

Rhetoric, Fiction and Theology: James Ussher and the death of Jesus Christ

Preaching in Oxford in 1640, James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh, drew the attention of his listeners to the dangers of rhetorical language in any discussion of the death of Jesus Christ:

Consider the invaluable price that was paid for thee, and how great he was who paid it . . . It was the second person in the sacred Trinity, he, and no other, that was thus humbled for thee: he was weary for thee, and reviled for thee, sweated and fainted for thee, hungered for thee, and was buffeted for thee. It was he, the second person of the blessed Trinity, in proper speech, without either trope or figure, shed his blood for thee, died for thee!

In the hermeneutical morass of the mid-seventeenth century, Ussher's words issued a timely warning. Developing Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Renaissance humanists had instructed their readers on the responsible en-coding of persuasive powers in literary texts. After the reformation, handbooks of rhetoric foregrounded the religious possibilities of de-coding the sacred text. The title page of Henry Peacham's *The Garden of Eloquence* (1577) claimed the usefulness of its contents for 'the better understanding of the holy Scriptures'; the title page of Dudley Fenner's *Artes of Logick and Rhetoricke* (1584) referred to its contents 'opening of certaine parts of Scripture, according to the same'. But the 'opening' of popular Bible reading tended to go further than the early theologians had preferred. Within Ussher's puritan tradition, the annotations of the Geneva Bible established a basic distinction between the sign and the signified in an effort to erect an interpretive apparatus that would limit and control the open-ness of the text. The Geneva annotations referred to such figures of speech as parenthesis, antithesis, synecdoche, 'metonymia', hyperbola, enallage, and hypallage – all explained for the benefit of the imagined 'simple reader'.²

But 'simple readers' went beyond the Geneva Bible's caution. Ussher's sermon, two generations later, was challenging the exegesis of those theologians who had come to interpret biblical statements indicating the universality of

the death of Christ – for the world, for ‘all’, ‘for thee’ – to mean something other than they initially appeared to mean. What did St Paul mean, in apparently transcending the issue of election, when he stated that ‘God is the Saviour of all men’ (1 Timothy 4:10)? The first page of Fenner’s *Artes of Logick and Rhetoricke* explained that the text showed ‘salvation to be the thing caused by God’, without making any claims for the number of the redeemed.³ What did St John mean when he wrote that Jesus Christ ‘is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world’ (1 John 2:2)? Protestant theologians could answer that question in quite different ways. Some ‘soul-torturing’ puritan scholastics with high Calvinist tendencies explained the text by identifying ‘the world’ as a sign and referring it to the elect.⁴ At the opposite end of the theological spectrum, others, increasingly described as Arminians, refused to identify the expression as a metaphorical sign and argued instead that Christ’s death had placated God’s wrath against every individual: ‘the world’ really meant ‘the world’. Between these poles, and often still within the puritan camp, ‘hypothetical universalists’ followed Calvin on election and predestination, but, like the Arminians, insisted that the atonement provided by the death of Christ was universal in its scope. Their retention of the universality of the death of Christ – ‘for thee’, in general – recognised that the Biblical language of the passion was ‘proper speech’ indeed. By contrast, Ussher reflected, high Calvinist theologians, pursuing a refined orthodoxy, were systematically misidentifying signifieds as signs, undermining the plain style, and promoting excessive interpretive openness. In warning against the elaboration of ‘trope or figure’, therefore, his sermon was rooting its discussion of the death of Christ within the wider plain style and apparent closed-text preferences of the older puritan rhetoricians – preferences the sermon described as providing for ‘proper speech’ – and was contrasting those approaches with the inadequate literary methods of the high Calvinists.⁵ But the sermon was also actively engaged in the theological contest that lay behind the rhetorical struggle, the contest to define the extent and intent of the atonement. For Ussher, combating the excessive open-ness of high Calvinist exegesis, orthodoxy was at the mercy of metaphor, and plain style was the ground of truth.

Paradoxically, however, Ussher seemed to subvert that emphasis in a subsequent sermon, preached in the same series, in which he warned his listeners to ‘believe not the painters’.⁶ His concern was not merely to dispute the number of nails used in the crucifixion, though that is the local context – his argument situates his icono-phobia within a larger puritan discourse. In the Christological theories of the protestant reformation, tangible representations of Christ’s passion – whether in visual iconography or in the eucharistic host – were rejected as being too closed, never really engaging with the transcending reality to which the passion narratives pointed. At the heart of reformation Christology was the ‘extra Calvinisticum’, the maxim *finitum non est capax infiniti*: ‘the finite cannot contain the infinite’.⁷ The problem

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with the painters was not just their historical inaccuracy, though that issue could be raised; their very method of finite representation limited the utility of their art. Rejecting the twin dangers of open exegesis and closed representation, Ussher was arguing that theological veracity required the exploration of textual liminality, an exploration that ‘proper speech’ allowed but religious art and high Calvinist theology did not. The debate about the atonement was a debate about rhetorical intent and expressive potential. Ussher’s problem, when it came to biblical interpretation, was that one person’s sign was another person’s signified.

These concerns drove Ussher to walk the tightrope of puritan poetics.⁸ His warnings against the misidentification of figurative language in theology and the excessive closure of the visual arts locate the discrepancy between sign and signified that drove puritan writers to a shared conclusion. To guard against the misinterpretation of Scripture and to foster proper meditation on Christ’s passion, godly readers should negotiate the liminality of texts. The expansion of popular Bible reading demanded an expansion of popular interpretive skills.

As the spiritual brotherhood of the elect transformed itself into a rhetorically-aware textual community, therefore, the leading dogmaticians of the puritan movement were drawn into sharp debate about the limits and locations of Biblical tropes. Centred on the hermeneutical and theological spaces afforded by the passion narratives of the four gospels, their dispute spilled over into the wider cultural realm. Between 1640, when Ussher’s sermon was preached, and 1660, when it was first published, the Stuart kingdoms witnessed a series of profound social, civil and ecclesiastical dislocations, many of which would be defended by hermeneutical arguments extrapolated from exegeses of the death of Jesus Christ. Rival interpretations of Christ’s passion fuelled the early divisions between puritans and Laudians within the English church. Like the struggle to define the meaning of ‘this is my body’ (Luke 22:19) – which, Beza declared, forced a choice between a trope and transubstantiation – an attempt to exegete the meaning of Christ’s death lay at the heart of early modern protestantism.⁹ There the debate was not merely about rejecting tropes or figures, as Ussher suggested; it was about identifying where those tropes or figures existed, interpreting their sign status and fitting what they signified into the contours of one’s wider systematic theology. ‘Who could have thought that the death of Christ, which was destined to secure peace and destroy enmity, as the Apostle speaks (Ephes. ii. 14–17, and Coloss. i. 20, 21) could have been so fruitful in the production of strife?’ wondered John Davenant, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, Bishop of Salisbury and English delegate to the Synod of Dort. ‘But this seems to arise from the innate curiosity of men, who are more anxious to scrutinise the secret counsels of God, than to embrace the benefits openly offered to them.’¹⁰ The problem, nevertheless, went much further than Davenant’s reflection on the dangers of intellectual pride in the pursuit of salvation. As a number of historians have

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noticed, the implications of the discussions transcended theological refraction. In this interrogation of the sacred spaces of Scripture, the tropes and figures whose danger Ussher recognised fomented an ideological struggle, and the ideological struggle fuelled a revolution. At the heart of the civil wars lay debates about theology and closure, and at the heart of these debates lay competing constructions of the death of Jesus Christ.

