed this very issue in the answer to Query I: ‘*Whether are there any precepts in the gospel, that were not actually given before the gospel was revealed?*’ It explains that ‘in the gospel, taken strictly, there are no precepts.’ All precepts, including the command to believe and repent, belong to and flow from the law, ‘which fastens the new duty on us, the same moment the gospel reveals the new object’. Of course ‘Adam was not actually obliged to believe in a Saviour’ till he needed one. ‘But the same command that bound him to trust, depend on, and believe the promises of God Creator, no doubt, obliged him to believe in God Redeemer, when revealed.’ Nor could he repent before sinning; but having sinned, the same law that made him hate sin, obliged him to repent. ‘Faith and repentance’ are ‘obedience and conformity to the same law’ which has been transgressed against.

We call to mind, that on the contrary doctrine, Arminius laid the foundation of his rotten principles, touching sufficient grace, or rather natural power. ‘Adam,’ said he, ‘had not power to believe in Jesus Christ, because he needed him not; nor was he bound so to believe, because the law required it not: Therefore, since Adam by his fall, did not lose it, God is bound to give every man power to believe in Jesus Christ.’<sup>36</sup>

Brine’s reasoning depends upon covenant dichotomy and incompatibility: works pertain to the old covenant, faith is a new covenant blessing. It was influential in arguing against duty-faith, lifting the obligation of faith away from the natural principle of the old creation order under the covenant of works into the superior divine principle of the new creation order of the covenant of grace, the power of which enables special faith in the elect. It rested on the hyper-Calvinist premise common to Hussey, Skepp and Gill that man’s constitutional inability prevented him exercising saving faith, and he was therefore exonerated from blame on that account. What Brine did was develop this premise, deducing that human inability does not stem from sinful unwillingness as Fuller taught, but precedes the Fall to a power God never gave Adam. This undermines Nettle’s

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<sup>35</sup> Arminius, ‘Apology’, *Works*, 1:332-336.

<sup>36</sup> *Twelve Queries*, 1-2,4-7. (Note: Queries 8-9: nature of saving faith; Query 10: divine warrant to believe.)

argument that Gill was distinct from the other hyper-Calvinists because he did not hold the Adamic theory that is hyper-Calvinism's 'actuating premise'.<sup>37</sup>

Brine's second book to Jackson also answered Maurice's question. After outlining the 'Essentials of Christianity' on which there was general agreement (election, Adam as representative, covenant of peace, regeneration and sanctification, perseverance), Brine specified five doctrines which cause division. First, supralapsarianism, that God chose his elect before the fall. Second, the elect are united to Christ before they exercise faith. Third, adoption precedes faith. Fourth, eternal justification, God's immanent act not requiring 'the present Existence of the Object, much less the Being of Faith in the Object justified.' The fifth and major distinctive was denial of 'the immediate Duty of unregenerate Men, who hear the Gospel, to believe in Christ, with *special*, or *saving* Faith'. Thus Brine defined his own hyper-Calvinism. He attempted to dismantle Jackson's arguments for the obligation of faith, on the basis of the difference between the distinct nature of the two covenants. The Adamic covenant of works was suited to the revelation given him, requiring obedience and faith, but not special saving faith in Christ. It is a faith 'a Man may *carry to Hell* along with him, ... merely a rational Act excited in the Mind by rational Evidence'. The principle of grace in believers agreeable to the new revelation enables 'true saving Faith'. Brine asserted that unbelief is both *negative* and *positive*. *Negatively* it is twofold: 1) not believing in Christ for salvation, which is *not* punishable because it is *not* required under the covenant of works, and 2) not believing the gospel, which *is* punishable because it *is* required under that covenant. *Positively* unbelief is opposition to and rejection of God's appointed way of salvation, and this *also* is punishable under the first covenant. Brine insisted the idea of men being 'eternally damned for Want of special Faith in Christ' is so severe it is irreconcilable with divine goodness or justice, for unbelievers cannot be blamed 'for Want of a Principle of Life' they were never given or had any right to. It is important to understand how easily his words could be taken out of context, for example: 'To repent and turn to God is the Duty of all Men.' This could be used to prove his belief in duty-faith, as some scholars have misinterpreted Gill. But closer examination of the context reveals exactly what he means by this, distinguishing between the duties of all men

