

Archbishop James Ussher (1581–1656): His Life and Work, the Scholarship about Him, and His Significance for Confessional Presbyterians

By Harrison Perkins

INTRODUCTION

James Ussher, the seventeenth-century Archbishop of Armagh, is arguably the foremost voice for Reformed theology in the entire history of the church in Ireland, and one of the more significant figures for Reformed theology in England as well. Despite his theological prowess in the early-modern period, Ussher is now usually most associated with debates about the doctrine of creation and the age of the earth. Although world chronology was certainly one of his interests, it would be a shame to limit Ussher's importance to such a narrow issue. Ussher strove for real Reformation in the established churches of Ireland and England, continually and fiercely refuted Roman Catholic doctrine, and carried sway with some of the most prominent figures in seventeenth-century Presbyterianism. Ussher is, therefore, worth wide-ranging consideration.

This essay intends to provide a brief introduction to Archbishop James Ussher and the various important issues that necessarily arise when studying his life and writings. The first section outlines Ussher's biography but also highlights some of Ussher's major contributions throughout his ministry. The second section then describes the major issues being presently discussed in the secondary literature about Ussher in hopes that readers may have a better idea about what the field of Ussher studies has currently addressed. The final major section explores some of the theological themes in Ussher's thought that may raise the most questions for confessional Presbyterians. Ussher was an archbishop after all and held some views on doctrine and practice that would be out of accord with what most readers of this journal would hold. What are confessional Presbyterians to make of Ussher in this regard, and how can we still appreciate him despite those differences?

USSHER'S LIFE AND WORK

Ussher lived a long life according to the seventeenth-century expectancy and made many significant contributions to the life of the church. His life can be divided roughly into three periods: his early life, his career in Ireland, and his career in England.¹ The least information is available to us from Ussher's early life up until his graduation from university. He was born in Dublin on January 4, 1581, into a prominent family that had long served the English government in Ireland. He attended a school founded by two Scottish presbyterians, James Fuller and James Hamilton. In 1594, he entered the newly founded university of Trinity College Dublin, where Fuller and Hamilton were also Fellows.

Ussher's time at Trinity College is not the most eventful period of his life, but it does certainly show that Ussher was always on a trajectory of academic success. He became a fellow of the university in 1598, graduated with a BA in 1599, and obtained an MA in 1600. Also in 1600, actually prior to obtaining his MA, Ussher had a pivotal debate with Henry Fitzsimon, a Jesuit missionary then imprisoned at Dublin Castle. The public encounter with this Jesuit theologian would prove at least

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1. There are three biographies of Ussher that are most useful. The most academic account is Alan Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007). An older, but still useful biography that is not quite as overwhelming in detail is R. Buick Knox, *James Ussher Archbishop of Armagh* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1967), 7–79. A more introductory level biography that is easily available is Crawford Gribben, *The Irish Puritans: James Ussher and the Reformation of the Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003).

in some ways formative for the rest of his career. Ussher was only nineteen-years-old at the time, but this series of debates forced Ussher to consider at length the writings of the Jesuit apologist, Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621). Ussher would, for the rest of his life, emphasize refuting specifically the Jesuit brand of Roman theology, even as he instructed ministry students in 1643–44, “Reade no Jesuites at all, for they are nothing but ostentacion and never understood the Scriptures.”² His first debate with Fitzsimon was about whether the Pope is the Antichrist, which was an obvious early indication of Ussher’s lifelong anti-Catholicism.

At this point, Ussher’s early life and the beginning of his career in Ireland begin to overlap. In the first years of the seventeenth century, Ussher’s emphasis was on his involvement in the local church. In 1602, he was appointed as Catechist and Proctor at Trinity, but, in that same year, the Archbishop of Armagh, Henry Ussher, ordained Ussher as Deacon and Priest on the same day, which was at least an unusual practice.³ During a particularly pointed effort in 1602 to impose Protestantism upon Irish Catholics, Ussher was assigned as the preacher to St. Katharine’s in Dublin.⁴ In 1605, Archbishop Adam Loftus appointed Ussher as chancellor of St. Patrick’s, Dublin, and Ussher devoted himself to preaching weekly in his church in Finglas. This devotion contrasted with many of Ussher’s contemporaries who sought to obtain multiple benefices

rather than committing themselves to care well for a single charge. Ussher also “lectured” regularly on Sunday afternoons at Christ Church, Dublin, which simply means that he gave the catechetical instruction in Protestant doctrine.⁵ In both preaching tasks, Ussher showed himself enthusiastic about teaching a majority Roman Catholic population to believe in Reformed theology.

Ussher had not, however, set aside his academic pursuits, which took on renewed focus in 1607 when he received his BD from Trinity College. Soon after receiving this degree, Ussher was appointed as the Professor of Theological Controversies at Trinity. The notes that remain from his weekly divinity lectures beginning in 1607 show how he used this post to continue a focused refutation of Robert Bellarmine.⁶ It is most likely that Ussher composed his famous catechetical work, *A Body of Divinitie*, which he likely intended for use in instructing parishioners and for use in preparation for university lectures during this period as the Professor of divinity.⁷ In 1612, Ussher received his DD from Trinity College, completing his years of supervised study at the college.

The next several years saw Ussher develop both his academic and ecclesiastical interests. In 1613, he published his first major work, *Concerning the Gravest Question about the Christian Church*, which argued for the church’s continuity even since the New Testament era.⁸ This point about the church’s historical unity into Protestantism would remain a significant part of Ussher’s anti-Catholic polemical writings for the rest of his career. In 1614, Ussher married Phoebe Challoner, the daughter of another significant Fellow at Trinity College Luke Challoner (1550–1613).⁹ In 1615, however, the Irish Convocation met, which resulted in the production of the Irish Articles as the Church of Ireland’s confession of faith. Although it has been somewhat debated, it is most likely that Ussher was the primary author of the Irish confession, which included some confessional developments of blatantly Reformed theology.¹⁰

It is worth noting some of the important aspects of the Irish Articles since they highlight some of Ussher’s chief concerns for the advancement of Reformed theology. This confession was the first to explicitly state the doctrine of the Covenant of Works explicitly, although here referred to as “the covenant of the law.”¹¹ Ussher emphasized the doctrine of the Covenant of Works as an important feature of Reformed theology throughout his entire career.¹² This confession also included the express statement that the Pope is the Antichrist. Article 80 reads,

2. Queen’s College, Oxford MS 217, fol. 42v. See the transcription of this manuscript published in this issue as “Archbishop Ussher’s Recommended Reading,” on page 32.

3. Knox, *James Ussher*, 9.

4. Ford, *James Ussher*, 30–31.

5. Ford, *James Ussher*, 33.

6. James Ussher, *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, ed. by C.R. Elrington and J.H. Todd, 17 vol. (Dublin, 1829–64), 14:383–523.

7. Harrison Perkins, “Manuscript and Material Evidence for James Ussher’s Authorship of *A Body of Divinitie* (1645),” *Evangelical Quarterly* 89.2 (2018): 133–61.

8. James Ussher, *Gravissimae Quaestionis de Christianarum Ecclesiarum* (London, 1613).

9. Knox, *James Ussher*, 9.

10. Ford, *James Ussher*, 85–103; Harrison Perkins, “The Westminster Assembly’s Probable Appropriation of James Ussher,” *Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology* 37 no 1 (Spring 2019): 51–52. For an extensive defense of Ussher’s authorship of the Irish Articles, see the introduction to “The Summary Method of the Christian Religion” in Harrison Perkins (ed.), *James Ussher’s Theological Manuscripts: Critical Texts with Commentary* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

11. [Church of Ireland], *Articles of Religion Agreed upon by the Archbishops and Bishops and the Rest of the Cleargie in Ireland, in the Convocation* (Dublin, 1615), article 21.

12. Harrison Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works: James Ussher and the Reformed Tradition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020).

