

COMMUNION  
WITH  
GOD

The Divine  
and the Human in the Theology of  
John Owen

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FOREWORD BY J. I. PACKER

  
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In Memory of Colin E. Gunton  
Scholar, Mentor, Friend

and

In Loving Appreciation of Tabitha Kacic  
Beloved

To the Puritans, communion between God and man is the end to which both creation and redemption are the means; it is the goal to which both theology and preaching must ever point; it is the essence of true religion; it is, indeed, the definition of Christianity.

J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*

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## FOREWORD

I remember a time when a stereotype of the English Puritans as crude religious bigots held sway, and academic analysis and appreciation of their thought was virtually nonexistent. Accurate understanding of the magisterial Reformers was similarly at a discount, and the English translation of Calvin's *Institutes* was out of print. But pendulums swing, and today the study of Reformation theology and of Lutheran and Calvinist scholasticism and of early European pietism and of the many-sided Puritan legacy has become a sizable cottage industry in academia's larger world. Lecture courses, doctoral theses, journal articles, and printed books on the Puritans now abound, and the flow increases. Reissues of Puritan material constantly appear, and it is clear that more and more Christians are coming to value this heritage. Some of us find that a very hopeful sign.

A cultural development in the West that has triggered some of this renewed interest in Puritan Christianity is our latter-day focus on experience, our longing for good experiences, and our awareness that experiences spawned by our sophisticated hedonism are mostly unsatisfying, not to say bad. Out of this has blossomed a fixation on personal spirituality, meaning a quest for self-discovery and self-transcendence, and this has led some to a fresh exploration of Christian spirituality—the theological, pastoral, communal, ethical, ascetic, doxological reality of communion with God in and through Jesus Christ in faith and hope and love. As a result, there is dawning a new appreciation of the supreme excellence in this field of Puritans such as John Bunyan, Richard Baxter, Jonathan Edwards, and John Owen.

Long regarded as Puritanism's theological Everest, Owen was forgotten in the twentieth century until about twenty years ago. As Dr. Kopic's

bibliography shows, there have been some voyages around him, and some soundings of his thought on specifics, in recent years. None of these, however, come as close to Owen's heart as Dr. Kavic himself does. For understanding, enjoying, and communicating communion with God was what Owen understood his life and ministry to be all about. His writings reveal him as not only an evangelical confessor and controversialist in the Reformed mainstream, but also as a Calvinist catechist, weaving in applicatory pastoral rhetoric at every point. Dr. Kavic coins the word *anthroposensitive* to characterize this aspect of his expository method. It fits.

This is a landmark book in modern Puritan study, and it is a joy to commend it.

J. I. Packer

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Life is full of journeys, and those treks are enjoyable primarily because of the people with whom one walks. Although I remain responsible for all that follows—since it can only represent my limited perspective of the many things seen during my excursions—it must be said that if others had not helped me notice details in the landscape and pointed out distant vistas, my own record of the journey would be much less interesting. With this in mind, I would like briefly to thank those who have been so influential along the way.

It is appropriate for me to begin by thanking God for the late Colin E. Gunton. Like many others who studied under Colin, I find myself profoundly impacted by this man who unapologetically loved theology, his church, his family, and his garden. His investment in me has had a deep and lasting impact, and although it is painful to no longer hear Colin's laughter and see his smile as he fidgets with his tie or his pen, there is no doubt that aspects of his voice continue through the research, writing, and preaching of his former students.

Since this project has been in the works for many years, it is necessary to acknowledge some former teachers and friends who have been exceedingly helpful in shaping my own thinking about various aspects of this study, often offering invaluable feedback and encouragement: Mark A. Noll, Frank A. James III, J. I. Packer, Roger Nicole, Richard Gamble, Susan Hardman Moore, Ashley Null, Sinclair Ferguson, Paul Helm, Steve Holmes, Dave Horner, Daniel Hill, Randal Gleason, Charles MacKenzie, Paul Chang-Ha Lim, Carl Trueman, Graham McFarlane, Donald McKim, Jay Green, Jeff Morton, Jeff Hall, Justin Taylor, Ron Frost, Brian Brock, Randal Rauser, Babu Venkataraman, Eric Flett, and John Yates. While much of this book was presented at different academic conferences, I would like to express my particular debt to the

Research Institute of Systematic Theology, where members heard and commented on much of what follows. Finally, I have benefited from the grace of many former students who took the time to work carefully through the entire manuscript, including Cameron Moran, Andrea Long, Brian Hecker, Heidi Herberich, and Cole Hamilton. While I would prefer to write something particular about each individual mentioned in this paragraph, let me simply say a collective thank you, for without you this volume would be much weaker and my life far less rich.

Given that one cannot engage in this type of research without the help of some excellent research libraries, I would like to thank the following institutions and their exceptional staffs: King's College, the University of London, the British Library, Oxford University, Cambridge University, Dr. Williams Library, and Covenant College. Librarians Tad Mindeman and John Holberg deserve special mention.