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<sup>37</sup> Nettles, *By His Grace*, 389-391.

under the covenant of works and the duties of believers under the moral law *not* as a covenant but as a rule of conduct. The kind of faith, love, fear and repentance required of everyone is strictly non-evangelical and non-saving. The reason: because the covenant of works does not reveal God evangelically as saving, gracious or forgiving, therefore those under it cannot believe in him that way. They are limited in their type of belief by the revelation given to Adam. Hence there are two kinds of faith.<sup>38</sup>

Brine's was a restricted theology, as he admitted himself: 'A narrow Doctrine is most likely to be true, because *the Way to Life is narrow, and but few will find it.*'<sup>39</sup>

### 3 Scholarly opinion on Brine's hyper-Calvinism

Fuller was more ready to openly criticise Brine than Gill, even for similar teaching. For example, Brine's interpretation of John 6:29 ('This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent') was that Jesus confirmed faith is *necessary* for salvation, but desisted from saying it was their *duty*. Fuller asked, 'How can our Lord be supposed ... to tell them of an act which was necessary, acceptable, and pleasing to God, but which was not their present duty?' Again, against Brine's insistence that 'until a Man, *thro' the Law, is dead to the Law*, he hath *no Warrant* to receive Christ,' Fuller asked, 'Does he need any warrant?' and simplified the issue: 'To "receive" Christ ... stands opposed to *rejecting* him.' It 'easy to perceive', he wrote, 'that every sinner has not only a warrant thus to receive Christ, but, that it is his great sin, if he receive him not.'<sup>40</sup>

Toon observed that 'Brine's basic position is to distinguish carefully' between common and evangelical repentance and between general and special faith. The law demands the first sort from everyone, but only the Spirit's 'inner illumination' enables the second. Brine deduced human duty from the covenant of works, which 'requires faith, obedience and reverence to God', but not saving faith in Christ. Toon confirmed that Brine's five hyper-Calvinistic doctrines

<sup>38</sup> Brine, *Motives*, 3-20,28,31-33,47-48.

<sup>39</sup> Brine, *Certain Efficacy*, 150.

<sup>40</sup> Fuller, 'Gospel Worthy', *Works* 1:39-40,45-46 (ref Brine, *Motives*, 42,38-39).

‘were also shared’ by Gill and before him Skepp, Hussey and Crisp. In Toon’s article on Brine in *Free Grace Record* (a quarterly, according to Oliver, ‘which sought to prod Strict Baptists out of their Hyper-Calvinist slumbers’<sup>41</sup>), the editor, J C Doggett, inserts a footnote that Brine was affected by eighteenth-century rationalism. He perspicaciously added, ‘This chain of reasoning *which forms the basis* of the suggestion first widely canvassed at that time that all men are not under the obligation to repent and believe the gospel pries into matters about which scripture is silent and is not supported by Brine by a single quotation from the Bible.—Ed.’<sup>42</sup>

Garrett concluded that Brine fulfilled his hyper-Calvinistic indicators (ch1,pt1). He taught eternal justification, and the eternal Trinitarian covenant conflated with the temporal covenant of grace, all in a supralapsarian framework. He ‘answered the “modern question” by insisting on a “warrant” and rejecting the dutiful nature of repentance and faith’.<sup>43</sup> Peter Beck refers to ‘the modern Baptist shibboleth, hyper-Calvinism’, describing Skepp as the ‘conduit’ of Hussey’s hyper-Calvinism into the Particular Baptists, Gill ‘strongly defended or roundly dismissed by later interpreters’, and Brine lying ‘between these two extremes’ with little being written on him. Beck calls him ‘a central character in a great theological tragedy’. There were strong ‘theological similarities’ between Skepp and Brine, Skepp known for arguing against man’s ability to persuade others to follow Christ in that it undermined the Spirit’s work and stoked spiritual pride in moral suasion, and Brine for a similar unevangelical style of preaching without invitations or application. As Brine’s congregation dwindled, his influence increased, and his and Gill’s ‘reputations, influence, and theology became virtually inseparable’. Beck remarks on the significance of Gill and Brine’s polemicism which is essential to understanding Brine’s theological emphases. Relying on Garrett’s taxonomy, he concluded Brine ‘went beyond the bounds of the Second London Confession’ and ‘stands convicted of hyper-Calvinism’.<sup>44</sup> According to Garrett’s and Beck’s estimation, Brine was not

