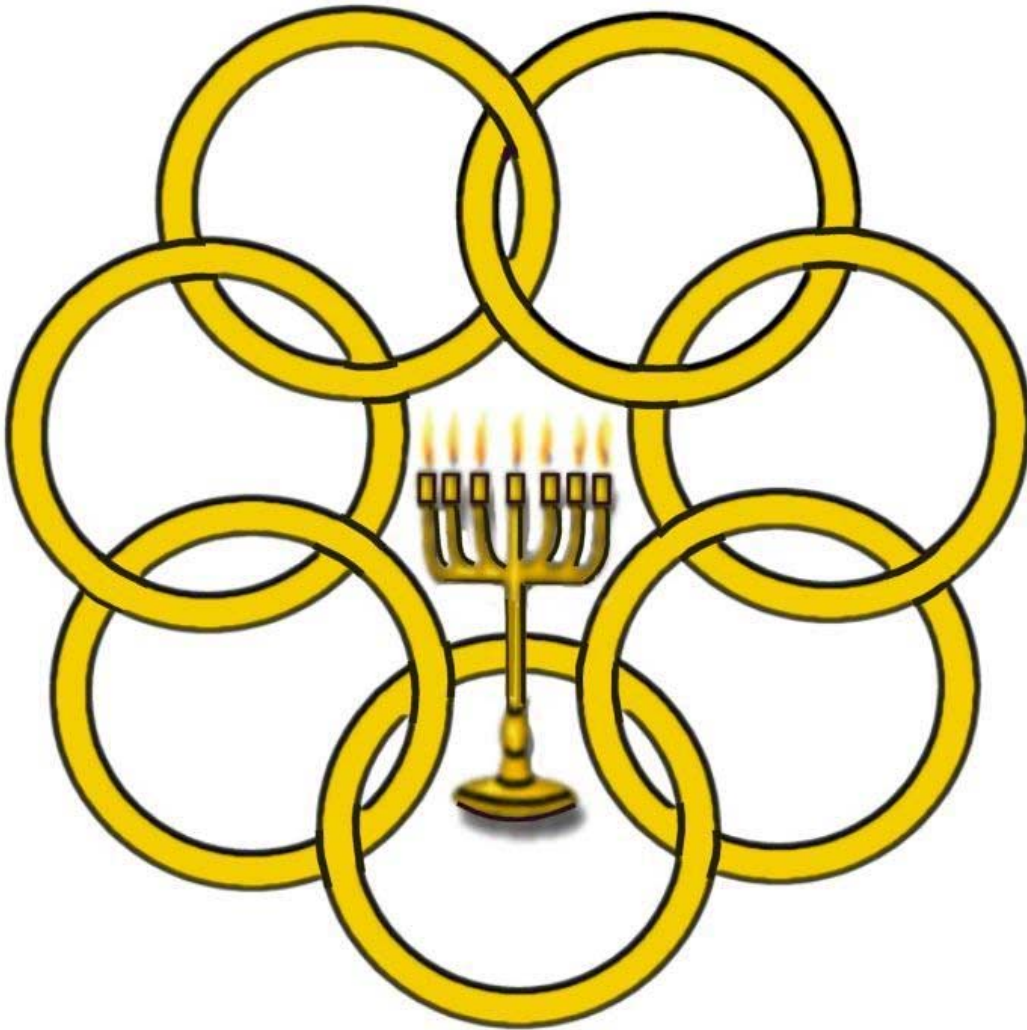


**REV. DR. JOHN OWEN  
RE-PRESBYTERI-ANIZED**



by

**Rev. Presbyterian Prof. Dr. Francis Nigel Lee  
Queensland Presbyterian Theological College  
Brisbane, Australia  
(revised edition A.D. 2000)**

## **EXPLANATION OF COVER DESIGN**

The flames from the seven prongs on the golden candlestick (*cf.* Rev. 1:20*ff*), represent the testimony of each of the Congregations within the Classis or Presbytery. The latter in turn is represented by the candlestick as a whole.

The Presbytery-Candlestick stands in the foreground of seven other Presbyteries. They are represented by seven golden rings, each linked together into a circle of rings. That circle of rings would represent the General Assembly of Christ's Church (*cf.* Acts 15).

My sincere gratitude to Braam Scheepers for the typesetting, and to Larno Meyer for the cover design.

Prof. Dr. F.N. Lee

## **REV. DR. JOHN OWEN RE-PRESBYTERI-ANIZED**

The purpose of this essay is to demonstrate that Britain's great Puritan Theologian, Rev. Dr. John Owen, was essentially not a Congregationalist but a Presbyterian. He first pastored a Presbyterian Church. On his deathbed, he re-affirmed Presbyterianism.

### **The depresbyterianized Owen later re-embraced Presbyterianism**

Dr. Owen, 1616-83, was quite the greatest alleged Congregationalist and certainly one of the most thorough Theologians Britain has ever produced. Educated at Oxford, he first pastored a Presbyterian Church — in 1643, the year the Westminster Assembly itself was convened. After reading a book by the American John Cotton, Owen inwardly embraced Congregationalism.

In his next parish, he seceded from Presbyterianism. That latter was the system many in the Puritan Parliament and most at the presbyterianizing Westminster Assembly were then trying to promote in the wake of *The Solemn League and Covenant — for Reformation and Defence of Religion; the Honour and Happiness of the King; and the Peace and Safety of the three Kingdoms of Scotland, England, and Ireland* — taken and subscribed several times by King Charles and by all ranks in the said three kingdoms.

At the termination of the Monarchy and the establishment of the Commonwealth in 1649, Cromwell the Congregationalist appointed Owen Vice-Chancellor at Oxford. He became the chief architect of the Cromwellian State Church, and helped compose the congregationalistic *Savoy Declaration of Faith* in 1658 (intended to replace the presbyterial *Westminster Confession of Faith* and its chapter 31:1-5). Subsequent to the termination of the Commonwealth and the Restoration of the Monarchy in 1660, Owen was ejected from Oxford.

After congregationalistically pastoring a 'gathered church' in his own home and elsewhere for the next two decades — at the end of his life he certainly moved back toward and seems actually to have re-embraced Presbyterianism. How could it be otherwise — with Owen constantly improving his own infant baptism, in the Name of the Triune God (Who is Himself a Presbytery)? See *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Q. & A. 167! Thus the proto-Presbyterian Rev. Dr. John Owen — after a lapse into Congregationalism — thereafter increasingly re-presbyterianized.

### Owen's *Biblical Theology*: Elders in O.T. Church carry over into N.T. Church

Dr. Westcott, the acknowledged authority on Owen's *Biblical Theology*, would probably agree that Owen there presupposes the **Church** to have existed already with even the most ancient *Presbuteroi*: such as Abel, Enoch and Noah (Heb. 11:1-7 *cf.* 10:25-29 & 13:7,17,24). *Bib. Theol.* [*Theol. Pant.* 1661], 1994, pp. vi-ix, 22*f*, 90*f*, 184*f*, 218-20*f*, 365-70*f* & 439*f*.

On p. 593, Owen says "Jesus Christ Himself...was He Who in times past showed Himself in human form to the [patriarchal] fathers.... He was that 'Angel of the Lord' with **the [Mosaic] Church in the wilderness** (Acts 7:38)."

On pp. 565*f*, Owen insists that even while "the whole Mosaic ritual system was soon to pass away" — the "Church continued." For then "its exclusively Jewish face" was "removed to make way for the New Testament inclusiveness of the Kingdom of God."

So in Acts 15 "the Apostles with the **Elders** and entire Church at Jerusalem," holds Owen, "decided...converts from Gentile nations should not be bound by the Law of Moses." Yet that latter is quite distinct from the Pre-Mosaic Law of God, which still obtains. Gen. 1:28; 2:17; 8:6-12; 9:1-12; Eccl. 7:29; Hos. 6:1-10; Acts 15:20-29; 16:4; Rom. 1:18-32; 2:14-16; 7:7-22; Jas. 2:8-12.

### The Presbytery of the Trinity before man's fall

The Triune **God** is Himself a 'Presbytery' — as can be seen at the ordination by the Father of the Son with the Spirit, at Christ's own baptism. Mt. 3:16*f* & Isa. 61:1*f*. Indeed, from all eternity, that Son was always with the Father and with the eternal Spirit — before the world was. Jh. 17:1-5 & Heb. 9:14. At the beginning of time, these Three Persons all acted together, as One Presbytery, in divine harmony — at the creation of the universe. Gen. 1:1-3. They again did so at the formation of the human family as His righteous image. Gen. 1:26-28; 5:1-4*f*; Eccl. 7:29; Rom. 2:14*f*; Eph. 4:24-29.

After His incarnation and then His resurrection, the divine Messiah required (and still requires) God's Triune Name to be impressed on the foreheads of His followers at their baptism by a Minister of His Presbytery. See Mt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:14-16; Rev. 7:2-9*f*; 22:4*f*. Then, at His human ascension, the Spirit-anointed Son returned to His Father the Ancient of days — there to **rule** through His Elders, here and now on Earth as too in Heaven, even unto all eternity. Dan. 7:13 & 9:25*f* and Rev. 4:4 to 5:14*f*.

In Owen's *Works* — Banner of Truth eds. 1968 & 1991 (XX:413) — he rightly recognizes what we shall call the fundamental Presbytery — *viz.* the Triune God Himself. "Here the sacred truth of the *Trinity of Persons* in the divine Nature or Essence openeth itself unto the creatures...."

"All the natural and essential properties of that Being are absolutely and essentially the same; and all the operations of this divine Essence or Being...are undivided — as being the effects of one principle; one power; one wisdom.... In these actings of the Persons of the Trinity in such ways as firstly respect themselves or their operations '*ad intra*' where one Person is as it were the Object of the other Persons' acting, the sacred truth of the plurality of Persons in...undivided Essence is gloriously manifested."

Owen states elsewhere (XXIII:43-45) that "the visible works of God...were designed for no other end but to declare in general the Nature, Being, and Existence of God.... In this Nature there are *three Persons* distinctly subsisting.... This, therefore, was designed unto manifestation and glory in the creation of man.... Therefore the first express mention of a plurality of Persons in the divine Nature, is in the creation of man....

"There were from all eternity personal transactions in the holy Trinity concerning mankind...which first manifested themselves in our creation.... 'God said, Let Us make man in Our image' [Gen. 1:26].... This is sufficiently evident, that the reporter of this story apprehended an unanswerable appearance of a *plurality of subsistences* in the Deity.... The ancients unanimously agree that a *plurality of Persons*...is here revealed and asserted."

Owen explains further (III:43,66f,102,285) that "from the foundation of the world, the Person of the Father was immediately represented.... He did withal give out promises concerning the peculiar exhibition of the Son...as also of the Holy Spirit.... Adam may be said to have had the Spirit of God [and indeed also to have known all three Persons of the Triune God].... The supernatural life of Adam in innocency...is that which the life whereunto we are restored by Christ doth answer."

### **The Presbytery of the Trinity rules over man also after the fall**

From Gen. 3:15f (*cf.* Matt. 28:16-20) — it is obvious that the **Church** of this Triune God dates even from Adam onward. Thus, in XVII:120 (compare too pp. 170-77 & 186f), Owen rightly claims that "God founded his Church in the promise of the Messiah given unto Adam." Also see IX:316f & X:290 & XI:305f.