Calvin and the Calvinists

The centrality of the atonement debate in puritan thought has been widely recognised in recent critical scholarship. As historians of theology discuss the seventeenth-century reception of reformation dogmatics, issues surrounding the extent and the intent of the death of Christ have been regularly highlighted as a principal focus of concern. Whatever their other disagreements, the various schools of thought agree that the locus of the atonement is one of the most sensitive registers of the evolution of protestant theology in the early modern period.¹¹

There is widespread disagreement, nevertheless, about how that evolution should be configured. In this debate about 'Calvin and the Calvinists', a number of scholars have posited a radical discontinuity between the initial construction of Reformed dogmatics in the biblical exegesis of Calvin and other reformers, and the reception of that body of theology in the writings of seventeenth-century puritan theologians. This historiographical model argues that Calvin's moderation was reified by the development of Protestant scholasticism in the seventeenth century, and that his universal atonement evolved into a limited atonement as 'Calvinist' theology crafted new contours for its mentor's thought. Others, following the trend of scholarship that currently prevails, have recognised the organisational significance of Protestant scholasticism but have emphasised a basic continuity of methods, approaches and conclusions across the first century of the early modern pan-Calvinist community.¹² The ambiguity of these sources offers rich resources for intellectual historians, and the debate, after decades of heated discussion, shows little sign of slowing down. Those conclusions that have been reached are at best provisional, for the evidence is largely ambiguous. It is certainly impossible to trace any straight line of theological development from Calvin, as originator, to receivers among his sixteenth-century peers and seventeenth-century 'Calvinists'. Calvin and his readers simply do not stand in that kind of relationship. Some of Calvin's peers seem more 'Calvinist' than he does: Girolama Zanchi, preaching limited atonement as early as 1561, or Theodore Beza, discussing it more clearly in the 1580s.¹³ Throughout the same period, Calvin's statements on the extent of the atonement seem ambivalent, even uncertain; at times he presented the atonement as limited by election, as being only for the elect, and at other times as unrestricted. In this respect, Calvin's legacy was 'inherently unstable',¹⁴ and

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his instability was purposefully echoed in the most symbolically important of the international Reformed confessions. The Synod of Dort (1618–19), whose canons defined the boundaries of subsequent Calvinistic orthodoxy, was extremely reluctant to move beyond the medieval compromise, first coined in Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, that Christ's death was 'sufficient for all, efficient for the elect'.¹⁵ As the international Reformed movement struggled to maintain its unity in the face of multiple threats, it found something very useful in confessional ambiguity.

This ambiguity has provided as many frustrations as opportunities for historians. Despite a great deal of scholarly industry, the conflict between these competing historical paradigms shows little sign of ending. There are several reasons for this. The focus of much of the research has been too narrow. In the texts that it privileges, the debate has concentrated upon official theological works, and has neglected the reception of dogma in the pews.¹⁶ In its geography, much of the research has concentrated on English and Scottish contexts, neglecting the puritan cultures of the wider Atlantic archipelago and their intellectual exchanges with European protestant thinkers.¹⁷ These factors, as well as the relative brevity of Irish reformation scholarship, have ensured that the relationships between Calvin, Calvinists and Irish theologians have been largely unexamined.

This lack of evidence is particularly obvious in assessments of the intellectual life of the Irish reformation. For various reasons, the protestant reformation in Ireland failed to produce a volume of literature comparable to that which emerged in Scotland or England.¹⁸ In terms of chronology and market, the Irish protestant reformation began later and continued with much less popular appeal than it did in England or Scotland.¹⁹ Protestant publication was challenged by the material needs of printers.²⁰ Ideas of religious change were conflated with a local – perhaps characteristically late – expression of the European renaissance.²¹ In the confessionalisation of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, therefore, movements which elsewhere evolved over long periods of time and in various locations were, in Ireland, chronologically and geographically compressed; quite disparate shades of religious and cultural opinion existed simultaneously within the confines of the same church. It is this that makes the method and contents of the Irish Articles (1615) so surprising, anticipating, as they do, the distinctive features that would shape Reformed scholasticism in the later seventeenth century. But the consequence of this compression of ideological plurality is that Irish reformation theology hardly lends itself to the extended developmental model that both sides in the 'Calvin and the Calvinists' debate require. Within the terms of this debate, therefore, any assessment of Irish protestant intellectual life requires patient qualification. Despite the brevity of background context, both sides in the debate have appealed to the opinions of the greatest of Ireland's reformation churchmen, 'perhaps the leading British biblical scholar of the time', Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656).²²

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Ussher and the Calvinists

Ussher had been Archbishop of Armagh for fifteen years before his 1640 sermon on the death of Jesus Christ. His accession had been the auspicious climax to his rapid advancement through the church's hierarchy. He had begun with the best connections: he was born into one of Dublin's leading families, and two of his uncles had been Archbishops of Armagh.²³ Ussher had been one of the first graduates of the new Trinity College in Dublin, beginning his studies in 1593, one year after its opening. There he imbibed the heady puritan atmosphere that had been fostered by his former school teachers, the Scottish Calvinistic exiles James Fullerton and James Hamilton, and the English Presbyterians Walter Travers and Humphrey Fenn.²⁴ Ussher graduated BA in 1598, MA in 1601, and began his teaching career at the college. In 1607, he gained his BD and was appointed to a professorship in divinity, gaining a DD in 1613 and a promotion to the Vice-Chancellorship one year later. In 1621 he was made Bishop of Meath, a member of the Irish Privy Council in 1623, and, two years later, was appointed to Armagh.²⁵ He had assumed the leadership of the Irish church during one of its most difficult periods.

The Irish reformed church maintained an ambivalent and ambiguous position in the island's civil and political life. As the church 'by law established', it retained the economic and coercive assistance of civil government while commanding the allegiance of a tiny minority of the island's population. In the north, nominal adherence to the church disguised the massive local nonconformity of those emigrant ministers and congregations whose most basic loyalty was to Scottish Presbyterianism. Throughout the rest of the island, the process of counter-reformation was educating nominal Catholics into the basics of the Tridentine system.²⁶ In the early 1600s, a series of new colleges on the Continent were offering superior training to Irish Catholic ordinands, and missionary clergy were working towards a shadow hierarchy in every Irish diocese.²⁷ Only in the Pale did the established church receive much popular support.²⁸

Ussher's difficulty, as head of this church, was in exploiting the Catholic threat to weld together the disparate loyalties of Ireland's protestants. In 1625, in his new appointment to Armagh, he was no stranger to this challenge. While teaching at Trinity, Ussher had exercised profound influence upon the composition of the confession of faith drawn up during the first post-Reformation convocation of the Irish church (1613–15).²⁹ These Irish Articles attempted to define a body of doctrine that would be received by the whole church.³⁰ Avoiding the difficulties of liturgical union – where the Irish bishops initially turned a blind eye to the nonconformity of the immigrant Scots – the Irish Articles aimed to achieve some semblance of doctrinal agreement.³¹ At the very least, if they did not guarantee widespread solidarity, they did define a body of doctrine which could not legally be contradicted in Irish

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protestant pulpits. It was not to be expected that every Irish churchman would identify with every detail of the creed. In keeping with their mentor, the Irish Articles were recognisably 'puritan', and the most vigorously Calvinistic of the Reformation confessions. Attracting criticism for their 'strict austerity', they articulated a synopsis of the emerging covenant theology and included the first creedal statement incorporating the reformation maxim that the Pope was the 'man of sin'.³² But it would be a mistake, in recognising this bias, to understand the Articles, or the theologians behind them, as necessarily advocating a scholastic approach to high Calvinist theology. On a number of central issues, including that of the death of Christ, their studied ambiguities sustained a range of interpretations.³³ The Articles moderated the doctrine of the atonement in a catena of allusions to Scripture and the ancient ecumenical creeds (Article 30): Christ 'came as a Lambe without spott, to take away the sins of the world, by the sacrifice of himselfe . . . to reconcile his Father unto us, and to be a sacrifice not onely for originall guilt, but also for all our actual transgressions.'³⁴

This is a purposeful statement, but the clarity of its expression is somewhat misleading. The allusions embedded into the statement rob it of much of its explanatory value. Article 30 is less a definite statement of definitive faith than a negotiated centre, a site of theological compromise. Because the allusions are lifted directly from those passages of Scripture whose meaning the atonement debate controverted, they invite rather than provide interpretation, and seem to suggest the calculated denial of the 'proper speech' for which Ussher's sermon would later appeal. The necessity of achieving puritan unity made necessary the construction of creedal ambiguity, and creedal ambiguity could not but defer textual closure. The Articles appeared to function as a signified, but, instead, illuminated their status as a sign.