Yet research requires more than the academy, and particular thanks goes out to a special group of family and friends, without whom this work could never have been accomplished. Since this work began as research for my doctoral dissertation, during our years overseas and since our return, Tabitha and I have found ourselves sustained through the prayers, words of encouragement, and strong support of others. Our parents and siblings have consistently demonstrated their love for us in remarkable ways. Thank you Gary and Linda Kapic, John and Lynne Malley, David and Jennifer Kapic, Ming and Jennifer Chiou, and Danny and Emily Kapic. A special thank you to Jim and Dayle Seneff for your tremendous support and guidance on so many different levels—your friendship is dear to us.

It is said that if you want to emphasize a point, you must either begin or end with it. Although it is common for authors to thank their spouses, and I am sure they mean it, I fear that this general practice may somehow take away from the abiding gratefulness I wish to express to Tabitha, my wife and most vigorous editor. Words cannot describe the joy I feel for being allowed to join you on this great journey over the last fourteen years of our marriage. Your sacrifices have been significant, your encouragement profound, your friendship steadfast, and your love unwavering. One of the best parts about the years of research and teaching has been those opportunities we have had, especially over long meals and coffee, to dream and hope together. Now with two little ones filling the house with the delightful sound of feet scampering across wood floors, our lives are fuller than we could have ever imagined. John Owen, quoting an earlier theologian, once said that, "The delight in love is that of the lover in the beloved. Love is the beat of the heart that delights itself in someone." Through being with you I believe that I have experienced hints of what Owen describes as the soul resting and delighting in another, and in this way you have pointed me to the very love of God.

## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>BE</i>	Owen, <i>Works</i> , Banner of Truth reprint edition
<i>BQ</i>	<i>The Baptist Quarterly</i>
<i>BT</i>	Owen, <i>Biblical Theology</i> , Westcott translation
<i>CD</i>	Barth, <i>Church Dogmatics</i>
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>DA</i>	Aristotle, <i>De anima</i>
<i>DLGTT</i>	Muller, <i>Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>EN</i>	Aristotle, <i>Ethica nicomachea</i>
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>FR</i>	<i>Fides reformata</i>
<i>GC</i>	Owen, Greater Catechism
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>IJST</i>	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JHBS</i>	<i>Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences</i>
<i>JPP</i>	<i>Journal of Pastoral Practice</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KJV</i>	King James (or Authorized) Version
<i>KTR</i>	<i>King's Theological Review</i>

LC	Owen, Lesser Catechism
<i>NPNF</i> <sup>1</sup>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series</i>
<i>NPNF</i> <sup>2</sup>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series</i>
PL	Jacques Paul Migne, ed., <i>Patrologiae . . . latina</i> , 222 vols.
<i>PRRD</i>	Muller, <i>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics</i> , vols. 1–4
RC	The Racovian Catechism
<i>RD</i>	Heppe, <i>Reformed Dogmatics</i>
<i>RR</i>	Johnson and Leith, eds., <i>Reformed Reader</i> , vol. 1
<i>SBET</i>	<i>The Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology</i>
SC	Owen, A Short Catechism or A Brief Instruction in the Worship of God
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>ST</i>	Aquinas, <i>Summa theologiae</i>
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TR</i>	<i>Theologia reformata</i>
<i>TT</i>	<i>Theology Today</i>
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism
<i>Works</i>	Owen, <i>Works</i> , Goold Edition
WSC	Westminster Shorter Catechism
<i>WTJ</i>	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>



## THE LINGERING SHADOW OF JOHN OWEN

Dr. John Owen was a man of no ordinary intellect.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Notes on English Divines*

Some writer in the last century (Dr. James Hamilton, if I mistake not) declared that evangelical theology had been hitherto alluvial for the most part, and that its main element was a detritus from mount Owen.

James Moffatt, *The Golden Book of John Owen* (1904)

### **The Continuing Presence of a Theologian**

Since many twenty-first-century Christians are not well-acquainted with John Owen (1616–83), it may surprise some to learn that the long shadow of this theological giant is still readily visible if one is paying attention. The streets of Liverpool, Belfast, or Edinburgh today pass by numerous bookshops bearing Owen’s name.<sup>1</sup> Visiting the outskirts of London, one might also stumble across a nonconformist seminary that has recently opened the John Owen Theological Centre.<sup>2</sup> Moving from the streets of the city to

1. Wesley Owen Books and Music stores, which refer to John Wesley and John Owen, have over forty shops throughout the UK.