In I:120-23, Owen explains: "**Faith in Christ was required from the beginning**.... It must be granted that 'without faith it is impossible to please God'; which the Apostle proves by instances from the foundation of the world, Heb. xi." This is "the very foundation of **Christian** religion.... Gen. iii.15 — truly called *Prootevangelion* — was **revealed**.... This is the very foundation of the faith of the **Church**.... The *person of Christ*, His incarnation and mediation...were promised under the name of the seed of the woman....

"Our first parents and all their holy posterity *did believe this promise*.... Mentioned by name in Scripture...[are] Abel, Enoch, Noah, and some others.... The Apostle affirms that they had this testimony — that they pleased God, Heb. ix.5.... In the same place he confirms their faith, and justification thereon, with a 'cloud of witnesses,' chap. xii.1."

As Owen adds in I:254f, "it is a **Church**-state which is constituted hereby.... Believers at present have, by faith, an admission into communion with **this Church**.... For we 'are come unto Mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God...and...to the **General Assembly and Church** of the first-born...and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better things than that of Abel.' Heb. xii.22-24.... In this holy **Assembly** and worship have we communion by faith whilst we are here **below**, Heb. x.19-22."

Indeed, precisely that latter passage adds most presbyterially just three verses later (in Heb. 10:25-28): "not forsaking the **assembling** of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another.... He that despised Moses' law died without mercy, under two or three Witnesses" — viz. at the instance of **presbyterial Elders**. Dt. 17:6-9 & 19:12-15. How much heavier a punishment, do you think, will he deserve who has trodden under foot the Son of God — and who has regarded the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified as an unholy thing; and who has spited the gracious Spirit?

### **All of the antediluvian Patriarchs were themselves also Presbyters**

In Vol. XXIII:13 of his *Works*, Owen says that antediluvian *Presbuteroi* Abel and Enoch and Noah in Heb. 11:2-7 were "*Seniores*." Now Owen would certainly agree (XIX:412-25) that also the New Testament Church should sing the Psalter. See Ps. 22:22 & Heb. 2:9-12. So, very presbyterially, Ps. 105:22 speaks of "**Princes**" and "**Senators**" — of *Saaraayv* and *Z'qeenayv* in the original Hebrew; of "*Archontas*" and "*Presbuteros*" in the 270 B.C. Greek Septuagint; and of *Principes* and *Senes* in Jerome's 400 A.D. Latin Vulgate.

Again presbyterially, also Ps. 107:32 enjoins the Members of the Church of the Lord in all ages to "exalt Him also in the Congregation [or the **Church**] of the people, and praise Him in the **Assembly** of the **Elders**." Here, the inspired Hebrew has *bi-Q'hal 'am uu-b'e-Mooshav Z'qeeniyim*; the Septuagint has "*en Ekkleesia, laou kai en Kathedra, Presbuteroon*"; and the Vulgate has *in Ecclesia plebis et in Cathedra Seniore*.

As Rev. Dr. John Owen himself states (XXIII:25-28), "from the foundation of the world there was...the **Church** in all ages.... Abel...obtained witness that he was righteous.... This was so famous in the **Church**, that he seems commonly to be called by that name 'the righteous Abel'; as he is by our Saviour, speaking of him, Matt. xxiii.35.... The good fame and report that Abel had in all generations...is...common to him with Noah, Abraham, and all the Patriarchs. They were spoken of, and their praise celebrated in the **Church** not less than Abel's."

In Heb. 11:2-7, continues Owen (XXIII:29-33), after Abel, "Enoch...is the second man unto whom testimony is personally given that he 'pleased God'.... This Enoch lived...three hundred years...and 'walked with God.' To 'walk with God' is to lead a life of faith in **covenant** obedience unto God." Later, "his rapture was *visible* in the sight of many that feared God who were to be witnesses of it unto the world — that it might be his ordinance for the conviction of sinners and the strengthening of the faith of the **Church**."

The third example among the **Elders** in Heb. 11:2-7, is Noah. Explains Owen (XXIII:52f): "Of this faith of Noah...the immediate effect was the saving of his **family**...for the continuation and propagation of a **Church**.... In this saving of the family of Noah by the ark, we have a figure of God's saving and preserving a remnant in all ages, when desolating judgments have destroyed apostasized **Churches** and Nations. So the Apostle Peter declares, with respect unto the vengeance and overwhelming destruction that was coming on the apostasized **Church** of the Jews: I Pet. iii.20,21.... [Yet] the visible, professing **Church** shall never fall into such an apostasy nor be so totally destroyed but that God will preserve a remnant."

### **Presbyterian Church Government under the Noachic and Abrahamic Covenants**

Clearly then, in the treatment of Heb. 11:2-7 in Owen's *Works* XXIII:13, the antediluvian *Presbuteroi* Abel and Enoch and Noah were at least "**Seniores**." Owen also realized (e.g. in XX:259) from Gen. 6:9-18 & 8:20-22 that precisely the **Church** is embraced also under the Noachic Covenant. Its universal laws were summarized already in Gen. 9:1-12 (as a postdiluvian update of the Adamic Law in the covenant of life mentioned in Hos. 6:7f).

Those Adamic/Noachic laws were explained to be binding on all mankind forever — not only in Gen. 9:12, but also in the B.C. Hebrew books of *Enoch* (chs. 54f & 60 & 65-69 & 106f) and *Jubilees* (7:20f). The same explanation was given by the pre-Christian Rabbis, as later recorded in that uninspired body of Judaistic literature known as the *Talmud* (at its *Sanhedrin* 56a).

Moreover, and far more importantly, those very same Adamitic/Noachitic laws were enjoined also upon Gentile Christians precisely by the **Christian Elders** at the **Synod of Jerusalem** — viz. the **First General Assembly** of the **apostolic Presbyterian Church**. Compare: Acts 15:18-20; 15:23-29; 16:4-5.

Owen then (XXIII:56) "proceeds unto the *next period of time*, from the flood and the renovation of the world in the family of Noah, unto the giving of the law; so to manifest that in every state of the **Church** the way of pleasing God was one and the same.... He who in this period of time is first testified unto in the Scripture, is...Abraham."

Also others "were **confederate** with Abram." Gen. 14:13. He himself was "a **Prophet**" alias a Minister of the Word or a Preaching Elder. Gen. 20:7. Indeed, also Eliezer of Damascus was his "Eldest Servant" alias his **Elder**. Gen. 24:2. There, the original Hebrew has *Z<sup>e</sup>qan*; the Greek Septuagint, *Presbuteroo*; and the Vulgate, *Seniorem*.

In XVII:447-67, Owen notes "concernments of the **Church** in the posterity of Abraham...concerning the **oneness** of the **Church**." Thus "the **Elders** of his house[hold] and all the **Elders** of the land of Egypt" helped Joseph to go bury his father Jacob. Gen. 50:7.

Indeed, coming to Moses and God's mercy in sparing the first-born of the Israelites in Egypt — Owen remarks that "this also [was] not without a prospect toward the redemption of the '**Church**' of the first-born' by Jesus Christ, Gen. xii.23. And this gave a period to the first dispensation of God towards the **Church** in the posterity of Abraham, [which had lasted] for the space of four hundred and thirty years."

### God's Presbyterian Church under Moses even before Mount Sinai

Also in the time of Moses, the Church was clearly not congregationalistic but presbyterial. Ex. 3:16f & 4:29f. Thus, Owen too acknowledges that the Christian Church thrived under the leadership of Elders in graded Courts alias Presbyteries — even before the **re**-promulgation of the Decalogue at Sinai.

In fact, even before the exodus, Owen admits (XVII:504f) that "for the families or principal houses of the fathers, there were *ha-Z<sup>e</sup>qeeniyim*, 'the **Elders**,' who presided over them. These Moses and Aaron gathered together at their first coming into Egypt, Ex. iv.29....

"Besides these, there were Officers who attended the service of the **whole** people as to the execution of justice and order — called *Shoṭ<sup>r</sup>riym*, 'Shoterim'!... Exod. v:14.... There are two sorts of persons mentioned that were over the people in respect of their works, even in Egypt — *han-Nog<sup>e</sup>shiyim* and *Shoṭ<sup>r</sup>riym*; 'extractors' or task-masters, and 'Officers.' Exod. v.6.

"The former or the *noghesim* the Jews say were Egyptians; and the latter, or 'the Shoterim,' Israelites.... They tell us in *Midrash Rabba* on Exod. sect. 1, that one of these *noghesim* was over ten of the Israelitish Officers; and one of **them** over ten Israelites; whence was the following division of the people into tens and hundreds."

The institution of the **Passover**, says Owen (XVII:460), involved "joining or separating households, Exod. xii.4" — and indeed precisely under the collective leadership of "the **Elders** of Israel." Ex. 12:21-27. Owen further adds: "They ate it afterwards in societies or fraternities, as our Saviour had twelve with him at the eating of it; and the Jews require ten [mature males] at least in society unto this celebration. Whence the *Targum* [or Aramaic translation] expressly on this place, Exod. xii.4 — 'If the **men** of the house be fewer than the number of ten'; for this was a sacred number with them.

"They circumcise not, marry not, divorce not — unless ten [mature males] be present. Thence is their saying in *Pirke Aboth*: 'Where ten sit and learn the law, the divine presence resteth on them' — as Ps. lxxxii.1."

This is the Presbyterian Church's system of graded Courts. Such consist, Biblically, of: Elders-over-ten in the Session; Elders-over-fifty in the Presbytery; Elders-over-hundred in the next higher Court; *etc.* Ex. 18:12-22; Dt. 1:13-17; 17:6-9; Ruth 4:2f, *etc.*



Right after Israel's exodus from Egypt, as the apostolic Christian martyr Stephen himself later pointed out under divine inspiration, the national Mosaic Covenant was indeed "the **Church** in the wilderness." Acts 7:38*f*. Owen too says (XIX:50*f* *cf.* XX:575) that even then, Christ Himself "was upon his throne, when He spake with the **Church** in the wilderness, Acts vii.38." Because led by **Elders** alias **Rulers** (Ex. 12:21*f* & 16:22*f* & 17:6*f*), that national Church was in fact — **Presbyterian**.

States the Bible: "Jethro, Moses' father in law, took...sacrifices for God: and Aaron came, and all the **Elders** of Israel, to eat bread...before God." Ex. 18:12. As Owen explains (XVII:505), "after their coming up out of Egypt — during their abode in the wilderness — Moses presided over them" *viz.* as Moderator. "By the advice of Jethro, he took in others unto his assistance, Exod. xviii.13-26....

"In the wilderness the body of the people was cast into...**thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens**; all which **had their peculiar Officers or Rulers** chosen from amongst themselves. Exod. xviii.25; Deut. 1:13-15.... The principal distributions of these, planting themselves together in the cities or towns of Canaan, however afterward they multiplied or were decreased, continued to be called by the name of the 'thousands of Israel' or Judah. So Bethlehem Ephratah is said to be 'little among the thousands of Judah,' Micah v.2."