There was, of course, significant value in such ambiguity. The Articles' carefully-worded statements were deliberately designed to achieve puritan consensus throughout Ireland and beyond. An edition published by Thomas Downes in London in 1629 was deliberately marketed to appeal to English puritan readers. Its preface advertised its puritan credentials: 'In these Articles are comprehended, almost word for word, the nine Articles agreed on at Lambeth the 20th of November Anno 1595. This marke [a pointing hand] in the Margent points at each of them and their number.'³⁵ The Lambeth Articles had been proposed by Archbishop Whitgift as a basis for the puritan reform of the Church of England, but had merited the disapproval of Elizabeth and had been rejected by James I. In the 1620s, the Irish Articles' restatement of these earlier English puritan concerns addressed a new context of ecclesiastical and political discontent. This attempt to achieve a pan-puritan consensus was made all the more urgent by the 'rise of the Arminians' throughout the 1620s and 1630s. Although much debated by historians, many contemporary observers believed that a changing theological atmosphere at court was being signalled by restrictions on the public discussion of

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distinctly Calvinistic doctrines and the simultaneous promotion of Arminian churchmen on both sides of the Irish Sea.³⁶ As a leader of the Irish church, Ussher firmly resisted this trend, believing that it would subvert the Reformed basis of his church: 'let not every wanton wit be permitted to bring what fancies he list into the pulpit, and to disturb things that have been well ordered'.³⁷ For Ussher, Arminianism presented a dangerous threat to Ireland's carefully-balanced protestant establishment. The threat was made all the more serious by the fact that it was occurring at the same time as the Irish reformation visibly failed and Irish Catholics were appearing to be offered toleration.³⁸

The political momentum of the late 1620s and the consequent struggle for control of the Irish establishment drove Ussher into determined, if cautious, opposition. As the theological preferences of the court moved further from its inherited reformation tradition, Ussher was compelled to negotiate between his concern for orthodoxy and his concern to maintain influence at court. The subtext to his correspondence during this period is clear: the only way the Arminian assault on the Church of Ireland could be stopped was by his influencing the court whose collective ear they had captured. Biting the bullet, Ussher was compelled to moderate his public stance on Calvinism – and on other issues, such as millennial eschatology – to maintain his influence with the king.³⁹ This called for a complex series of manoeuvres. In 1620, for example, a number of individuals, motivated by 'Envy and Detraction', 'trauded' Ussher to the King. Accusing him of being a 'Puritan', they were attempting to 'lay a block in the way of his future Preferment'. Richard Parr, Ussher's seventeenth-century biographer, recorded that Ussher travelled to London to clear himself of the charge.⁴⁰ Substantially, the charge was true, but Ussher could never admit that to the King, and he was appointed as Bishop in the subsequent year. After 1620, the colonial situation of the Irish Reformed church required Ussher to appear to compromise in England – to temper his public statements and underplay the significance of his opinions – in order to maintain his situation in Ireland and thus prevent compromise at home. To maintain his own position, and thus to support the puritan-inflected independence of the Irish church, Ussher had to avoid describing his church and himself as they really were.

The complexity of this colonial and political context therefore requires recognition that changes in the presentation of Ussher's theology – or even his retraction of earlier opinions – need not indicate any change in his basic commitments. Consideration of the mechanics of private or public circulation, the time and place of publication, as well as the literary complexities of authorial voice and implied readership, are foundational to the responsible exegesis of Ussher's description of his theology.⁴¹ This fact has not always been recognised in Ussher scholarship or in the scholarship surrounding the 'Calvin and the Calvinists' debate. There Ussher's statements have been cited as evidence both for and against the claim that a radical discontinuity separates sixteenth- from seventeenth-century protestant theology.

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Ussher and the atonement

The debate about Ussher's view of the atonement – and the struggle to appropriate or dismantle his reputation – escalated shortly after his death. In 1658, Peter Heylin published *Respondet Petrus* to argue, among other things, that Ussher lacked the theological credentials of a faithful Anglican leader. Citing a range of liturgical texts, Heylin argued that the Church of England had endorsed a theology of general redemption, and accused Ussher of being unfaithful to the opinions of the Church in narrowing the range of the atonement to the elect. The significance of the debate appeared undiminished almost thirty years later, when, in an appendix to his 1686 biography, Parr defended Ussher from all charges of moving from the Anglican centre.⁴² Parr's response was a sympathetic exegesis of Ussher's opinions on the subject, but a response that turned Ussher's language into a play of signs. He claimed that Ussher's statements as to the effect of the atonement were, for example,

not general, but limited Propositions: since by *reconciling his Father to us*, can be understood no further than *to us* that are not Reprobates (every Man supposing himself not to be of that number); and in this sense the Lord Primat himself makes use of the words *we* and *us* in his Body of Divinity, when he speaks of Justification and Reconciliation by Faith, tho he there supposes that all Men are not actually justified, nor reconciled to God by Christ's Sufferings.⁴³

Parr did not lack his own ecclesiastical axes to grind; but the passage of time between Heylin's initial challenge and Parr's eventual reply indicates the extended significance of the struggle to appropriate Ussher's legacy. Parr's arguments illustrate the manner in which the debate about the atonement – even the debate about Ussher's view of the atonement – demanded a degree of rhetorical sophistication, if not actual sophistry.

The debate has continued ever since. In the early nineteenth century, Thomas Chalmers, professor of divinity at the University of Edinburgh, argued that Ussher's views did not develop, and that he always adhered to limited atonement. Chalmers read Ussher's letters on the subject to his class and 'strongly recommended' them to the attention of his students. The letters were subsequently reprinted in pamphlet form in 1831.⁴⁴ Charles Elrington, Ussher's nineteenth-century biographer, editor, and successor as professor of theology in Dublin, was a high-church Anglican who was keen to appropriate the reputation of his most distinguished Archbishop to further his own ecclesiastical cause.⁴⁵ He argued that, 'in the earlier part of his life', Ussher 'had held rigidly the opinions of Calvin', but later in life developed wider hopes for the benefits of Christ's passion.⁴⁶ Alexander Mitchell and John Struthers, on the other hand, argued that Ussher always adhered to a universal atonement. They interpreted Ussher's published statements through the mists of an oral tradition. Citing interviews that Ussher gave with Richard Baxter and Henry Hammond shortly before his death, they concluded that a basic hypothetical

universalism informed his entire theological system, and that 'his later opinions will be found to be as nearly as possible identical with his earlier.'⁴⁷ The debate has continued in such recent works as G. M. Thomas's *The Extent of the Atonement* (1997), which argues in favour of Ussher's hypothetical universalism, and Carl R. Trueman's *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (1998), which argues that the Irish Articles (as well as the canons of the Synod of Dort and the Westminster Confession) 'fundamentally agree' with limited atonement.⁴⁸ The argument is complex and the evidence is sparse; the fact that Chalmers, Elrington, Mitchell, Struthers and more modern historians all cite the same evidence to reach contradictory conclusions demonstrates the nature of the debate.

