the Secession theologians John Brown of Edinburgh (1754-1858) and Robert Balmer (1787-1844). In this sense ‘Rabbi’ Duncan was correct about the Brown and Balmer position in saying: “Oh, since the days of ‘the Marrow’ they have elaborated, and elaborated, and elaborated the free offer of the Gospel, and perhaps rather neglected other things” (D. Brown (Ed.), The late Rev. John Duncan, LL.D. In the Pulpit and at the Communion Table (Edinburgh, 1874), 46-7. How the balance could tip!

Of course the Dutch Reformed tradition falls outside the focus of this study. In the Netherlands the same discussion took place in the eighteenth century as the Marrow conflict in Scotland. The lay preacher Theodorus Avinck (1740-82) wrote a book of 378 pages Het Eerste en Voornaamste Deel der Uitwendige Roeping [The First and Most Important Part of the Outward Calling] (Utrecht, 1779), with many quotations of Dutch and foreign theologians who defended the free offer of grace. It is a proof of similarities in the logical development of Calvinistic soteriology in different countries. There is no new thing under the sun! (Eccles. 1:9).

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Sin and salvation were the two central religious preoccupations of men and women in Reformation England. According to Jonathan Willis, the editor of this collection of articles, this book is the first to address in a sustained and rounded form the transformations and permutations that the concepts of sin and salvation underwent over the course of the reformation in England, as well as the practical consequences of these changes in the lives of believers. This volume contains fourteen essays, divided into four parts: ‘Defining Sin and Salvation’; ‘Contesting Sin and Salvation’; ‘Reforming Sin and Salvation’, and ‘Living with Sin and Salvation’.

Ralph S. Werrell, who has published several studies on the first English reformer and biblical translator, William Tyndale, makes clear that the blood of Christ (referenced 441 times in Tyndale’s writings) affects every aspect of God’s plan to undo the effects of the fall. Just as remarkable is his emphasis on the newness of life which depends solely on the Holy Spirit applying the blood of Christ to the elect. He applies the blood of Christ to every aspect of life, bringing forth new life and the liberty to respond to the gospel, to love God’s law, to worship God, and to do good works. By focusing on spiritual renewal,
Tyndale has influenced the Puritan tradition, which not only emphasized regeneration, but also sanctification. Several times Werrell distinguishes between Tyndale and his fellow Reformers. For example, on p. 27, he suggests that “unlike his fellow reformers, Tyndale wrote that fallen man was powerless to hear the gospel, and therefore he could not respond to it without the Holy Spirit bringing forth the new birth in him by virtue of Christ’s blood.” However, both Tyndale and other reformers emphasized that God’s grace is solely responsible for spiritual renewal, so that the notion of a difference between Tyndale and others is too far-fetched.

Jonathan Willis focuses on the redefinition of sin in light of the Ten Commandments in Protestant theological and pedagogical works. The Seven Deadly (or Capital/ Cardinal) Sins as the chief moral system taught by the Western Church was replaced by the Decalogue. During the English Reformation, the Ten Commandments came to be widely understood as not merely the primary, but rather as the only religious framework for defining the very concept of sin, and for moral instruction. The reformers therefore needed to subject the Decalogue to rather creative hermeneutics to render them fit for practical use, because theologically speaking the commandments were a reflection of the eternal law of God, encompassing all possible sinful behaviors and their converse virtues. In practice, however, that list proved to be but partial and limited. Therefore the brevity of the commandments required extensive exposition and explanation. The Decalogue was viewed as a set of ten categories, within which all manner of sinful behavior could be included. However, the nature of these ten categories was such that one could not ascribe a fixed or specific group of sinful behaviors to them. Rather, the new interpretative framework that Protestant divines were constructing in reference to the Ten Commandments did not simply yield a redefining of sin, but rather it established a framework within which concepts of sin could be formulated, modified, appropriated, or rejected whenever an individual would reflect upon his behavior.

The third part, ‘Reforming Sin and Salvation,’ looks at ongoing attempts to redefine beliefs and behaviors regarding sin and salvation within a broader societal context by means of instructional, liturgical, and devotional texts. The article of Maria Devlin on ‘Generic Damnation and Rhetorical Salvation in Reformation Preaching and Plays’ is captivating. She describes a trend in historical and literary treatments of the English reformation that emphasizes the Calvinist, predestinarian character of Reformation theology and its inevitable result: despair. However, the narrative of despair tends to rely on the content of this theology – the systematic articulation of Calvinist doctrines. Devlin wants to focus on the modes and genres governing the teaching of this theology, such as the sermon, catechetical instruction, morality plays,
dialogues, and the spiritual handbook, referring to these as “rhetorical theology”.

