The rising prominence of John Owen: A research article of "The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology"

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ABSTRACT

Scholars are only recently beginning to note the importance of John Owen as a seventeenth-century reformed orthodox theologian. The *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology* is the first book of its kind. This fact should flag this work as an important benchmark in Owen studies. Kelly Kapic and Mark Jones have assembled a wide array of scholars to treat aspects of Owen's theology from the standpoint of his relevance both to historical theology and to contemporary reflection. While all of the essays in this volume will attract those interested in Owen and in the theological topics treated, they are not all of equal quality. This work is not only important for historical theology. It has the potential to bring Owen's theology to bear on many areas of contemporary theology. Because of the importance of this book, each chapter merits careful analysis.

KEY WORDS
John Owen, Reformed theology, The Ashgate Research Companion, Christology, 17th Century Trinitarian

TREFWOORDE
John Owen, Gereformeerde teologie, The Ashgate Research Companion, Christologie, 17de-eeuse Trinitariese teologie

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NOTE
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1. GENERAL OVERVIEW AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

Following a preface by Carl Trueman, the book is divided into three sections: method (chapters 1 – 6), theology (chapters 7 – 12), and practice (chapters 13 – 17). Trueman's preface provides a helpful overview of Owen's life, context, and theological contributions. The book concludes with a nearly exhaustive bibliography of material related to Owen by John Tweeddale. This highly valuable resource includes all of Owen's printed works in their first editions with full titles. One useful feature is that Tweeddale devotes an entire section to recording the numerous prefaces that Owen wrote to other works (309-312). This provides a widow into books that interested him and authors whom he was willing to endorse. The list of seventeenth-century sources that responded to or explicitly interacted with his theology in some manner is interesting as well (312-316). The rest of the bibliography divides secondary literature between pre and post 1900 publications, followed by doctoral dissertations. This bibliography will prove invaluable to serious students for years to come.

2. ANALYSIS OF CHAPTERS

The book gets off to a strong start with Ryan Kelly's article on John Owen's role in the complexity of theological codification in the seventeenth-century (3-30). This is one of the most fascinating chapters in this volume. It addresses Owen's role in creed making during Cromwellian England, which culminated in his central role in the Savoy declaration of faith and order. This new confession was a culmination of the creed making efforts of seventeenth-century England, even though it did not gain as much prominence as the Westminster Standards due to its late introduction. Savoy fulfilled the purpose of Cromwell's Instrument of Government in desiring to make a new confession and it sought to vindicate Congregationalism as a branch of Reformed theology. The last section (27-29) adds that Owen and several of his contemporaries – Baxter being the notable exception – believed that new creeds and confessions with increasing precision in addressing the relevant issues of the time was a sign of the health of the church. This research breaks new ground and provides a needed window into the Reformed orthodox use of confessions.

Sebastian Rehnman accurately portrays Owen's view of the relationship between faith and reason (31-48). This is a difficult task for living after the Enlightenment, since post-Enlightenment views of reason have shifted radically. One way in which this is the case lies in detaching metaphysics from epistemology. By contrast, Reformed epistemology was based on Reformed metaphysics and ontology. This chapter shows that Owen believed that the will or heart determined the intellect in matters of faith (47). This distinguished faith from other areas of scientific knowledge, since faith

rests on divine testimony rather than on historical proofs or evidences. He argues skilfully that Owen was neither a "fideist," or one who embraced the Christian faith without reason, nor a "rationalist" who rooted faith in evidence or reason. However, Rehnman overstates his case when he argues that Owen believed that rational arguments disposed one to faith without producing faith (37) or that such arguments "count in favour of faith" (40). It is more accurate to say that he believed that faith rested on divine testimony alone and that rational arguments disposed one to faith only after the regenerating work of the Spirit. In light of his earlier work on Owen,[1] it is surprising that Rehnman cites so little primary source literature from Owen's contemporaries. Nevertheless, this is a reliable guide to Owen's use of reason in relation to faith.