2. The London Theological Seminary opened this Centre in 1999. Students in their ThM program receive internationally accredited degrees through the Centre’s partner, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, USA.

the superhighway in cyberspace, one discovers numerous Web sites either dedicated solely to him, or including him as an authority.<sup>3</sup> Ages Software has even produced an entire CD-ROM that compiles most of Owen's writings in a searchable format.<sup>4</sup> A twenty-four volume edition of his *Works* remains in print,<sup>5</sup> and a recent translation of his major Latin treatise (with the Greek title *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΑ*—*Theologoumena pantodapa* [Theological Teachings of All Sorts]) on the discipline of theology has also recently appeared.<sup>6</sup> A revival has taken place in publishing abridged and "easy-to-read" versions of many of his key books.<sup>7</sup> Kris Lundgaard, although not exactly engaged in abridgment, openly confesses to having

3. Although countless Web sites either refer to Owen or use extensive quotations from his work, two particular examples demonstrate his popularity in this medium. The first is a recent Web site strictly dedicated to all things Owen: [johnowen.org](http://johnowen.org). This site includes a good and growing bibliography, some of Owen's works scanned for Internet reading, a gallery of quotations and images, an old biography, and so on. The second example shows how people continue to regard him as an authority able to persuade today's reader: "John Owen on the Jewish People," [chaim.org/owen.htm](http://chaim.org/owen.htm). At this site one finds an appeal to Owen in order to convince contemporary Reformed congregations to minister particularly to Jewish people.

4. *The Works of John Owen* (Rio, WI: Ages Software, 2000). Although claiming to be the nineteenth-century edition, this is clearly a scanned copy of the Banner of Truth reprint mentioned below. Unfortunately, the CD is missing the Latin works, uses the Banner volume numbers, and has altogether new page numbers.

5. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold, 24 vols. (Edinburgh & London: Johnstone & Hunter, 1850–55). Vols. 1–16 were reprinted in Edinburgh by Banner of Truth Trust, 1965. However, the Banner Edition (hereafter cited as BE) omitted all of Owen's Latin writings and orations, thus rearranging and combining vols. 16–17. The last seven volumes of the Goold set, containing Owen's Hebrews commentary, were also reprinted (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991). The BE of Hebrews does not follow the volume numbers of the Goold edition, being always one volume behind. E.g., BE's vol. 20 = Goold's vol. 21. Hereafter, *Works* (even without Owen's name) will refer to the original Goold 24-volume edition. Volume number and pages will always annotate references to Owen's *Works*. The frequent italics found in Owen's *Works* are not retained, since many times it is unclear, from the different seventeenth-century editions, whether the emphasis comes directly from Owen or from an excited printer.

6. John Owen, *Biblical Theology, or, The Nature, Origin, Development, and Study of Theological Truth, in Six Books*, trans. Stephen P. Westcott (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994); hereafter cited as *BT*. The original title of the translated work is *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΑ*, sive, *De natura, ortu, progressu, et studio, veræ theologiæ* . . . , 6 vols. (Oxonix [in Oxford]: Tho. Robinson, 1661), appearing in vol. 17 of the original Goold edition; it has been left out of the more recent BE publication.

7. E.g., *The Treasures of John Owen for Today's Readers*, a multivolume series printed by Banner of Truth Trust and edited by R. J. K. Law. See also James M. Houston's version of three of Owen's treatises, in *Sin and Temptation: The Challenge of Personal Godliness* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1996). Grace Publications also printed several abridgments of classic Owen treatises. Christian Focus Publishers (Fearn, Tain, UK) has just started new releases of nicely reformatted but unabridged paperback volumes of key Owen books, which were previously available only in the expensive hardbound *Works* edition.

“kidnapped Owen,” using him as a sort of “co-author.”<sup>8</sup> Lundgaard’s book, in essence a modern version of Owen’s thoughts on the believer’s struggle with sin, has already sold over fifty-five thousand copies! These different adaptations have been well received, since even admirers of the learned Puritan fondly refer to his writing style as “Latinized English,” which certainly does not make for easy reading.<sup>9</sup>

Beyond this popular literature and various reprintings, over the last thirty years there has been a steadily growing interest in scholarship on Owen, primarily concerned with his theology rather than his life. For the most part this revival has thus far taken the form of unpublished dissertations, with a few academic monographs now beginning to be available in print.<sup>10</sup> In all of these formats, this Puritan preacher shows his continued influence on clergy, laity, and scholars. Clearly Owen has cast a long shadow, and there is good reason for a new generation to rediscover him as a significant theological dialogue partner, worthy of serious study.

Before providing a brief sketch of the man who cast this shadow and outlining the focus of our study of Owen, it may prove interesting if we first hear a few examples of how Owen was viewed from the seventeenth through the early twentieth century. Again, the level of Owen’s influence during this period is often surprising, and this quick survey helps make the case that Owen deserves a fresh hearing in the twenty-first century, for he has long been viewed as a first-rate spiritual theologian.