### **Pre-Sinaitic derivation of also Ancient Britain's Presbyterian Government**

Also, even the most rudimentary investigation of Celto-Brythonic and Anglo-Saxon ancient law and political history — soon brings to light that the time-honoured Anglo-British practice of dividing both church and state into 'tithings' and 'fifties' and 'hundreds' *etc.*, is derived (*via* also the New Testament Church) just like that of Ex. 18:12-26*f* above from **Old Testament Presbyterianism**. Such was derived ostensibly from the earlier Eldership of Heb. 11:2-7 and Gen. 24:2 & 50:7 and Ex. 3:16.

This was the pattern also in Britain, both in ancient times and during the middle ages. See the Early-Welsh *commot* or association of fifty; the *cantred* or group of hundred households; and the *pen-cenedl* or headman of the hundred. See too the Anglo-Saxon *tythings* or associations of ten commoners and *tenmannetale* or "ten men's tallies" and the *hundredmote* or gatherings of the hundreds.

Traces of the above can still be seen even today — *e.g.*, in the 'Chilton Hundreds' *etc.* So too the 'hundredor' jury system; the entire appeal process; and the system of graded Courts, both ecclesiastical and forensic. Dt. 1:13-16; 16:18; 17:6-9; 19:12-15*f*; Mt. 18:15-20; II Cor. 13:1*f*; I Tim. 5:19*f*; *etc.* See too Barrister Owen Flintoff's *Rise and Progress of the Laws of England and Wales* (London: Richards & Roworth, Bell-Yard, Temple-Bar, 1840); and Sir William Blackstone's 1765 *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Chicago University Press, 1979 rep., I-IV).

## Presbyterianism continued also under the Mosaic Law

"As was before observed," explains Owen (XVII:167), "**there are two parts of the law** — the *moral precepts* of it, and the *instituted worship* appointed in it.... **The moral precepts** of it are the same with those that were **written in the heart of man by nature or the law of his creation**, which he transgressed in his first rebellion." Gen. 1:26-28; 2:15-17; Eccl. 7:29; Isa. 24:5; Hos. 6:7f; Rom. 2:14f. See too the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 19:1-2, and also its identical reproduction in the *1558 Savoy Declaration* 19:1-2.

Now it is very significant that Moses interacted with **the Elders** of the people of God especially at the time of the giving of the Ten Commandments. Remarks Owen (XVII:473f): "Moses went up into the Mount of God [Ex. 19:3].... Being ascended, God calls unto him...and teacheth him to prepare the people for the receiving of the law, chap. 19:3-6."

Moses came and called for the **Elders** of the people. He then laid before their faces all the words which the Lord commanded him. Ex. 19:7 *cf.* 20:1-20.

Provision was made for restitution, in respect of certain crimes, to be made just "as the **Judges** determine.... Both parties shall come before the **Judges**.... Whom the **Judges** shall condemn, he shall pay double unto his neighbour." Ex. 21:22f *cf.* 22:9.

So Moses took seventy of the **Elders** alias the **Nobles** of Israel half-way up Mount Sinai. He built an altar and twelve pillars according to the twelve tribes of Israel for the **National Church in the Old Testament**; and he looked upon the paved work of sapphire stone under the feet of Israel's God. Ex. 24:4-9f *cf.* Num. 11:16-25 & Acts 7:38.

Owen observes (XVII:504f) that "for the families...of the fathers there were...'the **Elders**' who presided over them. These Moses and Aaron gathered together.... And these, as I said before, being the **Rulers** of the first families, were probably in number seventy — from when afterwards was the constitution of seventy **Elders** for **rule**. Exod. xxiv.1....

"There were **Officers** who attended the service of the whole people as to the execution of justice and order.... They are afterwards distinguished from the **Elders** and the **Judges**, Deut. xvi.18.... After these things, by God's appointment, was constituted the **Great Court** of the **Sanhedrin**" alias the "**Session** of the **Highest Board** of **Elders**."

## Elders mentioned more than one hundred times in the Old Testament

We shall not list the many scores of references to ecclesiastical Elders in the Old Testament alone (which will be found set out in full in any good *Bible Concordance*). We shall, however, mention several passages where Elders are said to have been convened together — in order to promote a reformation within the Church. This presupposes also their regular gatherings together — in Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, and General Assemblies.

Thus, God Himself commanded His people: "**Gather** unto Me **all** the **Elders** of your **Tribes**...[so] that I may speak these words in their ears." Dt. 31:28. "Solomon **assembled** the **Elders** of **Israel** and **all** the Heads of the **Tribes**." See: I Kgs. 8:1 *cf.* II Chr. 5:2.

"The king [Josiah] sent — and they **gathered** unto him **all** the **Elders** of **Judah**." II Kgs. 23:1 *cf.* II Chr. 34:29. "So David and the **Elders** of **Israel** and the **Captains over Thousands** went to bring up the ark of the covenant of the Lord." I Chr. 15:25.

"David and the **Elders** of **Israel**, who were clothed in sackcloth, **fell upon** their faces." I Chron. 21:16. "Let now our **Rulers** of **all the Congregation** stand...and with them the **Elders** of **every city**." Ezra 10:14. "Praise Him in the **Assembly** of the **Elders**!" Ps. 107:32.

The husband of the "virtuous woman" sits or rules "among the Elders of the land." Prov. 31:10-23. "The Elders of Judah," records Ezekiel, "sat before me." Ezek. 8:1 (*cf.* too 14:1 & 20:1). "Call a solemn Assembly; gather the Elders!" Joel 1:14. "Gather the people; sanctify the Congregation; assemble the Elders!" Joel 2:16.

### The degeneration of the post-exilic Hebrew Sanhedrins

The 'Sanhedrin' mentioned in our last citation from Owen was one in a system of graded Courts, comprising of at least the Lesser Sanhedrin and the Greater Sanhedrin. References in the Older Testament to the roots and perhaps too even the first buddings of the then-developing Sanhedrins, include: Deut. 17:6-10; 19:11-15; Ezra 5:5-11; 6:7-14; 10:8; Neh. 2:16; 4:13-21; 7:4-7*f.*

References to the Sanhedrins in uninspired intertestamental Hebrew writings are found *inter alia* also in II Macc. 1:10; 4:44; Jth. 4:8; 11:14; 15:8; Josephus' *Antiquities* IV:8:41; and, in particular, *Sanhedrin* 1:6*f.* References in the inspired Newer Testament to the by-then-degenerated sanhedrins, corrupted from Hebrew Trinitarianism into Judaistic Unitarianism, are found in: Mt. 5:22; 26:59; Mk. 15:1; Lk. 22:66; Jh. 11:47; Acts 4:15; 5:21; 6:12; 22:5; & 22:30.

Acts 5:21 refers to "the Council and all the Senate of the children of Israel." The original Greek here has *to Sunedrion kai pasan teen Gerousian toon huioon Israeel* — where **Sunedrion** means "the sitting of the Board"; and where **Gerousia** means "Senate of Elders." Jerome's Vulgate here has *Concilium*, which means "Council"; and *Seniores*, which means "Senators" alias "Elders."

Also Acts 22:5 refers to "all the **estate** of the **Elders**." There the New Testament Greek has *pan to Presbuterion* alias "the entire **Presbyteriate**." The Vulgate has *omnes Majores*, alias "all of the **Major [Officers]**."

These Judaistic Courts had apostasized from the Trinitarianism of the Older Testament to the later Unitarianism of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. As Owen observes (II:273) — "The Jews, in the time of our Saviour's converse on the earth, being fallen greatly from the faith and worship of their forefathers, and ready to sink into their last and utmost apostasy from God, seem amongst many other truths to have much lost that of the doctrine of the holy Trinity and of the person of the Messiah."

### **Older Testament Presbyterianism continues as Christian Presbyterianism**

However, the corrupt Judaistic Sanhedrins — as perversions of the pure Presbyterianism of the Older Testament — were soon to be replaced by correct Christian Courts. Even as Jesus Himself had predicted, the Kingdom of God was removed from the apostate priests "and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Mt. 21:23-43. This re-form-ed nation is the Christian Church of the Newer Testament, with its Presbyterian system of graded Courts grounded in the Older Testament.

The Christian Church's system of graded Courts themselves continued and expanded those of Ancient Israel. Bypassing the corrupted Courts of apostate Judaism, they consist of: the Christian Kirk Session of Elders, which rules each local Congregation (Phil. 1:1 & I Tim. 3:1f & Tit. 1:5f); the Christian Classis or *Presbuterion* of regional Elders, which supervises the Kirk Sessions (Acts 13:1-5 & 14:23 & I Tim. 4:14): and further the Christian General Assembly as a Synod or "Meeting of the Highest Board of Elders" to which all Presbyteries may appeal. Ex. 18:12-26; Dt. 1:13-17; 16:18; 17:6-9; 19:12-15; Mt. 16:18; 18:15-20; Acts 14:26f; 15:1-41; 16:1-5; Heb. 12:22f.

Very remarkably, even when still a Congregationalist the already represbyterianizing Owen (XV:252) quite clearly writes: "Some there are who plead for a **national** Church-state arising from an association of the **Officers** of particular **churches** in several degrees, which they call **classical** and **provincial**, until it extend itself unto the limits of a whole nation.... I shall **neither** examine nor **oppose** this opinion; there hath been enough, if not too much, already disputed about it."

Owen then also writes (XV:325f): "Such a Church-state was constituted and appointed under the **Old Testament**, founded in and on an especial covenant between God and the people, **Exod. xxiv** [*cf.* especially the graded "Elders" alias the "Nobles" in vv. 1-11]. Unto this **Church** [*cf.* Acts 7:38], everyone that would please God and walk before Him was bound to join himself....

"As the Apostle demonstrates at large in his Epistle to the Hebrews [see 12:22f & 13:7-17 *etc.*] — all the commands [and] promises and threatenings given or annexed unto **that** [*viz.* the **Older** Testament] **Church-state** concerning the **conjunction** of men unto it and walking in it, are **transferred** unto this of the new erection of **Christ**.

"Wherefore, although the state of the **Church** itself be reduced from that which was **nationally** congregational unto that which is simply and absolutely so" — the decongregationalizing Owen cautiously goes on — "yet the **commands**, promises and **threatenings** made and given unto it as a **Church** are **all** in **full** force with respect unto this **new** [*viz.* **Newer** Testament] **Church-state**."

### **Christ's continuing Promise: 'I shall keep on building My Church!'**

Now the first indications of this development of the Old Testament system of graded Courts into their counterparts within the New Testament Christian Church, are found in Mt. 16:19 and 18:15-20. In the former verse, Christ announces: "I will build My **Church**."

The above expression **cannot** mean, as Dispensationalists allege: 'I shall **start** building My Church' (although only after Calvary). It can **only** mean: 'I shall **continue** building My Church' (also and especially after Calvary). For Christ had **started** to build His Church in the garden of Eden (Gen. 1:26-28 & 3:15f), and had **continued** building it ever since (*cf.* Acts 7:38f).

In Mt. 16:19, the word "build" translates *oikodomeesoo* — which here apparently means: I shall **keep on** building.' The tense is future-continuous. It suggests that the Son of God who had been building His Church ever since 4004 B.C., would also in the future keep on building and indeed continue to expand it — even until the very end of world history. *Cf.* Mt. 28:16-20.

