

THE PASTORAL PREDICAMENT OF
VAVASOR POWELL (1617–1670):
ESCHATOLOGICAL FERVOR AND ITS
RELATIONSHIP TO THE PASTORAL MINISTRY

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The dawn of a new millennium, the almost staggering proliferation of popular “Christian novels” about end-time events, some Christian magazine publisher’s willingness to accept commodities brokers’ advertisements that seek to sell gold and other precious metals to tremulous Christians (as a hedge in the possibility of an economic meltdown or some other possible catastrophe), as well as the millennial madness that invariably accompanies such epochal moments in history, have all led, it seems, to a heightened interest in matters eschatological. Moreover, the widely heralded collapse of a moral and ethical center in Western society has combined with the end-time speculation to produce an era of great fascination in the end of the world.

It is also a fitting time for pastoral practitioners, pedagogues, and seminarians to ask questions about the relationship of eschatological fervor and the pastoral ministry. This is, in fact, the theme of this essay. The present paper is not about the preference of one eschatological scheme over another, not is it about exegetical controversies surrounding the study of last things. This article rather will seek to expose, through historical case study and theological reflection, excesses and subsequent problems that arise from an unbalanced approach to eschatology in the pastoral ministry and then aim to encourage a Biblical balance between “Blessed Hope” teaching and the contemporary pastoral task. The setting for the study will be a very ripe time for both Reformed confessional orthodoxy and sectarian heterodoxy: mid-17th century England and Wales. Moreover, I want to lift certain events from the ministry and life and times of one, Vavasor Powell (1617–1670), a 17th century Welsh Puritan pastor and evangelist, and apply them to my subject in this paper.

1. THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF VAVASOR POWELL

Sadly, there are no portraits or drawings of any kind of Vavasor Powell. From his remains and from the writings of his peers, however, we can gather that Vavasor Powell was a non-conformist minister born in Kuncklas in the parish of Heyop, Radnorshire, in Wales in the year 1617. Educated by his Uncle

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Erasmus Howell, vicar of Clun, Shropshire and, by at least one account, at Jesus College, Oxford, Powell returned to Clun in 1637 to become a schoolmaster.

In the years 1638–39 he was deeply influenced by the evangelistic preaching of the great Welsh minister Walter Cradock (c. 1606–1659) and the writings of the celebrated English Puritans Richard Sibbs (1577–1635) and William Perkins (1558–1602) and showed all of the signs of a genuine conversion.

In the same year as his conversion, he was apparently called to preach and began a fruitful itinerant ministry in his home country in 1639. His early public preaching led him to what would become a mark of his ministry: forceful opposition by many to his inflammatory presentation of the gospel.

Powell's early preaching, for instance, led him to be attacked by numerous spiritually convicted if not downright agitated auditors. Once, in a preaching campaign in Radnorshire, four men ambushed Powell while he was leaving church. On another occasion, a man heard Vavasor Powell's sermon and then immediately vowed to kill him. Still again, the fiery Welshman was once attacked by a butcher yielding—we are left to imply—the instrument of his trade.

Powell once wrote in "Upon the Saints Suffering":

This is the Fire through which thou
dost, purge away Dross and Tin:
This is the Water that doth wash,
in part the filth of sin.
This is the Wind that blows away our Chaff, and which light is,
This is the School wherein we learn the best
experiences,
This is the way wherein we do follow the Son
and saints:
This is the way to Liberty, with thee by our
restraints¹

Truly, Vavasor Powell entered into his ministry with a robust message set in a time of upheaval. It can be argued that the struggles he endured because of interjecting his strong "repent or perish" message in the midst of such a combustible period of history actually fueled the prophet-like Powell to even greater levels of forcefulness. Why? Because Vavasor understood that his suffering was the very sign of his faithfulness.² He later would write, in a