The Bishop of Rome is so farre from being the Supreme head of the universall Church of Christ: that his workes and doctrine doe plainly discover him to bee *that man of sinne*, foretold in the holy Scripture, *whome the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and abolish with the brightness of his comming*.¹³

Ussher had publicly initiated this concern during his debates in 1600 with Fitzsimon, but he had clearly maintained his vigorous antagonism for popistry. Although it is easy to overlook, even this article's reference to the "Bishop of Rome" is polemical, since it denies the legitimacy of the papal title itself. It makes sense that the Irish Reformed community would be the first to confess that the Pope is the Antichrist since they would very pointedly fear the majority Roman Catholic population and its allegiance to the Roman pontiff. They did likely see themselves in an essentially eschatological faceoff for the spiritual fate of their nation. On a more upbeat note, however, the Irish Articles also include a particularly Reformed mention of the Lord's Day. Article 56 says,

The first day of the weeke, which is the *Lords day*, is wholly to be dedicated unto the service of God: and therefore we are bound therein to rest from our common and dayly buisnesse; and to bestowe that leasure upon holy exercises, both publike and private.¹⁴

Although this article may not seem very striking to confessional Presbyterians, in the context of the established church of Ussher's day, this was an express statement of sympathy with some notable puritan concerns. After all, England's Thirty-Nine Articles had no such endorsement of the Lord's Day, and the issue was becoming a point of contention within the debates about conformity.¹⁵ It could be that the confession used the terminology of "Lord's Day" rather than "Sabbath" in order to omit more inflammatory language, but the omission is not all that significant, especially since Ussher himself referred to the Lord's Day in Sabbatarian language.¹⁶ It is notable, however, that the Irish Articles do not address polity even though the Church of Ireland was episcopal, since there were many ministers who favored and promoted Presbyterian polity laboring in Irish charges.¹⁷ Ussher's role in producing the Irish Articles itself makes him significant in many branches of the ongoing Reformed tradition, considering the Westminster Assembly used the Irish Articles as a particularly important source document in preparing the Westminster Confession.¹⁸

Although Ussher was not personally involved, the next major event in this timeline would be the Synod

of Dort, which met 1618–19 to address the Arminian controversy in the Netherlands. The British sent a delegation of theologians to the synod, which included Ussher's close friend Samuel Ward (1577–1640). The British Delegation's main focus seemed to be in their contribution regarding the extent of Christ's satisfaction on the cross. Some, such as Ward and John Davenant (1572–1641), argued for a version of hypothetical universalism that posed that Christ died in some way for every member of the human race, even though the benefits of His death were applied only to believers in Christ. Ussher most likely wrote his letter about the extent of Christ's satisfaction at this time, which came into the hands of the British delegates to Dort.¹⁹ In this letter, Ussher argued that Christ's death does have some sort of universal significance in rendering human nature savable, even though only those who are elect become partakers of Christ's death, which is an issue that will be revisited in the final section of this essay.²⁰ It has been reasonably argued that Ussher's opinion and this letter were important in shaping the British Delegation's arguments at the Synod of Dort.²¹

13. [Church of Ireland], *Articles of Religion*, article 80 (italics original).

14. *Ibid.*, *Articles of Religion*, article 56 (italics original).

15. Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: CUP, 2010).

16. E.g. James Ussher, *a Body of Divinitie* (London, 1645), 124; *The Correspondence of James Ussher, 1600–1656*, ed. by Elizabethanne Boran, 3 vol. (Dublin: Irish Manuscripts Commission, 2015), 2:706–7 (letter to William Twisse), 2:715 (letter to John Ley).

17. Knox, *James Ussher*, 21–24; Ford, *James Ussher*, 41–47.

18. Richard A. Muller, "Inspired by God—Pure in All Ages": The Doctrine of Scripture in the Westminster Confession," in Richard A. Muller and Roland S. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Public Worship* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2007), 40–42; J.V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 60; A.F. Mitchell, *The Westminster Assembly: Its History and Standards* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1884), 372–85; Robert Letham, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2009), 62–82; Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1959; repr. Still Water Revival Books, 1991), 59; Perkins, "The Westminster Assembly's Probable Appropriation of James Ussher," 51–63.

19. *Correspondence of James Ussher*, 1:139–47 (letters to Ezekiel Culverwell); published in the early-modern period as James Ussher, *The Judgement of the Late Arch-Bishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland*, 1. *Of the Extent of Christ's Death, and Satisfaction*, 2. *Of the Sabbath...* 3. *Of the Ordination of Other Reformed Churches* (London, 1657), 1–40.

20. For discussion of Ussher's view of Christ's death, see Richard Snoddy, *The Soteriology of James Ussher: The Act and Object of Saving Faith* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), 40–92; Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 179–205.

21. Jonathan D. Moore, "James Ussher's Influence on the Synod of Dort," in Aza Goudriaan and Fred van Lieburg (eds.), *Revisiting*

Ussher's career took a significant, although not necessarily unexpected, shift when King James I appointed him as the Bishop of Meath in January of 1621. He had to resign from Trinity College to take the bishopric, and yet Trinity continued with its inclination toward puritan theology.²² Ussher preached before the House of Commons at Westminster's St. Margaret's Church on February 18, 1621, which further marked his accession in political favor.²³ Upon return to Ireland, he embarked upon arguing in favor of recusancy fines for Roman Catholics who absented from Protestant worship. Ussher's vigor on this issue was partly due to his enthusiasm to find ways to fund the administrative burden of the churches, but partly due to his ongoing anti-Catholic efforts.²⁴ His concerns in that regard were most clearly expressed in his next two publications, the 1622 book, *An Epistle concerning the Religion of the Ancient Irish*, which was later reprinted in 1631 in London as *A Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and the British*, and his 1624 work, *An Answer to a Challenge Made by a Jesuite in Ireland*.²⁵ This book was one of Ussher's more directly theological publications, and it focused on refuting eleven different Roman doctrines. He sounded the anti-Catholic note again, even if more moderately, in his 1624 sermon before the king.²⁶ Even with Ussher's limited reach as bishop, the clear emphasis of his role in 1621–24 was on doing his best at administration in the face of threats to Protestantism.

the Synod of Dort (1618–1619) (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 163–79; Michael J. Lynch, "John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism: A Defense of Catholic and Reformed Orthodoxy" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2019), 127–80.

22. Ford, *James Ussher*, 42–43.

23. The most accessible version of this published sermon is in *James Ussher and a Reformed Episcopal Church*, ed. by Richard Snoddy (Moscow, ID: The Davenant Press, 2018), 22–61.

24. Knox, *James Ussher*, 27–32.

25. James Ussher, *An Epistle concerning the Religion of the Ancient Irish* (Dublin, 1622); James Ussher, *A Discourse of the Religion Anciently Professed by the Irish and the British* (London, 1631); James Ussher, *An Answer to a Challenge Made by a Jesuite in Ireland* (Dublin, 1624).

26. *James Ussher and a Reformed Episcopal Church*, 62–96; Ford, *James Ussher*, 63, 76.

27. Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Eng.th.e. 25. For the context and content of these sermons, see in this issue Richard Snoddy, "'The Mysteries of Christ': James Ussher Among the Puritans, 1626," p. 33.

28. Knox, *James Ussher*, 34.

29. Ford, *James Ussher*, 144–64.

30. Knox, *James Ussher*, 97.

31. Knox, *James Ussher*, 38–44.

32. Ford, *James Ussher*, 150–51.

33. James Ussher, *Gottschalci et praedestinationae controversiae ab eo Motae Historia* (Dublin, 1631).

34. Ford, *James Ussher*, 155–61; Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 153–57.

In 1625, however, the limitations of Ussher's role diminished when James I, as one of his final acts before he died, appointed Ussher to be the Archbishop of Armagh, the highest See in the Church of Ireland, which was a charge that Ussher held until his death. Ussher had traveled to England in 1624 and remained there for some time due to illness and the king's encouragement to stay to advance his studies. It was during this time that Ussher wrote his *Answer to ... a Jesuit*. At the beginning of 1626, Ussher preached a series of sermons in various pulpits on Christology, which is full of rich doctrinal exposition of the mystery of the Incarnation and Christ's work as our covenantal Mediator.²⁷ Ussher returned to Ireland to take up his prelate in March of 1626. Soon, however, he was back in England in May of 1626 when he was made DD at the University of Oxford.²⁸ By the end of 1626, though, he was back in Ireland and more settled into his duties as Archbishop.