Owen himself writes (XV:335 & XV:512) that "all Christians were **originally of one mind** in all things needful unto **joint communion**.... The **discipline of the Church**...consists in the due exercise of that **authority and power** which the Lord Christ, in and by his Word, hath granted unto the **Church** for its continuance, increase and preservation in purity, **order** and holiness according to his appointment. **Matth. xvi.19**; Rom. xii.8; 2 Cor. x.4-6; Rev. ii.2,20.

In XVI:106, Owen also states: "**The rule and government of the [New Testament] Church**, or **the execution of the authority of Christ** therein, is in the hands of the **Elders**. All Elders in Office have rule, and none have rule in the Church but Elders. As such, rule doth belong unto them. The **Apostles**, by virtue of their especial Office, were intrusted with **all Church-power**; but **therefore they were Elders also**. I Pet. v.1; 2 John I; 3 John 1. See Acts xxi.18; I Tim. v.17. There are some of them, on other accounts, called 'Bishops, Pastors, Teachers, Ministers, **Guides**' — but what belongs unto any of them in point of rule, or what interest they have therein, it belongs unto them as [**Presbyters** or] **Elders and not otherwise**. Acts xx.17,20.

"So [too] under the **Old Testament**, where the word [Elder] doth not signify a difference in age but is used in a moral sense, **Elders are the same with Rulers or Governors** — whether in Offices civil or ecclesiastical. Especially **the Rulers of the Church were constantly called its Elders**. And the use of the word, with the abuse of the power or office intended by it, is traduced to signify men in authority (*'Seniores, Aldermanni'*) in all places.

"Church-power, acted in its rule, is called 'The keys of the kingdom of heaven' by an expression derived from the keys that were a sign of office-power in the families of kings. Isa. xxii.22.... It is used by our Saviour Himself to denote the communication of Church-power unto others, which is absolutely and universally vested in Himself — under the name of 'The Key of David.' Rev. iii.7; Matt. xvi.19."

### **Old and New Testament Church Discipline by at least two or three Elders**

Also especially the second above-mentioned passage (Mt. 18:15-20), ultimately involves the entire Church and all of its graded Courts. For it declares that if a Christian's brother shall trespass against him, the offended one is to go and tell him his fault between the two of them alone. If the offender then heeds the complainant, the latter regains his brother.

However, if the offender will not heed the complainant, the latter is then to take with him one or two more persons — so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. If the offender neglects to heed them, this is to be told to the Church. Then, if he neglects to heed the Church — he is thenceforth to be regarded as a heathen.

Jesus then went on to assure especially all of His apostolic Elders there that whatever they would bind on earth, would be bound in heaven; and that whatever they would loosen on earth, would be loosed in heaven. Again He assured them that if two of them would agree on earth regarding anything they would request, it would be done for them by His Father in heaven. "For where two or three [plural] are gathered together in My Name," He promised them — "there am I in the midst of them [plural]." See too John 20:21-23f.

This passage regarding serious grievances, was addressed by Christ generally to all of "the disciples" alias 'those whom He had taught' (Mt. 18:1) — and particularly to His Presbytery of the twelve 'sent-out' Apostles. Jh. 20:21-23f *cf.* Lk. 22:8-30 & 24:33-48f. On **appeal**, after an unsuccessful private admonition, such matters were to go before at least two or three witnessing Elders or Judges — and, if again unsuccessful, finally before special gatherings of the whole Church (representative of the whole denomination).

For compare the words "**two or three witnesses**" in Mt. 18:16 and "**Church**" in 18:17 and "**you**" and "**ye**" [plurals] repeatedly in Mt. 18:18-19 and "**two or three**" specially "**gathered together in My Name**" in Mt. 18:20 — with the words "the **Elders**" and "**two witnesses...or three witnesses**" in Dt. 19:12-15, and with the words "**two witnesses or three witnesses**" and "**a matter too hard for you in judgment**" and "**then you shall arise and get yourself up into the place which the Lord your God shall choose**" in Dt. 17:6-9. Also note how the same words "**too hard**" in Dt. 1:13-17 and the words "**hard causes**" in Ex. 18:12-26, there too presuppose such an **appeal procedure** — from **one** set of **Elders**, to **another** set of **Elders**.

It is therefore clear that Mt. 18:15*f* is derived from both Dt. 17:6*f* and 19:12*f* (and more remotely also from both Dt. 1:13-17 and Ex. 18:12-26). However, all those texts teach **not just the rule of Elders over their own local Congregation**. They also authorize appeals from such a local Court to a **higher Court of similar Ruling Judges**. So too, it follows — by good and necessary inference — does Mt. 18:15*f*.

### **Owen on the confederative nature of church discipline according to Mt. 18:15*f***

As also Dr. John Owen explains (XV:177*f*): "None can be ignorant of what is required of them, Matt. xviii.15-20. ... They are bound by the Law of Christ in **due order**...required of them toward the Church.... The duty also of the whole Church in such cases is no less evidently declared...**to put from amongst them** [!!!] such obstinate offenders.... Hereunto also are subservient all the commands that are given them to exhort and admonish one another [*cf.* Heb. 10:24-29 & 12:22*f* & 13:7-17], that the whole Church may be preserved in purity, order, holiness. and faithfulness....

"With whom rests the principal care and **power** — according to the mind of Christ — to see the **discipline** of the Church in particular congregations exercised, and to exercise it accordingly? If this should be found to be in the Ministers [plural] and, through their neglect in the administration of it, offenders be left in their sins and impenitency without a due application of the means for their healing and recovery; if **the Church itself** come to be corrupted thereby, and to fall under the displeasure of Jesus Christ as these things in one degree or other, more or less, will ensure on that neglect it will not turn unto their comfortable account at the great day. That this is their **duty**, that this **authority** and **inspection** is **committed** unto them, the reasons before **insisted** on...do undeniably evince."

Further, in XVI:154 & XVI:169 Owen adds: "All lawful societies constituted such by voluntary confederation according unto peculiar laws and rules of their own choice unto especial duties and ends, have a right and power by the light of nature to receive into their society those that are willing and meet — engaging themselves to observe the rules, laws and ends of the society and to expel them out of it who wilfully deviate from those rules.... Wherefore, when our Lord Jesus Christ gives unto his **Church** the **power of binding and loosing** — directing **them** in the exercise of that power — He directs them to ask assistance by prayer when they are **gathered** together, **Matt. xviii.18-20**."

## **The multiplication of the Presbyterian Church from Matthew 28 to Acts 6**

After His resurrection, the Son of God urged His Ministers of the Word and Sacraments to keep on going into all the world; to disciple all nations; to baptize them into the Name of the Triune God [the Ultimate Presbytery]; and to teach them to observe **all things whatsoever** He had ever commanded (from creation onward, **including Presbyterial Church Government**). Mt. 28:16-20; Mk. 16:15*f*; Lk. 24:47*f*.

Inevitably, this would lead to the creation of many Congregations; to the formation of whole Presbyteries of Congregations; and to the convening from time to time of General Assemblies constituted from those Presbyteries (such as those of Judaea, Samaria, Galilee, Phoenicia, and Antioch, *etc.*). Acts 1:5-8; 8:25*f*; 9:31; 11:19*f*; 11:27*f*; 13:1*f*; 14:23*f*; 15:1 to 16:5.

**This presbyterial principle** is seen very clearly even in the earliest days after Pentecost Sunday. About three thousand persons, **including infant children**, were then baptized — and the Lord kept on adding to the **Church** daily such as should be saved. Acts 2:38-47.

Soon, even in Jerusalem alone the number just of the adult male believers had climbed to about five thousand (Acts 4:4) — quite excluding also the number of their co-believing women and children. This, then, clearly required several Congregations — within at least one Presbytery — in that city alone.

Still the Jerusalem Christians kept on increasing — and rapidly came to constitute "a multitude." Acts 4:32. Peter and the other Apostles, trained and ordained by Christ Himself, persevered — and continued labouring. Acts 5:29*f*. "And daily... in every house — they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ. Acts 5:42.

Thereafter, "in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, the...twelve [Apostles] called the multitude of the disciples unto them and said, 'It is not reasonable that we should leave [aside the preaching of] the Word of God, and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, look out among yourselves for seven men of honest report...whom we may appoint over this business! But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the Ministry of the Word.'

"And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost; and Philip"; and five others, all of whom were mentioned by name — "whom they set before the Apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests became obedient to the faith." Acts 6:1-7.



Owen compares what happened here, with what occurred later at the Synod of Jerusalem in Acts 15. "The occasion there mentioned," he states (in XVI:230f), "was guided by the Holy Ghost — that it might be an example and rule for the Churches of Christ in cases of a like concernment unto them in all ages, and so have the force and warranty of an institution: as it was in the case that gave occasion unto Deacons, Acts vi." In that case, "a matter of fact wherein was some disorder, rectified by a practice answering the necessity of the Church, became an institution for order in all future ages.

### **The expansion of the Presbyterian Church from Jerusalem to Antioch**

Soon, both Deacon Stephen and Deacon Philip were appointed Evangelists — or Ministers of the Word and Sacraments ordained by Presbytery to start new works for the Church especially in the regions beyond. Acts 7:8f & 8:5 & 21:8f *cf.* I Tim. 1:3 & 4:14f & II Tim. 4:1-5 & Tit. 1:4-5f.

Stephen started telling the Jews that **Jesus** the promised **Messiah** is "He that was in the **Church** in the **wilderness**" — Who spoke to Moses when the latter was on Mount Sinai (**together** with the **Elders** of Israel). Acts 6:8-14f & 7:2f & 7:37f (*cf.* Ex. 18:12-26; 19:7f; 24:1-14f; Gal. 3:19f). The Evangelist Philip in turn went to Samaria, preaching and baptizing there. Acts 8:1-12.

Such ministries led to the multiplication of new Congregations and to the creation of new Presbyteries. Soon "the Churches...throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria...were edified; and, walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." Acts 9:31. "It became known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord." Acts 9:42.

"They which were scattered abroad at the persecution that arose about Stephen, travelled as far as Phoenicea and Cyprus and Antioch — preaching the Word.... Some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which when they had come to Antioch spoke to the Greeks, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them; and a great number believed, and turned to the Lord." Acts 11:19-23.

### **Liaison between Jerusalem and Antioch and the increase of Elders**

With so many new Congregations in that region, this soon led to the creation of the new Presbytery of Antioch. "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.... Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to the Elders." Acts 11:26-30.

Note here the **connection** in the relationship between the Presbytery of Antioch, and those in Judaea. "The Word of God grew and multiplied. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem" to Antioch. Acts 72:24f.

"Now there were in the Church that was at Antioch, certain Prophets and Teachers" — four of whom were mentioned (in addition to Saul or Paul). "As they ministered to the Lord..., the Holy Ghost said, 'Separate Barnabas and Saul unto Me, for the work whereunto I have called them!' And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." Compare Acts 13:1-3*f*. Thus commissioned as Missionary Evangelists by the Presbytery of Antioch, Revs. Saul and Barnabas preached the word and created house-churches in Cyprus and in what is now Turkey. Acts 13:4 to 14:21.