¹ *The Life and Death of Mr. Vavasor Powell, that Faithful Minister and Confessor of Jesus Christ. Wherein his Eminent Conversion, Laborious, Successful Ministry, Excellent Conversation, Confession of Faith, Worthy Sayings, Choice Experiences, Various Sufferings, and other Remarkable Passages, in his Life, and at his Death, are faithfully Recorded for Publick Benefit. With some Elogies and Epitaphs by His Friends. Heb. II. 3, Who being dead yet speaketh. Heb. II. 38. Of whom the world was not worthy. Rev. 14:13. Blessed are the dead, which dye in the Lord, they rest from their Labours, and their Works follow them.* Printed in the Year MCVLXXI. No author is given. "Upon the Saints Suffering" by Vavasor Powell, lines 1–12, pp. 104–105. Copy in the British Museum. Hereafter referred to as *Life*.

² See Michael A. Milton, *The Application of the Theology of the Westminster Assembly in the Ministry of the Welsh Puritan, Vavasor Powell (1617–1670)*, "The 'Injudicious Zealot of Wales' or The Puritan Prophet?" on pp. 325–342. Hereafter referred to as Milton, *Dissertation*.

poem bearing the title “A Dialogue Betweene Feare & Faith,” about the opposing forces at work in his own life:

Feare

I doe much feare Christ crosse to wear
 my strength is weake I may
 Of blisse fall short & loose my part
 in Christ on such a day.

Faith

I shall not faile but shall pr'ualile
 through Christ on whom I rest
 Christ he will be firme strength to me
 for him do I love best³

And in his work the “Apostate’s Conscience awakened” Vavasor Powell refers to the struggle with outside forces, which began in this period:

Cheere vp yee faithfull soules be not afraide
 let not your hearts grow faint or be dismaid
 when troubles great arise Christ doth fulfill
 his word of truth [and] turn it unto his will.⁴

In 1640 Powell narrowly escaped yet another attempt on his life only to subsequently be arrested for his Puritan preaching in Breconshire. Upon the outbreak of the civil war, Powell left Wales for London. Vavasor Powell—by then a celebrated nonconformist minister—preached in London and was then appointed as Puritan vicar at Dartford Parish Church (1644–1646).⁵ It was an especially difficult time for the new pastor of Dartford, since he assumed his charge during an outbreak of the plague. During his first year of ministry, Vavasor Powell conducted 62 burials—many of these being entire families.⁶ Furthermore, his parish had only recently undergone the divisive transition from a prayer-book congregation to one with limited form in the public worship services. Needless to say, there was plenty of gospel work to be done by an industrious pastor. But Powell’s pastoral charge was constantly being interrupted by his dangerous zeal and commitment to the political intrigue that was sweeping all of England. For instance, the church records show that on several occasions the local church leaders had to summon a replacement preacher from London because their pastor was engaged in a military skirmish.⁷ Despite the pressing need for a committed pastor to minister to the many spiritual needs at Dartford, their man, Powell, was undeniably preoccupied with what he perceived to be more important matters.

³ “A Dialogue Betweene Feare & Faith” by Vavasor Powell as quoted from National Library of Wales Add. Ms. 366 A., p. 28. This is included in APPENDIX I. of Robert Tudur Jones, *The Life, Work and Thought of Vavasor Powell (1617–1670)* (Oxford: Oxford University, D. Phil. Dissertation, 1947) 347. Hereafter referred to as RTJ, *Dissertation*.

⁴ *Life*, 49, “The Apostates Conscience Awakened” by Vavasor Powell.

⁵ John Duncan, *The History and Antiquities of Dartford* (London, 1844) 382.

⁶ From the hand of Mr. John Gilbert, archivist of Holy Trinity Church, Dartford, in his correspondence to the author on November 8, 1995.

⁷ The church warden of Dartford recorded in the pages under the year 1646 the following: “pad [paid] for a horse two [to] John Shoute for to fetch a Minister from London and two carrye him two

He remained a pastor at Dartford until a committee of the Westminster Assembly called him to take the reforming ministry to Wales. This new call seemed to suit the ambitious young preacher perfectly.