The following years saw Ussher thoroughly engaged with the business of the Church of Ireland, primarily against the rising problems of Arminianism and Roman Catholicism.²⁹ Beginning in 1627, he worked to have William Beddell, a graduate of the puritan-leaning Emmanuel College, Cambridge, installed as the Provost of Trinity College.³⁰ He continued to work for the success of Protestantism over the Roman Catholic majority, but his endless efforts on this front were also constantly strained.³¹ In 1628, he began a regular correspondence with William Laud (1573–1645), who would later become the Archbishop of Canterbury. Although Ussher would end up in tension with Laud over the church's theological direction when both occupied the highest positions in the established churches of Ireland and England, Ussher earlier seemed to work well with Laud for the Church of Ireland's administrative well-being.³²

The Arminian problem came to the forefront in the early 1630s, which is more than evident in Ussher's publications from that time. In 1631, he reprinted his work on the ancient religion of the Irish and British, which included a chapter on predestination (see *Discourses*, 11–21). Even more significantly but also in 1631, Ussher published a book about the medieval monk, Gottschalk of Orbais (808–868).³³ At times, Ussher presented this book as a dispassionate description of a ninth-century controversy over predestination; other times, he was very clear that this work was meant to vindicate the doctrine of double predestination as a part of the orthodox and Augustinian heritage.³⁴ In 1632, he followed this book up with another historical work on the continuity of the church,

Veterum epistolorum. This string of publications shows Ussher's efforts to situate Reformed Protestantism on a solid historical footing in the face of growing challenges against it, even from within the established churches.³⁵

In 1634, the issue of imposition from the Church of England became a problem that Ussher had to face. Although Ussher himself was content with most of the features of the Thirty-Nine Articles, the Book of Common Prayer, and English canon law, he also clearly had more specific views along Reformed lines than those documents required. He knew that many of the other clergymen in Ireland had more stringent opposition to conformity to the English church than he did. Even apart from theological issues, however, Ussher had worked for the Church of Ireland's freedom in doctrine and practice, which was a significant motivation behind the Irish Articles of 1615, of which Ussher was at least the primary author. Thomas Wentworth was the newly appointed Lord Deputy of Ireland and the soon-to-be Earl of Strafford, who championed the cause of the Church of Ireland's uniformity with the Church of England. The 1634 Convocation saw the Church of Ireland adopt England's Thirty-Nine Articles as a confessional standard; however, Ussher interpreted the lack of repealing the Irish Articles to mean that the two confessions stood in tandem in the Church of Ireland.³⁶

The other issue that developed from the problem of Wentworth's push for uniformity was the production of Irish canon law.³⁷ Canon law is essentially a set of rules about church practice, something akin to a book of church order, but, from the puritan perspective, which mandated things contrary to Scripture.³⁸ England had possessed binding canon law since 1604, but Ireland had no such set of laws.³⁹ Ussher helped develop a set of canon laws that were specific to the Church of Ireland, and, even if they went further than some of the more thoroughly puritan-minded preferred, Ireland's canon laws were much less rigorous on conformity—especially in some of the hotter points of tension—than if the church had simply received England's canon law.⁴⁰ The Church of Ireland's canons were published in 1635. In the wake of the Convocation issues, however, Ussher had been quickly drawn into another controversy around Arminianism, which ended up setting him at least somewhat at odds with Wentworth and Laud for the remainder of the decade.⁴¹

Ussher's major achievements for the 1630s, however, were likely his various publications. In 1638, he published his theological work on Christology, *Immanuel*.⁴² This book is a fascinating statement of ecumenical Christology interlaced with the thoroughly Reformed

themes of covenant theology. In some ways, it appears to be a revision of some of the material that Ussher had preached in England as part of his series of sermons on Christology in early 1626. Ussher followed this publication with another work about the history of British churches.⁴³ This was a massive work, spanning 1196 pages that Ussher intended to use to settle the discussion about the origins of Christianity in Britain and Ireland with an emphasis on the attempts to excise Pelagian errors.⁴⁴ This work, however, was the last major point in Ussher's career in Ireland.

In mid-1640, Ussher traveled to England, bringing his family, for a not unusual visit to make use of the great English libraries, but the eruption of the Irish Rebellion of 1641 prevented him from ever returning to the shores of Ireland. Ussher, however, essentially mounted a renewed second wave of his career in England. This era would produce some of Ussher's most significant publications, contain some of his most turbulent interactions, and also leave us some of the most important manuscript sources from Ussher's long ministry.

Ussher's scholarly work throughout the 1640s and 1650s focused on his favorite issues of church history. He produced several works about the antiquity of church polity, which were clearly intended to support episcopacy in the face of those who were challenging it during and after the English civil war.⁴⁵ He also produced studies in biblical-philological and more general historical works, one of which was his famous *Annales of*

35. James Ussher, *Veterum Epistolorum Hibernicarum Sylloge quae partim ab Hibernis, partim ad Hibernos vel rebus Hibernicis sunt Conscriptae* (Dublin, 1632). Alan Ford, "Shaping History: James Ussher and the Church of Ireland," in Mark Empey, Alan Ford, and Miriam Moffitt (eds.), *The Church of Ireland and Its Past: History, Interpretation and Identity* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), 19–35.

36. Ford, *James Ussher*, 175–97; Knox, *James Ussher*, 44–53.

37. Ford, *James Ussher*, 184–97.

38. Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 7–9.

39. [Church of England], *Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical* (1604).

40. [Church of Ireland], *Constitutions, and Canons Ecclesiastical* (Dublin, 1635); Ford, *James Ussher*, 188.

41. Ford, *James Ussher*, 197–207.

42. James Ussher, *Immanuel, or the Mystery of the Incarnation of the Son of God* (Dublin, 1638).

43. James Ussher, *Britannicarum Ecclesiarum Antiquitates* (1639).

44. Ford, *James Ussher*, 208–20.

45. James Ussher, *A Geographical and Historical disquisition touching the Asia properly so called, the Lydian Asia...* (Oxford, 1643); James Ussher, *In Ploycarpianam Epistolarum Ignatianarum Syllogen Annotationes* (Oxford, 1644); James Ussher, "The Original of Bishops and Metropolitans," in *Confessions and Proofes of Protestant Divines of Reformed Churches...* (Oxford, 1644); James Ussher, *Polycarpi et Ignatii Epistolae* (Oxford, 1645); James Ussher, *Appendix Ignatiana* (London, 1647).

the *World*, wherein he outlined the world's chronology as beginning on the evening before October 23, 4004 BC.⁴⁶ When he died, he was working on another history spanning work of recovering the ideas of the ancient church, but this work was never published.⁴⁷ Clearly, Ussher had a prodigious output while he had time to access the resources of England's major universities and libraries more freely.

This period of Ussher's career was also marked with a renewed focus on preaching and teaching theology. When Ussher first arrived in England, he spent time in Oxford and Cambridge before coming to London late in the year.⁴⁸ Once he had settled into the capital, he also settled into a regular pattern of preaching. He began preaching weekly at John Hacket's church in Cheam.⁴⁹ Ussher then preached at St. Paul's Church in Covent Garden from February 1641 until November 1642. There remains a good manuscript record of these sermons, which is a critically important source for examining Ussher's theology and his preaching.⁵⁰ Although Ussher had many close relationships with Parliamentarians, when the civil war erupted in 1642, he relocated to Oxford to be with the royalist party that made its home base there.

Ussher remained in Oxford from late 1642 until early 1645. His time there is worth noting, simply because this is the period in which the Westminster Assembly convened and did the bulk of the work in writing

the Westminster Confession. Ussher had been summoned to attend the Assembly as a representative from Oxford University, but he absented, since, as he made clear in a 1643 sermon, his royalist politics wherein he believed that God had sovereignly appointed the monarch outweighed any risks that came with disobeying Parliament.⁵¹ He threw himself into his studies while in Oxford, but also made two important theological contributions during this time. The first is a set of theological lectures that were recorded sometime in 1643–44.⁵² In these lectures, which were primarily delivered and recorded in Latin, Ussher outlined the entire body of divinity. He used a distinction typical of his theological works of separating theology into the topics of God's nature and God's kingdom. After discussing the doctrines of Scripture and theology proper, Ussher turned to God's relationship with humanity. It can legitimately be claimed that this section of these lectures on God's kingdom is close to being a treatise on covenant theology. Ussher emphasized the importance of the Covenant of Works as the framework in which to understand the law and Christ's work as the second Adam. After his section on the body of divinity, Ussher gave a brief discussion about how to compose a sermon, which demonstrates that he was always concerned with how even heavy doctrine should be preached. The last section of these lectures contains Ussher's recommendations for what divinity students should be reading on various topics.⁵³ These little considered lectures are a critically important source that displays Ussher's mature and thoroughly Reformed theology as he explained it relatively late in his life.