John Tweeddale (chapter three) recognizes that Owen regarded his massive work on Hebrews as his *magnum opus* and the culmination of his life's work (49-64). He notes the distinctively Christological focus of these volumes and how they tie together the entire corpus of his works. However, when the author cites Owen's three stated themes that organized this work, he neglects to point out Owen's explicit stress on public worship under the old and new covenants (58-59). This reviewer argues elsewhere that the central place of public worship in Owen's theology has largely gone unnoticed.[2] This is true even in this case where the author provides a block citation in which public worship is flagged as a central concern of the work on Hebrews. In addition, Tweeddale accounts for Owen's interest in Hebraic studies by appealing exclusively to the fact that the Jews were recently readmitted to England (62). While this is observation it vital, it is important to remember that a seventeenth-century Bible commentator shared common concerns with modern commentators. The original context of Hebrews involved problems related to Jewish converts to Christianity. It is important to remember that while historical context is vital for understanding how and why reformed authors thought it is not the only contributing factor to their exegetical labours. However, these criticisms are minor. Tweeddale distils the essence of this great work and urges readers rightly to recognize its importance.

Willem van Asselt examines the similarities and differences between Owen and Johannes Cocceius on the relationship between the covenants of grace

1 Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002).

2 Ryan M McGraw, *A Heavenly Directory: Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship, and a Reassessment of John Owen's Theology* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming). Daniel Hyde makes the same point in this present volume, but he does not connect Owen's views of public worship to his practical trinitarianism.

and redemption (65-84). He argues that this theological construction was the foundation for relational theology and that it held great potential for promoting "a living Reformed theology" (65). Van Asselt is a leading figure in studies of Reformed orthodoxy and his contributions are always exceptional and profound. He shows that while there is no evidence for Cocceius depending on Owen, there is some evidence for Owen depending on Cocceius (67). Van Asselt illustrates why many seventeenth-century authors regarded distinguishing an eternal covenant between the Father and the Son from the covenant of grace as integral to sound trinitarian theology and to the knowledge of God. He writes, "Underlying this argument is the fundamental assumption in Reformed theology that there must be a divine *ad intra* foundation for all divine works *ad extra*. It is a fundamental architectonic device in the doctrine of God indicated by the distinction between archetypal and ectypal theology" (77).

This outstanding essay warrants one minor correction. Van Asselt asserts that Thomas Boston (1676-1732) and John Gill (1697-1771) developed the idea of collapsing the *pactum salutis* and the covenant of grace into eternal and temporal aspects of a single covenant (81). However, the idea goes back at least to Samuel Petto (1624-1711), who treated the concept without giving the impression that he originated it.[3] Though this question requires further research, it is possible that collapsing the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace into one covenant was more in vogue in antinomian circles than among others. The reason is that while most Reformed authors regarded the covenant of redemption as providing the unconditional and gracious ground for the conditional covenant of grace, the antinomians regarded both covenants as unconditional and had less difficulty collapsing the two.[4] This does not imply that Boston and Gill were antinomians. Boston used the idea of an unconditional covenant of grace to combat the legalism in the Church of Scotland at the time. A single unconditional covenant also fit well with Gill's hyper-Calvinistic tendencies, which denigrated human responsibility to some extent. Van Asselt's chapter should lead modern readers to reassess the

3 Samuel Petto, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained with an Exposition of the Covenant of Grace in the Principal Concernments of It* (London: Printed for Eliz. Calvert, 1674), 5-7, 13, 16, 19.

4 Mark Jones's forthcoming book on antinomianism expounds this trend clearly. See also, Robert McKelvey, "'That Error and Pillar of Antinomianism:' Eternal Justification," Michael AG Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth Century British Puritanism* (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 223-262.

reasons behind older constructions of covenant theology and the practical results of Reformed covenant theology.

Gert van den Brink illustrates how Owen steered a course between Armenianism and Antinomianism in his views of impetration (redemption accomplished) and application (redemption applied; 85-96). Armenians connected the impetration and application of redemption to different people. Antinomians subsumed the application of redemption into Christ's work on the cross. This made the covenant of grace entirely unconditional and meant that people were justified prior to coming to faith in Christ. Owen argued that the death of Christ was the moral cause of justification, but not the physical cause of justification. Moral causes do not produce effects until a subject exists. Van den Brink argues that Owen used this distinction to steer clear of both Armenianism and Antinomianism. Failing to make distinctions in causation was why Richard Baxter mistakenly accused Owen of Antinomianism. The author concludes that this issue is important for three reasons (95). First, it clarifies the nature of the controversy between Owen and Baxter. Second, it helps us understand the debate over universal redemption in relation to harmonizing the impetration and application of redemption. Third, distinguishing physical and moral causes avoids neglecting contingency in favour of determinism. The reason is that moral causes assume that secondary and intermediate causes (such as faith and repentance) come between impetration and application in salvation. This chapter usefully establishes the lay of the land at the core of seventeenth-century debates over soteriology.