Despite these shifting conclusions, scholars since the seventeenth century have regularly described Ussher's theology as basically 'conservative' and 'Reformed'. In his own day, he was widely regarded as a champion of puritan integrity and moderation. Richard Baxter hailed the 'great name of that Reverend, Learned, Famous, Solid, Pious Divine', held Ussher in higher regard than he did any other of his contemporaries, and had 'unbounded' respect, even 'reverence', for his mentor.⁴⁹ Other historians have made the more general claim that 'there was no theologian for whom the English Puritans had a higher regard' than for Ussher.⁵⁰

This is certainly the conclusion to which his career successes point. In 1641, Ussher, along with a small number of other doctrinally conservative churchmen, served on a House of Lords committee that discussed the recovery of the English church from Laudian innovation. Their suggested revisions certainly engaged with Arminian advances; among a range of other measures, the committee sought to downplay the figurative status of the 'trope or transubstantiation' dilemma by resolving to reform the Prayer Book so that 'these words in the forme of the Consecration, *This is my body, this is my bloud of the New Testament*, [should not] be printed hereafter in great Letters.'⁵¹ The rhetorical significance of the sacrament might never have been so easily evaded.

The relative failure of this project was indicated two years later, when Ussher was nominated onto another committee, this time comprising ten bishops and twenty peers, to advise the House of Lords on the conservative reformation of the establishment. The delegates – who included John Prideaux (later Bishop of Worcester), John Hacket (later Bishop of Lichfield) and Samuel Ward (Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge), all of whom had served with Ussher on the earlier committee, and Samuel Twisse (first Prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly), who had not – met for six days in May 1643 in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey. Their attempt to anticipate the conclusions of the more radical puritans and to preserve a link with the Anglican past also failed, without concluding anything.⁵²

Meanwhile, parliamentary proposals for more radical reform gained currency, and Ussher, whose reputation was appreciated by the radicals, was

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invited with a number of the committee's other delegates to attend the Westminster Assembly.⁵³ Charles, however, had forbidden the Assembly, and Ussher's adherence to his theory of the 'godly prince' required him to respect the monarch's wishes. Although Ussher turned down the invitation of 1643, he was reappointed to the Assembly upon his return to London in 1647, when he was made preacher of Lincoln's Inn.⁵⁴ It is certain that he never attended the Assembly, and possible that he preached against it in several sermons in Oxford, but his influence prevailed there nevertheless.⁵⁵ A. A. Hodge, nineteenth-century professor of theology at Princeton Seminary, believed that *A Body of Divinitie* (1645), which circulated among the Westminster divines, 'had more to do in forming the Catechism and Confession of Faith than any other book in the world'.⁵⁶ His claim should be qualified by the fact that *A Body of Divinitie* was not published until two years after the Assembly had convened and by the fact that Ussher initially denied any responsibility for its contents.⁵⁷ With greater plausibility, Mitchell and Struthers traced the 'main source' of the Westminster Confession to the Irish Articles, which they regarded as 'almost its exact prototype in its statement of all the more important and essential doctrines of Christianity'.⁵⁸ In whatever form it was best represented, therefore, these competing parties agree that Ussher's theology was at the heart of the evolution of the puritan tradition.

But this conclusion – because it highlights the inter-textual development of early modern theological reflection – tells us less than we might expect. The meaning of the landmark texts that might evidence continuity or discontinuity between Calvin and his seventeenth-century successors are, as we have noted, debated. Since its first publication in 1647, scholars have disputed the extent to which the Westminster Confession actually deserves its reputation as the definitive statement of scholastic Calvinism. It was often argued that the Westminster Confession, like the earlier canons of the Synod of Dort, was deliberately framed so as not to exclude those milder Calvinists who maintained a commitment to hypothetical universalism. As in the Irish Articles, the drive for compromise was making a sign of the Westminster formulations, couching statements in Biblical language that invited, rather than provided, interpretation. The necessity of achieving puritan unity highlighted the necessity of limited creedal ambiguity, and creedal ambiguity deferred the closure of the confessional text. The puritan confessions did not always sustain a single reading of their theological contents. The ostensible goal of the confessional project – the definition and defence of an ultimate orthodoxy – was always at odds with the ecumenical ambitions of the theologians who pursued it.

Whatever the limits of the confessional tradition, Ussher was certainly aware of the importance of articulating the atonement with greater clarity in his personal papers and correspondence. There creedal 'sign' appeared to give way to the private articulation of the theological 'signified', and Ussher's hypothetical universalism clearly appears.⁵⁹ *The Method of the Doctrine of Christian Religion* and *The Principles of Christian Religion* were, for example,

two catechisms that Ussher had drawn up for private use ‘about the age of two or three and twenty years’, but which were pirated (like *A Body of Divinitie*) and later published with the author’s revisions in 1654.⁶⁰ If we take their revised text as an indication of Ussher’s convictions at the time of their composition, then Ussher’s commitment to hypothetical universalism can be dated to as early as 1602. In these catechisms, Ussher imagines that Christ’s obedience and suffering were ‘of infinite worth and value, as proceeding from such a person, as was God equal to the Father’, and that his death provided ‘a perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world’.⁶¹

This early commitment to hypothetical universalism would be confirmed by the dating of Ussher’s first meeting with John Davenant, in 1609.⁶² Ussher claimed that he had persuaded Davenant of hypothetical universalism, and this persuasion must have been effective before Davenant defended the thesis at the Synod of Dort (1618–19).⁶³ Davenant went on to become one of the best-known advocates of the idea, and Ussher certainly looked to him as a spokesman for the movement. In letters to Samuel Ward, Davenant’s successor as Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge,⁶⁴ Ussher presented Davenant’s discourses on the subject as the epitome of Biblical expression: ‘For the Arminian questions, I desire never to read any more than my lord of Salisbury’s lectures touching predestination and Christ’s death’,⁶⁵ he stated. ‘They are excellent, learnedly, soundly, and perspicuously performed, and I hope will do much good here for the establishing of our young divines in the present truth.’⁶⁶ Four years later, his enthusiasm was undiminished: ‘I have met with none that hath treated of those points with that perspicuity and judgement which he hath done.’⁶⁷ Fulsome in his praise, Ussher was actively involved in marketing his colleague’s reputation, and would be responsible for the posthumous publication of Davenant’s manuscript notes on the question, *Dissertationes duæ prima de morte Christi, quatenus ad omnes extendatur, quatenus ad solos electos restringatur: altera de prædestinatione & reprobatione* (Cambridge, 1650).⁶⁸

Ussher’s enthusiasm to see the publication of Davenant’s work seems inversely proportional to the reluctance with which he appeared to present *A Body of Divinitie* to the public. The text was a compendium of systematic theology that had been published under Ussher’s name, but without his consent, in 1645.⁶⁹ Like the *Method* and *Principle*, Ussher had prepared the text for private use. Although, Parr claims, *A Body of Divinitie* ‘was not intended by him to be published, being only some Collections of his, out of several modern Authors, for his own private use, when he was a young man’,⁷⁰ this systemisation of early puritan thought represented a significant advance in the development of the British and Irish dogmatic tradition. But it also offered a significant glimpse into Ussher’s theological formation. John Downe, who edited and introduced the text, claimed that it represented a collation of ideas from Ussher’s reading in the mid-1610s, ‘above thirty yeares’ earlier.⁷¹ The title page claimed that the ideas, ‘collected long since out of

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sundry Authors', bore the stamp of Ussher's having 'reduced' them 'to one common method'.⁷² Ussher wrote to Downname to downplay the significance of the organisation – *A Body* was no more than 'a kinde of common place book'⁷³ – but Downname's claim that the manuscript can be dated to the mid-1610s reinforces Davenant's statement that Ussher was reflecting on hypothetical universalism before the Synod of Dort.