The other contribution that Ussher made during this period in Oxford, which is arguably even more directly related to the Westminster Assembly, is a series of eighteen sermons that were recorded and published by some of his auditors.⁵⁴ Some have thought that Ussher preached these sermons while visiting Oxford in 1640. I have argued elsewhere that there is a substantial case to be made that the timing of Ussher's various trips makes that 1640 date unlikely and that the content of the sermons indicates that Ussher most likely preached them while in Oxford during 1643–44.⁵⁵ The importance of this timing is crucial for Ussher's relationship to the Westminster Assembly. Although granting that he did not attend, the content of some of these sermons makes it appear as though Ussher was indirectly addressing some of the very debates that the Assembly had, namely about justification. Thomas Gataker (1574–1654) was a Westminster divine who rather forcefully questioned the doctrine of the imputation of Christ's

46. James Ussher, *De Romanae Ecclesiae Symbolo Apostolico Vetere* (London, 1647); James Ussher, *De Macedonum et Asianorum anno Solari Dissertatio* (London, 1648); James Ussher, *Annales Veteris Testamenti* (London 1650); James Ussher, *de Textus Hebraici* (London, 1652); James Ussher, *Annalium Pars Posterior* (London, 1654); James Ussher, *De Graeca Septuaginta* (London, 1655).

47. British Library, London MS Harleian 822; Bodleian Library, Oxford MS e. Mus. 46; Bodleian Library, Oxford MS e. Mus. 47.

48. Ford, *James Ussher*, 227–28.

49. Ford, *James Ussher*, 228; Knox, *James Ussher*, 57.

50. Cambridge University Library MS MM. 6.55.

51. Chad van Dixhoorn (ed.), *The Minutes and Papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, 5 vol. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1:141; James Ussher, *The Sovereign Power, and the Subjects Duty: Delivered in a Sermon, at Christ-Church in Oxford, March 3 1643* (Oxford, 1643).

52. Queen's College, Oxford MS 217, fol. 31r–42v.

53. The portion of these lectures containing Ussher's recommended reading is published in this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian* as "Archbishop Ussher's Recommended Reading." The sections containing Ussher's Latin lectures on divinity and sermon composition are included in the aforementioned edition of Ussher's manuscripts that I hope will be published soon.

54. James Ussher, *Eighteen Choice Sermons Preached in Oxford in the Time of the Wars, Before His Late Majesty of Blessed Memory* (London, 1662).

55. Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 29–32.

active obedience, which sparked a lengthy debate on this topic. Daniel Featley (1582–1645), another Westminster divine, and a fellow Reformed episcopal, actually sent material from the Assembly debates about justification to Ussher in a letter. Ussher would then verifiably have had some knowledge of this debate, aside from a general assumption that he likely would have heard the news from the Assembly debates anyways. In one of Ussher's Oxford sermons, in the midst of a set of fairly pastoral and practical addresses, he vigorously attacked a view of imputation that seems remarkably like Gataker's with a set of reasonably technical arguments.⁵⁶ In sum, it is likely that Ussher used his preaching opportunities in Oxford, at least on occasion, to make his contribution to the Assembly, even though he was a non-attending member.

It was also during this period that John Downame (1571–1652), a clergyman linked to the Westminster Assembly's licensing of publications, printed Ussher's rather well-known catechetical works, *A Body of Divinitie* and *The Principles of Christian Religion*.⁵⁷ The trouble was that he printed these without Ussher's permission, which aroused Ussher's displeasure. Ussher even tried to distance himself from the *Body*, but there is a formidable case that demonstrates how Ussher regularly used material from the *Body* in his sermons and other writings, so much so that the *Body* clearly represents his theological positions, at least what he held in the early 1600s when he composed the book.⁵⁸ Given a long tradition of claiming that Ussher's *Body* was supremely influential on the Westminster Assembly, it could even be that Downame's reason for printing it was to make it easily available to the Westminster divines. After all, Ussher's library had been confiscated and was among those which Parliament gave the Assembly permission to ransack.⁵⁹ There is still a manuscript copy of the *Body* that exists among Ussher's papers that is dated August 8, 1643.⁶⁰ Although Ussher let the issue about the *Body of Divinitie* go, he did revise the shorter catechetical work and republish it with his approval as a mature statement of his theology in 1653.⁶¹ These works contain some of Ussher's more significant theological material and are still well worth consulting.

As Parliament began to gain the upper ground over the royal forces in the civil war, Ussher was forced to leave Oxford in early 1645. He fled throughout the country and spent some time at St. Donat's in Wales, near his daughter, Elizabeth, and son-in-law, James Tyrrell. When his retreat became obviously futile, Ussher returned to London in 1647. Despite his lack of loyalty to the Parliamentary cause, it was not long before Ussher

was preaching again. He was appointed as a lecturer at Lincoln's Inn, where he preached nearly weekly until 1653 when his health seemed too frail to continue.⁶² He eventually retired to the house of Lady Peterborough in Reigate, where he continued to study and write as his sight permitted. It seems that Phoebe, who had apparently been with him for much of his time in Oxford, Wales, and London, died sometime in 1654.

On March 21, 1656, James Ussher passed into glory; his last words recorded as, "O Lord forgive me, especially my sins of omission."⁶³ He was buried in Westminster Abbey on April 5. Oliver Cromwell temporarily rescinded the ban on the Book of Common Prayer so that it could be used at Ussher's funeral.

Ussher's legacy was disputed almost immediately from his death. The most fantastic claims were that he had secretly converted to Roman Catholicism, and had even planned to relocate to Rome when he was prevented from escaping England.⁶⁴ Ussher had sustained his anti-Catholic polemic even late into his ministry, and some of his final sermons were marked with thoroughgoing Reformed theology. His chaplain, Nicholas Bernard, wrote the first biography just after Ussher died in which he painted him as a political moderate with puritan leanings.⁶⁵ That portrait was, of course, well suited to the tastes of the Cromwellian Interregnum. Richard Parr wrote the second biography of Ussher in 1686, who was this time portrayed in a more "Anglican" hue with a spotlight on his royalism.⁶⁶ That description was obviously very palatable during the Restoration period when those with more avid puritan tendencies were seen unfavorably, if not worse.

56. I have given detailed discussion of these sermons and the links to Gataker and the Assembly in Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 225–42.

57. James Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie* (London, 1645); James Ussher, *The Principles of Christian Religion Sumarily Sett Downe according to the Word of God: together with a Breife Epittomie of the Bodie of Divinitie* (London, 1645).

58. Perkins, "Manuscript and Material Evidence for James Ussher's Authorship of *A Body of Divinitie*," 133–61.

59. Perkins, "The Westminster Assembly's Probable Appropriation of James Ussher," 57–58.

60. Trinity College Dublin MS 773.

61. James Ussher, *The Principles of Christian Religion with A Briefe Method of the Doctrine thereof* (London, 1653).

62. Ussher's sermons from Lincoln's Inn are also recorded in Cambridge University Library MS Mm. 6.55.

63. Ford, *James Ussher*, 271.

64. Knox, *James Ussher*, 77–79.

65. Nicholas Bernard, *Life and Death of the Most Reverend and Learned Father of Our Church, Dr. James Usher* (London, 1656).

66. Richard Parr, *Life of the Most Reverend Father in God, James Usher* (London, 1686).

Charles Elrington's nineteenth-century biography described Ussher as the quintessential high-churchman, who overcame his youthful infatuations with Reformed theology for more moderate ecumenism.⁶⁷ Undoubtedly, the nineteenth-century Anglicans of the Church of Ireland would have greatly appreciated that narrative, which roughly resembled the very history of their denomination. Alan Ford's magisterial biography is the most recent, wherein Ussher comes across as a politically savvy, yet theologically gifted figure navigating the complexities of working for reform within his various contexts of the established church.⁶⁸ There is most likely some truth in all of these portraits of Ussher, although the myths of his conversion to Romanism and his outgrowing Reformed theology should be entirely abandoned. Varying biographical emphases, however,

should not lead us to think that we can make Ussher into whatever each of us wants him to be. He was a complex yet brilliant theologian, historian, and churchman with his successes, strengths, failures, and flaws like the rest of us. On the other hand, although we should not try to make Ussher into whatever we might want him to be, we should assume that he does have something to teach each one of us if we would well consider his life and works.