"And when they had ordained them **Elders in every Church...**, they commended them to the Lord in Whom they believed... After they had passed throughout Pisidia...they went down into Attalia — and thence sailed to **Antioch from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.**

"And when they were come, and had gathered [the **Antiochian Presbytery** of] the Church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them — and how He had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they stayed for a long time with the disciples." Acts 14:23-28.

### **Dissension in Presbyteries led to the calling of a Synod**

However, "certain men which came down from Judaea, taught the brethren and said, 'Unless you get circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved!' When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain other of them should go up to Jerusalem **to the Apostles and Elders about this question...** And when they had come to Jerusalem, **they were received by the Church and by the Apostles and Elders.**" Acts 15:1-4.

According to Acts 15:2*f*, representatives of the Presbyteries of at least Antioch and Jerusalem now met together in order to settle a very important matter — after "no small dissension and disputation" had plagued the Church. Indeed, it seems that representatives would also have been sent — from the equally-concerned Presbyteries of Syria and Cilicia. Acts 15:23 & 15:41.

For a great doctrinal controversy had arisen in the apostolic Congregations first in Judaea and later in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. It was a controversy as to whether converts to Christianity from heathendom (in addition to needing to be baptized) needed also to be circumcised "after the manner of Moses."

The matter was sent up by way of **reference** ore **referral** — apparently by the regional **Presbytery of Antioch** (13:1-5 *cf.* 14:27*f*), and possibly also by the regional **Presbytery of Syria** and the regional **Presbytery of Cilicia** (*cf.* Acts 15:23 & 15:41). It was referred not to a mere Congregation (however influential) in Jerusalem, but to the **Apostles** and **Elders** themselves (Acts 15:2) — in other words, to a **Synod** which 'came together' precisely to ejudicate on this. Indeed, the very word 'Synod' — from the Greek words *sun* and *cod(os)* alias 'with' and 'road' — means precisely a 'cross-roads' where people would gather for meetings.

**"The Apostles and Elders came together for to consider this matter."** Acts 15:6. These **Apostles** and **Elders**, and **they alone**, came together to consider the matter. Acts 15:6.

Other non-commissioned persons present, were simply observers at that Synod — such as "the multitude" in Acts 15:12 and "the whole Church" (alias the entire Congregation) in Acts 15:22 and the "brethren" in Acts 15:23. Such observers only **silently** and **non-votingly** concurred in the decision made by the Synod itself.

Many Delegates to that Synod spoke up. "And, when there had been much disputing" (Acts 15:7) — Peter, Barnabas, Paul and finally James all spoke their minds (Acts 15:7-13).

James referred to the sacred Scriptures — explicitly pointing to the prediction of the internationalization of the Church in Amos 9:11*f*, and implicitly presupposing the ongoing obligatoriness of the provisions of the Noachic Covenant in Gen. 9:1-12. Then he recommended that the Synod write to the troubled Gentile Christians, and decree not that they should observe the Mosaic laws but indeed that they should keep the Noachic laws (derived from the Moral Law given to all men from Adam to Noah *etc.*). Acts 15:13-20*f*.

### **The Synod decreed binding injunctions upon the Presbyteries and their Churches**

**"Then it pleased the Apostles and Elders with the whole Church, to send chosen men at their own company to Antioch** with Paul and Barnabas; (namely) Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas — Chief Men [or *Andres Heegoumenous* alias '**Ruling Men**'] among the brethren," Acts 15:22. Thus too Owen (XXIII:420*f*).

"They wrote letters for them after this manner: **"The Apostles and Elders and brethren send greetings unto the brethren which are from the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia!** Forasmuch as we have heard that certain [men] who went forth from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, 'You must get circumcised and keep the law' — to whom we gave no such commandment — **it seemed good to us, being assembled, with one accord to send chosen men to you** with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have risked their lives for the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have thus sent Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth." Acts 15:23-27.

Here, the Synod then resolved to write to the Presbyteries of Antioch and Syria and Cilicia. It resolved further, also to choose Delegates and then to send those chosen Delegates to those Presbyteries. Those Delegates from the Synod would then also orally assure those Presbyterial Courts and their Congregations of the mind of the Synod anent several important matters.

The Synodical Letter then continued: "It seemed **good** to the **Holy Ghost** and to us, **to lay upon you no greater burden than [all of] these necessary things; that you abstain from foods offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication; from which, if ye keep yourselves, you shall do well.** Fare well!" Acts 15:22b-29.

Here, the Synod assured Gentile Christians in those Presbyteries that the Holy Spirit did not wish to burden them with any necessity of their being circumcised after the manner of Moses. However — and what is often overlooked — the **Synod** also assured those Gentile Christians that "it seemed **good** to the **Holy Ghost** and [therefore] to **us**" that it was indeed **necessary for them to observe** certain essential practices.

Such were the "**necessary things**" of **God's Moral Law**, *viz.*: 'you shall not make for yourself any graven image!'; 'you shalt not murder!'; 'you shall not commit adultery!' *etc.* For that Moral Law is Pre-Mosaic and indeed part and parcel of both the Adamic and the Noachic Covenants which God still enjoins all men everywhere to observe. See: Gen. 2:17f; 9:1-12; Eccl. 7:29; Hos. 6:7f; Mt. 19:17-19; Rom. 2:14f; 13:8-10; Jas. 2:8-12.

### **The Synod's decrees delivered to the Congregations within the Presbyteries**

The Delegates thus deputized by and from that Synod then "came to [the Presbytery of] **Antioch**: and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle: which, when they had read it, they rejoiced because of the consolation." Acts 15:30f.

"And **Paul** chose **Silas**, and...went through [the **Presbyteries** of] **Syria** and **Cilicia** — [while] **confirming the Churches.... And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees that had been ordained by the Apostles and Elders** — for [the **Presbyteries**] **to keep [them]**.... And **so** were the **Churches** [alias all of the Congregations in the Presbyteries] **established** in the [Christian] **Faith**, and **increased** in number **daily.**" Acts 15:40 to 16:5.

Here, note that the word "**decrees**" translates the Greek word *dogmata*. It means '**enacted ordinances.**' Such enactments of the Synod were not merely advisory but indeed actually **obligatory** for the Christians — in all of the Congregations within the several Presbyteries here addressed.

As Owen himself observes (XVI:46f) — "The brethren of the Church may be so multiplied as that the constant meeting of them all in one place may not be absolutely best for their edification; howbeit, that on all the solemn occasions of the Church whereunto their consent was necessary they **did of old and ought still to meet**, in the same place [*viz.* in **such Synods**], for **advice** [and] **consultation** and **consent**.... This is so fully expressed and exemplified in the **two great Churches** [in the **Presbyteries?!**] of **Jerusalem** and **Antioch**, Acts xv, **that it cannot be gainsaid.**"

Elsewhere too, Owen explains (XVII:99): "The **Synod** indeed at Jerusalem had **determined** [!!!] that the **yoke of the law** [of the Israelites] should not be put upon the necks of the Gentile converts. Acts xv."

### **Dr. Owen's most extended treatment on the Synod of Jerusalem (Acts 15)**

Here is Owen's most extended treatment of the Synod of Jerusalem as it is described in Acts 15.

- "(1) The **occasion** of it," he explains (XVI:207f), "was a **difference in the Church of Antioch**, which they could not compose among themselves; because those who caused the difference, pretended authority from the Apostles — as is evident; verses 1,24.
- "(2) The means of **its convention** [alias the reason for its then being convened] was the...**reference** of the matter in debate made by the Church at Antioch.
- "(3) The **persons constituting the Synod** were the Apostles, **Elders**, and brethren of the Church at Jerusalem **and the Messengers** [**Commissioners**] of that of Antioch with whom Paul and Barnabas were joined in the same **Delegation**.
- "(4) the **matter** in difference was **debated** as unto the mind of God concerning it **in** the **Scripture**, and **out** of the **Scripture**. On James' proposal, the **determination** was made.
- "(5) There was **nothing imposed anew** on the practice of the Churches.... **Direction** is given in one particular instance as unto **duty necessary** on many accounts unto the Gentile converts namely to **abstain from fornication**" *etc.*
- "(6) The **grounds** whereon the Synod proposed the reception of and compliance with its decrees were four —
- [1] That what they had determined was the **mind of the Holy Ghost** [Acts 15:28a]....
  - [2] The **authority** of the Assembly, as convened in the Name of **Christ** and by virtue of His presence.... 'It pleased the Holy Ghost **and us**' [Acts 15:28b]....
  - [3] That the things which they had determined were '**necessary**' [Acts 15:28c & 15:29a]....
  - [4] From the duty with respect unto the peace and **mutual communion** of the Jewish and Gentiles Churches: 'Doing thus,' say they, 'ye shall do **well**' [Acts 15:29b]."

### **Owen's great *Discourse Concerning the Administration of Church-Censures***

In Owen's *Discourse Concerning the Administration of Church-Censures*, he applies Acts 15 to the exercise of connectional ecclesiastical discipline. "On the part of **other Churches**," Owen there explains (XVI:230f), "a Church may either causelessly or...with just cause, cast out or withdraw communion from...a number of their Members.... This whole order and practice are grounded on especial warrant and approbation, recorded Acts xv....

"The occasion there mentioned, fell out in the providence of God.... The practice upon it, was guided by the Holy Ghost — that it might be an **example** and **rule** for the **Churches** of Christ in cases of a like concernment unto them in **all** ages, and so have the **force** and warranty of an **institution**; as it was in the case that gave occasion unto Deacons, Acts vi." In that case, "a matter of fact wherein was some disorder, **rectified** by a practice answering the necessity of the Church, became an institution for **order** in all future ages." (*Cf.* the "Deacons" also in Phil. 1:1 & I Tim. 3:8-13.)

At the later Jerusalem General Assembly (Acts 15), "in that **Synod**...the truth was searched out and the mind or the Holy Ghost searched into — by reasonings...and the consideration of **Scripture testimonies** whereby they were guided in their conclusion and determination.... That wherein many Churches are concerned...should be considered, advised upon and **determined by more Churches** holding communion together and **meeting for that purpose by their Messengers**" alias their **Commissioners**.

"To deny an institution of so great necessity to the peace and edification of the Churches — will give great countenance unto men who, supposing such defects, are ready to supply them with their own inventions." Thus Dr. Owen. What a good description of the "inventions" of 'Independency'!

### **Presbytery Elders in the Church Courts at Ephesus and Rome and Crete**

In Acts 20:17-28, Paul admonished all of the Elders in Ephesus. In Acts 21:18-25 *cf.* Gal. 2:1-9, James and the Elders in Jerusalem remind even Paul of the conclusions reached at the previous Synod and its binding power on Christians. In Rom. 11:16-26 and Gal. 3:16 to 4:26, Paul insists that the Christian Church was and is the heir of Ancient Israel. And in Rom. 12:4-8, he upholds Presbyterial Government by Elders — not only in Greece's Church of Cenchrea but also in respect of all of the tiny House-Congregations in the Presbytery of Rome (15:1-17).