Following an examination and appointment by a prominent committee that included the likes of Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1599–1646) and Stephen Marshall (c. 1594–1655),⁸ the Westminster Assembly sent Vavasor Powell to Wales to carry on the Puritan reformation in his native land. Upon his return, he began an extensive preaching ministry that took him to nearly every parish in Wales. He became known as the “metropolitan of itinerants” for his great energetic ministry in that country.⁹ Powell was a noted preacher of the day and preached before the Lord Mayor of London on 10 December 1649 and before Parliament on 28 February 1650. He was also a defender of Calvinism and held disputations with Arminians and others outside of the parameters of the Westminster Confession of Faith, such as the 31 December 1649 debate with John Goodwin on the matter of universalism.

Powell was an ardent preacher and as his Welsh defenders wrote

it may be said without Hyperbole, that he feared not the face, nor yet the fury of the most menacing, most mighty Mortal . . .¹⁰

The Welsh Puritan pastor was called to serve on a commission “for the better propagation and preaching of the Gospel in Wales, and redress of some grievances.” One of twenty-five ministers, Powell was the most active of all of them in displacing Anglican clergymen from their parishes and replacing them with Puritans. That created a host of enemies for Powell, and one of them made a charge in a popular book that Powell had profited from his position.¹¹ The charge proved spurious, but it nonetheless damaged the reputation of Vavasor Powell.

Prior to Cromwell’s assumption of his role as lord protector, a millenarian meeting—the *Saint’s Parliament*—was summoned and “Powell took an important and influential part.”¹²

In the spring of 1653 Powell preached at Charter House on March 17. There were even men known as “Vavasor Powell’s Party” in London during

London two preach . . . when Mr. Powell was goon [gone] to the sege [siege] of Ockford [Oxford].” From the Dartford Church Warden’s Account Book, copied for the author by Mr. Gilbert in the correspondence of November 8, 1995.

⁸ See Milton, *Dissertation* 101–103 for a complete listing of the ministers on his examining committee.

⁹ The term was actually first used as a derogatory description of Vavasor Powell’s reforming work by Alexander Griffith in 1653. See note 11 in this paper.

¹⁰ From *A Winding Sheet for Mr Baxter’s Dead*, “On the Memory of Vavasor Powell.”

¹¹ Alexander Griffith, *Strena Vavasoriensis A New-Years-Gift for the Welch Itinerants, Or a Hue and Cry after Mr Vavasor Powell, Metropolitan of the Itinerants, and one of the Executioners of the Gospel, by Colour of the late Act for the Propagation thereof in Wales; as also A true Relation of his Birth, Course of Life, and Doctrines Together with a Vindication of several places of Scripture wrested and abused, against the present Government and all publick Ministers of this Nation. His Hymn sung in Christ-Church London; with an Antiphona thereunto; and a lively Description of his Propagation.* London; printed by F.L. 1654. Copy in the British Museum. Hereafter referred to as Griffith, *Strena*.

¹² RTJ, *Dissertation* 108.

these days.¹³ In May rumors flew that Powell was back on the border enlisting mounted soldiers to come to London for a fight.¹⁴

These events lead one to consider Powell's role with that broad millenarian and sometimes anarchist movement called *The Fifth Monarchy Men*, so called because of its application of Daniel 2.

In that chapter, Daniel is brought before King Nebuchadnezzar to reveal the meaning of the monarch's troubling dream. The dream is of an image with a head of fine gold, a chest and arms of silver, a belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet partly of iron and partly of clay. The image was then shattered by a stone that had been cut out without hands. Daniel had interpreted the dream as the rise and fall of four kingdoms. There would come a fifth kingdom. The prophet reveals it when he informs the king,

And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever. Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream is certain, and the interpretation thereof sure. (Daniel 2:44–45, KJV)

The Fifth Kingdom, as interpreted by a large number in that day (as in our own day), would be an earthly millennial reign of Jesus Christ, which would usher in the Golden Age of the world. The saints would reign for a 1000 years (interpreted so from Revelation 20) until a final uprising would usher in the Day of Judgment and then the Heavenly City.

