

Correspondence

PROF. LEE RESPONDS TO DR. WESTCOTT

OWEN & DR. WESTCOTT ON
EARLY BRITISH CHRISTIANITY

"I am not too in love with the Francis Nigel Lee contribution. I suspect that this 'history' was not told us at school mainly because it is Dr. Lee's *personal view* of what credence can be given to early myth and legend! Interestingly the concept of 'Christian' British kings, the 'Lucius' legend, and the Joseph of Arimathea story, with 'Jewish-Christian' Druids etc. was examined at length by John Owen three centuries ago, and demolished with his usual thoroughness."

Thus spake Dr. Westcott, in our BRJ (8) of 1994, at page 43. I here refrain from citing any source material from my own million-word D.C.L. dissertation: *The Roots of Common Law in Biblical, Ir-Scottic, Brythonic & English Jurisprudence*. I would however, like to draw the attention of BRJ readers to several excerpts from John Owen himself.

In his 1653 *Dissertation on Divine Justice*, Dr. John Owen, probably the greatest British theologian of all time - declares: "No doubt can be entertained concerning the inhabitants of Britain...From them came the Druids... 'The doctrine of the Druids', says Caesar, 'is thought to have been found in Britain, and brought thence into Gaul....Now, such as are desirous to examine more particularly that matter, generally go thither (to Britain) for the sake of information.'" Julius Caesar: *Gallic Wars* VI.

Owen further cites Caesar's statement that 'the Gauls...employ the Druids...They have an opinion that unless a human life be given for a human life, the heavenly deiti(es) cannot be appeased.' Then Owen himself rightly comments: "These last words seem to me to acknowledge a persuasion that must have arisen from some ancient tradition about the sub-

stitution of the Son of Man in the stead of sinners as a propitiation for sin."

Owen continues: "Concerning the ancient Gauls, we have the most credible evidences Cicero commends them.. 'They think it necessary that the God(s) should be appeased... with human victims.....' Cicero: *Pro Fonteio*... Diodorus, in Book V, wrote of the Druids, 'They fix up their malefactors upon poles....and sacrifice them to their God(s).'" Cf. *Deut.21:22 with Gal. 3:13*.

In Owen's 1646 *Vision of Unchangeable Free Mercy*, he declares: "In the very morning of the gospel, the Son of Righteousness shone upon this land; and they say the first potentate on the Earth that owned it, was in Britain. *Nicephorus II:40*, and the *Epistle of Eleutherius* to Lucius."

"The island or at least the greatest part thereof..lost the gospel..when the Saxons wrested it from the Britons...Though for faith and persuasion we do not find that they were corrupted, and do find that they were tenacious enough of antique discipline as appeared in their following oppositions to the Roman tyranny as in Bede.. 'Oh, that we could remember the days of old! God will again water His garden, once more purge His vineyard - once more of His own accord He will take England upon liking...The reformation in England shall be more glorious than of any nation in the world, being carried on neither by might nor by power but only by the Spirit of the Lord of hosts.'"

In Owen's 1662 *Animadversions on a Treatise entitled Fiat Lux*, he observes: "Christianity coming into Britain...came directly by sea from Palestine into France and was thence brought into England by Joseph of Arimathea...That faith and worship which he brought along with him we know full well...was the faith and worship of his teachers and associates in the work of propagating the gospel recorded in the Scripture...the gospel was preached here in

England probably before ever St. Paul came to Rome."

Concerning the "conversion" of "this nation...by Joseph of Arimathea," declares Owen, "we have no contest...That the gospel was preached here in the apostle's days, either by him or some other evangelist, is certain...Immediately from Palestine..the gospel..came to England. We are persuaded Joseph brought no other religion with him than what was taught by Peter and Paul and the rest of the apostles.. The writings of the apostles are still extant...That doctrine then unquestionably taught Joseph in Britain."

By the second century A.D., continues Owen, "in the days of King Lucius..... Fugatius and Damianus came hither..and furthered the preaching of the gospel which had taken footing here so long before."

Finally there is Owen's 1663 *Vindication of the Animadversions on Fiat Lux*. Here Owen insists "that we received the gospel...not first from Rome, but by Joseph of Arimathea from Palestine...The Britons...inhabited the land... Christendom ...prevailed and lasted among the Britons ... the Britons at first received not the gospel from Rome ...It was never utterly extinct in Britain from its first plantation."

"The Christianity which prevailed in Britain was that which continued among the Britons in Wales ... That they came not from Rome, is manifest from the customs which they observed and insisted on, differing from those of Rome ...BEDE, Book II chap.2 .. For the customs the British Church adhered unto, were such as, having their rise and occasion in the East, were never *admitted* at Rome ...