THE STATE OF USSHER SCHOLARSHIP

Recent years have seen a relative boom in studies about James Ussher. Although it comes nowhere near the amount of literature about someone like John Calvin, there is a small but growing field of research centered around Ussher and his work. This section will by no means give a detailed summary of all the secondary literature, but it does provide a brief sketch of the major issues that are presently active in Ussher studies.⁶⁹

Although older secondary literature focused on Ussher by trying to enlist him in some rather tired debates about the dating of creation and church polity, more recent research has developed three newly fruitful areas of inquiry.⁷⁰ The first area involves Ussher's theology, but this is the most limited area. Richard Snoddy's work on Ussher's soteriology was pivotal in charting a fresh course through his nuanced grasp of complex doctrines related to the Reformed understandings of salvation.⁷¹ My work has focused on Ussher's covenant theology, and his role in codifying the Covenant of Works-Covenant of Grace distinction within confessional Reformed theology, along with that distinction's implications for various other doctrines.⁷² Jack Cunningham has also compared Ussher's theology with his contemporary John Bramhall (1594–1663), although this book has received less critical success.⁷³ Although Snoddy treated the issue of Ussher's views on hypothetical universalism, Jonathan Moore and Michael Lynch also discussed this issue.⁷⁴ In terms of theological investigation, Ussher's view about the extent of Christ's satisfaction is certainly the most rapidly developing question in the literature.

The two other areas of inquiry are easier to summarize, even though there are more sources. The second area of inquiry in Ussher studies has to do with his work as a historian. These studies have shown how Ussher implemented his historical work in order to shape a specific Irish Protestant identity and to function as a polemic against claims about the antiquity of the Roman Catholic faith.⁷⁵ The third area highlights Ussher's

67. *Work of James Ussher*, 1:1–322.

68. Ford, *James Ussher*.

69. I have outlined these areas of scholarship in more detail in Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 11–20.

70. On creation: Robert Letham, "In the Space of Six Days: The Days of Creation from Origen to the Westminster Assembly," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61 (1999): 171–72; K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 441; Mike Fluent, "James Ussher: Champion of Piety and Scholarship," *Fundamentalist Journal* 6 no 7 (July–August 1987): 31–33; Colin Groves, "From Ussher to Slusher, from Archbishop to Gish: or, Not in a Million Years . . .," *Archeology in Oceania* 31 no 3 (1996): 145–51; Peter Hiscock, "The Creation of Time," *Archeology in Oceania* 31 no 3 (1996): 101–2. On ecclesiastical polity: William M. Abbott, "James Ussher and 'Ussherian' Episcopacy, 1640–1656: The Primate and His Reduction Manuscript," *Albion* 22 no 2 (1990): 237–59; Henry Sloane Coffin, "An Anglican Precursor of the 'Basic Principles,'" *Anglican Theological Review* 26 no 1 (January 1944): 49–51; Knox, Ussher, 113–89; R. Buick Knox, "Archbishop Ussher and Richard Baxter," *Ecumenical Review* 12 no 1 (1959): 50–63; R. Buick Knox, "A Caroline Trio: Ussher, Laud, and Williams," *Church Quarterly Review* 164 no 353 (October–December 1963): 451–52; Jack Cunningham, "The Eirenicon and the 'Primitive Episcopacy' of James Ussher: An Irish Panacea for Britannia's Ailment," *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 8 no 2 (2006): 128–46.

71. Snoddy, *Soteriology of James Ussher*.

72. Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*; Perkins, "The Westminster Assembly's Probable Appropriation of James Ussher"; Harrison Perkins, "Reconsidering the Development of the Covenant of Works: A Study in Doctrinal Trajectory," *Calvin Theological Journal* 53.2 (2018): 289–317.

73. Jack Cunningham, *James Ussher and John Bramhall: The Theology and Politics of Two Irish Ecclesiastics of the Seventeenth Century* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007).

74. Jonathan D. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism: John Preston and the Softening of Reformed Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 175–86; Michael J. Lynch, "John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism: A Defense of Catholic and Reformed Orthodoxy," (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2019), 133–43.

75. Alan Ford, "Shaping History: James Ussher and the Church of Ireland," in Mark Empey, Alan Ford, and Miriam Moffitt (eds.), *The Church of Ireland and Its Past: History, Interpretation and Identity*

activities as a scholar in the networks he formed and sources that he collected. Scholars in this area have shown as well that Ussher often developed friendship connections and fostered the collection of manuscript sources to further his polemical purposes.⁷⁶ These two areas of research on Ussher focus more on his scholarly habits and purposes in writing than on explaining his actual ideas; they are nonetheless fascinating and important avenues of investigation that shed light on the complex figure of James Ussher.

USSHER AND HIS SIGNIFICANCE FOR CONFESSIONAL PRESBYTERIANS

This last section highlights some issues that will be of particular interest to regular readers of this journal. The three issues discussed concern Ussher's views that are in conflict with the confessional Presbyterian position. The purpose of discussing these issues is to think through how confessional Presbyterians might still think appreciatively about Ussher, despite our disagreement on important topics. It should be noted again at this point how Ussher undoubtedly played a positive role within the early-modern Reformed tradition. I have mentioned already how the Westminster Assembly itself likely made significant use of Ussher's theology in developing its confessional standards. His catechetical works are still very useful expositions of Reformed theology. Ussher articulated creedally orthodox doctrines of God and Christology, which tends to be a critically weak point even among some modern confessional Presbyterian theologians. He also vigorously defended the doctrines of predestination and justification by faith alone. He also played a role in codifying mature Reformed covenant theology into the confessional tradition. None of these points are meant to reduce theological agreement to the lowest common denominator, but simply to indicate that Ussher was truly a substantial figure in the confessionally Reformed tradition. In that light then, it seems best to consider how we might understand our disagreements with Ussher while maintaining a more appreciative perspective.

CHURCH POLITY

The first issue discussed here, which is perhaps most obvious from his biography, is that Ussher advocated for episcopal church government. There is a complicated history of debate about how precisely he related to presbyterians in Ireland—ranging from claims that he covertly supported them to suggestions that any seeming concessions he made for them were due to oversight or his weaknesses as an administrator.⁷⁷ The

truth, however, is as usual somewhere in between those interpretations. Ussher's context is critically important in understanding him on this issue, and is arguably even preeminently significant in grasping why he would so thoroughly value episcopacy when so many of his Reformed compatriots on the Continent and in Scotland had embraced some form of presbyterial polity in their churches.

The context of late-sixteenth-century Ireland was rife with complexity, dispute, and even difficulty across the ecclesiastical landscape. The Reformation in Ireland always struggled to take hold, so much so that some have even argued that it failed from the beginning, but this strain owed at least a great deal to the overlap of religion and politics.⁷⁸ Ireland fell under Elizabethan governance, which meant that there was a political divide between the native Irish and the ruling English.

(Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), 19–35; Alan Ford, "James Ussher and the Creation of an Irish Protestant Identity," in Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (eds.), *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533–1707* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 196–207; Ute Lotz-Heumann, "The Protestant Interpretation of History in Ireland: The Case of James Ussher's Discourse," in Bruce Gordon (ed.), *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, vol. 2, *The Later Reformation* (Aldershot: Scholar, 1996), 107–20; Coleman M. Ford, "Everywhere, Always, by All": William Perkins and James Ussher on the Constructive Use of the Fathers," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 7 no 2 (2015): 95–111; Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature and Theology, 1550–1682*, rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 87–113; Saul Leeman, "Was Bishop Ussher's Chronology Influenced by a Midrash?," *Jewish Biblical Quarterly* 31 no 3 (July–September 2003): 195–96; Robert W. Smith, "James Ussher: Biblical Chronicler," *Anglican Theological Review* 41 (1959): 84–94.

76. Elizabethanne Boran, "The Libraries of Luke Challoner and James Ussher, 1595–1608," in Helga Robinson-Hammerstein (ed.), *European Universities in the Age of Reformation and Counter Reformation* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1998), 75–115; Elizabethanne Boran, "Ussher and the Collection of Manuscripts in Early Modern Europe," in Jason Harris and Keith Sidwell (eds.), *Making Ireland Roman: Irish Neo-Latin Writers and the Republic of Letters* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2009), 176–94; Bernadette Cunningham and Raymond Gillespie, "James Ussher and His Irish Manuscripts," *Studia Hibernica* 33 (2004–5): 81–99; Katherine Birkwood, "Our Learned Primate and That 'Rare Treasure': James Ussher's Use of Sir Robert Cotton's Manuscript Library, c. 1603–1655," *Library and Information History* 26 no 1 (2010): 33–42; Bernard Meehan, "The Manuscript Collection of James Ussher," in Peter Fox (ed.), *Treasures of the Library, Trinity College Dublin* (Dublin: Trinity College, 1986), 97–110; James G. Fraser, "Ussher's Sixth Copy of the Samaritan Pentateuch," *Vetus Testamentum* 21 no 1 (January 1971): 100–102; Peter Fox, *Trinity College Library Dublin* (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 6–33; William O'Sullivan, "Ussher as a Collector of Manuscripts," *Hermathena* 88 (November 1956): 34–58.