Vavasor Powell was caught up in this Fifth Monarchist Movement, without a doubt.¹⁵ He believed, like so many of that day, that the reign of Christ was both spiritual (this age) and literal, the "fifth" kingdom on the earth—the Kingdom of the Saints, ruled over by "King Jesus." Powell could thus ask the congregation at Blackfriar's Church while filling the pulpit vacated by the death of the revered William Gouge (1578–1653):

Let us go home and pray, and say Lord wilt Thou have Oliver Cromwell or Jesus Christ to reign over us?¹⁶

That little remark—on the day that Cromwell was named Lord Protector—landed Powell in jail.

Alexander Griffith, an Anglican previously ejected from his pulpit in Wales by the reforming Powell, and the Welsh evangelist's chief antagonist, wrote:

¹³ Ibid. 110.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. 298.

¹⁶ Cal State Papers Dom., XLII. Pp. 304ff. Information of Marchamont Needham, December 20, 1653. This is one of the more famous quotes of Powell's which has found its way into several manuscripts on the seventeenth-century crisis. For instance, Eerdmans' *Handbook to the History of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) uses it on p. 395 to describe the radical element of English Baptists during that time.

Now his chief work is to preach and advance Christs [sic] Personal Reign here on Earth, being the Antient Errour and Fopperie of the Chiliasts or Millenarians.¹⁷

Vavasor Powell, though, as has been said, was not alone in his views on this subject. It was a time of eschatological fervor. A large part of the Puritan populace, it seems, was caught up in it. R. Tudor Jones, the late professor of theology at Bangor in North Wales, affirmed this fact when he wrote that:

The millenarian teaching of Powell and Feake was in harmony with much of the thought of religious people in those years and there was the possibility that the revolutionary attitude of the preachers would provoke others to follow in their steps.¹⁸

The whole of Christianity in England seemed to be taken up with eschatological excitement, and as A. J. D. Farrer has written,

there was not a denomination in which the [millenarian] idea did not exist.¹⁹

The Scot, Robert Ballie, taking part in the Westminster Assembly in 1645 would write back to his countrymen that

The most of the chief divines are not only Independents but others . . . are express Chiliasts.²⁰

Indeed, Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), a well-respected Puritan, had a sermon published in 1654 in which he advocated the coming earthly reign of Christ. His sermon title was “A Sermon of the Fifth Monarchy, Proving by Invincible Arguments, That the Saints shall have a kingdom here on Earth; Which is yet to come, after the Fourth Monarchy is destroy’d by the Sword of the Saints, the followers of the Lamb . . . on Revelation 5:9, 10, Rev. 24:21.”²¹

Books appeared and even went into five printings to quench the public’s desire to learn more about the imminent return of Christ and the setting up of the earthly kingdom. Phrases such as “King Jesus” became synonymous with the anticipation of the earthly reign of Christ seated on his new throne in Jerusalem.²² With the loss of a monarchy, the overturning of the Church of England (with little assurance as to what would replace it), the unprecedented growth of myriad religious sects, and even the uncertain economic situation in seventeenth-century Britain,²³ it is little wonder that the Fifth Monarchy movement was so popular. It must be stated, though, that the Fifth Monarchy movement was not monolithic on all points. There were wings in the party. There were those extreme men—anarchists and zealots

¹⁷ Griffith, *Strena*, p. 5, cf. pp. 6–10. For a thorough analysis of the subject, see RTJ’s *Dissertation* 108–134 on the matter of Powell and the Fifth Monarchists.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 119.

¹⁹ A. J. D. Farrer, *The Fifth Monarchy Movement, 1645–1660* (trans. Baptist Historical Society II. 1910–1911) 167 as quoted in note 1 in RTJ, *Dissertation* 269.