For all Christians everywhere, baptized in the Name of the Triune God (as the Ultimate Presbytery) — are obligated also to work with one another within that presbyterial system. I Cor. 12:3-28; 12:13; 16:1-8f; Eph. 4:3f; Phil. 1:1; Col. 4:14f; I Tim. 3:1-8f. Thus, in I Tim. 4:14 Paul reminds Rev. Timothy to heed the prophecy given him when ordained with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery; I Tim. 5:17-22 re-enacts the Old Testament requirements of two or three Witnesses, especially in respect of the work of the Elders; and Tit. 1:5-11 reminds Rev. Titus that he had been commissioned also to ordain Elders in every city throughout Crete.

### **The Book of Hebrews grounds N.T. Elders in the O.T. Church**

In Heb. 3:3-6, we are told that Christ "was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He Who has built the house has more honour than the house." For Christ was and is "a Son over His Own house." Nevertheless, just as the Old Testament Church was designed by Christ (and merely **constructed** by Moses) — so too the New Testament Church as its fulfilment and replacement was also designed, and is being built toward its completion, by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself — "Whose house are we."

Similarly, in Heb. 7:5f, Moses was admonished by God — when he, as the Lord's agent, was about to start constructing the tabernacle. "For see," God said to Moses, "that you make all things **according to the pattern shown to you on the Mount[ain]!**" It was there that Moses, **together with the Elders** of the Older Testament's **Church**, waited upon the Lord. Ex. 24:1-15 & 25:40.

Christ has obtained a much more excellent ministry! He exercised His fine ministry also through the rule of Elders in His **Older Testament Church**. So too, He now exercises His still more excellent ministry also through the rule of Elders in His **Newer Testament Church**. See Heb. 13:7,17,24. "Christ," says Owen (XV:245f), is seen in "His faithfulness in and over the house of God, wherein He is compared unto and preferred above Moses. Heb. iii.3-6. Now the faithfulness of Moses consisted in this, that he did and appointed all things according to the **pattern** showed him in the Mount [Heb. 7:5]; that is, all whatever it was the will of God to be revealed and appointed for the **constitution, order, rule, and worship** of His **Church** — and nothing else. But it was the will of God that there should be **all** those things in the **Gospel Church** state **also**." For the Church in both Old and the New Testament times was and is the same Presbyterian system — in which Christ ruled, and keeps on ruling, through His Elders in their graded ecclesiastical Courts.

In Heb. 10:23-29, **Christians** everywhere are urged (**also today**) not to neglect the gathering of themselves together — and are warned about the testimony of two or three Elders also in **Old** Testament times. Dt. 17:6-9. Thus, in the very next chapter (Heb. 11:1-4f), Members of especially the New Testament Church are reminded of the faith and action of the **Presbuteroi** Abel and Enoch and Noah (whom also Owen regards as **Seniores**). Cf. Heb. 11:1-4f with 12:1-2f & 12:6-9 & 12:22f with 13:7,17,24.

## The General Assembly of the Church of the first-born in Heb. 12:22f

In Heb. 12:22f, God tells His New Testament Church that she had "come unto **Mount Zion**, and unto the **City of the living God**, [namely] the **heavenly Jerusalem**, and...to the **General Assembly** and **Church** of the first-born..., and to Jesus the Mediator of the **New Covenant**, and to the blood of sprinkling, speaking better things than [that of] **Abel**" the **Presbuteros**.

Says Dr. Owen (XXIII:328-38): "We have here a blessed, yea, a glorious description of the **Catholic Church** [alias the **Church Universal**], as the nature and communion of it are revealed under the Gospel.... The Catholic Church is distributed into two parts, namely that which is militant and that which is triumphant; they are both comprehended in this description....

"For the first expressions...'Mount Sion, the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem' — do **principally** respect that part of the Church which is **militant**.... The foundation of this catholic communion or communion of the **Catholic Church** comprising all that is holy and dedicated unto God...is laid [down] in the recapitulation of all things in and by Jesus Christ. Eph. 1.10, 'All things are gathered into one Head in Him'...Which is the sole foundation of their **mutual communion**.... We have here an **As-soc-iation**."

Now precisely from "**Gal. iv.25-26**...it is apparent that by 'Mount Sion' and 'the heavenly Jerusalem' the same state of the **Church** [**Militant**] is intended.... The Apostle calls the state of believers under the New Testament by the name of Sion.... All pleas about church order, power, rights and privileges, are useless — where men are not interested in this Sion state.... This was the **City of God**.

"The state of the Church under the New Testament is so.... Therein, He disposeth all his children into a spiritual **soc-iety**.... Their *politeuma* or 'city conversation' is in heaven, Phil. iii.20.... This is the second privilege of the Gospel state, wherein **all** the remaining promises of the **Old Testament** are **transferred** and made over to **believers**.... There is a spiritual **order** and beauty in the communion of the **Catholic Church**, such as becomes [or behooves] the **City of the Living God**....

"Another instance of the glory of this state, is that therein believers come to 'the **General Assembly** and **Church** of the first-born'.... The words here used, *Paneeguris* and *Ekkleesia*, are borrowed from the customs of those cities whose government was democratical....

"*Paneeguris* was the solemn Assembly.... Hence is the word used for any great General Assembly.... *Ekkleesia* was a 'Meeting of the Citizens' to determine of things and affairs which had had a previous deliberation in the **Senate**. Hence it is applied to signify that which we call '**the Church**' or **Qaahaal**....



"Herein, there may be an allusion unto the Assemblies of such cities. But I **rather** think the Apostle hath respect unto the **Great Assembly** of all the [**mature**] **males** of the **Church** of the **Old Testament**. This was a divine institution to be observed three times a year.... Exod. xxx.23; Deut. xvi.16.... The Assembly of them was called 'the Great Congregation.' Ps. xxii.25; xxv.18; xl.9-10.... It may be, regard is had unto the **General Assembly** of the whole people at Sinai — in receiving of the Law." Note there that **the People** of the Lord **received that Law of God** precisely **through** their **graded Courts of Elders**. Ex. 18:12-26; 19:1-7f; 20:1f; 21:22f; 24:4-9f.

### **Heb. 13:7-24 — "Remember your Guides" and obey your Ruling Elders!**

Also Owen realized this. For he soon goes on (XXIII:420f) to quote Heb. 13:7 as follows: "Remember your **Guides** [plural] who have spoken unto you the Word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of [**their**] conversation" alias the purpose of their behaviour. Owen then further explains that this relates to the "persons of some men" [plural] who lead the People of God — namely to such as are "their 'Guides' [plural].

He adds: "We must consider who are the persons intended. Our translation makes them to be their present **Rulers**, *toon Heegoumenoon humoon*, 'them which have the **rule** over you'.... *Heegoumenos* is a participle of the present tense" — meaning: 'he who **keeps on ruling**.' Hence the plural *Heegoumenoi* means "**those who keep on ruling**" — and thus: '**Rulers**' alias **Ruling Elders**.

Owen continues with his advice to New Testament Church Members to obey their Ruling Elders. On Heb. 13:17, he states: "There is another precept given with respect unto **them** afterwards...and that in words suited unto the duty which they owe **them**.... 'Obey **them** that have the **rule** over you, and submit yourselves'....

"Judas and Silas are called *Andras Heegoumenous en tois adelphois*, **Acts xv.22** [the General Assembly passage!] — '**Chief Men** among the brethren'.... *Ho heegoumenos*...is used in this chapter only — [Heb. 13] verses 7,17,24 — for an **Officer** or **Officers** in the Church...who **guide** and **direct** the **Church**; which is the nature of **their** Office. That is Bishops, Pastors, Elders that preside in the **Church**; guide it; and go before it."

In XXIII:462f, Owen cites also Heb. 13:7 — 'Obey **them** that have the **rule** over you, and **submit** yourselves.' Owen then explains: "There is a supposition of a **settled church-state** — among them unto whom the Apostle wrote — whereof he gave intimation, chap. x.24-25. For there were **among them Rulers**, and those that were ruled....

"These **Guides** or **Rulers**," explains Owen, "are those who are called the '**Elders**' [plural] or '**Bishops**' [plural] of the **Church**.... There were **many** of them in **each** Church [alias each single Congregation].... Each of them must be supposed to have had more of these Rulers of their own than one; for they are directed to obey **them** that had the rule over them.... Here is no room left for a single Bishop and his rule in the Church, must less for a Pope....

"These Rulers or Guides were then of two sorts, as the Apostle declares, I Tim. v.17; first, such as **together with rule** *laboured also in Word and doctrine*; and then, such as attended unto **rule only**.... The **Rulers** or **Guides** here intended, were the **ordinary Elders** or Officers of the Church which were then settled among them.... That there be such, more than one in every Church [alias Congregation], belongs unto the complete state and constitution of it."

In Heb. 13:24, a postscript, the holy writer enjoins: "Salute all **them** that have the **rule** over **you**, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you." The latter phrase perhaps suggests that the Members of at least one **Presbytery in Italy** — and apparently also **from Italy** — were giving their fraternal and also **connectional** salute to Hebrew Christians under the several **Presbyteries in Judaea** within the **General Assembly of the Church** of the first-born. Compare Owen's *Works* XVII:96-101 with Heb. 12:22*f* and also with Heb. 13:24.

At XXIII:484*f*, Owen explains it is his immediate addressees (in **Judaea**) to whom the holy writer "speaks...peculiarly in this post[s]cript — giving them in charge [within Judaea] to salute both their **Rulers** and all the rest of the saints or members of the Church, in his name.... Who these **Rulers** were whom they are enjoined to salute, hath been fully declared in verse 17."

### **Presbytery Elders in the so-called *Catholic Epistles* (James to Jude)**

In Jas. 1:1 and 5:14*f*, needy Christians among all of the twelve tribes of Israel were urged to call in the Elders [plural] of the **Church** — to pray for those who were sick. Too, in I Pet. 1:1 & 5:1-5, those scattered throughout Pontus and Galatia and Cappadocia and Asia and Bithynia were urged to obey the **Elders** among them. Indeed, also in II Pet. 2:1-5*f* & 3:2-7*f* [*cf.* Heb. 11:2-7] Christians were reminded that **Noah was a Preaching Elder** — and that the world should heed similar preaching throughout history.

In I Jh. 2:9-14, the Apostle urges his beloved Christian addressees to maintain the bond of their covenantal solidarity with **all** of their brethren — be they "little children" or "fathers" or "young men" *etc.* In I Jh. 2:19, he warns these groups not individualistically to backslide into Independency.

In II Jh. 1-13, that Apostle calls himself an **Elder**. He assures what seems to be a **presbytery** or "elect lady" and her congregations or "children" that "the children" also of her "elect sister" [**presbytery**] greet them.

In III Jh. 1-11, the same **Elder** anticongregationalistically commends the **connectional intercourse** between the Congregation of Gaius on the one hand and his other brethren elsewhere on the other. Yet the **Elder** also reminds his addressees that he "wrote unto the **Church**" in order to rebuke and to admonish the domineering Diotrephes.

Dr. John Owen himself explains (XVI:199) "the *ends* of...**Synods** among the **Churches**.... The general end of them all, is to promote the edification of the whole Body or **Church Catholic**; and..."**to relieve** such by advice as may be by any Diotrephes unduly cast out of the Church." III Jh. 1-10f.