77. Knox, *James Ussher*, 166–89

78. The literature on the Reformation in Ireland is immense, but filled with significant points of debate. I have summarized the present shape of this literature in Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 26–29.

The Irish perceived Protestantism to be part-and-parcel with what they considered to be English intrusion, which entailed that acceptance of Reformed religion was a betrayal of national loyalty. This obstacle to a genuine Irish Reformation was never truly dismantled, and it meant that the Reformation in Ireland was distinct at least in that most of the European Reformations grew from the ground up, whereas the Irish Reformation was being brought in from the top down. This created a tension between the established church and the populace, which infused church affairs with an immediate difficulty for bringing laity into the activities of church governance. Presbyterianism, however, advocated precisely that premise.

Despite how Ireland legally fell under the regulations of the Elizabethan Settlement, the Church of Ireland, in the late-sixteenth-century, contained some inconsistencies with the more thoroughgoing establishment. Archbishop Adam Loftus (1533–1605) was admittedly “weak” in his dedication to English rites and ceremonies. Walter Travers (1548–1635) was a Scottish presbyterian who became the first provost of Trinity College Dublin in 1594. James Hamilton and James Fuller, other Scottish presbyterians, also taught at Trinity. The Irish church in the late-sixteenth-century was, therefore, at least lenient with those who disagreed with their polity.⁷⁹

The early-seventeenth-century saw that situation of presbyterians in the ranks become more complicated. In 1609, James I began the Plantation of Ulster, which officially provided means for Scottish and English families to settle in what was then Ireland’s northern province.⁸⁰ The Plantation of Ulster meant that even during Ussher’s tenure as Archbishop—Armagh notably being in Ulster—the Scottish presence entailed a significant population of presbyterians. There were a significant number of Scots, having presbyterial ordination, who took Irish charges without receiving ordination from a bishop. Even throughout Ussher’s ministry in Ireland, presbyterians received charges in Church of Ireland parishes. The context of ministry in Ireland included a mix of those committed to

a more English model of church and those who were presbyterian.

There are questions and multiple interpretations of Ussher’s relationship to the presbyterians in Ireland. Still, it ought to be clear that Ussher did not live in tension with them regardless of how we understand his support for them. He was, after all, happy enough to name Robert Rollock (1555–99) and Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603), two notable presbyterian theologians, as some of the more important writers from whom he drew in developing his theology.⁸¹ It is most likely that ministry in the Church of Ireland, even in Ussher’s time as Archbishop, attracted presbyterians because of its known, if relative, leniency for them. Irish Protestantism was certainly in need of solid ministers who could help disseminate the Reformed faith well, which almost inevitably eclipsed passion for procedural concerns of polity, at least to some degree for men like Ussher.⁸²

Even then, the compromises are more complex than might be imagined. In the early modern period, the issue of ordination was one of the thorniest issues between episcopals and presbyterians, namely in the issue of whether the bishop or the presbytery ordained someone to ministry through the laying on of hands. It does not seem that many of the presbyterians who came to Ireland had to go through “re-ordination” under the bishop’s hands. Even then though, the Book of Common Prayer had never forbidden other ministers to lay hands on the ordinand with the bishop, which meant that episcopal ordinations could look remarkably like presbyterial ordinations while satisfying everyone’s conscience if the ordinand was willing to accept that flexibility while knowing the bishop properly did the ordination.⁸³ Although some have attempted to explain away Ussher’s actions as though he maintained a thoroughgoing episcopal practice, it is hard to get around that he at least made some knowing concessions and happily allowed presbyterian clergy to function within the Church of Ireland.

Ussher’s flexibility with presbyterians, however, does not dilute that he truly believed in episcopacy. His actions and publications, while in England in the 1640s, make it perfectly clear that he advocated for episcopal polity, and his defense of episcopacy should be understood in light of the Root and Branch Petition of 1640 that proposed that Parliament utterly abolish episcopacy.⁸⁴ Situated within the raging debates between King and Parliament, which did significantly involve issues of church polity especially when the Scots became involved, Ussher issued several publications in defense of episcopacy, the two foremost being *The Original of*

79. Ford, *James Ussher*, 44–47.

80. Philip Robinson, *The Plantation of Ulster: British Settlement in an Irish Landscape, 1600–1670*, 2nd rev. ed. (Belfast: Ulster Historical Foundation, 1984); S.J. Connolly, *Contested Island: Ireland 1460–1630* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 289–308.

81. Queen’s College, Oxford MS 217, fol. 42r (see in this current issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*, pp. 24–26); Correspondence of James Ussher, 3:880 (letter to John Downname).

82. Ford, *James Ussher*, 164–74; Knox, *James Ussher*, 166–89.

83. Ford, *James Ussher*, 169.

84. Ford, *James Ussher*, 223–56; Knox, *James Ussher*, 119–45.

Bishops and Metropolitans (1644) and *The Reduction of the Episcopacy* (1657).⁸⁵ Both works show how he advocated a moderate, supposedly more primitive form of episcopacy. Even though the second of these treatises was not published until after Ussher's death, it seems that he had prepared it in 1641 as a solution to the dispute between warring factions. Early in the war, King Charles I rejected it because it was not episcopal enough. When Ussher raised his proposal again in 1648 while visiting the King as a Parliamentary envoy on the Isle of Wight, the King accepted it but no longer had the position to negotiate with Parliament.

Ussher's publications, however, show that he was a moderate episcopal with a thought-out argument for the existence of ecclesiastical hierarchy. In *The Original of the Bishops and Metropolitans*, he argued that God had clearly mandated a hierarchy among the Old Testament clergy. There was a high priest, but then the priests were above the Levites. He then argued that the New Testament confirms that structure's abiding validity for the church. He interpreted Titus and Timothy to be bishops sent to ordain elders (presbyters) in the churches. He also interpreted the angels of the seven churches in Revelation 1:20 to be the bishops for these seven regional churches. He believed that the churches of these major cities in Revelation were not individual congregations, since the Apostles' ministry would have reached far further, but that these were diocesan churches, and their bishops (angels) had jurisdiction over the regional areas. Ussher supported this exegetical argumentation by appealing to the practice of the early church, especially the letters of Ignatius.

In *The Reduction of the Episcopacy*, Ussher outlined how he thought he vision of a moderated episcopal structure could work. In the original edition of this work, the margin included notes about how this proposal had similarities to the structure used in Scottish presbyterianism.⁸⁶ At the local level, Ussher's proposal does not look all that different than a presbyterian structure. The rector (pastor) of a congregation must work with churchwardens and sidesmen (lay leaders) to lead and discipline in the local church.⁸⁷ Above the local congregations then is a diocesan synod, headed by a bishop who must work with the other presbyters, which is to handle matters of more serious discipline as well as address matters related to the doctrine and practice of the presbyters.⁸⁸ With the requirement that the bishop work alongside the other presbyters—and Ussher would even concede the title of bishop could be “moderator”—these diocesan structures would have worked similarly to presbyteries. The provincial synods, moderated by the

archbishops, consisted of “clergy as should be elected out of every diocese within the province.” Their matters were further to be “ordered therein by common consent as in the former assemblies.”⁸⁹ These looked rather like a general assembly, although held less frequently.

Ussher's proposal never took root, perhaps precisely because it was not strictly presbyterian or episcopal enough for each side. Presbyterians would still object to a hierarchy of concentrated authority in the bishops and archbishops; episcopals would reject the notion that the bishops and archbishops need to work in tandem with and for the consensus of the presbyters of their region. Either way, Ussher's view was clearly planted in his own exegetical and historical studies and aimed for the betterment of the church, regardless of any assessment of those arguments.