"I know not certainly who first preached the gospel in Britain. Some say Peter, some Paul, some Simon Zelotes, most Joseph of Arimathea ... But some one it was, or more, whom God sent upon His errand and with His message ... The gospel was preached in England before any church was founded at Rome. It was so, saith Gildas, '*summo tempore Tiberii Caesaris*' ... that is, '*extremo*', about the end of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, who died in the 39th year of Christ

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"Joseph of Arimathea ... delivered his Christianity unto some Britons ... the gospel came out of the East into this land ... the land was then called Albion or Brittany, and the people Britons or Cimbrians ...

"Christianity was well rooted and known in Britain when Lucius ... sent to Eleutherius for assistance in its propagation ... Baronius will assure you no less, ad an. 183, n.3,4. Gildas, *De Excid.*, will do it more fully. Virunnius tells us that the Britons were then 'strengthened in the faith,' not that they then received it; strengthened in what they had, not newly converted

"The days of Lucius are assigned by Sabellicus as the time wherein the whole province received the name of Christ '*publicitus cum ordinatione*' - 'by public decree.' That it was received there before, and abode there as in other places of the world under persecution, all men agree."

"In this interval of time" between 39 A.D. and the second century's King Lucius - concludes Owen (implicitly alluding to II Tim. 4:21) - "did the British Church bring forth Claudia, Ruffina, Elvanus, and Medunus; whose names, amongst others, are yet preserved. And to this space of time do the testimonies of Tertullian (*Adversus Judaeos*), and of Origen (*Hom.4 in Ezek.*), concerning Christianity in Britain, belong ... The very epistle of Eleutherius ... plainly intimates that the Scripture was received amongst the Britons, and the gospel much dispersed over the whole nation."

Dr. Stephen Westcott was kind enough, after the publication of his above-mentioned letter to the editor published in our *BRJ*, to send me thirteen page-proofs. These were from his own forthcoming 860-page "English interpretation" from Gould's Latin text of Owen's work *Theologoumena Pantadapa*. This work he says was never before published in English, and is right now to appear under the title of *Biblical Theology*. It would seem Dr. Westcott's letter to the editor of our *BRJ* was motivated largely by his interpretation of that particular work.

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Dr. Westcott rightly guessed that I had not seen that work - in any language. Nor do I yet know what Owen may or may not have said about the Church History of Early Britain in his 860-page work, other than in the thirteen pages Dr. Westcott sent me.

Now I do not agree with everything in the statements Owen there makes about Christianity in Britain during the first century A.D. Nor do I agree with the way Owen there discounts England's first Church historian, the Venerable Bede, and the great Puritan theologian John Selden, on the life and times of Lucius (whose reign in any significant part of Britain Owen there questions). Yet I am indeed in general agreement with at least the following statements of Owen in those thirteen pages (the fly leaf and pp. 330-341).

"Our island was as it were severed from the rest of the world," explains Owen. "Yet it was by God's merciful providence that messengers and preachers of the gospel landed here even in the very infancy of the faith.

"Simon Metaphrastes and Menalogius say that Peter preached the gospel here. Theodoret and Sophronius say that Paul did. Nicephorus says that Aristobulus (mentioned by Paul in his letter to the Romans) did ... Nearly all English writers of modern days such as Parker, Bailey, Fox, Camden etc., say that Joseph of Arimathea preached here. In Joseph's case, there is hardly a voice raised in doubt, and very early Christian sources such as Tertullian and Origen state that Britain received the faith from this source.

"Martial makes mention of Claudia Rufina, a British woman of high birth and great erudition ... Some scholars have seen in her the Claudia mentioned by Paul in 2 Tim. 4:21. The dates certainly fit ...

"Eleutherius lived in the reign of the Emperor Commodus ... This much is true ... Sabellius says, 'Of all the Provinces, Britain was the first to officially recognize Christ' ... We shall not deny the possibility that a certain Lucius, possibly of royal descent, and possibly enjoying some prestige among the Britons, did at this time become a convert to Christianity, and make every effort to further the faith here."

Thus Dr. Westcott's interpretation of Owen.

Not once did I so much as mention John Owen in my *BRJ* articles. So I am quite at a loss to understand why Dr. Westcott has appealed precisely to Owen, in his letter to the editor to protest what he has called "early myth and legend" in my *BRJ* articles which he is "not too in love with." The difficult matter of interpreting early history must surely rest on sources far more ancient and broader than that of the modern Dr. Westcott's perception largely if not exclusively only of the seventeenth century Owen. May God then give all of us humility, and an increasing openness to re-weigh all of the available evidence.