In Jude (verse 1), that holy author calls himself "the brother of James" — apparently meaning the brother of the Moderator of the **Synod of Elders** described in Acts 15:13 *cf.* 12:17 & 21:18f. Jude (ver. 4) warns his addressees against "certain men crept in unawares" (*cf.* Acts 15:24f & Gal. 2:3-10).

Jude accuses such hyper-independent individualists, as having "gone in the way of Cain" — rather than having stayed in the good way of the **Presbyter** Abel (ver. 11 *cf.* Heb. 11:2-4). He even compares them with the unruly antediluvians — who were preached against by **Presbyters** like Enoch and Noah (ver. 14 *cf.* Heb. 11:2-7 & II Pet. 2:1-5f).

Finally, Jude urges his addressees to heed the words previously spoken by **the apostolic Elders** (verses 17f). That would certainly include their words spoken at the Synod of Jerusalem. *Cf.* Acts 15:4f & 15:13f & 15:23f.

Owen says (XXII:37) that the pre-Mosaic independent hyper-individualists mentioned "in Jude 7...'are set forth for an example'...of what would be God's dealing with provoking sinners at the last day." Indeed, the great Congregationalist Theologian even refers to "the Socinians" alias the hyperindividualistic anti-trinitarian Unitarians. "Many things concerning God and his essential properties" such as His **Tri-unity**, explains Owen (I:87), "they have greatly perverted. So is that fulfilled in them, which was spoken by Jude."

To this, we ourselves would only add that once people depart into Independency from connectional Presbyteries reflecting the Triune God Himself as the Ultimate Trinity — it is usually not very long before those Independents further lapse into at least a 'High Arianism.' That curtails the full co-importance of the Second Person, and also especially the Third Person, within the Ultimate Presbytery of the Holy Trinity.

It also undercuts the full deity even of the First Person Himself — by leaving Him, from all eternity, as a 'non-Father' bereft of the filial companionship of a Co-eternal Son and devoid of perpetual fellowship with Him in the Holy Spirit. Indeed, in the very long run, Orthodox Trinitarianism and Orthodox Presbyterianism stand or fall together.

### **The Presbytery and the two dozen Elders in the Trinity's *Book of Revelation***

In Rev. 1:10-20 & 2:1 to 3:20f, one finds a beautiful picture of Presbyterian Church Government. For there, seven different Congregations reflecting both the Oneness and the Manyness of the Triune God Himself (Rev. 1:4-6) are organically and indissolubly conjoined within the same Presbytery — as **seven different Branches of one and the same golden Candlestick**. *Cf.* Ex. 25:31-40 & 37:17f.

Dr. John Owen too (XV:512) saw that "**all** Christians were *originally of one mind...unto joint communion....* The *discipline of the Church...consists in the due exercise of that authority and power* which the Lord Christ...hath granted unto the Church for its continuance, increase and preservation in...**order** and holiness according to His appointment.... **Rev. ii.2,20.**"

In Rev. 4:4*f* (cf. 5:8-14) the Apostle John saw in heaven "four and twenty seats [or thrones], and upon the seats...four and twenty Elders sitting." Now here, the New Testament Greek has *thronous eikosi tessaras Presbuteros katheemenous* — where *thronous* means "**thrones**" and *Presbuteros* means "**Elders**" and *katheemenous* means "**thoroughly seated**" (alias '**in Session**'). The Vulgate here has *sedilia* (which means "**seats**") and *Seniores* (which means "**Senators**").

In Rev. 11:16*f*, the twenty-four "Elders...sat before God on their seats." Here, the New Testament Greek has *Presbuteroi hoi enoopian tou Theou katheemenoi epi tous thronous autoon* — where *Presbuteroi* means "**Elders**" and where *katheemenoi* means "**thoroughly seated**" and *thronous* means "**thrones.**" The Vulgate here has *Seniores* (which means "Senators" alias "Elders") and *sedent in sedibus suis* which means ("sat in their seats"). Cf. too also Rev. 19:4*f*.

In Rev. 21:12-14*f* (cf. 4:4-11 & 5:8-14 & 7:2-8 & 14:1 & 19:4 & 22:4), it is made plain that the names of the twelve **Tribes of Israel** (cf. their **Provincial Assemblies**) and the names of the **twelve Apostles** (cf. their **General Assembly** or **Synod**) are both equally written on the gates and foundations of the **City of God** called '**New Jerusalem.**' This shows that Christ's Biblical Church is grounded in both the Older Testament represented by the twelve Patriarchs and the Newer Testament represented by the twelve Apostles — and further reflected by the twenty-four **Elders** of the **Presbyterian Church of all ages** (B.C. 4004 till A.D. 1995*f*).

Finally, in 22:16*f* (cf. 1:12-20 & 2:1 to 3:22), Jesus testifies of these things in **all of the Congregations** in His **Presbyterian Church**. He then adds that no man may add to His Book (as does the non-presbyterial Romish Church with her vain traditions), and that no man may take away from His Book (as do the congregationalistic sects of Dispensationalists which take away the Old Testament foundation from the government of the New Testament Church).

### **Owen before Parliament: "I plead for Presbyterial Government in Churches!"**

Practically throughout the Westminster Assembly — of which he himself was **not** a member, Owen was still a Presbyterian and not yet a Congregationalist. Thus on 29th April 1646 he proclaimed (VIII:26-52) to the Parliament: "In the very morning of the Gospel, the Sun of righteousness shone upon this land; and they say the first potentate on the Earth that owned it, was in Britain.... God will again water His garden, once more purge his vineyard, once more of his own accord He will take England upon liking.... **I plead for Presbyterial Government in Churches....**

"We judge it needless to express ourselves...unless to such as shall be so simple or malicious as to ask whether this way be that of the Presbyterians or Independents.... Civil divisions of men that may conveniently be **taught by one Pastor and ruled by Elders**...as **Presbyterians esteem them**...receive no injury, nor are abridged of any of their privileges."

Owen's later editor, W.H. Goold, was himself sympathetic to Congregationalism. So it is not surprising that Goold here says (VIII:2) of Owen: "There can be no doubt...that he was at this time undergoing the change of view which led him in the end to profess Congregationalism" alias (*sic*) 'Independency.'

### **Owen "not concerned" even if Presbyterian Government had been settled in 1660**

According to Goold, Owen was "led...in the end to...Congregationalism." Yet according to actual fact, at the end of his life Owen seems rather to have been led — back to the Presbyterianism of his earlier days.

For during his turbulent years, he had become increasingly disillusioned with Congregationalism. Hence the episcopalian Anglican Dr. Stillingfleet not inappropriately asked, after the 1660 enthronement in England of Charles II: "Hath Dr Owen yielded, that...if **Presbytery** [rather than Episcopalianism] had been settled upon the king's restoration — would they [Owen's Congregationalists]...have continued in their separation?"

To this, the decongregationalizing and represbyterianizing Owen responded (XV:432f): "Had the **Presbyterian Government** been settled at the king's restoration, by the encouragement and protection of the practice of it, without a rigorous imposition of everything supposed by any to belong thereunto, or a mixture of human constitutions, if there had [been] any appearance of a schism or separation continued between the parties — **I do judge they [Congregationalism and Presbyterianism] would have been both to blame had they 'continued in their separation.'**

For, Owen adds: "It would have been a matter of no great art absolutely to unite them.... If it shall be asked, then, Why did they not formerly agree in the [Westminster] Assembly? I answer, (1) I was none of them, and cannot tell; (2) They did agree, in my judgment, well enough.... **I am not concerned in the difference.**"

### **The functions of Elders in Owen's own 1667 *Short Catechism***

Owen's famous *Short Catechism* was published in 1667. About this, his later editor Goold very truthfully wrote: "Certain principles laid down in Owen's *Catechism*, in regard to the Ruling Elder for example, are thought to bear some traces of affinity with **Presbyterianism**.... There might be ground for supposing that, on terms suggested by the *Catechism*, a coalition might be effected between the two denominations." See Owen's *Works*, XV:446.

Here, Goold was quite right. For, after dealing with the duties of Pastors alias *Ministers of the Word and Sacraments* "to preach the Word" and "to administer all the ordinances" — Owen, in that same *Catechism*, had gone on to ask (XV:499f): "*Wherein principally doth the authority of the Elders of the Church consist?*" He answers by citing: "Acts xx.28; Heb. xiii.7,17; I Pet. v.2; I Cor. xii.28; I Tim. iii.5; Col. iv.17; 2 Cor. x.4,8; I Tim. iv.11; Titus ii.15; I Pet. v.2-5." Then he adds some very telling words.

"The means whereby the Lord Christ communicates this power unto men," explains Owen (as clearly as one might possibly wish), "is by His Law and Constitution...exercised in His Church...by such and such persons.... Matt. xvi.19; xviii.17-20.... The way, then, whereby the Elders of the Church do come to participate of the power and authority which Christ hath appointed to be exercised in His Church — is by their and the Church's due observance of the rules and laws given by Him for their election and setting apart unto that Office. Heb. v.4.5; Acts xiv.23."

Significantly, precisely that last text records the **appointment** of Elders specifically by representatives of the **Presbytery** (after their prior **election** by the **Congregation** but only at the instance of the **Presbytery's** Leaders of the Apostolic Church as such). Acts 13:1-5 & 14:23-27 *cf.* 6:1-6.

Owen says (XV:501f) "The reason therefore why the consent of the Church is required unto the authoritative acting of the Elders therein is not because from thence any authority doth accrue unto them anew which virtually and radically they had not before, but because by the rule of the Gospel this is required to the **orderly** acting of their power.... If it be asked 'What then shall the Elders do in case the Church refuse to consent unto such acts as are indeed according to rule and warranted by the institution of Christ?' — it is answered, that they are....

"1. Diligently to instruct them from the Word in their duty....

2. To declare unto them the danger of their dissent....

3. To **wait patiently** for the...giving [of] light and **obedience** unto the Church; and

4. In case of the Church's continuance in any failure of duty, to seek for advice and **counsel** from the Elders and brethren of **other Churches**."

Then, Owen further asks (XV:528f): "Wherein consists the duty of any Church of Christ towards other Churches?" Dr. Owen's answer includes also the following duties: "**communicating supplies**...Acts xi-29-30"; "**receiving** with love and **readiness** the **members** of **them** into **fellowship**...Rom. xvi.1-2; 3 John 8-9"; and "making **use** of their **counsel**...Acts xv.2,6."

The above-mentioned Acts 11:29 records donations being sent to the Elders of the Jerusalem Presbytery superintending many thousands of Christians within that region. And Rom. 16:1f commends Phoebe, from the Cenchræa Congregation in the Presbytery of Corinth, to the various House-Congregations within the Presbytery of Rome (Rom. 16:5-15).

Indeed, the above-mentioned text Acts 15:2-6 records the beginning of the deliberations of the General Assembly in Jerusalem, in answer to its receipt of the reference from the Presbytery of Antioch. This is to be found just prior to its formulation of binding decrees to be kept by "the Churches" in all of "the cities" of Antioch and Cilicia and Syria where Congregations had been established. Acts 13:1f; 14:23-27; 15:1-41; 16:4-5.