Confessional Presbyterians will undoubtedly reject Ussher's exegetical and historical argumentation. A reconsideration of Ussher's ecclesiastical context might help foster some sympathy for what drove him in his desire for episcopacy. It was noted above how the Reformation in Ireland was notably different from the Reformations in Europe, in that it was driven from the top down. Whereas the Continental Reformations were often, in many ways, populist movements that petitioned their magistrates, the Irish Reformation can, in some ways, be seen as a matter of imposition upon the people. Imposition has never sat all that well with people, and the case was no different from the Reformed religion in Ireland. Religion was too easily confused with politics—from both sides—and Protestantism became associated with English rule. That perception, in some ways at least, became truer to the fact. Even when William Beddell (1571–1642) avidly worked to foster a ministry of Reformed religion in the Irish vernacular to try to overcome the linguistic barrier that, no doubt, at least in some ways contributed to a political divide that crept into the church. Even Ussher eventually withdrew his support for that plan out of fear that it might foster a sense of Irish nationality.⁹⁰ The Irish Reformation's lack of roots among the people meant that it had to be administratively and institutionally maintained.

That need for official maintenance obviously

85. The most accessible editions of these works are in *James Ussher and a Reformed Episcopal Church*, 118–54.

86. Richard Snoddy has provided those marginal notes in his new edition of this work in *James Ussher and a Reformed Episcopal Church*, 148–54.

87. *James Ussher and a Reformed Episcopal Church*, 152.

88. *James Ussher and a Reformed Episcopal Church*, 152–53.

89. *James Ussher and a Reformed Episcopal Church*, 153.

90. Knox, *James Ussher*, 87–90

conflicted with the presbyterian system that, even then, relied heavily upon the consent of the people in a way that would be easy to think that full presbyterianism would mean the end of the Reformed faith in Ireland. It is impossible to know if that would have been true. Certainly, it is easy to sympathize with Ussher's likely fear that handing church polity into the hands of the people, who were predominantly Roman Catholic, would mean the end of Irish Protestantism. Ussher did argue exegetically and historically for episcopacy, which indicates he did believe it by conviction, but it is hard to see how he could have believed otherwise. In Ireland, where Reformation and even puritanism took on a different hue than at least most other places, Ussher likely perceived that episcopacy was the best way to preserve and propagate the Reformed faith. Confessional Presbyterians may have our critiques of his views these four centuries later, but Ussher's commitment to growing a robust Reformed church in his homeland should not be questioned.

THE REGULATIVE PRINCIPLE OF WORSHIP

Ussher's stance toward the regulation of worship is perhaps where he appears most mixed from the perspective of some Continental and especially the "puritan" and presbyterian traditions. His view here is likely best described as holding some version of the regulative principle, but with some concessions in *adiaphora* matters and even some aspects of ceremony.

Ussher did argue against humanly devised innovations in worship, and his writings clearly indicate that he had an impulse toward the regulative principle. His 1624 book *An Answer ... to a Jesuite* contained a chapter written directly against human traditions, especially those like Rome had developed.⁹¹ Notably, he also forcefully

argued against making images of any person of the Godhead, which is one of the preeminent issues related to the regulative principle.⁹² On the other hand, in his recommended reading to divinity students in Oxford, Ussher remarked that "Hooker is good for ceremonies," which refers to Richard Hooker's anti-puritan defense of retaining some of the ceremonies and rites within the Church of England, even though Rome had practiced them.⁹³ Scottish presbyterian, George Gillespie, took foremost aim at this position in his *Dispute Against the English-popish Ceremonies*.⁹⁴ It is likely that Ussher's comment should be read as a limitation, meaning that he was clarifying that he did not endorse everything that Hooker said, but only the section of Hooker's *Law of Ecclesiastical Politie* that argued that some things of the ancient rite should be retained.⁹⁵ Ussher's citation of Hooker presents an obvious sort of tension, at least with a consistent and thoroughgoing application of the regulative principle.

Still, Hooker's argument in that specific section did not outline the exact ceremonies and rites that should be retained, and Ussher did not adhere to nearly as many of the ceremonies and rites that other conforming clergy did. Even in making use of things that would certainly bristle confessional Presbyterians as part of the liturgy, Ussher still manifested an impulse to consider those parts of the liturgy in light of the regulative principle. In his personal journal, Ussher wrote a long series of notes about why Scripture demands congregants to kneel during parts of corporate worship. He began this section, "adoration is the devoc[i]on of the heart & is inward worship: p[ro]trac[i]on & kneeling is the outward worship." He cited Augustine and made a comparison with inward and outward aspects of fasting and giving alms before continuing "in publike & solemne adorac[i]on here must be both inward devotion & outward kneeling." He then made brief notes about a host of passages that described how God's people knelt when they encountered God.⁹⁶ He closed this section by writing,

Adorac[i]on is an art of inward reverence & sacrifice to God w[ith] w[hic]h in the intention of the heart is called Devotion & in the attention thereof is called piety. as the heart is first framed & then the outward partes, so grace first offereth the harte in devoc[i]on to God & then tendreth the bodie in bowing and kneeling in his service.⁹⁷

The point here is not about whether Ussher's exegesis and conclusions were correct, but that this portion of

91. Ussher, *An Answer*, 35–44. *Discourse*, 30–44.

92. Ussher, *An Answer*, 447–64; Ussher, *Body of Divinitie*, 221–36; Ussher, *Principles*, 28.

93. Queen's College, Oxford MS 217, fol. 42v; see in this issue of *The Confessional Presbyterian*, p. 29.

94. George Gillespie, *A Dispute Against the English-popish Ceremonies* (Leiden, 1637).

95. Richard Hooker, *Of the Lawws of Ecclesiastical Politie*. *Eyght Bookes* (London, 1593), 169–209 (book IV).

96. These notes appear in Cambridge University Library MS Add. 69, fol.16r–17r. The passages that Ussher cited are: Gen. 17:3, 17; Deut. 9:18; 1 Chron. 21:16; Psal. 95:6; 2 Chron. 6:13; 1 Kings 8:21; 1 Kings 18:42; Dan. 6:10; Matt. 2:11; Matt. 8:2; Mk. 1:40; Lk. 9:12; Matt. 9:18; Mk. 5:22; Lk. 8:41, 47; Matt. 15:25; Mk. 7:25; Acts 9:40; Acts 20:36; Acts 21:5; Acts 7:60; Eph. 3:14; Matt. 26:3; Mk. 14:35; Lk. 22:41; Phil. 2:10; Mk. 3:11; then comparing Scripture with Scripture through Is. 45:23 with Rom. 14:11 and Phil. 2:10; 1 Kings. 19:7 with Rom. 11:4.

97. Cambridge University Library MS Add. 69, fol. 17r.

his notes indicates that Ussher did think through the lens of some version of the regulative principle concerning what ought to be done in worship. He later noted in this journal that “p[ro]trac[i]on & kneeling is not so much a ceremonie as a p[ar]t or duty in divine worship, not to be omitted but in case of necessity as Christ could not kneele at he prayers in the cross, yet kneeled in the garden. Luc. 22:41.” In some cases regarding rites to which others would strongly object, it is not that Ussher disregarded the regulative principle, but rather that he believed that Scripture warranted some things that others did not.

A more complex issue relates to the Book of Common Prayer and Ussher’s retention of some of its features. The Book of Common Prayer—and prescribed liturgies in general—was one of the major issues between conformity and puritanism. The foremost issue relevant here is that of holy days other than the weekly Lord’s Day. The Book of Common Prayer forbids the practice of keeping the invented holy days, but listed exceptions that were to be maintained.⁹⁸ Ussher seemed to observe those that were mandated by the establishment, as evidenced by the series of sermons on Christology that he preached at the beginning of the feast of Christ’s circumcision.⁹⁹ Ussher, therefore, either went beyond the regulative principle regarding holy days or somehow thought that they were consistent with it.

Still, Ussher was no full-blown ceremonialist, nor did he slavishly follow every ceremonial and ritual practice that the Church of England maintained, even when William Laud mandated that he did. Ussher did preach in his episcopal habit, enforced wearing the surplice while preaching, and maintained practices from the Book of Common Prayer, but he refused to set communion tables “altarwise,” as they had been when the church was under papal authority.¹⁰⁰ It is notable that the Irish canon law of 1634 that Ussher helped compose omitted some of the more controversial aspects of English canon law, such as the defense of making the sign of the cross at baptism. In fact, Ussher’s resistance to some aspects of ceremony can be seen in his participation in 1641 on a Parliamentary committee about “innovations” in the Church of England’s doctrine and practice.¹⁰¹ This committee published a list of proceedings, many of which addressed deviation from Reformed theological doctrines, but some also dealt with ceremonial practice. For example, the proceedings listed turning communion tables altarwise, bowing to the altar, using candlesticks, compelling communicants to come to the rails to receive the elements, using crucifixes and images, requiring ministers to turn their back to the congregation during

communion, and the use of the sign of the cross at baptism as issues that were innovations in the established church or things that needed to be amended from the Book of Common Prayer.¹⁰² Although Ussher seemed to use canon law to some degree as the measure of his conformity, there were some issues where he rejected certain English canons and even parts of the Book of Common Prayer.¹⁰³ In issues of actual *adiaphora*, such as what a minister wears while preaching, he did seem to defer to what his authorities had decided, which is not surprising given his immense respect for God’s providence in appointing those in authority, as is evident in his arguments for episcopacy and divine right royalism. At the same time, Ussher did manifest a pattern of thinking biblically about issues of worship practice, and held some version of the regulative principle, even if he practiced some things that confessional Presbyterians should find incompatible.