Crawford Gribben brilliantly re-evaluates the usefulness of Edward Millington's library catalogue of Owen's books as a source for understanding his interests and influences (97-109). He sets an important precedent for historical investigation regarding the use and misuse of similar book catalogues. He argues provocatively that Owen scholars such as Trueman, Kapic, and Rehnman have rested too heavily on this catalogue as an indicator of his theological influences. He argues that "it is impossible" to demonstrate that the *Bibliotheca Oweniana* bore "a direct and uncomplicated relationship to the books in Owen's possession at the moment of his death" (100). For instance, the catalogue does not always reflect the importance that he explicitly assigned to certain authors. Gribben argues that Rehnman is mistaken in concluding that the number of references to a theologian and statements of appreciation are an accurate means of calculating theological influence (101). This reviewer has found this to be true in relation to Johannes Hoornbeeck. Even though Owen made few references to Hoornbeeck and he did not list him among "the

principal authors," his prolegomena bears remarkable similarities to Hoornbeeck's.[5] Gribben adds that the credibility of this catalogue is questionable in light of its omissions. For example, it contains almost no Bibles or Bible commentaries, yet Owen certainly owned such works and used them continually in his preaching ministry (107). The most interesting aspect of Gribben's research is that he has discovered a disproportionate number of books in the catalogue that appeared within the last three years of Owen's life. This includes books such as, *The Young Man's Guide to Preferment.* Gribben adds, "It is seems uncertain why Owen was obtaining self-help career guides one year before his death at the tender age of 67" (107). The evidence possibly suggests that Millington "decided to pack the catalogue with recently published material he hoped to sell on the back of Owen's reputation" (108). He concludes that the *Bibliotheca Oweniana* may be a less reliable source regarding Owen's reading and influences than scholars should expect (108). This chapter sets a model for research and scholarship that transcends Owen studies. This reviewer eagerly awaits Gribben's projected intellectual biography of John Owen.

Kelly Kapic treats Owen's teaching on what it means for the Holy Spirit to be the gift of God (113-140). He seeks to advance both historical and contemporary theology (114). He shows how Owen rejected Socinian claim that if the Spirit is the gift of God then he is not God. He answered this conundrum by pointing to the voluntary condescension of the Spirit as the gift of the Father through the Son to believers. Kapic argues that the primary value of Owen's teaching on the Holy Spirit as God's gift is that the personal presence and operation of the Spirit is the source of true spirituality. This provides an avenue through which to enjoy communion with God in three persons. This chapter accurately describes Owen's position and sets the context in terms of Socinianism and Quakerism. However, the author does not engage much with other Reformed authors. Readers better understand the significance of Owen's contributions when they know whether or not he is typical or atypical among his contemporaries.

Suzanne McDonald takes up the "theological direction" (142) of Owen's treatment of the beatific vision (141-158). This is one of the most fruitful contributions to this book. It provides an outstanding model for a Christ-centred view of the vision of God in heaven and lays the groundwork for the ethical implications of this doctrine for this life (147). She contends that this subject is important because it received so little attention by most Reformed orthodox authors. She argues that in contrast to earlier authors such as Aquinas and contemporary authors such as Turretin, Owen

5 See McGraw, *A Heavenly Directory,* chapter 2.

did not merely regard Christ as a means of obtaining the beatific vision, but as a central component of seeing God in heaven (146, 150, 154).

While her argument is profound and valuable both from a historical and a dogmatic standpoint, yet it suffers from the same limited use of contemporary sources as several other contributions to this volume. The only primary sources McDonald cites beyond Owen are Aquinas and Turretin. This raises several questions: Did other Reformed authors adapt Aquinas on the beatific vision in a similar way? Did Turretin represent one option among others? Did the beatific vision factor differently into practical works than dogmatic works? McDonald's analysis of Owen and Aquinas is outstanding. This reviewer hopes that her work will spur others on to fill in the historical gaps surrounding this issue. In the meantime, it is difficult to substantiate her claim that "Owen initiated" this Christocentric trajectory on the beatific vision that involved the resurrected bodies of the saints (158). Discovering the precise origins of a viewpoint is a very difficult historical question. Thomas Manton referred to the beatific vision as "ocular" and made Jesus Christ the object of physical sight in heaven.[6] This single example shows that it may be claiming too much to say that Owen reformed the beatific vision. It is possible that Owen influenced Manton, but it is also possible that both drew from a common unknown source. Both Owen and Manton treat the beatific vision in works directed towards a popular rather than an academic audience. By restrict our search for material on this subject to scholastic theological works we may unintentionally neglect primary source material that might make Owen appear less innovative than McDonald claims. Ironically, she includes Jonathan Edwards as building on the groundwork laid by Owen, but in a meditation on "The Pure in Heart Blessed," Edwards argued that the beatific vision would not (and could not) be with bodily eyes.[7] Edwards reflects a Christ-centred view of heaven while rejecting Owen and Manton's teaching on the place of Christ's physical body and ours.