²⁰ Robert Ballie, *Letters and Journals* (1775) as quoted in note 35 by Christopher Hill in his *The World Turned Upside Down* (London: Penguin, 1975) 96.

²¹ Printed with that title (London: for Livewell Chapman, at the Crown in Popes-head-Alley, 1654), British Museum, Dr. William’s Library.

²² See RTJ, *Dissertation* 276–277.

²³ The economic turmoil might have been integral to the matter of population, as C. Hill suggested in his remark that “the population was greater than the economy as then organized could

like Colonels Rainshorough, Rich, and Overton and “particularly Thomas Harrison”²⁴—who believed that their Puritan military efforts were, indeed, in violent obedience to Christ in order to prepare the way for his soon-coming Kingdom. Those who could endure in the time of testing, they thought, would be the remnant who would rule in the millennial kingdom on earth. Christopher Feake, one of the more vociferous clergymen in the Fifth Monarchists’s camp could then write that

I wait to see this reserved remnant call’d out of their Several holes and caves, where they are hid from the world, and from one another, and so brought together, even as so many dry bones . . . to make a standing Army for the King of Saints, in the time appointed of the Father.²⁵

Many other Puritans including William Twisse (c. 1578–1646), William Bridge (c. 1600–1671), Jeremiah Burroughs (c. 1599–1646), Thomas Goodwin,²⁶ and the ever-controversial John Milton (1608–1674)²⁷ were caught up in the fervor.²⁸ Even the distinguished John Owen (1616–1683)—whether he meant to or not—was an often-quoted participant in advancing the millenarian scheme.²⁹ Surely, the statement by Iain Murray that “[t]he Puritans, apart from the Fifth Monarchists—if they can be classed as Puritan at all—had no party divisions determined by prophetic beliefs”³⁰ must be taken as oversimplifying the issue. Oliver Cromwell, no Fifth Monarchist, certainly, but a millenarian nonetheless, declared in his opening speech to the assembly on 4 July 1653 that

this may be the door to usher in things that God hath promised and prophesied of.³¹

absorb.” See C. Hill, *The Century of Revolution: 1603–1714* (2nd ed.; London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1980) 18. For a more complete review of the economic condition of Great Britain during the Interregnum and its relation to religious thought, see Hill’s *Economic Problems of the Church* (London: Panther, 1946) and *Reformation to Industrial Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1946).

²⁴ RTJ, *Dissertation* 281.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 282, quoting Christopher Feake, *The new Non-conformist . . .* (London, 1654), Preface. Rare Civil War tract copy located at Bodleian Library, Oxford.

²⁶ [Thomas Goodwin] “. . . a perfectly respectable Independent Divine, by no means an extreme radical . . . believed the last times would begin in 1650.” Christopher Hill uses this in his *The World Turned Upside Down*. He quotes from “A Glimpse of Zion’s Glory” in A. S. P. Woodhouse, “*Puritanism and Liberty* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1938) 234.

²⁷ Christopher Hill, *World Turned Upside Down* 27.

²⁸ Iain Murray’s comment that the Independents of the Westminster Assembly were “moderate” in their pre-millennial views and not a party to the “wilder form . . . with the Fifth Monarchy party” is not altogether supportable, when one considers the breadth of the Fifth Monarchy movement. Furthermore, when Thomas Goodwin preaches a sermon defending the principles of “the Fifth Monarchy, proving by Invincible Arguments that the Saints shall have a kingdom here on Earth . . .,” it does seem that he is in the movement. What must be advanced, then, is that there was, in fact, a difference between men in the party over the issue of their present relationship with the civil magistrate. This is argued for on p. 122 of Milton, *Dissertation*.

²⁹ See RTJ, *Dissertation* 272 in which the author quotes from Owens’s sermon “The Advantage of the Kingdom of Christ in the Shaking of the Kingdoms of the World.”