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<sup>41</sup> Oliver, ‘Baptist Confession Making, 1989: <https://reformation-today.org/articles-of-interest/455/>

<sup>42</sup> Toon, ‘Brine’, *FGR* (Autumn 1965) 565-566,570.

<sup>43</sup> Garrett, *Baptist Theology*, 92-93,108.

<sup>44</sup> Beck, ‘Brine’, *British Particular Baptists*, 4:211-228

antinomian, but perhaps they have not sufficiently discriminated between doctrinal and practical antinomianism.

Naylor elucidated that Brine, on the basis of innate inability, exonerated men from the duty of faith and repentance together with culpability for deliberately rejecting Christ. He also refrained from offering God's grace to sinners. Naylor suggests that 'Brine might just have been a besieged servant of an enclosed and synthetic theological system rather than, on this subject, a candid expositor of Scripture.'<sup>45</sup> If this is true of Brine, it is true of all hyper-Calvinists.

William Brackney wrote of Brine, 'He declined to address the condition of the unconverted and this caused his ministry to wither by mid-century, an obvious product of extreme Calvinism.'<sup>46</sup> Roberts clarified that 'pre-revivalists' like Brine and Gill were not 'absolutely non-evangelistic', but it was 'restricted evangelism', limited 'to those who gave evidence of election'. They did not venture out to evangelise, or invite people into their churches.<sup>47</sup> Howson provided evidence from Brine's writings that he held the hyper-Calvinistic tenets (ch1,pt1) of rejection of offers, only the elect to exercise saving faith and evangelical repentance, justification before faith, eternal covenant of redemption, irresistible grace and passivity of the elect.<sup>48</sup> Nettles wrote that Brine, unlike Gill but along with Hussey and Wayman, 'without equivocation rejected duty-faith' on the basis of Adam's spiritual powers in the unfallen state.<sup>49</sup> (In fact Hussey rejected offers rather than duty-faith, and not on the basis of Adam's prelapsarian state.)

Ella defended Brine, calling his response to Taylor 'a full-gospel refutation' of the 'man-centred novelty' of duty-faith which had 'infiltrated the Particular Baptists' through Maurice. Ella provides seven arguments against this 'new movement', taken from Brine's theology. He defends Brine's Adamic argument: 'Duty-faithites thus teach that fallen sinners have extra powers that untried

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<sup>45</sup> Naylor, *Calvinism*, 170-172,176-180.

<sup>46</sup> Brackney, *Historical Dictionary*, 75-76.

<sup>47</sup> Roberts, *Continuity and Change*, 58-59.

<sup>48</sup> Howson, 'Question of Orthodoxy', PhD, 188-203.

<sup>49</sup> Nettles, *By his Grace*, 30,97,390.



Adam never had.’ But ‘Brine taught that Christ’s righteousness was greater than Adam’s. For this piece of Biblical wisdom, he is called a Hyper-Calvinist.’ ‘Saving faith in Christ’, writes Ella, ‘is not an Old Creation duty but a New Creation gift.’ Contrary to Maurice’s argument that all sinners are warranted to look to Christ, ‘Brine, following Scripture, says that unregenerate man has no claim to gospel benefits and privileges.’ Again with Brine as with Gill, Ella argues from within the parameters of hyper-Calvinism, and encourages his readers to ‘discover Brine as a dependable witness to the cause of God and Truth’.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ella, ‘Brine’, AHB (6 July 2022): <https://www.baptists.net/history/2022/07/john-brine-1703-1765-and-his-contemporaries-as-seen-by-modern-revisionists-2/>