She concludes that Owen's Christological reorientation of the beatific vision "is correct, and that the earlier tradition is deficient" (157). However, she criticizes him for his lack of material on the Holy Spirit in the beatific vision, thus mitigating a fully trinitarian position (158). This criticism is fair on some level, but in *Communion with God,* Owen treats communion with the Holy Spirit on earth as already enjoying

6 Thomas Manton, *The Complete Works* (London: Nisbet, 1870), 20:460.

7 Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards,* Sereno E Dwight and Edward Hickman, Eds. (Edinburgh: Banner of Thrust, 1997), 2:905-912.

heaven in measure.[8] This parallels his assertion that communion with Christ by faith now and by sight in heaven share are of the same essence but not by the same degree. It is legitimate to say that Owen should have been more explicit regarding the Spirit's role in the beatific vision in his Christological works, yet this criticism diminishes when we look at his theology as a whole. He taught explicitly that the communion that believers enjoy with the Father, through the Son in heaven is sill by the Spirit. However, the beatific vision involves sight. The Son is the only object of bodily sight in glory since he is the only person in the Godhead who assumed (and retains) human flesh. While his trinitarianism demands that the beatific vision involves communion with all three persons, his Christology explains the emphasis that he placed on seeing Christ. Vision and communion are closely related concepts, but they are not synonymous. This chapter opens useful avenues of research. McDonald raises questions that strike at the heart of the Christian life in Reformed orthodox and Puritan theology.

Chapter nine treats the oblation and intercession of Christ in his humiliation and exaltation (159-169). Edwin Tay illustrates the intimate connection between Owen's teaching on the priesthood of Christ and his work of atonement. He unfolds his teaching on Christ's oblation and his subsequent intercession and then treats the significance of Owen's debate with Baxter over the nature and extent of the atonement. Christ's oblation is equivalent to his entire state of humiliation and his intercession to his entire state of exaltation. Tay argues that the reason why Owen could distinguish between the elect possessing the right to justification and yet not hold it in possession until exercising faith was that the right corresponded to Christ's oblation and the application or possession corresponded to his intercession. In so doing, he shows the consistency of Owen's atonement theory with his Christology. The theme of this chapter overlaps significantly with chapter five, since Tay notes that oblation and intercession are "synonymous" with impetration and application (167, fn 48). The primary difference lies in Tay's more explicit attention to the priesthood of Christ. This treatment usefully illustrates the close connection between Owen's orthodox Christology and Soteriology.

Chapter ten is a condensed version of Alan Spence's previous book on John Owen's Christology (171-184).[9] The essence of his argument is that Owen's view of Christ's human dependence on the Spirit provides a vital alternative to modern

8 John Owen and William H Goold, *The Works of John Owen, D.d.* (London; Edinburgh: Johnstone and Hunter, 1850), 2:246.

9 Alan Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration John Owen and the Coherence of Christology* (London; New York: T & T Clark, 2007).

Christological models that mitigate claims to Christ's deity in search of the true Jesus of history. While the author's conclusions are sound, he draws from a limited range of Owen's works and does not adequately set his teaching on the Spirit in historical context. For instance, this reviewer has found similar emphases on the relation of the Sprit to Christ's humanity in contemporary authors such as Thomas Goodwin,[10] and later authors such as Thomas Boston.[11] Spence gives the impression that this is a distinctively, if not exclusively, Owenian contribution to theology. On page 178, he slightly misses the origin of Socinian influences in England by connecting it to John Biddle. However, Sarah Mortimer has recently demonstrated that Socinian influences came into England much earlier, but that Socinian influences in the English context were indirect and complex.[12]

Robert Letham's chapter is thought provoking, but has some historical limitations (185-198). He asks whether Owen's Trinitarian emphases have eastern or western tendencies. He argues that Owen's views on matters such as the *filioque* clause were western, but his stress on distinct communion with the divine persons was eastern in tone (186, 191). When we read Letham's many helpful and profound works on the Trinity,[13] we always walk away with the impression that western Trinitarians are the "bad guys." This essay is no exception (188, for example). Citing verbatim from an earlier publication, Letham notes, "Owen is not so much an innovator as a brilliant synthesizer" (190).[14] The synthesis that he has in mind is between western emphases on the unity of God and eastern emphases on the divine persons. He adds, "[Owen's] focus on the three persons was and is missing from the West in general" (196).