## Signs of the Shadow through the Centuries

Little captures Owen’s popularity during the seventeenth century better than a vicious letter sent to him by a Quaker sympathizer.<sup>11</sup> Apparently

8. Kris Lundgaard, *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk about the Power and Defeat of Sin* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1998), 14. Lundgaard has also published another volume entitled *Through the Looking Glass: Reflections on Christ That Change Us* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2000), which is likewise based on Owen’s writings and has already sold over 8,000 copies.

9. J. I. Packer muses: “Owen’s style is often stigmatised as cumbersome and tortuous. Actually it is a Latinized spoken style, fluent but stately and expansive, in the elaborate Ciceronian manner”; from *A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 194.

10. For a general review of the literature on John Owen over the last century, see Kelly M. Kopic, “Communion with God: Relations between the Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen” (PhD diss., King’s College London, 2001), 12–48. An extensive bibliography of both primary and secondary literature is also included at the end of this book.

11. The original letter is found in the British Library, but Peter Toon, ed., has conveniently reprinted it in *The Correspondence of John Owen (1616–1683)* (Cambridge, UK:

“Thomas Truthsbye,” in an effort to discover which “Clergy-men were famous, and notorious” in the eyes of the leaders of the “late revolutions in England,” kept hearing Owen’s name above the others.<sup>12</sup> Offering what appears to us to be a wonderful compliment of a theologian’s accessibility—though never intended that way—he adds: “I can scarce visit a Tavern, or Country Ale-house, but forth comes some of the Learned Works of *John Owen*, a Servant, &c. as if you were cut out to entertain all sorts of Guests; if I send Tobacco, your Books are the inclosure of it, and there I finde your name stinking worse than that *Indian Weed*.” This attack shows how influential Owen and his writings had become by the second half of the seventeenth century.

Owen’s fame continued into the eighteenth century, though usually friends rather than foes remembered him. Judging by the testimony in David Clarkson’s sermon at Owen’s funeral and the two early biographies of Owen, the public clearly considered Owen a (if not *the*) leading British theologian of the seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup> As such, people often idealized him to represent the best of Puritan theology and practice, usually drawing attention away from his political involvement. This later generation’s willingness to downplay Owen’s participation in the political turmoil of the seventeenth century demonstrates the ongoing value placed upon his theological contributions. His writings continued to have a wide readership, giving rise to more than fifty printings in the eighteenth century of different works by Owen, many of which were translated into Dutch, Swedish, and Welsh.<sup>14</sup> Thus William Wilberforce (1759–1833), best known for his leading role in abolishing the slave trade in Britain, could highly recommend Owen to his readers in 1797, knowing that the books would be available to them.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, it was the nineteenth century that witnessed a real explosion of interest. On average there was a book by Owen published every

James Clarke, 1970), 166–67, original emphasis. Toon suggests that “Thomas Truthsbye” is probably Thomas Taylor; cf. *DNB*.

12. Truthsbye writes: “Your [i.e., Owen’s] Worship was cried up as high as Tyburn, as well known, and as little trusted; in my Travels Westward they calld [*sic*] you *Quaker*, Northward *Anabaptist*, in *Oxford* a *State Independent*, in *London* a *Jesuite*, beyond Seas a conscience-mender.”

13. David Clarkson, Owen’s successor at the Leadenhall Street church in London, preached Owen’s funeral sermon. It is reprinted in Thomas Russell’s 1826 edition of *The Works of John Owen*, 1:411–22. In 1720 an anonymous *Life of John Owen* was printed, followed by John Asty, “Memoirs of the Life of John Owen,” in *A Complete Collection of the Sermons of John Owen*, ed. John Asty (London: John Clark, 1721).

14. See Oxford Libraries’ Union Catalogue (OLIS) and WorldCAT.

15. William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians, in the Higher and Middle Classes in This Country, Contrasted with Real Christianity*, 18th ed. (London: T. Cadell, 1830), 240–41.

year between 1800 and 1860.<sup>16</sup> In 1826 Thomas Russell made the first effort to publish Owen's complete works, although this early attempt left much to be desired.<sup>17</sup> Given the renewed zeal for Owen's writings and the inadequacies of the Russell edition, William H. Goold produced the definitive edition of Owen's works from 1850 to 1855.<sup>18</sup> Goold's final collection contained twenty-four volumes, including Owen's Latin speeches and writings. This edition grew out of and continued to encourage interest in Owen both for pastoral and academic purposes.

One need only look to the popular nineteenth-century Baptist minister C. H. Spurgeon (1834–92) to see that Owen's appeal in England remained strong. Spurgeon, influencing a whole generation of preachers through the Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle in London, clearly encourages his students to wrestle through Owen's writings. Commenting on Owen's exposition of Psalm 130, Spurgeon praises him:

It is unnecessary to say that he is the prince of divines. To master his works is to be a profound theologian. Owen is said to be a prolix, but it would be truer to say that he is condensed. His style is heavy because he gives notes of what he might have said, and passes on without fully developing the great thoughts of his capacious mind. He requires hard study, and none of us ought to grudge it.<sup>19</sup>

While we may argue that Spurgeon is overly kind regarding Owen's prose style, his enthusiasm toward this Puritan remains representative of many at this time.

Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920) reminds us that Owen also had an international following. Kuyper was a renowned Dutch theologian and

16. Abridgments of Owen's writings testify to his popularity and wide readership during this time. E.g., W. Wilson, ed., *Selections from the Works of John Owen* (London, 1826).

17. Thomas Russell, ed., *The Works of John Owen*, 21 vols. (London: Richard Baynes, 1826), containing another biography by William Orme (1787–1830). This edition was criticized for numerous reasons. For example, Russell declined to correct the significant inaccuracies of earlier editions: these include mispointing of the Hebrew, incorrect Greek accents, and significant problems with quotations from the early Greek and Latin fathers. Russell's edition also omits such important works as *Exercitations concerning . . . a Day of Sacred Rest* and *ΘΕΟΛΟΓΟΥΜΕΝΑ ΠΑΝΤΟΔΑΠΑ*. Although in our study *Works* always refers to the later Goold edition, the reader must beware that even now some scholars persist in using the Russell edition, which has different volume and page numbers. E.g., Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

18. For more on Goold, see Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 369.

19. Charles H. Spurgeon, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1876), 103. Cf. W. H. Goold, "John Owen," in *Evangelical Succession*, 3rd ser., printed lecture (Edinburgh: MacNiven & Wallace, 1883).

later prime minister of the Netherlands (1900–05). In the original Dutch edition to Kuyper's classic work *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest* (*The Work of the Holy Spirit*), he begins his tome by noting his debt to Owen, whom Kuyper even two centuries later considered the leading authority on the subject of the Holy Spirit.<sup>20</sup> After discussing Owen's important contribution, he lists for his readers many works of Owen—seventy-four volumes—many of which are available in Dutch translation. Kuyper's respect for Owen and the phenomenal number of Dutch translations demonstrates how Owen's books found an eager audience beyond Britain and the United States. Since their original appearance, Owen's books have been translated into a number of languages beyond Dutch, including Korean, Scottish Gaelic, Welsh, and Spanish. As recent studies of Owen published in Portuguese and Dutch clearly demonstrate, this international interest has not died.<sup>21</sup>

In the twentieth century the "Atlas of Independency"<sup>22</sup> remained a favorite among English conservative congregational ministers, providing an intellectual foundation for many of their distinct theological emphases in a changing world. Likewise, Owen's writings continued to elicit the occasional response from those who viewed his theology as unbiblical and dangerous. For example, in the early part of the twentieth century an anonymous author attacked Owen's classic statement on particular atonement, in *Under Calvin's Yoke: Dr. John Owen's Three Invincible Questions Answered by Bereana*.<sup>23</sup> Here the author tries to answer Owen's infamous syllogism, which countless Calvinists thought inevitably leads all reasonable Christians to conclude that Christ died only for the elect.<sup>24</sup>

20. Abraham Kuyper, *Het werk van den Heiligen Geest* (Amsterdam: J. A. Wormser, 1888). The material on Owen is in the *Voorrede* (prologue), which includes his listing of Owen's translated works. This listing of works is missing in the English translation of Kuyper's book. Cf. Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri de Vries (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1900).

21. E.g., Valdeci dos Santos, "O 'Crente Carnal' à Luz do ensino de John Owen sobre a Mortificação," *FR* 4, no. 1 (1999): 57–68; R. W. DeKoeper, "Pneumatologia: Enkel aspecten van de leer van de heilige Geest bji de puritein John Owen," *TR* 34 (1991): 226–46, which is based on his thesis, "Pneumatologia: Een onderzoek naar de leer van de Heilige Geest bij de puritein John Owen (1616–1683)" (Utrecht, 1990). A recent thesis from the Philippines also testifies to Owen's remaining international appeal: D. J. McKinley, "John Owen's View of Illumination and Its Contemporary Relevance" (ThD diss., University of Santo Tomas, Manila, 1995).

22. This name given to Owen originated as a slur when used by George Vernon, *A Letter to a Friend* (London: printed by J. Redmayne, 1670), 36. He was discussing Owen's alleged role in bringing down Richard Cromwell. For a fuller discussion, see R. Tudor Jones, *Congregationalism in England, 1662–1962* (London: Independent Press, 1962), 71–72.

23. Anonymous, *Under Calvin's Yoke: Dr. John Owen's Three Invincible Questions Answered by Bereana* (London: Elliot Stock, 1930).

24. This syllogism is laid out and discussed in chap. 5 of this book.

While the argument in this brief book is of no direct concern to our study, what is of interest is that over two hundred years after Owen's death, Owen's arguments were still used by Calvinists, and Arminian theologians still found it necessary to interact with the long deceased spokesman of Puritan congregationalism. Clearly this anonymous author felt compelled to free those who, even after several centuries, remained not only under Calvin's influential yoke, but also Owen's!