There is no doubt that *A Body of Divinitie* emphasised the particular aspects of the atonement. Christ was anointed Prophet, it claimed, 'to teach his church', and King 'to rule and govern his church'. Christ was anointed Priest, it claimed, 'to offer sacrifice for his church, and to reconcile us to God'.⁷⁴ In a statement that seems to echo the high Calvinist exegesis by which Ussher's 1640 sermon was concerned, *A Body* stated that Christ's sufferings 'hath satisfied for the sines of the whole world of his elect'.⁷⁵ But these hints of particularity give way to universality in the discussion of the atonement: Christ's priesthood 'appeaseth and reconcileth God to his elect' by working 'the means of salvation in the behalf of mankind'.⁷⁶ Christ paid our debt and satisfied God's justice 'by a price of infinite value, (1 Tim 2. 6.)'.⁷⁷ Anticipating the conclusions of Ussher's later writing on the subject, *A Body* argued that the infinite nature of Christ's death was not grounded in a mathematically-conceived substitution, but in the reality of the incarnation: 'Because the Manhood being joined to the Godhead, it maketh the passion and righteousness of Christ of infinite merit'.⁷⁸ The reality of the incarnation also made Christ's passion possess the value of infinite length. The limited time of Christ's suffering is equivalent to an eternity of punishment because

in regard of the worthiness of the person who suffered them, they were equivalent to everlasting torments. Forasmuch as not a bare man, nor an Angell did suffer them, but the Eternall Son of God; (though not in his Godhead, but in our nature which he assumed:) his Person, Majesty, Deity, Goodness, Justice, Righteousness, being every way infinite and eternall, made that which he suffered, of no less force and value then eternall torments upon others; yea, even upon all the world besides.⁷⁹

The time of his sufferings, *A Body* argues, was 'of more value (for the worthiness of his person) then if all the men in the world had suffered for ever and ever'.⁸⁰ Thus, playing with ideas of closure in the nature, redemptive extent and duration of Christ's passion, *A Body* was balancing the limited and universal aspects of the atonement by arguing that Christ's death made 'Satisfaction for the sin of man' in general, and a 'full satisfaction for all our sins' in particular.⁸¹ Without using the terminology, Ussher's notes were following the medieval consensus that Christ's death was 'sufficient for all, efficient for the elect'. But Parr had still thought to defend the text's statements as in themselves insufficiently perspicuous.

The text that was to pick up on these earlier reflections circulated in manuscript long before its eventual publication, two years after Ussher's

death.⁸² On 3 March 1617, still before the Synod of Dort, Ussher wrote a letter, his clearest discussion of the problem, which was eventually published as *The Judgement of the Later Archbishop of Armagh, and Primate of Ireland, of the True Intent and Extent of Christ's Death and Satisfaction upon the Cross* (1658).⁸³ In this letter, Ussher emphatically distanced his own position from any reductionistic categorisation of 'Calvinism' or 'Arminianism': 'in the two extremities of opinions held in this matter, there is somewhat true, and somewhat false'.⁸⁴ His discussion of the death of Christ concluded on a similarly equivocal note: 'in one respect he may be said to have died for all, and in another respect not to have died for all'.⁸⁵ But behind the apparent ambivalence of this hypothetical universalism was an attempt to repudiate the 'unavoidable absurdities' of each extreme and to appropriate the best from each side of the discussion.⁸⁶ For Ussher, the effort to define the meaning of the death of Christ was really an attempt to control the language describing it.

But Ussher's writing was carefully balanced. The problem with Arminianism, he believed, was its lack of closure – it 'extends the benefits of Christ's satisfaction too far'. Teaching the actuality of the reconciliation achieved by Christ's death, that forgiveness has already been granted, Arminianism emphasised that it was the recipient's response that determined whether or not salvation would be applied: 'the reason why all men do not reap the fruit of this benefit, is the want of faith whereby they ought to have believed, that God in this sort did love them'.⁸⁷ Ussher's problem with the 'other extremity', alternatively, was excessive closure – high Calvinism confused the Biblical discussion of the death of Christ by introducing into evangelism the limitations of election, and implying that 'none had any kind of interest therein, but such as were elected before the foundation of the world'. Ussher argued instead that the gospel message of the death of Christ emphasised a universality that references to election unhelpfully narrowed.⁸⁸ The errors were polar opposites, but at the heart of both extremes Ussher found the same basic difficulty – a failure to properly negotiate textual closure, a failure to distinguish between the accomplishment of the death of Christ, and its application to the individual. The Arminian atonement may have advanced on the principles of 'proper speech', but it had clearly gone too far. In the currency of medieval terminology, Ussher was complaining, both high Calvinism and Arminianism failed to distinguish between the sufficiency and the efficiency of the atonement.⁸⁹

In protestant theology, this distinction was vital. Ussher believed that the death of Christ, objectively considered, does not generate forgiveness; it only makes 'the sins of mankind' forgive-able, 'fit for pardon'.⁹⁰ He argued that Christ's all-sufficient objective work must be subjectively applied to the soul in order for salvation to become effective, and that it is this 'particular application' of the atonement that brings pardon to the sinner.⁹¹ Forgiveness, therefore, is granted in existential time, in the life of the believer, rather than

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objectively, in (and at the time of) the death of Jesus Christ. In evacuating the accomplishment of salvation from the historic death of Christ, the atonement has become, in Ussher's thinking, only a sign pointing to its signified, the salvation wrought by the existential application of the death of Jesus Christ in the life of the believer. The irony of Ussher's position was that his search for 'proper speech' to describe Christ's passion – a speech devoid of tropes or figures – had turned the passion itself into a sign.

Paradoxically, Ussher appropriated another medieval distinction – between mortal and venial sin – to clarify his understanding of the effects of the atonement. In his use of these terms, however, Ussher undermined their traditional distinction by referring both terms to the entirety of sin. All sins, Ussher claimed, are both mortal *and* venial. The fact that Christ died demonstrates that sin is mortal, for it requires death and eternal damnation.⁹² But the death of Christ has made all sin venial – though 'all do not obtain actual remission, because most offenders do not take out, nor plead their pardon as they ought to do'.⁹³ Ironically, while Ussher criticised Roman Catholics for blurring theological debate by their changing theological definitions, he was prepared to adopt their terminology and adapt its traditional use for his own ends.⁹⁴ Words, as signs, could be applied to new signifieds.

For Ussher, this offer of pardon was to be proclaimed in the signified, the 'proper speech' of the preached Word, and dramatised in the sign of the sacraments. Because preaching is necessary for salvation, Ussher presented a high view of the preaching office.⁹⁵ Its purpose is to emphasise the freeness of the offer of pardon: 'The matter of our redemption purchased by our Saviour Christ lieth open to all, all are invited to it, none that hath a mind to accept of it, is excluded from it'.⁹⁶ Playing on the shared etymology of 'mystery' and 'sacrament', Ussher understood that offer as dramatised in the sacraments: in 'the mystery of the Gospel', Christ offers himself to us.⁹⁷ Ussher grounded the transitive status of the sacraments, guarding against notions of transubstantiation that would undermine the protestant distinction between the sign and signified of the eucharist: 'these elements are changed spiritually in their natures; not in substance, but in use'.⁹⁸ Thus the sacraments represent Christ offered *to* us and *for* us: 'what we have heard with our ears, we may see with our eyes, being represented by signs'.⁹⁹ The problem with signs, however, was that they faced Ussher with all the difficulties of the topological discourse he was trying to avoid. As signs, the sacraments require narrative discourse for their interpretation; their relationship is ultimately with language. Nevertheless, the transitive definitions of Ussher's 'mortal'/'venial' argument and the full range of his writing about the atonement had already signalled that Ussher's own language, with its changing signifieds, itself possessed the status of a sign.