## Conclusion

In fulfilling its objective of analysing the original writings of Hussey, Skepp, Gill and Brine, this thesis has produced evidence that they met the criteria of hyper-Calvinism according to its accepted definitions. The new system they designed and supported is distinctive enough to warrant its own category and name in the taxonomy of Calvinism. From the start this was recognised, and was variously labelled pseudo-Calvinism, ultra-Calvinism etc, until the term hyper-Calvinism was considered most suitable. Its challengers clearly understood and recognised an identifiable theology bearing common characteristics. It is unfortunate that a number of historians still refer to it as high Calvinism, with which it shares some characteristics, and that its importance and relevance, even its existence, has been downplayed by several theologians, partly due to its complex nature.

During the period from Hussey through to Brine, hyper-Calvinism evolved and refined. Hussey was its architect, fuelled by antinomianism's emphasis on free grace. His writing was disorganised but his message was clear: the elect are saved exclusively by God's operations, with which general offers and invitations are incompatible. His theology was conveyed by his convert Skepp, Gill's mentor, into the Particular Baptists. He emphasised the necessity of divine energy in salvation, the sinner's passivity and inability, and the futility of human persuasion. From there it resonated with friends and colleagues Gill and Brine, both of whom were familiar with it through their upbringing in Northamptonshire. Gill with his superior intellect and gift of systematisation gave this theology coherence, producing a unified, sophisticated and compellingly-logical defence of a soteriology which exalted divine sovereignty and minimised human agency, making philosophical deductions from biblical premises. The result was a vigorous denial of general offers of grace and the duty of faith and repentance. Brine worked closely with Gill, defending and supporting him. He argued that humanity's constitutional inability to believe originated in Adam's prelapsarian state, further strengthening rejection of duty-faith. All four equated the free gospel offer with Arminianism. Such was their influence that by Fuller's time, the writings of Hussey, Gill and Brine had become the standard of orthodoxy.

Hyper-Calvinism is a Procrustean theology. Using Taleb's metaphor of the 'inverse operation of changing the wrong variable', where Procrustes 'the stretcher' altered his visitors to fit his bed, so the hyper-Calvinist 'hacks and hews ... to bring the word of God into a more systematic shape,<sup>1</sup> to quote Spurgeon. Or as Sheehan expresses it, rather than accept scripture's meaning, he attempts 'to fit the teachings that do not comply with the truth he has grasped into a neat and logical system'.<sup>2</sup> 'We humans' can resolve the tension of mysteries and paradox and unknowable things 'by squeezing life and the world into crisp commoditized ideas, reductive categories, specific vocabularies, and prepackaged narratives', Taleb observes.<sup>3</sup> Hyper-Calvinism relies upon its own categories, vocabularies and narrative, and this thesis has used these categories as headings by which to present evidence from the writings of Hussey and Gill, providing a framework designed to expose its novel distinctions which are essential to serve and enable its theological rationale. Failure to discern these distinctions, and instead impose the orthodox interpretation on words, inevitably means misinterpreting the writer. For example, which type of faith is being referred to: special or natural? which repentance: evangelical or legal? Does 'gospel' mean proclamation of doctrine or inviting sinners to Christ? and so on. Hyper-Calvinism's overruling distinction between elect and reprobate governs all other distinctions. This eternal breach sets the discrepancy throughout time, blocking any connection between the antitheses. The elect receive the internal call by special revelation, becoming recipients of a salvation bestowed upon them from eternity. The non-elect receive the external call by outward revelation, and are obliged to produce legal repentance (moral reform) and external faith. This informs the important distinction between gospel preaching and offering, doctrine and salvation, faith and coming, between grace and offers, gift and offers, between sensible and dead sinners, law and gospel. This crucial separation enables the deduction that human duty includes common faith and obedience but not saving faith, for making faith a duty would be to put it into the realm of the moral law. It also enables rationalisation of scripture's indiscriminate commands to repentance and faith, redirecting them to apply only in a moral, natural, national or Jew-specific context. It provides the basis

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<sup>1</sup> Spurgeon, *Commenting*, 9.