³⁰ Murray, *Puritan Hope* 55.

³¹ As quoted by Derek Hirst in his *Authority and Conflict: England 1603–1658* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986) 313.

So the Fifth Monarchists movement was a radical—at times anarchist—urban movement that mixed politics, loose Bible interpretation of difficult passages, eschatological fervor, and populist preaching into an explosive cocktail that threatened—amazingly and at once—Crown and Parliament, Gentry and lower classes, Puritan and Anglican. Indeed, it divided the Puritan party and probably contributed to its decline.

Vavasor Powell, defender of Westminster and advocate of an otherwise strong classical Calvinism in his native Wales, was no anarchist. He would defend himself against such charges by writing:

I am not conscious to my self of Preaching or doing any thing against the present Powers, or their Laws, neither can my Accusers prove any more against me, than the Jews could against Paul.³²

As usual, the accusations against Powell and his ministry were, for him, the tokens of and assurance of a divine appointment:

But I will bear the indignation of the Lord, till He plead my cause; and pray as Jesus Christ hath taught me; “Father forgive them, for they know not what they do.”³³

However, his association with the Fifth Monarchists was ill-advised. His fiery and controversial style along with this unwise association, his loose handling of difficult exegetical issues, and his keen desire to use every popular means at his disposal to bring reform and “force” revival and somehow usher in the Savior’s return placed him at odds with the first line-Puritan leadership, and thus some have been tempted to recall Powell as a part of the radical fringe of seventeenth-century Puritanism. This is a mistake, as Sir Christopher Hill has shown, but it nonetheless points to the image problem Powell suffered (even then).³⁴

Still reeling from what he understood to be a human monarchy standing in the way of Daniel’s vision of a Fifth Monarchy, Powell drew up what he hoped would be seen as a Welsh national response. However, only 300 persons signed “A Word for God.”³⁵ It hardly carried the weight of the most respected Puritan clergy (of the most respected clergy only Powell and the venerable Morgan Llywd signed it), and the absence of Walter Cradock’s signature was a glaring commentary on the immoderate position of Powell in the matter.³⁶

³² From Vavasor Powell’s *A Word in Season*.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ See C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down* 16. “Historians, in fact, would be well-advised to avoid the loaded phrase ‘lunatic-fringe.’ Lunacy, like beauty, may be in the eye of the beholder. There were lunatics in the seventeenth century, but modern psychiatry is helping us to understand that madness itself may be a form of protest against social norms, and that the ‘lunatic’ may in some sense be saner than the society which rejects him.”

³⁵ *A WORD FOR GOD. Or a Testimony on Truth’s Behalf; from several Churches, and divers hundreds of Christians in Wales (and some few adjacent) against Wickedness in HIGH-PLACES. With a Letter to the Lord Generall CROMWELL.* Vavasor Powell’s name appears on the third column from the left on p. 7 of the document; 10th from the top under William Price and before John Williams. His name is also mentioned in the “POSTSCRIBE” [*sic*]. National Library of Wales.

³⁶ It would have been absolutely necessary to have secured Cradock’s signature. Indeed, Cradock was so pre-eminent by this time that the Welsh Puritans were called “Cradockians.” See John Davies’s remarks in *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 1993) 281.

In fact, Cradock led a counter-address, which was signed by 758 persons and presented to Cromwell to ease any fears about a runaway Welsh state.

For Powell's indiscretion in the matter of the *Word for God*, he was apprehended by authorities at Aberbechan, Montgomeryshire, and brought before Major-General James Berry at Worcester.³⁷ Powell was actually spared more severe penalties by Oliver Cromwell through the intervention of Major-General Berry, who drafted a letter to the Lord Protector and assured him that Powell's *Word for God* amounted to merely "the reliving of his conscience."³⁸

Powell was simply an excited Millenarian in search of a democracy.