### The Life of John Owen, Who Cast This Shadow

We have given contemporary and historical examples of the high regard that people have shown to this Puritan divine, and now we turn our attention to the one who cast the shadow. Although we will not provide an extensive biography, a few highlights from Owen's life shed some light on our theological discussions.<sup>25</sup>

The year of Shakespeare's death, 1616, was also the year of John Owen's birth, and although Owen was no match for Shakespeare's eloquence, both men did share a remarkable ability to understand human nature.<sup>26</sup> Though Owen put his pen to treatises rather than plays and delivered sermons instead of poems, both men in their distinct ways were able to speak into the complexity of human nature: full of dignity and disease, deception and longing, pride and hope, fear and rest.

In the following chapters our theological interest will focus on Owen's view of humanity, which he distinctly frames in terms of relations with

25. For biographical material on Owen, Peter Toon's *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen; Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971) is a historically sensitive treatment and remains the most accessible point of entry into understanding the "historical Owen." Earlier Congregationalist historians tended to view Owen from an overtly partisan perspective and usually with an eye toward his theological writings. While Toon remains a bit too distant from Owen's theological writings, he presents the fullest and fairest biography of Owen readily available. To understand Owen's continuing popularity at the lay level, one should recognize that popular biographies were also written around this time. See, for example, Peter Barraclough, *John Owen, 1616–1683* (London: Independent Press, 1961); R. Glynne Lloyd, *John Owen—Commonwealth Puritan* (Liverpool: Modern Welsh Publications, 1972). Other academic treatments are found in Sarah Gibbard Cook, "A Political Biography of a Religious Independent: John Owen, 1616–83" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1972); and Lloyd G. Williams, "'Digitus Dei': God and Nation in the Thought of John Owen; A Study in English Puritanism and Nonconformity, 1653–1683" (PhD diss., Drew University, 1981). See also the reissuing of Andrew Thomson's short biography of Owen, which was originally found in the first volume of the Goold edition in the nineteenth century: *The Life of Dr. Owen* (Edinburgh, 1850); repr. as *John Owen: Prince of Puritans, History Makers* (Fearn, Tain, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2004).

26. For a provocative look at Shakespeare along these lines, see Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (London: Fourth Estate, 1998).

God. Three principal sources guide Owen's reflections: the Scriptures, historical theology, and experience. Because novelty for novelty's sake has no strong appeal for this Puritan, the Scriptures and church history keep his reflections well within the paths of classical orthodox Christianity. Having said that, we should also avoid common stereotypes that continue to present Puritans like Owen as dry rationalists—such grievous misunderstandings appear to die hard. He is never content simply to repeat past theological formulations apart from pastoral application. As we will see throughout our study, Owen constantly moves from his received theology to experience, then back to theological reflection. By keeping this reciprocal relationship, with human experience informing theological reflection and theological reflection reforming experience, Owen provides fresh anthropological insights.

Geoffrey F. Nuttall ably argues that the seventeenth century was a time that put a great stress on experience, for this was

the century which has Hamlet as its prototype and exemplar, and one could be only surprised if there were no corresponding emphasis in theology. At what other stage in philosophical development would it be argued *Cogito, ergo sum*? It is the age of diaries, often intensely introspective and finding in the slightest events God's personal dealings with the writer's souls; and of the earliest memoirs and autobiographies.<sup>27</sup>

Although there was debate about how to incorporate one's experience into one's theology, in seventeenth-century England it was not unusual to value learning from participation in daily life, and this is the context in which Owen was nurtured. Eventually this Puritan will carefully try to include the best aspects of this experiential emphasis within his own theology, while also trying to avoid some of what he will conclude are the extremes of his age. To know how Owen finds his own center, we turn to a rapid tour of his life.

Although we have some word of Owen's enjoyment of the flute, throwing the javelin, and even doing the long jump during his early years, from his youth he showed himself to be particularly zealous for study, sometimes averaging just four hours of sleep a night. While at Queen's College, Oxford, studying for his BA and MA degrees, Owen proved to be an able student in all manner of fields, including the classics, ancient languages, history, grammar, philosophy, and rhetoric. Growing ecclesi-

27. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience*, 2nd ed. (1947; repr., Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7; cf., Toon, *God's Statesman*, 166–67. Also see Gavin McGrath, "'But We Preach Christ Crucified': The Cross of Christ in the Pastoral Theology of John Owen, 1616–1683," St. Antholin's Lectureship Charity Lecture, 1994 (London: Latimer Trust, 1994).

astical and political tensions made it difficult for Puritans like Owen to stay at Oxford when the High Church William Laud was appointed to be Chancellor of Oxford (1630) and then Archbishop of Canterbury (1633). Leaving the university with his MA, Owen spent time as a private tutor, chaplain, author, and eventually as a pastor. During this period Owen had a noteworthy experience at Aldermanbury Chapel.