THE EXTENT OF CHRIST’S SATISFACTION

Secondary literature on early-modern theology is rapidly developing material about the issue of hypothetical universalism, which is a doctrine that taught that Christ died in some sense for the sins of the whole world, even if the elect were the only ones who would ultimately partake of the benefits of Christ’s death. The interest in this doctrine began with Jonathan Moore’s investigation of John Preston’s doctrine of hypothetical universalism, which he argued was a “softening” of the Reformed tradition. Moore included a significant discussion of Ussher’s view, arguing that Ussher had essentially invented the doctrine.¹⁰⁴ Richard Snoddy, however, documented Ussher’s shift from holding to particular redemption in the early 1600s to his view of hypothetical universalism, which Ussher seemed to develop sometime just before 1618.¹⁰⁵ That change is notable in his already-discussed letter from 1618 that

98. [Church of England], *The Booke of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments* (London, 1615), sig. A11v.

99. Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Eng. th.e 25; see Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 205–7; see Snoddy’s essay in this issue.

100. Nicholas Bernard, *Clavi Trabales* (London, 1661), 57–61; Ford, *James Ussher*, 56, 164–73, 205–6; Kenneth Fincham, “The Restoration of Altars in the 1630s,” *Historical Journal* 44 no 4 (December 2001): 919–40.

101. Ford, *James Ussher*, 247–48.

102. *A Copie of the Proceedings of Some Worthy and Learned Divines... Touching Innovations in the Doctrine and Discipline of the Church of England. Together with Considerations upon the Common Prayer Book* (London, 1641), 2–4, 6.

103. Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 6–8, 13–16.

104. Moore, *English Hypothetical Universalism*, 173–86, 208–13.

105. Snoddy, *Soteriology of James Ussher*, 40–92.

was connected to the British Delegation to the Synod of Dort. Snoddy's argument that Ussher developed his view in conversation with sources from the ancient tradition and, especially, the more recent English divines effectively undermined Moore's claim that he originated hypothetical universalism. Michael Lynch has more recently discussed Ussher's view of this doctrine in connection with his research on John Davenant.¹⁰⁶ Lynch rightly argued that Ussher formulated his doctrine in contrast to Arminian views of the atonement, which Ussher said too universally applied Christ's death. Although Ussher thought that Christ's satisfaction had a universal aspect of procuring the possibility of salvation, he limited the application according to God's decree. Even with this set of literature already treating his view on Christ's death, this area will undoubtedly become one of the most researched questions in studying Ussher's theology.

There are some obvious questions that confessional Presbyterians will raise about Ussher's view of Christ's death since it is doubtful that presbyteries in NAPARC denominations would allow candidates for ministry to share his view. There are some points of theological analysis that are worth raising here. In my research on Ussher's doctrine of the Covenant of Works, I have noted how he emphasized Christ's role as the last Adam.¹⁰⁷ Whereas Adam naturally had a "Principall dett" of active obedience in the Covenant of Works, he also came to have an accrued debt of penalty as the consequence of his sin.¹⁰⁸ I also argued that Ussher had a strong view of nature, meaning that God created things to be a certain way, and the patterns of providence and salvation had a strong accord with that nature. Concerning Christ's role as the last Adam then, Ussher grounded the pattern of Christ's representation after the pattern of Adam's in the Covenant of Works. In itself, then, that original pattern had an obvious universality to it, which explains why Ussher would give Christ's death a type of universality as well.

Still, Ussher had the Reformed sensibility that God had to be sovereign over who received the benefit of Christ's death. His Reformed impulse here is clear in the

way that, although he argued a universality to Christ's death in one sense, he placed the aspect of particularity in Christ's work of intercession. He wrote,

In his Justice, His Satisfaction, And His Intercession. His Satisfaction Is Indefinite, tis not only Sufficient, but is proposed as a Comon Remedy to all men: 22 Revel. 17. Let whosoever will, take of the water of life, freely. Every Body is Invited: But Intercession is more restrayned: Intercession, for those whome God hath given him: 17. John. 24 Father, I will that They w[hi]ch thou hast given mee, be with mee, even where I am, that they may behold my Glory, w[hi]ch thou hast given mee. His Justice first satisfied: And His mercy Implored. God must finde a Ransome: A Propitiation. And this satisfaction must bee performed In a state of Humiliation.¹⁰⁹

Ussher did emphasize the particularity of salvation, although he did not locate it antecedent to Christ's death, but in Christ's application before God's throne of his death.

Since part of Ussher's formulation of hypothetical universalism had reference to his strong doctrine of the Covenant of Works, confessional Presbyterians should commend him in that regard. We can further note, however, that the missing formulation from Ussher's doctrine that could have relocated particularity to God's full purpose for Christ's death rather than in Christ's intercession is the Covenant of Redemption. The doctrine that says that the persons of the Godhead covenant together in the plan of salvation for the redemption of the elect would have provided Ussher with the mechanism to maintain his strong link between Christ's work and the Covenant of Works without taking a voluntarist route about the extent of Christ's satisfaction. Since the Covenant of Redemption establishes Christ's reward and obedience, then that reward could have simply been forgiveness for the elect, and the obedience is dying for the elect. Although Ussher emphasized the Covenant of Works and Christ's recapitulation of the Adamic mandate, the Covenant of Redemption did not fully develop until late in his ministry. J.V. Fesko has posited 1638 as the earliest use of the terminology, which would likely make it too late in Ussher's career for him to incorporate it fully into his doctrinal system.¹¹⁰ Although this is more theological than historical analysis, confessional Presbyterians can sympathize with Ussher's consistency with his doctrine of the Covenant of Works, while recognizing that he lacked the structure of the Covenant of Redemption that may have helped make his doctrine of Christ's satisfaction more consistently particularist.

106. Lynch, "John Davenant's Hypothetical Universalism," 133–43.

107. Perkins, *Catholicity and the Covenant of Works*, 166–208.

108. Cambridge University Library MS Mm.6.55, fol. 54r (sermon on Philippians 2:8, dated January 16, 1647 [1648]); Bodleian Library, Oxford MS Eng. th.e. 25, fol. 39v–40r, 55v–61v (two sermons on Hebrews 9:15, dated 1625 [1626]).

109. CUL MS Mm.6.55, fol. 53r (sermon on Philippians 2:8, dated January 9, 1647 [1648]).

110. J.V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016), 30–31.

CONCLUSION

James Ussher still casts a long shadow into Reformed theology, even if some of his contributions have been overlooked or forgotten. He was not a confessional Presbyterian, but still served the church well in developing the Reformed faith. There are certainly ways in which confessional Presbyterians will disagree with his doctrine and practice, but there are many more ways in which they can appreciate his lifetime of labor for the sake of Reformed theology. ■

COMPLETE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF USSHER
SECONDARY LITERATURE

The main areas of inquiry from the secondary literature were surveyed in the article above, but even though the footnotes direct readers to the most important sources, there is a significant amount of other literature that is devoted to Ussher. Since Ussher's death in 1656, there have been a few cycles of interest in him, even if modern scholarship is only just now picking up steam for Ussher research. Because some of the literature on Ussher can be fairly old, rare, or niche, it can be difficult to find the best entry point into the research. Although the brief outline of where the field currently stands and the more extensive discussion about the literature concerning Ussher in my book are meant to provide some holistic statement about how to understand the body of secondary sources, that is no substitute for having a full knowledge of those sources, if one wants to pursue serious scholarship in Ussher studies. This bibliography, therefore, collects the most complete list of secondary sources on Ussher available in print. To the best of my knowledge, it is exhaustive, although there are likely rare or unknown articles or entries that I have overlooked. Not all of these sources are of equal importance, but having a comprehensive list of the secondary literature can be one of the most helpful starting places for new researchers on a topic.

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