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Queensland Presby. Theol. Hall,
Brisbane. AUS. Nov.1994

OTHER LETTERS.

From Mr. Bernard Low,
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Christian Greetings,

I just want to say how much I have enjoyed the *British Reformed Journal* (BRJ) ... I have enjoyed reading every issue ... and the published articles have thus been very instructive, enlightening and edifying. I believe my commitment to the doctrines of Sovereign Grace has been strengthened as a result of reading the BRJ. I would be most grateful if you could continue sending me the BRJ so that I could continue to grow, think, and act theologically in a distinctively Reformed direction.

I am currently enrolled in a Master of Divinity programme at the Singapore Bible College (SBC) with a view to preparing myself for the Reformed ministry. SBC unfortunately is not a seminary committed to the Reformed Faith. As such I have to get my Reformed theology outside the curriculum of SBC by reading Reformed books and journals such as the BRJ. If you could recommend a reading programme, I would be most grateful.

I would like to conclude my letter with two requests. Firstly, in issue No.7 of the BRJ, Tom Reid's article "What Good are

They Today?" mentions six major documents produced by the Westminster Assembly, the *Confession of Faith*, two *Catechisms*, (Larger and Shorter), the *Sum of Saving Knowledge*, the *Directory for the Public Worship of God*, and the *Form of Presbyterial Church Government*. If these are available from your office, I would appreciate it if you could send them to me.

Secondly, I would like to request, if possible, that the editor of the BRJ could consider writing and publishing expositions of the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards in future issues of the BRJ. I believe such expositions would be warmly welcomed by Reformed people everywhere.

Thank you for your kind attention. I look forward to hearing from you.
(Contact made by Tony Horne, Editor.)

From Mr. Gary A. Meharg,
36145 Barkley Avenue, Livonia,
MICHIGAN 48154-5101.

I enclose £10...to cover subs. to your fine publication. from the British Isles I also receive the Banner of Truth, Evangelical Times, and Sword and Trowel. I visited UK first in 1989, in 1993 my wife and I spent 2 weeks in Scotland staying B&B, concentrating on Scottish Church History, in particular Knox and the Reformation times. In 1995 I will be coming with Westminster Seminary group for 1 week at St. Andrews with Sinclair Ferguson, and 1 week at Cambridge with Dr. Sam Logan,

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studying background to founding of America by Cotton-Hooker-Shephard.

I wholeheartedly can subscribe to your doctrinal standards. I am 39 years old, live with my family in Livonia, a city of 100 000 near Detroit. Since 1986 we have been members of Ward Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a church of 4 700 members, one of the largest Presbyterian congregations in the US. Dr. J.R.DeWitt had been in our EPC denomination until recently. Dr. Rob Norris has a very large EPC in Washington DC area. EPC was founded in 1982 by a small group of reformers who felt that PCUSA had departed from Westminster Standards, especially in ref. to the Divinity of Christ. EPC has over 80 000 members. Our church has planted 5 other churches, which comprise another 2000+ members in the region. Dr. Bartlett Hess, God's instrument in all this has a 500 person congregation now in Ann Arbor, age 84!

I am familiar with Free Church of Scotland group in Livonia, am at present in the Insurance business, but am feeling the Lord's calling me to prepare to transition to a ministry of some type. I hope to study at Westminster seminary for 3 years starting in a few years. I have a 3000 book library of finest Puritan/Reformed literature. I am very active in used book market, have several hundred works from 1600's Sibbes, Perkins, Ames, Goodwin Cotton,...etc.

God has given me a special interest in the period 1500 - 1662. May God richly bless your work to His Glory.

NOLAN'S INQUIRY..THE RECEIVED TEXT.review contin. from p.44

Nolan possessed a fine intellect: the first cleric to give the Boyle, Bampton, and Warburton lectures successively, he authored a major work harmonizing the grammar of twelve languages (1822), many of them with a biblical or semitic connotation. In 1839, he published *The Catholic Character of Christianity as recognized by the Reformed Church, in opposition to the corrupt traditions of the Church of Rome, asserted*; this was among the first broadsides against the Oxford movement.

This book is the product of an era when the subject of diverging texts (the precursor to multiple Bible versions) was treated factually and thoroughly, without the interjection of sentimental emotionalism on the one hand, and the unquenchable appetite for the latest craze on the other. This book is highly recommended, an indispensable source of data, and an ever relevant means of education regarding the issues still under debate.