The damage, however, had been done with his other Puritan comrades. His thoughtless zeal injured his ministerial reputation with fellow Welsh Puritans and surely separated him from mainline Puritans such as Richard Baxter, who would—upon Powell's death—write a tract against his ministry.³⁹

In 1666, Vavasor Powell might have viewed the Great Fire of London in that year as the fulfillment of his own prophetic understanding.⁴⁰ Given his message and the message of so many in that day, it would not be far-fetched to say that they probably thought it was the end of the age and the inauguration of

³⁷ The "PostScript" to *A Word for God* supplied the following account of that precipitous incident:

Reader, This paper had sooner come into thy hands, if the Subscribers hereof (who were willing to do nothing rashly) had not waited for further Council and direction from God herein then they had at their first intention of the publishing hereof, and withal it was deferred for a time, hoping that God might some other way convince the Person chiefly concerned in it; and seeing God gave him time to repent ["Rev.2.21" is added on the sidebar], and yet he repented not, we have published this our Testimony. To which you might have had many more Subscribers (who were willing to own this Paper) if convenience and Providence had made way for it to come into their view: There hath been great endeavors to stifle it in the Birth; to that end, some of the Subscribers were threatened with imprisonment, and Others were issued out to imprison some (whereof one was secured) namely Mr Vavasor Powell, who was taken by a company of Souldiers, from a day of Fasting and Prayer at Aberbechan in Mountgomory shire, where many Saints were gathered together, which caused much sadness, yea and much heartbreakings to them all; and he remained for some time a prisoner upon that account. FINIS. National Library of Wales.

³⁸ *The Dictionary of National Biography* (ed. Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Sidney Lee; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963–64) 250. [Hereafter, the DNB.]

³⁹ The tract is called "Catholic Communion: Doubly Defended." It was answered by anonymous Welsh supporters of Vavasor Powell who produced *A Winding Sheet for Mr. Baxter's Dead: Or, Those whom he hath Kill'd and Slain in his 'Catholic Communion', sweetly embalmed, and decently Buried again. Being an Apology for Several Ministers, viz., Mr. Erbury, Mr. Cradock, Mr. Vavasor Powel [sic], and Mr. Morgan Lloyd, misrepresented by Mr. Baxter to the world.*

⁴⁰ The previous year, 1665, was a horrible year for London because of the plague. Daniel Defoe in his *A Journal of the Plague Year* (London: Penguin Classics, 1986 reprint of the 1722 first edition) wrote, "I shall conclude the account of this calamitous year therefore with a coarse but sincere stanza of my own, which I placed at the end of my ordinary memorandums the same year they were written:

A dreadful plague in London was
In the year sixty-five,
Which swept an hundred thousand souls
Away; yet I alive!" [see p. 256].

Taken together—the plague, the fire, and the Civil War, along with the proliferation of end-time preaching and his own understanding of how the eschaton would appear—it is easy to see how Powell lost track of the main, ordinary pastoral tasks.

The Fifth Monarchy. But, the day came and went. Powell would have to realize that it was not so.

Powell was the first Puritan imprisoned at the Restoration and ended up serving eleven years in prison. According to his jailers, Vavasor “turned his prison into an academy” as he catechized the guards, preached to other prisoners, and was even allowed to go out into the streets on the Lord’s Day that he might evangelize passing Londoners.⁴¹ Powell, in prison and removed from the old temptations to preach his urgent millenarian convictions and play the role of agitator in the Kingdom of Christ, reverted to his former pastoral ways. He wrote several fine pieces of devotional literature while at Fleet Street Prison. His works included a worthy work entitled, *Bird in a Cage Chirping*⁴² (which was a work on his own afflictions), and *The Sufferer’s Catechism*⁴³ (in which Powell encouraged those who suffered for Christ in this life, and urged caution concerning sufferers’ relations with those who do not suffer, lest spiritual pride creep in). Of Powell’s written works, the most successful and enduring contribution to the Church has been his *A New and Useful Concordance to the Holy Bible* (1671). The second edition of 1673 included an introduction and recommendation by the famed John Owen, and that version went into a fourth and final printing in 1816.