Ussher argued that preaching is necessary in any administration of the sacraments if they are to be received with understanding, and, therefore, with profit. The signs of the sacraments require the knowledge that preaching provides:

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If thou knowest not what the signs are, or the relation of them to the thing signified, hast no insight, or understanding of the mysteries: know that it is to no other purpose to thee to come to the sacrament, than if thou wentest to a mass, to see the gesticulations, elevations, or if thou wentest to see a play, not knowing to what end and purpose it was done.¹⁰⁰

But Ussher's oppositions between protestant sacrament, mass and drama contextualise his theology within a larger frame of reference. If the abuse of the eucharist turns it into an incomprehensible play, Ussher's argument equates the sign status of misunderstood sacrament and the language of misunderstood performance. The sign is of no benefit without its explanation, but when linguistic explanation is itself couched in the possibility of sign status, both the sacraments and the sermons or confessional statements that describe them exist as the 'tropes or figures' that Ussher is required to remove. Theology, of whatever stripe, becomes the antithesis of 'proper speech'. Rhetoric reduces theology to fiction.

Ussher, the atonement and puritan debate

Ussher's discussion of the atonement was comprehensive, but its reception demonstrated unease on the part of many puritan readers. Ussher was surprised that his letter had been circulated without his permission, and confessed astonishment at the range of criticisms his opinions had attracted.¹⁰¹ One 'Mr. Stock',¹⁰² possibly Richard Stock (1569?–1626), the puritan rector of All Hallows, Bread Street, London, used the material to publicly charge Ussher with confusing the theological status of the Biblical 'all' by making 'the universality of all the elect, and all men to be one'.¹⁰³ Stock was a strict Calvinist, and if he had made the charge, it was most likely on the basis of a refusal to separate the object of the atonement from the object of election, a strategy that took the 'hypothetical' out of hypothetical universalism, and stripped the divine decrees of any discriminating purpose: he was charging Ussher with believing that Christ died for all of humanity, and therefore all of humanity were elect. Stock's charge was eccentric, but serious enough to be of concern. Neither was he a lone critic. As others began charging Ussher with 'Papism, Arminianism and I know not what error of Mr. Culverwell's',¹⁰⁴ he prepared a second response in his own defence.¹⁰⁵

In this second statement, *An Answer of the Archbishop of Armagh, to some exceptions taken against his former letter*, Ussher repudiated the charge of incipient Catholicism on the grounds that he refused to add any mediation to the mediation of Christ.¹⁰⁶ He rejected the charge of Arminianism not on its view of the extent of the atonement but rather on its view of its efficiency, on the basis that it depicted God universally offering everything necessary to salvation, both 'sufficiently and effectually . . . and, that it resteth on the free will of every one to receive, or reject the same'.¹⁰⁷ Instead, defending the

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traditional Lombardian formula of ‘sufficient for all, efficient for the elect’, Ussher resorted to analogical arguments: ‘To bring news to a bankrupt that the king of Spain hath treasure enough to pay a thousand times more than he owes, may be true, but yields but cold comfort to him the miserable debtor: sufficiency indeed is requisite, but it is the word of promise that gives comfort.’¹⁰⁸ Having distanced himself from the errors with which he was charged, Ussher addressed the real issue identified by his detractors. The debate about the atonement was really a struggle to define the place of closure in the gospel narratives and theological discourse describing and explaining the death of Jesus Christ.

Ussher began his argument by outlining the soteriological relationship between time and eternity. In eternity, he argued, the purpose of election began in the mind of God. In and of itself, the decree to elect makes ‘no kind of alteration’ in its subject, nor does the historical accomplishment of the decree in the historic work of Christ. The benefits of salvation are applied only in the execution of that decree in time, through the spiritual regeneration of each one of its subjects and the ‘effectual calling’ of those of the elect who ‘have the use of reason’.¹⁰⁹ Justification therefore does not occur in eternity, nor at the cross, but at conversion: ‘St. Paul teacheth us that we be not only justifiable, but “justified by his blood”, yet not simply as offered on the cross, but “through faith in his blood”, that is, through his blood applied by faith.’¹¹⁰

This separation of the application of the atonement from the accomplishment of the atonement allows Ussher to escape the Calvinist-Arminian debate by rendering irrelevant the question of identifying those for whom Christ died. Within his terms of reference, there could be no actual mathematical substitution in the atonement – Jesus Christ should not be thought of as actually taking the place of a defined number of individuals, whether they are understood as the elect or all of humanity. Instead, Ussher drew attention from the represented to their representative. Christ’s atonement was universal, not because he represented all of humanity, but, picking up on the argument of *A Body of Divinitie*, because of the reality of the incarnation. His death involved his divine nature, and a finite atonement could not be accomplished by incarnate God. As the *Principles of Christian Religion* put it, Christ had to be God ‘that his obedience and suffering might be of infinite worth and value, as proceeding from such a person, as was God equal to the Father’.¹¹¹ Reflecting on the atonement, Ussher discovered that Christology was the answer to high Calvinism.

Identifying the core of the gospel call (somewhat problematically) as an invitation to believe that Christ died for the individual who hears the call, Ussher argued for the futility of inviting the reprobate to believe an untruth. This, he argues, is the ‘extreme absurdity’ of the typical high Calvinist syllogism: ‘seeing Christ in no wise died for any, but for the elect, and all men were bound to believe that Christ died for themselves, and that upon pain of

damnation for the contrary infidelity; therefore all men were bound to believe that they themselves were elected, although in truth the matter were nothing so'.¹¹² The implication of Ussher's thought, though he does not put it quite so succinctly, is that Christ was not an actual substitute for any in his death, but that he becomes a substitute for any given individual at the moment of their conversion. The paradox of Ussher's later appeal for 'proper speech' in discussing the atonement is that the theo-logic of his writings in the 1610s was driving him to suggest that Christ's death, like the language describing it, was itself only a sign – and that the existential application of his death was its signified. Christ's death was a 'trope or figure' of salvation.

Rhetoric, fiction and theology

Reflecting on the atonement throughout the 1610s, James Ussher was engaged in a complex and often concealed theological pursuit. In the run-up to the Synod of Dort, his caution was required by the times. Ironically, however, it was at the Synod of Dort that Ussher's opinions would enjoy their greatest influence. The English divines who travelled to Dort were divided in their understanding of the atonement. Most of the English delegates followed the advice of Archbishop Abbot in adhering to Beza's maxim that Christ died for the elect alone. Following the request of the king, Ward and Davenant, whom Ussher had persuaded of hypothetical universalism, argued instead that the synod's consensus should sustain the maxim of 'sufficient for all, efficient for the elect'.¹¹³ In December 1618, Ussher suggested that he would like the extreme Calvinism of some of the delegates tempered.¹¹⁴ In May 1619, Ward wrote to Ussher describing the synod's 'remarkable passages' and the difficulty of reaching a consensus on the issue of the atonement.¹¹⁵ His comments alluded to the divisions among the English delegates: 'Some of us were held by some half remonstrants, for extending the oblation made to the Father, to all; and for holding sundry effects thereof offered *serio*, and some really communicated to the reprobate'.¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, Ward argued, their final conclusion was deliberately moderated to 'say nothing which might gainsay the confession of the Church of England: which was effected, for that they were desirous to have all things in the canons defined *unanimi consensu*'.¹¹⁷ For Ward, the Synod of Dort said little that was new – but its restatement of the Anglican consensus nevertheless failed to realise the soteriological unity to which Ussher aspired. Indeed, in echoing of Biblical terms – so necessary if the canons were to achieve the required aperture of hermeneutical ambiguity, using language to which no theologian could object – the Dort canons, like the earlier Irish Articles and the later Westminster Confession, were refusing to reject the sign in favour of the signified. The creeds were proving no better than the paintings, no more useful than the unexplained sacraments, no better than a play in an unknown tongue. Like

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the images, and most of Ussher's writing on the subject, they did not provide interpretation, but invited it.