Since Owen was raised in a Puritan home with a father who was himself a pastor, he had long been familiar with the Scriptures and the doctrines of grace, but he longed for a personal experience that would help end his struggles with assurance. Although this young man had already served as a chaplain and tutor after leaving Oxford, Owen apparently did not yet find himself at peace about his spiritual state. According to an early biography, at the age of twenty-six those fears were done away with. He went to hear the celebrated Edmund Calamy preach at Aldermanbury Chapel, but instead a country preacher gave the sermon. Owen's cousin urged him to leave and hear another, more able minister elsewhere, but since Owen was weary he decided to stay. What he heard was a sermon on Matthew 8:26—"Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" Through the homily of a man who always remained nameless to Owen, this young Puritan experienced the fullness of God's love and acceptance, and he was able to break his five-year melancholy. Sensitivity for those who struggle to feel God's gracious approval and delight never left Owen, as demonstrated by the endless pages he devoted to helping others come to believe the glory of the gospel message. Clearly Owen's view of human experience, under both sin and grace, was not merely theoretical, but also a reflection of his own journey and understanding.<sup>28</sup>

Shortly after this experience Owen began what would be a most prolific writing career. His first book, *A Display of Arminianism* (1643), is a zealous defense of his Reformed faith, which he believes is the only escape from the "modern blind patrons of human self-sufficiency."<sup>29</sup> Behind this early argument is a concern that those who diminish God's sovereignty and providence in the end remove the security promised to believers, for instead of focusing on the sufficiency of God in Christ, an Arminian (according to Owen) tends to focus on human attributes rather than on God's. Although rough at many points, this early work displays a basic theological framework from which Owen never fundamentally departed.

28. Although the story of Owen's experience is retold many times, early details come primarily from the anonymous *Life of Owen* (1720); and Asty, "Memoirs" (1721); more recently, see Toon, *God's Statesman*, 12–13.

29. For this early book, see Owen, *Works* 10:1–137, quotation from p. 11.

Demonstrating his growing place in the political and ecclesiastical arena, Owen preached before Parliament in 1646, when he was just thirty years old. During this period Owen began to work through numerous issues, including his early view of religious toleration and civil peace. Here his theology and political practice informed one another. Through his study of history, Owen concluded that ultimately when the church persecuted and punished heretics, it did not purify the church, but rather created tyranny. As Peter Toon rightly explains,

Owen's own position was to the left of the Presbyterians and to the right of the Separatists and the Sectarians. He was firmly of the opinion that heretics as well as dissenters from the Established Church should not be punished merely because they were so, but only if they caused a public disturbance or were openly licentious. Their doctrinal errors should be countered by reasonable argument and spiritual weapons, not by the power of the sword.<sup>30</sup>

Here we encounter what will become Owen's common approach to a variety of issues: He studies the past experiences of the church to inform his view of present practice. He seeks to avoid the extremes. He believes in the Holy Spirit's activity as the only way to bring about true inner change in people, rather than depending upon external coercion. And he aims to allow freedom, but not chaos. Between the extremes Owen intends to be uncompromising in his view of God's sovereignty, while also strongly affirming human agency. These general principles will guide not only Owen's politics, but his fundamental theological methodology.

Proving to be a popular preacher and a man with influential relationships, Owen found himself preaching to the Commons several times in 1648–49. Two examples are noteworthy. First, Owen was present in London for the execution of King Charles I and was asked to preach the following day, wherein he gave an address entitled, "Righteous Zeal Encouraged by Divine Protection."<sup>31</sup> This sermon, which years later was condemned by Oxford University after Owen's death in 1683, draws some parallels between the prophet Jeremiah and the times in which Owen's contemporaries found themselves in England. Lest Owen be misunderstood, we must acknowledge that in the weeks after giving this sermon and before it went to print, he added "Of Toleration: and the Duty of the Magistrate about Religion," which, given the times, is a surprisingly liberal view of toleration.<sup>32</sup> In fact, there has even been some suggestion

30. Toon, *God's Statesman*, 24.

31. Owen, *Works* 8:127–62.

32. For this tract, see Owen, *Works* 8:163–206. L. G. Williams ("God and Nation," 153) concludes: "Owen's particular understanding of collective theology, especially his belief

that Owen's views of toleration eventually influenced John Locke, who later entered Oxford while Owen was dean at Christ Church and then vice-chancellor of Oxford University.<sup>33</sup>

Another sermon preached that year before the Commons was based on Hebrews 12:27: "Shaking and Translating of Heaven and Earth." For Owen, "heaven and earth" were not sky and dust; rather, using Old Testament examples he argues that these were clear references to all the proud national powers of the world (heavens) and the people who filled those nations (earth). He particularly had in mind the unfaithful political authorities, which he deemed as opposing the kingdom of Christ, tempting people to trust created powers rather than the Creator.<sup>34</sup> Listening to this eschatologically charged sermon was Oliver Cromwell, who was deeply impressed and afterward made himself known to the young preacher.