Letham does not give enough evidence either by comparing or contrasting Owen to his contemporaries to show that this was the case in seventeenth-century theology. Showing similarities between Owen and eastern authors on divine three persons means less if we find that other western authors held to similar emphases for different

10 Thomas Goodwin, *The Works of Thomas Goodwin, D.d. … the First Volume. Containing, an Exposition on the First, and Part of the Second Chapter, of the Epistle to the Ephesians. and Sermons Preached on Several Occasions.* (London: Printed by J.D. and S.R. for T.G., 1681).

11 Thomas Boston, *The Complete Works of Thomas Boston* (orig. pub., William Tegg & Co., 1852; reprint, Stoke on Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 2:5-14.

12 Sarah Mortimer, *Reason and Religion in the English Revolution: The Challenge of Socinianism* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2010).

13 Such as, Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2004).

14 Robert Letham, "'Where Reason Fails-': Papers Read at the 2006 Westminster Conference." (Westminster Conference, 2006), 11.

reasons. Owen is largely unique among English writers in terms of Trinitarian piety. However, he shows affinity with Dutch authors such as Voetius and Hoornbeeck, both of whom he cited periodically.[15] These and other Dutch authors developed a devotional emphasis on the divine persons in response to Armenianism. Armenians denied that the Trinity was a fundamental article of the faith because it had no practical value.[16] Owen was less directly concerned with Arminian views of the Trinity than these men, but it is more likely that his emphasis on the persons of the Godhead stems from a continental influence than from eastern theology. One historian has warned recently about relying too much on English books in studying English Reformed theology following the advent of Early English Books Online.[17] In this case, continental authors produced trinitarian emphases that were less common in an English context due to differing theological concerns. Moreover, Letham bypasses Richard Muller's defence of the Reformed orthodox against the charge that they tended to abstract the divine essence and attributes from the Trinity.[18]

Letham's preoccupation with the question of East versus West spills over into his examination of Owen on the covenant of redemption. He criticizes Owen for his "binitarian construction" of the covenant of redemption (196). He regards this as reflecting the western tendency to subordinate and depersonalize the Holy Spirit. However, Jonathan Edwards later clarified the role of the Spirit in the covenant of redemption. He argued that the Spirit is active in the covenant of redemption, but he is not a party in that covenant because he is not humiliated. The Son's humiliation

15 For example, John Owen, *Theologoumena Pantodapa, Sive, De Natura, Ortu Progressu, Et Studio Veræ Theologiæ, Libri Sex Quibus Etiam Origines & Processus Veri & Falsi Cultus Religiosi, Casus & Instaurationes Ecclesiæ Illustiores Ab Ipsis Rerum Primordiis, Enarrantur …* (Oxoniæ: Excudebat Hen. Hall … impensis Tho. Robinson …, 1661), 522 (Voetius) and 519 (Hoornbeeck).

16 See Gisperti Voetii, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum, Pars Prima* (Utrecht, 1648), 1:472, who called the Trinity the *fundamentum fundamenti*. He added that the doctrine of the Trinity was fundamental because it was the foundation of so many practical uses, personal holiness, and divine worship (473). For Hoornbeeck, see Johannes Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae* (Utrecht, 1663), 1:136.

17 Polly Ha, Patrick Collinson, eds., *The Reception of Continental Reformation in Britain* (Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2010), 235-236.