Despite his later appeals, therefore, Ussher's language of the atonement in the 1610s was not the 'proper language' of the puritan 'plain style'. Instead, high Calvinism, and Ussher's attempts to resist it, disturbs the simple equation of puritan mentality and plain-style discourse. Ussher's language was driven by puritan categories of thought which, like the language of the theologians to whom he objected, was unable to provide the 'proper speech' the older rhetoricians preferred. Ussher's difficulties illustrate the revenge of the 'simple readers', the revenge of the textual communities who took the Geneva Bible's semantic instruction and the Renaissance 'artes of logick and rhetoricke' and used them to fashion a theology absolutely alive to Scripture's textual implications and tropological possibilities. Ussher's problems stemmed from the fact that his own theology, like the rhetoric and fiction he feared, was grounded in textuality, and that his signifieds consistently eroded into signs. 'Believe not the painters', Ussher encouraged his audience; prefer 'proper speech'. But this was speech he was unable to provide. In attempting to situate his theology of atonement within the puritan poetic of the liminal, Ussher's writings point to the difficulty of describing exactly what happened when Jesus Christ, 'in proper speech', died.

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Notes

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- 1 James Ussher, *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher D.D.*, eds C. R. Elrington and J. R. Todd (Dublin, Hodges and Smith, 1847–64), XIII, 131.
- 2 Michael Jensen, "Simply" reading the Geneva Bible: The Geneva Bible and its readers', *Literature and Theology*, 9 (1995), 30–45; Crawford Gribben, 'Deconstructing the Geneva Bible: The search for a puritan poetic', *Literature and Theology*, 14 (2000), 2, 9–10.
- 3 Dudley Fenner, *Artes of Logick and Rhetoricke* (1584), sig. B.
- 4 The 'soul-torturing' expression is Ussher's; Ussher, *Works*, XIII, 65.
- 5 Ussher, *Works*, XIII, 131.
- 6 Ussher, *Works*, XIII, 154.
- 7 Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, CUP, 1986), p. 3; G. C. Berkouwer, *The Person of Christ*, Studies in Dogmatics (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1954), pp. 274, 282–9; Heiko Oberman, 'The "Extra" Dimension in the theology of Calvin', *JEH*, 21 (1970), 43–64.

- 8 For a discussion of puritan poetics, see Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and theology, 1550–1682* (Dublin, Four Courts, 2000), pp. 20–5.
- 9 Margarita de Grazia *et al* (eds), *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge, CUP, 1996), pp. 340–2.
- 10 ‘Quis unquam putâset Christi mortem paci sancienda & perimendis inimicitii destinata, ut loquitur Apostolus, *Ephes.* ii. 14. 17. & *Coloss.* 1. 20. 21. litibus pariendis tam foecundam fieri potuisse? Sed illud evenire videtur innatâ hominum curiositate, qui magis solliciti esse solent ut arcana Dei consilia scrutentur quàm ut beneficia publicè oblata amplectentur’; John Davenant, *Dissertationes duæ prima de morte Christi, quatenus ad omnes extendatur, quatenus ad solos electos restringatur: altera de prædestinatione & reprobatione* (Cambridge, 1650), p. 1. This translation is provided in Morris Fuller, *The Life, Letters and Writings of John Davenant, D.D., 1572–1641, Lord Bishop of Salisbury* (London, Methuen, 1897), p. 223.
- 11 G. Michael Thomas, in *The Extent of the Atonement: A Dilemma for Reformed Theology from Calvin to the Consensus* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1997), adds that ‘it is important to see the extent of the atonement not as an isolated doctrine, but in its relation to other doctrines within the thought of each theologian studied’, p. 3.
- 12 For representative positions, see R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, OUP, 1981), and Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin* (Oxford, OUP, 2000).
- 13 Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 99.
- 14 Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 34.
- 15 Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 1998), p. 200. Thomas describes ‘ambiguities’ in the description of atonement in the canons of the Synod of Dort, and explains that ‘nothing caused greater division’ than the atonement debate; *The Extent of the Atonement*, pp. 133, 147.
- 16 See Crawford Gribben, ‘Lay conversion and Calvinist doctrine during the English Commonwealth’, in D. W. Lovegrove (ed.), *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism* (London, Routledge, 2002), pp. 36–46.
- 17 Alan Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland, 1590–1641* (1984; 2nd ed. Dublin, Four Courts, 1997), pp. 18–19.
- 18 Phil Kilroy, ‘Sermon and pamphlet literature in the Irish reformed church, 1613–34’, *Archivium Hibernicum*, 33 (1975), 110–21.
- 19 For details of the Irish reformation, see Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland*.
- 20 Mary Pollard, *Dublin’s trade in books 1550–1800* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989); Raymond Gillespie, ‘The book trade in southern Ireland, 1590–1640’, in Gerard Long (ed.), *Books beyond the Pale: Aspects of the provincial book trade in Ireland before 1850* (Dublin, Library Association of Ireland, 1996), pp. 1–18.
- 21 John J. Silke, ‘Irish scholarship and the Renaissance, 1580–1673’, *Studies in the Renaissance*, 20 (1973), 169.
- 22 Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the ‘Grand Debate’* (Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1985), p. 106. The best biographical study of Ussher remains R. Buick Knox, *James Ussher: Archbishop of Armagh* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1967).

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- 23 Norman Sykes, 'James Ussher as Churchman', *Theology*, 60 (1957), 55.
- 24 Sykes, 'James Ussher as Churchman', p. 56.
- 25 *Alumni Dublinenses*, s.v.; Alan Ford, 'James Ussher and the creation of an Irish protestant identity', in Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (eds), *British Conscientiousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533–1707* (Cambridge, CUP, 1998), p. 199.
- 26 Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland*, pp. 28–9.
- 27 New colleges were founded at Salamanca (1592), Lisbon (1593), Douai (1594), Bordeaux (1603), Toulouse (1603), Paris (1605), Santiago de Compostella (1605), Lille (1610), and Rouen (1610). Michael P. Carroll, *Irish Pilgrimage: Holy Wells and Popular Catholic Devotion* (Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 142.
- 28 Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland*, p. 25.
- 29 Sykes, 'James Ussher as Churchman', p. 57. Richard Parr goes further than most modern historians in his claim that Ussher 'himself made, and drew up' the Irish Articles; *The Life of the Most Reverend Father in God James Ussher, Late Lord Arch-Bishop of Armagh, Primate and Metropolitan of all Ireland* (London, 1686), p. 42.
- 30 Amanda L. Capern, 'The Caroline Church: James Ussher and the Irish Dimension', *Historical Journal*, 39 (1996), 57–85.
- 31 Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland*, p. 27.
- 32 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 593; Crawford Gribben, 'The eschatology of the puritan confessions', *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology*, 20:1 (2002), 51–78.
- 33 For the calculated ambiguity of the Irish Articles, see A. F. Mitchell and J. Struthers (eds), *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines* (Edinburgh, Blackwood and Sons, 1874), pp. liv–lv.
- 34 Ussher, *Works*, I, xxxviii.
- 35 *Articles of Religion, Agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops, and the Rest of the Clergie of Ireland, in the Convocation Holden at Dublin in The yeare of our Lord God 1615. for the avoyding of Diversities of Opinions, And the establishing of Conccent touching true Religion* (London, Thomas Downes, 1629), sig. A2v.
- 36 For an analysis of this discussion, see Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists: The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590–1640* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1987), and Anthony Milton, *Catholic and Reformed: The Roman and Protestant Churches in English Protestant Thought, 1600–1640* (Cambridge, CUP, 1995).
- 37 Ussher, *Works*, II, 421.
- 38 Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland*, p. 11.
- 39 For Ussher's millennial eschatology, see Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium*, pp. 84–91.
- 40 Parr, *The Life of . . . James Ussher*, p. 15.
- 41 A parallel argument can be made with respect to Ussher's supralapsarianism. J. V. Fesko has argued that the *Method of Christian Religion* (1654), which Ussher claimed to have drawn up around 1602–1603, presents a strongly supralapsarian statement of God's decrees. Twelve years later, in the Irish Articles, Ussher's statements on the divine decrees had been significantly modified to reflect more of an infralapsarian approach. Despite this, Fesko still concludes that Ussher remained a supralapsarian, for the *Method* had been revised before its eventual publication in 1654. J. V. Fesko, *Diversity within the Reformed Tradition: Supra- and Infralap-*