Powell was, though, first and foremost a preacher. He wrote that

I would not neglect for the printing of a thousand Books, the preaching of one Sermon.⁴⁴

The Vavasor who started out with so much promise as an evangelist in Wales, as a pastor at Dartford, and who had become caught up in the eschatological fervor of his way, finally returned to his “first love”—but at the cost of forfeiting many years of otherwise fruitful ministry.

On 27 October 1670, at four o’clock in the afternoon, Vavasor Powell died in his cell at Fleet Street Prison, London, at the age of 53. The body of the great Welsh evangelist was interred at Bunhill Fiends, London, and his grave—in a dubious location—remains there to this day. The monument to his life and ministry, on which were written verses in his honor by Edward Bagshaw the younger, was erected soon after his death but has long since perished.

⁴¹ Jones, *Dissertation* 195.

⁴² צוֹרֵבִן בַּפֶּה or the BIRD IN THE CAGE CHIRPING.

⁴³ *The Sufferers-Catechism Wherein are many Necessary and Seasonable Questions and Cases of Conscience Resolved Many Encouragements Administered to Sufferers; And Most of all the Scriptures (especially in the New Testament) concerning Persecutions and Afflictions pertinently cited; And The Substance of divers Histories, concerning the Suffering Saints in former Ages, briefly hinted, And In true Love intended and Communicated to all, especially the Suffering People of God. Heb. 10.37. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Rev. 2.10. Be thou faithful unto the Death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life.* Printed in the Year 1664. A copy in Dr. William’s Library, London and The National Library of Wales. Although Vavasor Powell’s name does not appear anywhere in the work, his biographers state that he was, in fact, the author of it (see *Life* 120). The work certainly bears all the Vavasorian marks of authorship.

⁴⁴ From the Introduction to *Christ and Moses Excellency*.

Powell remained a hero to Welshmen well into the nineteenth century, and there is a Vavasor Powell Memorial Chapel still standing today in the village of his birth. But, among Puritan worthies, he is a virtual unknown.

His gravestone carried this inscription:

VAVASOR POWELL, a successful Teacher of the past, A sincere Witness of the present, and an useful Example to the future . . .

His life and ministry does, indeed, provide an "Example" for us today. Whether it was his eschatological fervor alone that robbed him of ministerial opportunities is arguable. But the record of his life and times will surely allow for one to conclude that the unbalanced attention to eschatological schemes limited his greater pastoral usefulness. In the end, this is probably his "example" to the future.

II. AN APPEAL FROM CHURCH HISTORY

I now offer an observation from this historical case study: it is possible and even likely for the ordinary day-in and day-out work of the pastoral ministry to suffer in days of eschatological fervor. In times when books are being published as fast as publishers can get them out, when the thirst of consumers for more titillating end-of-time Biblical data seems virtually unquenchable, and when sermon series on "the last days" and "prophecy conferences" represent the sure-fire way to pack out auditoriums and sanctuaries, we must—in light of case history—admit that there exists, at least, a threat to the pastoral charge. Consequently, if and when the pastorate becomes unbalanced, congregations are given to become so as well.

So I would urge that in our day—a time not so unlike the volatile days of seventeenth-century England and Wales—we pastors and ministers of the Gospel (too often not so unlike Vavasor Powell) resist the temptation to use our hearer's fears and anxieties about the future as an opportunity to gain an audience. In doing so, we will avoid the pastoral predicament that invariably follows such a strategy. Rather, let us, in days like these, "redeem the time" and be about the harder—but more faithful and satisfying—labor of gathering the saints through the preaching of the grace of God in Christ, and growing the saints through, among other Biblical injunctions, the exhortation to holiness, and the consistent announcement of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord, if we endure in faith until his appearing, whenever and however that might come to us.