18 Richard A Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, Ca. 1520 to Ca. 1725* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academics, 2003), 4:144-149. Muller makes the important observation that the table of contents of dogmatic works are not a reliable guide regarding how Reformed authors related the divine attributes to the persons of the Godhead in terms of their relative importance. Letham makes this mistake on pg. 189 and in other books where he treats Reformed orthodox views of the Trinity.

is vital to his being a party in the covenant of redemption. On the other hand, the Spirit is actively involved in the covenant because he cannot be inactive without dividing the Godhead.[19] Edwards did not invent this explanation, but he explained it more clearly than most Reformed authors.[20] Letham argues that Owen was allegedly aware of the danger that the covenant of redemption posed to the Trinity and that it implied that the persons of the Godhead needed a covenant to unite them in their purpose (196). He concluded that Owen's difficulty with the persons betrays his western roots (197). He adds that the East stresses that we know the persons by our relation to them in redemption rather than by definition. However, this was precisely Horrnbeeck's conclusion to his treatment of the Trinity[21] and it pervades Peter van Mastricht's chapters on the three persons.[22] Earlier in this volume, Willem van Asselt argued that the trinitarian structure of the covenant of redemption enabled Owen and Cocceius to emphasize communion with all three divine persons.

A broader context of seventeenth-century western trinitarianism might reveal that the question of eastern versus western trinitarianism was not on the Reformed horizon. Letham gives the impression that he is asking the wrong questions of the wrong century. His knowledge of eastern and western trinitarianism is impressive, but the context that he sets for Owen is too narrow in terms of primary sources and too broad in terms of historical setting.

George Hunsinger's chapter on Owen's position regarding the relationship between justification and mystical union with Christ (199-211) stands out to this reviewer as particularly valuable. This is true both for historical and contemporary theology. He notes that shortly after Luther's death, a distinction arose between Lutheran and Reformed theologians over this question. Post-Reformation Lutherans regarded justification as the cause of union with Christ while the Reformed treated union with Christ as the ground of justification (199-200). Both sides agreed that justification was a forensic or judicial pronouncement that a sinner is righteous in God's sight. The difference was that the Reformed distinguished between being constituted righteous and being counted righteous, while Lutherans treated these as

19 Jonathan Edwards, "Economy of the Trinity in the Covenant of Redemption", *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Online,* 20:441-442.

20 Van Asselt makes a similar observations about Cocceius's position. WJ van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669)* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 235.

21 Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae,* 1:139-141.

22 Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia. Qua, Per Singula Capita Theologica, Pars Exegetica, Dogmatica, Elenchtica & Practica, Perpetua Successione Conjugantur.* (Trajecti ad Rhenum, & Amstelodami: Sumptibus Societatis, 1724), 235-270.

synonymous terms. Hunsinger notes a similar distinction between Melanchthon's teaching that justification is because of Christ (*propter Christum*) and the Reformed view (shared with Luther) that justification is in Christ (204).[23]

The question regards the nature of imputed righteousness. Does God constitute sinners to be righteousness by imputation and then count them righteous on the grounds of union with Christ? Or does God justify sinners by declaration and count them as righteous because of this declaration? The author argues that the Reformed position was that God unites people to Christ and constitutes them righteous in Christ before he counts or declares them righteous. Thus union with Christ and imputed righteousness logically precede justification. Comparing justification to God speaking and brining the world into being, Lutherans often treated imputation and the declaration of justification as synonymous.

Basing his material largely on Owen's treatise on justification by faith, he argues that Owen drew several consequences from the Reformed position. First, imputation as opposed to infusion is the formal cause of justification (209). Second, imputed righteousness involved "a real change in the believer's condition, not just a new relationship with God" (210). Third, mystical union with Christ is more than a mere union of wills, yet without erasing the distinction between Christ and believers (210). The questions that Hunsinger addresses continue to be relevant in Reformed churches today. Though this is a historical treatment, the author approaches the topic with remarkable clarity that will serve both historians and theologians well.

Tim Cooper's chapter bears strong similarities to his outstanding work, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Non-Conformity* (215-226).[24] This longer work asks why Owen and Baxter disliked each other and what effects this had on the formation of non-conformity after the Restoration of the monarchy. Owen wrote very little about himself, he did not allow personal records to survive, and he is hard to find as a historical subject. The value of this work and the chapter in this volume lies in piecing together Owen's actions at Oxford, attacks against character, and his sharp disagreements with men such as Baxter to give a unique window into what he was possibly like. This is a difficult but brilliant approach to getting to know Owen. The liability is that this presents a slightly vilified Owen that may be more or less

23 John Fesko acknowledges this charge against Melanchthon and rejects it. J. V Fesko, *Beyond Calvin: Union with Christ and Justification in Early Modern Reformed Theology (1517-1700)* (Göttingen; Bristol, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012), 140-143. He treats *propter Christum* and in Christ as synonyms.