- sarianism in Calvin, Dort and Westminster* (Jackson, Mississippi, Reformed Academic Press, 2001), pp. 247–52. The *Method* is reprinted in Ussher, *Works* (1847–64), XI, 197–220.
- 42 ‘Appendix’, Parr, *The Life of . . . James Ussher*, pp. 8–11.
- 43 ‘Appendix’, Parr, *The Life of . . . James Ussher*, p. 11.
- 44 Anon., ‘Preface’, in James Ussher, *A Letter concerning the Death and Satisfaction of Christ* (Edinburgh, William Oliphant, 1831).
- 45 This claim was made by James Seaton Reid in *Seven Letters to the Rev. C. R. Elrington, D.D., Regius Professor of Divinity in the University of Dublin; occasioned by his animadversions in his Life of Ussher, on certain passages in the History of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland* (Glasgow, Ogle & Son, 1849).
- 46 C. R. Elrington, ‘Life of Archbishop Ussher’, in Ussher, *Works*, I, 289–95.
- 47 Mitchell and Struthers (eds), *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, p. lviii n. 1; cf. Ford, *The Protestant Reformation in Ireland*, p. 17 n. 41; S. J. Clausen, ‘Calvinism in the Anglican hierarchy, 1603–1643: Four Episcopal examples’ (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Vanderbilt University, 1989).
- 48 Thomas, *The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 151; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, p. 16.
- 49 Richard Baxter, *Plain Scripture Proof of Infants Church-Membership and Baptism* (1651, 3rd edition), p. 335; Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *Richard Baxter* (London, Thomas Nelson, 1965), pp. 67, 80; J. I. Packer, *The Redemption and Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 2003), p. 400; *The Autobiography of Richard Baxter*, ed. N. H. Keeble, Everyman’s Library (London, Dent, 1974), pp. 96, 284–5.
- 50 Mitchell and Struthers (eds), *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, p. xl.
- 51 *A copie of the proceedings of some worthy and learned divines, appointed by the Lords to meet at the Bishop of Lincolnes in Westminster: touching innovations in the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England* (1641), p. 5.
- 52 Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord*, p. 64; A. F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly* (London: James Nisbet, 1883), pp. 97–100.
- 53 Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly*, p. 100.
- 54 Mitchell and Struthers (eds), *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, p. xxxii n. 1.
- 55 Parr, *The Life of . . . James Ussher*, p. 50.
- 56 A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology: A Course of Popular Lectures* (1890; rpr. Edinburgh, Banner of Truth, 1976), p. 165; cf. B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and its Work* (New York, OUP, 1931), pp. 169–90.
- 57 Elrington records Ussher’s declaration that the *Body* was ‘in divers places dissonant from his own judgement’; Ussher, *Works*, I, 248–50; cf. Bryan G. Armstrong, *Calvin and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 141.
- 58 Mitchell and Struthers (eds), *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, p. xlvii. This opinion has been confirmed by Fesko, *Diversity within the Reformed Tradition*, p. 219.
- 59 Thomas refers to Ussher as a hypothetical universalist on the basis of the *The True Intent and Extent of Christ’s Death and Satisfaction upon the Cross; The Extent of the Atonement*, p. 151.
- 60 Ussher, *Works*, XI, 177–79.

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- 61 Ussher, *Works*, XI, 187–88.
- 62 *DNB*, s.v. James Ussher.
- 63 Baxter reports Ussher's claim to have persuaded Davenant of hypothetical universalism in *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, ed. M. Sylvester (1696), II, 206; Packer, *Redemption and Restoration*, p. 201 n. 3.
- 64 Ussher, *Works*, XV, 185, 18 March 1622.
- 65 Ussher, *Works*, XV, 583, no date [1634?].
- 66 Ussher, *Works*, XVI, 9–10, 15 September 1635.
- 67 Ussher, *Works*, XVI, 46, 10 September 1639.
- 68 Morris Fuller, *The Life, Letters and Writings of John Davenant, D.D., 1572–1641, Lord Bishop of Salisbury* (London, Methuen, 1897), pp. 221–2. The text was edited by Thomas Bedford, who also published, at Ussher's suggestion, a letter from Davenant to Ward, entitled *Vindiciae gratiae sacramentalis, duobus tractatulis comprehensae 1. de efficacia sacramentorum in genere, 2. de efficacia baptismi quantum ad parvalos* (1650).
- 69 This rejection of authorial responsibility explains Elrington's refusal to include them in the collected works; Ussher, *Works*, I, 250. Parr, nevertheless, defended its statements and appeared to identify them with Ussher's opinions; 'Appendix', Parr, *The Life of . . . James Ussher*, p. 11.
- 70 Parr, *The Life of . . . James Ussher*, p. 62.
- 71 John Downname, 'To the Christian reader', in James Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie, or the Summe and Substance of Christian Religion* (1645; third edition, London, 1649), sig. A3r.
- 72 Title page.
- 73 Ussher, *Works*, I, 249, 13 May 1645.
- 74 Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie*, p. 168.
- 75 Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie*, p. 171.
- 76 Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie*, p. 168.
- 77 Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie*, p. 171.
- 78 Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie*, p. 171.
- 79 Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie*, p. 173.
- 80 Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie*, pp. 173–4.
- 81 Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie*, p. 170.
- 82 Packer notes that Richard Baxter had a manuscript copy of the text; *Redemption and Restoration*, p. 201 n. 83.
- 83 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 551–60.
- 84 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 553.
- 85 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 559.
- 86 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 554.
- 87 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 553–4.
- 88 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 554.
- 89 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 554.
- 90 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 554.
- 91 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 554.
- 92 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 554.
- 93 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 554.
- 94 Ussher, *Works*, XIII, 239.
- 95 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 555.

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- 96 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 557.
 97 Ussher, *Works*, XIII, 162.
 98 Ussher, *Works*, XIII, 194.
 99 Ussher, *Works*, XIII, 192.
 100 Ussher, *Works*, XIII, 200.
 101 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 563.
 102 The *DNB* refers to a Richard Stock (1569?–1626); cf. Benjamin Brook, *Lives of the Puritans* (London, 1813), II, 344 sq., III, 515. For Stock's links with the young John Milton, see Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London, Faber and Faber, 1977), pp. 24–6, and Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2000), pp. 4, 25, who records Stock's death as taking place in 1625. See also Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'Orthodoxy', 'Heterodoxy', and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Manchester, MUP, 2001), p. 229.
 103 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 566.
 104 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 563.
 105 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 561–571.
 106 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 563.
 107 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 564–5.
 108 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 568.
 109 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 564.
 110 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 570. The Westminster Confession of Faith would later follow this argument (WCF 11:4).
 111 Ussher, *Works*, XI, 187. The *Method* provides a close parallel in XI, 209. The statement that Christ suffered 'for the sins of the world' (XI, 188) is ambiguous, for, as a Scriptural citation, it invites and does not provide interpretation.
 112 Ussher, *Works*, XII, 565.
 113 Leo F. Solt, *Church and State in Early Modern England, 1509–1640* (Oxford, OUP, 1990), pp. 161–2.
 114 Ussher, *Works*, XV, 143.
 115 Peter Hall (ed.), *The Harmony of Protestant Confessions* (London, John F. Shaw, 1842), pp. 550–4.
 116 Ussher, *Works*, XV, 144–5.
 117 Ussher, *Works*, XV, 144–5.

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