Owen states (XV:530) "it follows that in case any Church [singular]...do give offence unto other Churches [plural], those other Churches may **require an account** from them; **admonish** them of their faults; and **withhold communion** from them in case they persist in the error of their way.... Hence also it follows that those that are rightly and justly **censured** — in **any** Church [singular] — ought to be rejected by **all** Churches [plural] whatever...because of their **mutual communion**.... In case there had been any difficulty or doubt in the procedure of the Church [singular], they would have taken the advice of these Churches [plural] with whom they were **obliged** to consult."

### The final re-presbyteri-ization of Rev. Dr. John Owen

Presbyterian Baxter was so impressed by words like these in Owen's *Catechism*, that he wrote to him — **proposing union between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians**. To that, **Dr. Owen himself replied** (I:cix-cxxi) — "**I judge your proposals worthy of great consideration**.... I see no reason why all the true disciples of Christ might not, upon these and the like principles, condescend in love unto **the practical concord and agreement** — which not one of them dare deny to be their **duty to aim at**."

Owen himself (*Works* XVI:2) told several men that he could readily join with Presbytery the way it was exercised in Scotland. Moreover, historian Wodrow in his own [1716] *Analecta* (1842 ed. 2:263 & 2:309) records: "Blackwell tells...he had this account of Owen at his death from persons who were with him — that he expressed himself very much in favour of Presbyterian Government, and said he was persuaded that Presbytery was the way to God....

"Redpath told me...he visited Dr. Owen on his deathbed, and Presbytery and Episcopacy came to be discoursed of.... The Doctor said how he had seen his mistake as to the Independent way, and declared to him a day or two before his death that after his utmost search into the Scriptures and antiquity, he was now satisfied that **Presbytery** was the way Christ had appointed in His New Testament Church."

### Owen's posthumously-printed *True Nature of a Gospel Church and its Government*

Owen died in 1683. One of his most important tracts, *The True Nature of a Gospel Church and its Government*, was published posthumously six years later in 1689. Rightly, the later **congregationalistic editor W.H. Gould admitted** in his own 'Prefatory Note' thereto (VXI:2) that because "of some statements in the following treatise...**it has been gravely argued that the author returned to the Presbyterianism of his early days before he died.**" Those statements are found especially in Owen's chapter on 'the Communion of Churches.'

"This Communion," Owen there insists (XVI:183), is **incumbent** on every church with respect unto all **other** Churches of Christ in the world equally." Apparently thinking of I Cor. 12:3-26 (especially verse 13) and Eph. 4:1-16 (especially verse 5), Owen emphasized (XVI:189f) "that the true and **only union of all particular Churches consists in that which gives form, life and being unto the Church Catholic....** They have all one and the same God and Father; one Lord Jesus Christ; one faith and one doctrine of faith; one hope of their calling or the promised inheritance; one regeneration; one baptism; one bread and wine — and are united unto God and Christ in one Spirit....

"Two things concur," explains Owen, "unto the completing of this Union of Churches —

1. Their union or relation unto Christ;
2. That which they have among themselves....

"The Lord Christ Himself is the original and spring of this **Union**, and every particular Church is united unto Him as its Head; besides which, with, or under which, it hath none. This relation of the Church unto Christ as its Head, the Apostle expressly affirms to be the foundation and cause of its Union. Eph. iv.15-16....

"The **Communion of Churches**," Owen goes on, "is *their joint actings in the same Gospel duties towards God in Christ, with their mutual actings towards each other with respect unto the end of their institution and being, which is the glory of Christ in the edification of the whole Catholic Church....*

"Churches have Communion unto their mutual edification by advice in Synods or Councils.... **SYNODS are the meetings of divers Churches by their [commissioned] Messengers or Delegates**, to consult and determine of such things as are of common concernment unto them all — by virtue of their Communion which is exercised in them....



"The union of all churches as before described — in one Head, by one Spirit, through one faith and worship, unto the same ends — doth so compact them into **one Body Mystical**, as that none of them is or can be complete absolutely without a **joint acting** with other Members of the same Body.... **This acting in Synods is an institution of Jesus Christ...**in the nature of the thing itself, **fortified with apostolical example**. For having erected such a Church-state and disposed all His Churches into such **order** and **mutual relation** unto one another as that none of them can be complete or discharge their whole **duty** without **mutual** advice and **counsel** — He hath thereby ordained this **way** of their communion in **Synods**, no other being possible unto that end."

### Owen's final words as to why Synods of Elders are necessary

Says Owen (XVI:197f & XVI:205f): "**Synods** are consecrated unto the use of the Church of all ages by the example of the Apostles in their guidance of the first Churches of Jews and Gentiles; which hath the **force** of a **divine institution**, as being given by them under the infallible conduct of the Holy Ghost. Acts xv....

"Hence it is evident what are the *ends* of such Synods among the Churches of Christ. The general end of them all, is to promote the edification of the whole Body or Church Catholic; and that —

- (1) To **prevent divisions** from differences in judgment and practice, which are contrary thereunto. The **first Christian Synod** was an Assembly of the first [or foremost] two Churches in the world, by their Delegates. The first Church of the Jews was at Jerusalem, and the first Church of the Gentiles was at Antioch; to prevent divisions and to preserve communion between them was the first **Synod** celebrated, Acts xv.
- (2) To avoid or cure offences against mutual love among them.
- (3) To advance the light of the Gospel by a **joint confession and agreement** in the faith.
- (4) To give a **concurrent testimony against pernicious heresies** or error, whereby the faith of any is overthrown, or in danger so to be.
- (5) **To relieve** such by advice, as may be by any Diotrephes unduly cast out of the Church [III Jh. 1-10f]....

"There is a threefold **power** ascribed unto **Synods**. The first is **declarative**, consisting in an **authoritative** teaching and declaring the mind of God in the Scripture; the second is **constitutive**, appointing and **ordaining** things to be believed or done and observed by and **upon its own authority**; and thirdly, **executive**, in acts of **jurisdiction** towards persons and **Churches**....

"The **power** of a **Synod** for the execution of its decrees respects either —

- (1) The things or **doctrine declared**...on **its authority** from the presence of Christ; or
- (2) persons to censure, **excommunicate** or **punish** those who receive them not....

"The authority of a Synod declaring the mind of God from the Scripture in doctrine, or giving **counsel as unto practice synodically**, unto them whose proper **representatives** are **present** in it — whose **decrees** and determinations **are** to be **received** and **submitted** unto, on the evidence of their **truth** and **necessity**, as recommended by the **authority** of the Synod from the promised **presence** of **Christ** among **them**, is suitable unto the mind of Christ and the **example given by the Apostles**. Acts xv....

"A **Synod convened in the Name of Christ**, by the voluntary consent of **several Churches** concerned in **Mutual Communion**, may **declare** and **determine** of the mind of the Holy Ghost in the Scripture, and **decree** the observation of things true and **necessary**, because revealed and appointed in the **Scripture**; which are to be **received**, owned and **observed** on the evidence on the mind of the Holy Ghost in them, **and** on the ministerial authority of the **Synod itself**."

### **Conclusion: Rev. Dr. John Owen died re-presbyteri-anized**

Thus the life and death and writings of Great Britain's greatest of all 'Congregationalist' Theologians — the decongregationalizing and represbyterianizing Dr. John Owen. Congregationalists, congregationalistic Baptists, and all so-called 'Independent Bible Churches' and also Christian House-Churches worldwide — need to be moved to follow in his faithful footsteps.

For, as the Presbyterian Rev. Dr. Owen points out in what very many regard as the greatest commentary ever written on a single book of the Bible — his own *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (11:1-4) — it is precisely by faith that the first *Presbuteroi* obtained a good report. By faith, Presbyterian Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than the non-presbyter Cain. Abel, being dead, yet keeps on speaking. So too does Presbyterian Owen, who — having died as a Presbyterian — yet keeps on speaking thus!

### **SUMMARY OF JOHN OWEN'S PRESBYTERIANISM**

Let us summarize Owen's final conclusions in his own words. In his essay *Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished* (XIII:39), he wrote:

"The principles and rules of that church government from which...I desire not to wander, are...called presbyterial or synodical — in opposition to prelatical or diocesan on the one side, and that which is commonly called independent or congregational on the other."

One of his major works, is his *True Nature of a Gospel Church*. In chapter eleven thereof (entitled *Of the Communion of Churches*), Owen observes (XVI:185ff): "Herein then, we acknowledge...the state of the Church of Christ in this world." The true union is their "existing union with or relation to Christ their Head" — with "joint actings in the same gospel duties towards God in Christ." They have "mutual actings towards each other, with respect to their institution and being...."

"The outward acts of communion among churches...may be referred unto two heads of advice and assistance. Churches have communion unto their mutual edification by advice in synods and councils. Synods are the meeting of diverse churches by their messengers or delegates, to consult and determine of such things as are of common concernment unto them all, by virtue of this communion which is exercised in them...."

"This acting in synods is an institution of Jesus Christ...in the nature of the thing itself, fortified by apostolical example.... Truth, peace, and love may be lost among churches — and so the union of the catholic church in them be dissolved, unless this means for their preservation and reparation be made use of...."

"Where there has been any maladministration of discipline, whereby any members of the church have been injured — as suppose they are unduly cast out of the church by the power and interest of some Diotrophes....it is necessary, from the communion of churches and the interest the persons injured have in the catholic church, whose edification is the end of all church administrations, that the proceedings of such a church be reviewed by a synod, and a remedy be provided in the case...."

"If it be reported, or known by credible testimony, that any church hath admitted into the exercise of divine worship any thing superstitious or vain..., the church itself [then] not endeavouring its own reformation and repentance — other churches walking in communion therewith, by virtue of their common interest in the glory of Christ and [the] honour of the gospel, after more private ways for its reduction, as opportunity and duty may suggest unto their elders, ought to assemble in a synod for advice, either as to the use of further means for the recovery of such a church, or to withhold communion from it, in case of obstinacy in its evil ways.... It were not amiss if those churches which walk in express communion would frequently meet in synods to enquire into the spiritual state of them all, and to give advice for the correction of what is amiss...."

"Here it is evident what are the ends of such synods amongst the churches of Christ. The general end of them all is to promote the edification of the whole body or church catholic; and that —

- (1) To prevent divisions from differences in judgement and practice,
- (2) To avoid or cure offences against mutual love among them,
- (3) To advance the light of the gospel by a joint confession and agreement of faith,
- (4) To give a concurrent testimony against pernicious heresies or errors, whereby the faith of any is overthrown, or in danger so to be, and,
- (5) To relieve such by advice as may be by any Diotrophes unduly cast out of the church....

"Respect unto the causes or occasions of them, will determine what...may be necessary on such occasions to constitute a synod.... That kind of synod which some call a classis [or presbytery], which is a convention of elders or officers of sundry parochial churches...., is the constitution of...particular churches by the combination of them [all] into one...unto edification....

"Church-states whose being, bounds, and limits are given unto them absolutely by those of the civil government which they belong unto — it is thought meet [or suitable] that ecclesiastical synods should be accommodated. It is eminently useful unto the edification of the church catholic that all the churches professing the same doctrine of faith, within the limits of the same supreme civil government, should hold constant actual communication among themselves."