24 Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011).

true to life. If we follow Cooper's advice to use this evidence cautiously, then we can safely assume that he helps readers gain at least a glimpse of an otherwise elusive figure.

John Coffey has written extensively and authoritatively on toleration in Reformation and post-Reformation England (277-248). The application of his expertise to Owen is gripping and informative. He argues that Owen's attitude towards tolerating those from other trinitarian Christian communions was more generous than most in his time period, but that he vacillated in his views when faced with the question of Congregationalism potentially becoming the established religion in the interregnum.

Daniel Hyde usefully summarizes Owen's view of the work of the Spirit in public worship through the media of prayer (249-270). In addition to showing that Owen both rejected mandating forms of prayer and permitted their use in a limited manner, Hyde shows how Owen developed his theology of worship from his exposition of Scripture. In particular, he shows the importance of Eph. 4:7-13 (254-255), Zech. 12:10 (259-261), Gal. 4:6 (261-262), Rom. 8:26 (262-267), and Eph. 6:18 for the exegetical foundation for Owen's "liturgical theology." The result is that this chapter not only redresses the absence of material on Owen's theology of worship, but it fills some of the lacunae in the exegetical foundation of Reformed orthodox theology.

Lee Gatiss briefly outlines Owen's arguments in favour of infant baptism and infant salvation (271-282). He draws from a wide range of seventeenth century authors and establishes the context for his material more appropriately than several of the authors in this volume. He rightly recognizes the oft-neglected fact that the Anabaptist rejection of paedobaptism "was a major catalyst" in developing covenant theology in Reformed orthodoxy (272). His chapter shows how closely intertwined the ideas of covenant and baptism were in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries. This chapter is interesting, well written, and helps clarify the matters pertinent to this much-debated question.

The final chapter, by Martin Foord, examines the question regarding the will of God towards all people in relation to the free offer of the gospel (283-295). He locates Owen in the broader Reformed tradition and draws from a wealth of primary sources. The question regards God's will or desire towards the salvation of the unregenerate in relation to Ezekiel 18:23, 32, 33:11 (284). Foord traces the theology and exegesis surrounding this question through Calvin, Vermigli, Musculus, Zanchius, Perkins, Piscator, Twisse, Manton, Bates, and Turretin in order to situate Owen's view within Reformed options. In addition, he delves deeply into the medieval background of different senses of speaking of the will of God. This broad context makes his conclusions concrete and his observations helpful for contemporary questions.

Some authors distinguished simply between God's will of good pleasure (*voluntas beneplaciti*) and his significant will (*volutas signi*). The former refers to the divine decree and the latter corresponds to his precepts (285-286). Turretin later represented clearly what became the classic distinction between God decretive and his perceptive will (291). Others (Piscator and Twisse) argued that God wills the destruction of the wicked, but he does not take pleasure in it because they are his creatures (287-288). Manton argued that God delighted in the redemption of all people in some sense, but that he did not will it in another sense (290). Owen believed that the text referred to God's commands and said nothing about divine affections (292). He ultimately limited the love of God to the elect (294). His doctrine of God did not allow him to say that God delights in or wills the salvation of all in some sense. Foord concludes that Owen's views lean toward later eighteenth-century hyper-Calvinism and that his resolution of the Ezekiel text was only one among several Reformed explanations (295). This treatment gives a broad historical perspective on what continues to be a difficult question in Reformed theology.

3. CONCLUSION

The *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology* is an important benchmark in the study of Reformed orthodoxy. It is a monumental achievement that introduces readers to the general scope of Owen's thought. Some of the research in this volume is groundbreaking. All of it provides a foundation on which to move forward in both in historical and contemporary theology. Historical theology is one of the most useful means of enabling contemporary theologians to engage in self-critical evaluation through the eyes of different people with different problems. However, this book is not perfect. Some of the authors do not rely on primary source evidence and context as much as others. There are many gaps in subject matter as well. In addition to the themes treated here, it would be helpful to have an introductory volume to John Owen that investigates topics such as his trinitarian piety, connecting trinitarian piety to public worship, his Thomistic and medieval influences, the influence that he had on later Reformed theologians, a detailed introduction to his life and career in relation to his theology, the influence of his tenure at Oxford on the university and its students, his covenant theology and ecclesiology, and others. This reviewer hopes that this book will be the first among other volumes to help revive the importance and relevance of Owen both to the church and to the university.