



Jonathan M. Carter, *Thomas Goodwin on Union with Christ: The Indwelling of the Spirit, Participation in Christ and the Defence of Reformed Soteriology*

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Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), whose stature as a Puritan theologian is frequently hidden in the shadow of more popular writers, such as his younger contemporary, John Owen, has in the last two decades garnered the attention of several important studies that recognise his creative contribution to the development of Reformed Scholasticism. Jonathan Carter’s monograph, at the forefront of this research, moves Goodwin scholarship forward with great strides. Focusing on union with Christ as the definite *leitmotiv* in Goodwin’s ‘comprehensive scheme of soteriology’ (p. 10), Carter contends that Goodwin ‘founded the application of every aspect of salvation upon a particular conception of real union with Christ’ (p. 231).

As he makes his case, demonstrating admirably wide reading, Carter highlights Goodwin as a theologian who skirts the borders of heterodoxy but maintains, nonetheless, an orthodox voice. This is nowhere more apparent than in Carter’s careful analysis of Goodwin’s ‘deification soteriology’, an insistence that union with Christ through the Holy Spirit involves crucial union with his divine nature: a true participation in uncreated grace (p. 76). This focus upon Goodwin’s teaching that ‘the state of salvation must rise far above mere restoration’ is welcome and underscores Goodwin’s high Christology and soteriology (p. 225). For a stronger argument, Carter could pay more attention to the role of Christ’s humanity in this union with God’s people. Carter’s assertion that Goodwin ‘explicitly rejected the idea that believers are united to Christ through his human nature’ (p. 244) is misleading without noting Goodwin’s insistence that ‘the divine nature in the second Person dwells in us as he is God [and] the man Jesus dwells in us according to his capacity as he is man’.¹ There is for Goodwin ‘some special peculiarity’ in Christ’s union with humanity because of the incarnation which leads him to confess elsewhere,² ‘There is something in Christ more beautiful than a Saviour’.³

On the importance of union in Goodwin’s *ordo salutis*, however, Carter is particularly strong. Carter moves beyond Goodwin to challenge John Fesko’s claim that most Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century held justification to be the ground of union with Christ. Here, Carter presents a persuasive argument for Goodwin as a representative of the Puritan mainstream that maintained justification to be predicated upon the priority of this spiritual union.

¹Thomas Goodwin, ‘Exposition of Various Portions of the Epistle to the Ephesians’, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols. (Eureka, CA: Tanski Publications, 1996 [1861–1866]), 2.403.

²Ibid.

³Goodwin, ‘Of the Objects and Acts of Justifying Faith’, in *Works*, 8.190.

Although Carter carefully unpacks Goodwin's soteriology within the context of a galaxy of influential divines, his engagement with the magisterial Reformers is less satisfying. In particular, while Carter recognises the looming importance of Calvin, his interaction with the Genevan could be improved, especially given Goodwin's clear and massive debt to this Reformer. Carter understates Goodwin's dependence on Calvin, passing over the superlative epithet that Goodwin applies to his predecessor: 'that holy and greatest light of the reformed churches'.⁴

With respect to Carter's methodology, his sharp rejection of the scholarly value of the nineteenth-century critical edition (the Nichol edition) of Goodwin's works, and his argument for the use of the posthumously published, five folio volume collection of Goodwin's works (1681–1704), is well-taken with respect to the neglect of important original errata and the absence of some marginalia in the later edition. Nevertheless, Carter repeats an unhelpful underrating of nineteenth-century scholarship. Carter's most glaring claim involves the assertion that the Nichol editors, in places, fundamentally misunderstand Goodwin. His one example, pertaining to the loss of God's image *post lapsum*, is Goodwin's phrase 'ras'd and defaced', which the Nichol editors print as 'raised and defaced', a change, Carter alleges, that reverses Goodwin's original meaning from 'razed/destroyed' to 'raised/lifted' (p. 248). It is a hasty allegation, however, and Carter would have done well to stop and ask how otherwise competent editors could have missed an evident rhetorical doublet in Goodwin's prose, where both terms clearly serve as synonyms. The patent incompatibility of this supposed concept (that humanity erects the image of God before it tears it down) with Goodwin's Reformed anthropology should also have given Carter pause. It turns out, however, that the Nichol editors were not so ignorant. As the *OED* spells out, the term 'raised' was used interchangeably in the seventeenth century with the term 'razed' (or in Goodwin's spelling, 'ras'd') to mean 'to erase or destroy'. In this case, the editors are taking a potentially unclear abbreviation and expanding it to identify Goodwin's original meaning.

As a final note, Carter's sustained use of the term 'Catholic' to express an alleged contempt in Goodwin towards Catholicism is historically inaccurate. Goodwin never uses the term 'Catholic' with disapproval or disdain; instead, Goodwin's limited polemical writings consistently target the 'papists'. While references to 'papalism' would not everywhere suit Carter's purpose, a plea can be made for Carter to use the adjective 'Roman' when he refers to this branch of the Christian church. It would serve Carter well to remember Goodwin's stated ambition to 'make the Church more catholic'.⁵ Beyond this, Carter's consistent misuse of the term 'catholic' obscures Goodwin's routine dependence upon and charitable admiration for many near contemporary Catholic theologians, including Robert Bellarmine, Francisco Suárez and Cornelius à Lapide: a worthy trait that could go to support Carter's strong case for a creative and consequential Puritan divine.

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⁴Goodwin, 'The Knowledge of God the Father, and His Son Jesus Christ', in *Works*, 4.459.

⁵Goodwin, 'An Exposition of the First Chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians', in *Works*, 1.12.