<sup>2</sup> Sheehan, 'Presentation: Critique', *Foundations* (Nov 1982) 42-43.

<sup>3</sup> Taleb, *Bed*, xii.

for denial of gospel offers, again rationalising any apparently-indiscriminate offers as applicable only to those with the specific characteristics of the regenerate. It believes offers are extraneous for the elect, insincere for the non-elect. It is essential to hyper-Calvinist theology to maintain these divisions, and not to confuse vital principles by expecting unawakened insensible non-elect sinners to do what can only be performed by God's operation in accordance with eternal settlements.

The hyper-Calvinistic system is more complex and sophisticated than these distinctions. It argues against free gospel offers and duty-faith from inside the doctrines of election, effectual calling, irresistible grace, particular redemption, and human inability, contending that they cannot coexist. Further, Gill made significant innovation to the doctrine of the covenant of redemption in order to highlight God's free grace and minimise human cooperation in salvation, denying any form of conditionality. He collapsed the temporal covenant of grace requiring human response into the eternal intratrinitarian unconditional covenant of redemption. He explicitly included the Spirit in this covenant, removing synergism and response to divine grace. He removed temporality by asserting eternal union and justification as divine decrees, not contingent upon the act of faith. All this was crucial to his hyper-Calvinism, enabling the benefits of Christ's death to become the elect's before time, and removing the responsive instrumentality of faith. This double emphasis on eternal decrees and non-requirement of human input led to the introspection characteristic of hyper-Calvinism, shifting the essence of conversion and faith from belief in the gospel to an inward search for confirmation of election. The Spirit's whisper became the warrant for faith, a special ticket linking the sinner to their personal election in the eternal covenant. This is a subtle form of Gnosticism which defines faith as interior supernatural persuasion.

All these factors lie hidden but active behind the conspicuous distinctives of hyper-Calvinism: rejection of the free gospel offer, and its corollary of rejection of the duty of faith and repentance. There was logical appeal to Gill's theology. He developed a theory that the type of revelation always determines the level of faith required. God does not require all men to believe in Christ. If there is no internal revelation, no saving faith is required. He believed it was profoundly irrational for God to offer something he had no intention of giving through a

minister without the power to bestow it to an audience incapable of receiving it. On this basis he and other hyper-Calvinists rejected any culpability for lack of saving faith. The kind of unbelief for which people are accountable and therefore punishable is that of not believing gospel revelation. But special faith in Christ is a gift, therefore it cannot be a duty, therefore it is not accountable or punishable. God will never damn the non-elect for not exercising that which is outwith their power and which God has determined to withhold from them.

Naturally this theology has significant consequences for preaching and evangelism. Some hyper-Calvinist ministers carefully avoid addressing the unconverted at all. More usually ministers do not doubt the gospel should be proclaimed, declared and explained to sinners, although many wrestle over the question 'How should the gospel be presented to the non-elect?' The concept of indiscriminate exhortations and invitations to repent and believe seems a direct conflict with the doctrines they hold so dear: election, particular redemption, human inability.<sup>4</sup> This can clearly be seen in the Articles of Faith of the Gospel Standard Baptists. They reject any expressions which may suggest power within the hearers to respond to the gospel. They reject any expressions which may give the impression that salvation is available to everyone. They carefully guard and discriminate their preaching to avoid encouraging insensible sinners to believe and repent. Thus preaching reflects the domination of a deterministic interpretation of election, splitting the original and intended unity of the message into the distinction between light and darkness, correspondent to the distinction between elect and non-elect. Their determination to protect and defend God's glory and sovereign free grace, to withstand its compromise, is doubtless admirable. Daniel feels that their weaknesses stem indirectly from these strengths which protected divine sovereignty against the 'Man-centred theology' which permeated that of their opponents.<sup>5</sup> But antithetical vision means hyper-Calvinists typically cannot justify, explain or tolerate the coexistence of a universal gospel call requiring the response of repentance and faith with their closed-circuit system of eternal election, justification and union. Their determinist even fatalistic slant on theology, intolerance of conditionality, paradox and mystery, mistakenly believes human effort threatens sovereignty,

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<sup>4</sup> See Dix, 'Strict and Particular', PhD, 32.