According to Devlin, the rhetorical forms of Reformation theology carried implications that ran contrary to the predestinarian doctrines they were meant to teach. The dominant assumption in Reformation preaching and catechizing was that everyone addressed might be saved, the logical assumption being that it was possible for everyone to be saved. She questions whether it was systematic propositions of religion, or rather the dramatic, grammatical, and rhetorical modes in which they heard and articulated their religion that primarily affected their experience. Thus she argues that if believers were to internalize the implications of rhetorical rather than systematic theology, their primary response could have been hope rather than despair. I certainly agree with Devlin’s argument that rhetorical theology affirmed the possibility and hope that grace could be secured. However, I would question her rather sharp distinction between systematic and rhetorical theology, when she suggests that there was a “wide gap between official Calvinist theology and what was emphasized in its practical dissemination.” I believe that there is merely a distinction being made between both theologies. In systematic theology, internal calling as the link between predestination and regeneration meant that in pastoral theology human responsibility was taken seriously, and by way of the offer of the gospel the door to salvation was opened to all. And thus rather than this being a wide divide, we are dealing with a measure of logical inconsistency.

A similar wide divide is identified in Elizabeth Clarke’s essay on ‘Lady Hutchinson’s Principles of the Christian Religion’. In her theological treatise, Lucy Hutchinson devotes some time thinking and writing about what she calls “a preparatory worke”, the chief of which are conviction and humiliation for sin. However, for some strict Calvinists, it seemed to smack too much of Arminianism, requiring a human element in conversion, rather than the strict supernatural intervention of God. According to Clarke, there is a tension in the “Principles” between the Calvinistic scheme of grace and her authorship of rhetoric and imagery. Although as a Calvinist she sees salvation as being entirely the product of divine grace, as a poet she recognizes the nature and even the need of preparatory emotions. But this is not a real tension. Hutchinson wanted to make two things clear: first, that divine grace engages our human existence specifically by way of preparatory humiliation, and second, that humans are involved in this divine transformation from sin to grace. Systematic and pastoral theology were thus two ways of describing the encounter between God and men – an encounter in which divine grace has the preeminence, but which also includes human activity.

of conscience”. This cultural practice during the first half of the seventeenth century of writing and reading a “book of conscience” that chronicled sin and salvation by way of journaling can be seen as the cause of the radical growth of Puritan journaling that burgeoned in the 1650s and beyond. Puritans regarded the writing of their experiences as a record of God’s work within their lives, and of their lives as a record of work towards God. They used their journaling to better understand sin and salvation and their personal involvement in this. In a postscript, Alexandra Walsham concludes that this volume “delineates some of the complex and delicate ways in which clergy and laity negotiated the theological ruptures wrought by the reformation, but inevitably it cannot address many others.” This collection of essays is a very welcome contribution to a growing corpus of studies that researches core religious preoccupations of men and women in early modern England.

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The theologian John Owen looms large in the history of Puritanism, Dissent, and Reformed Orthodoxy. Between the 1640s and 1680s, he published eighty books containing eight and a half million words. His commentary on the book of Hebrews alone was a mammoth undertaking comprising over two million words in 2000 folio pages. And he did much more than just write. During the two decades of the English Revolution, he was an Essex pastor, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, Dean of Christ Church, Vice Chancellor of Oxford University, and the ‘Atlas of Independency’. After the Restoration, he was (with Richard Baxter) the nation’s leading nonconformist divine. At his funeral in 1683, one participant observed the presence of the carriages of sixty-seven nobles and gentlemen.

Crawford Gribben admits to approaching his subject with ‘trepidation’ and modestly confesses that ‘Owen has defeated me’ (ix, xiii). Yet this book is a landmark in the study of Owen and seventeenth-century Puritanism, not least because its author displays an impressive command of theology, history, and literary studies (the back cover carries commendations from an eminent theologian, an eminent literary scholar, and an eminent historian). The book’s success also owes much to the wealth of research and writing since W.H. Goold’s 24-volume Victorian edition of The Works of John Owen was republished by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1965. The Goold edition was