<sup>5</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 775.

that gift and duty are incompatible, that a promise cannot possibly be an obligation or peremptory command,<sup>6</sup> whereas God clearly works with, in and through people in their salvation, requiring of them repentance and faith in order to be saved. That God ordained not only the end of his decrees but the inadequate means of fallen people that enables their temporal fulfilment, may be deeply mysterious and humbling, but it is a theme which runs throughout scripture. This means his purposes do not roll on inexorably from eternity through time but wrap themselves around the people he created and loves, requiring their imperfect contribution including faith for the fulfilment of his decrees.

Hyper-Calvinism's preoccupation with eternity and God's hidden will impacts attitudes to prayer as well as preaching. Hussey for example allowed his perspective on predestination to rule out intercessory prayer, even for his own family and congregation. He aligned his will with God's *secret* will of election, arguing that God neither could or would answer prayers for the conversion of the non-elect. Any 'natural' prayer for 'supernatural' mercy could only be futile.<sup>7</sup> But an orthodox approach would be to align one's will with God's *revealed* will, which clearly states that he does not will anyone to perish but wills everyone to come to repentance (II Peter 3:9). William Burnett applies this principle to today's church: 'Hyper-Calvinism has dried the tears that once were shed over lost sinners, because if God has already made up his mind about the destiny of men, we do not need to pray for souls, and in fact, we need not get passionate about the gospel.'<sup>8</sup>

Hyper-Calvinism's distinguishing doctrines are not found in any of the major confessions or creeds. Nevertheless some hyper-Calvinists minimised the difference between them and orthodox Calvinism, even vowed to retract their claims if proved wrong. But their Modern Question challengers knew their views were incompatible with evangelical Calvinism, and were united in their

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<sup>6</sup> Hall Jr, 'Introductory Preface' to 3<sup>rd</sup> ed, *Help*, xix-xx.

<sup>7</sup> Hussey, *God's Operations*, 284-289. (See my ch2,5.1).

<sup>8</sup> Burnett, 'Praying Church', *Precious Seed* (May 2006) <https://www.preciousseed.org/articles/a-praying-church-is-a-powerful-church/>

diagnosis, using strong language to describe the danger of the system.<sup>9</sup> There never was any room for compromise, each position intolerant of and exclusive of the other.<sup>10</sup>

It is important to understand that hyper-Calvinism was not confined to the eighteenth century. It continued to spread and flourish after both the Modern Question and the revolutionary ministries of Fuller and his friends. It regrouped and consolidated. Spurgeon fought it constantly in the heart of London a century later. Almost two centuries later it remains a potent force in our own country and in various others particularly North America and the Netherlands. The general acceptance that it 'is basically a thing of the past'<sup>11</sup> is therefore problematic. Those raised in hyper-Calvinist churches know its negative impact on second- and third-generation adherents, particularly its isolationism, and its powerful deterrents to believe which trigger dread of presumptuous faith, and anxiety concerning election. This study is intended to stimulate such to discover like Fuller the way out of the labyrinth into authentic evangelical Calvinism.

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<sup>9</sup> Eg Maurice, *Modern Question*, 27,31; Maurice, *Modern Question Affirm'd*, 89,94,111; Taylor, *Address*, 20-24; Jackson, *Question Answered*, 47,55-56.

<sup>10</sup> As recognised by CRC, Synod 1924, 121.

<sup>11</sup> Daniel, 'Hyper-Calvinism', PhD, 759.

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## NOTES:

- 1 Every effort has been made to aid referencing this bibliography. This includes 1) categorising where appropriate and 2) where necessary, emboldening words used in footnotes to identity titles.
- 2 The symbol § is used to indicate separate articles, discourses, sermons, or shorter books within one book or multiple volumes of a work, for example 10 such are listed under Fuller's *Works* volumes 1-8, and 8 under Murray's *Collected Writings* volumes 1-4.

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