Cromwell and Owen were to have a long friendship, which in the end seems to parallel the tide of political affairs in the nation. After hearing Owen preach, Cromwell was adamant that this able minister must join him as a chaplain on an expedition to Ireland. This was to be the first of many times when Cromwell insisted on Owen's service, often against Owen's own desires. By 1650 he was an official preacher at Whitehall Chapel, and thus minister to the Council of State; consequently, Owen led prayers, Bible studies, and weekly preaching among those who were shaping the future of the Commonwealth.<sup>35</sup> His tremendous influence in seventeenth-century England is clearly shown by identifying some of those with whom he corresponded: Oliver and Richard Cromwell, leading Generals Charles Fleetwood and George Monk, members of Parliament, the governor of Massachusetts, Richard Baxter, and others.<sup>36</sup> Shortly after serving at Whitehall, Owen was appointed dean of Christ Church, Oxford (1651), and then vice-chancellor of Oxford University

in the toleration of dissent within a loose religious framework, aided in the development not of medieval conformity but of the greatest religious and social pluralism that England had ever seen till that time."

33. E.g., J. Wayne Baker, "Church, State, and Toleration: John Locke and Calvin's Heirs in England, 1644–1689," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal, 1994), 525–43, esp. 532; Cook, "Political Biography," 120–21. For Locke's writings, begin by reading his *First and Second Tract on Government* (1660 and 1662) and *An Essay on Toleration* (1667), in *Locke: Political Essays*, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 3–53, 54–78, 134–59, respectively.

34. Humanity, which suffers from "that deformity and dissimilitude to the divine nature" as a result of the fall, seeks now to "quiet and satiate his soul with restless movings towards changeable things [i.e., political powers]." The sermon (in a form longer than originally preached) can be found in Owen, *Works* 8:243–79; quotation from p. 247.

35. Toon, *God's Statesman*, 42.

36. See Toon, ed., *Correspondence of John Owen*.

(1652). Although personally feeling inadequate for the tasks of such appointments, he actually proved himself most able both academically and administratively. After these prestigious appointments, he was given the Doctor of Divinity degree in honor of his mastery of theological and philosophical learning. Nevertheless, Owen himself was no fan of titles, including being called “doctor” or “reverend.” Of the latter label, he once exclaimed that he had no value for it, citing Luther’s quip: “Religion is never put in danger except amongst the most reverend” (*nunquam periclitatur religio nisi inter Reverendissimos*).<sup>37</sup> During these years at Oxford, Owen was able to produce numerous significant volumes, writing on topics from justification to schism, from divine justice to a defense of Hebrew vowel points, from mortification to perseverance. Many of these writings began as short sermons delivered to the challenging audience of young men at Christ Church; as a result, these works often prove to be not only intellectually rigorous, but also experientially sensitive and insightful.

After his time at Oxford, serving both as vice-chancellor of Oxford University and dean of Christ Church, Owen faced a difficult period of growing uncertainty about the spiritual and political state of England. Before 1650, when Owen was appointed preacher to the Council of State and a chaplain to Cromwell, the hopeful Puritan held a strong belief that the welfare of England as a nation was intertwined with the welfare of the saints and churches that were in the country. This belief was grounded in his strong Calvinistic understanding of providence. However, Owen and Cromwell alike were severely disillusioned by the failure of the Barebones Parliament.<sup>38</sup> Owen’s previous optimism about the coming glory began to dwindle, and he started to view the end times as far in the future, rather than imminent, as he had once perceived.<sup>39</sup> According to Owen, human response to God influences eschatological realities, for although God maintains his sovereignty, he also responds to repentance (or to a lack thereof):

Imperfect present and ideal future were, in Owen’s mind, creatively accommodated to each other. The future would purify and fulfill the anomalous present; the present, with all its failings, could be utilized to prepare for the future. Incongruities in the present could be tolerated for they would eventually be removed in the future. Even if God should postpone

37. Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 73.

38. L. G. Williams, “God and Nation,” 21, 62. Cf. Christopher Hill, *God’s Englishman: Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970), 141–43; idem, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), 170–78.

39. Cf. L. G. Williams, “God and Nation,” 69ff., 222.

the future because of human sin, it still remained “near” to the eye of faith. It still retained its relevance. If the future were postponed Owen would simply reassess the situation and do the work appropriate to that generation.<sup>40</sup>

As realities on the ground changed, Owen was willing to rethink elements of his eschatological framework, since he allowed not simply for theology to shape experience, but also for experience to have a role in refining theological conclusions. In this way Owen proved a surprisingly flexible thinker; he adapted to new situations by urging toleration and social peace. For example, in 1657 the Puritan leader found himself in opposition to his old friend Oliver Cromwell, who was entertaining the idea of becoming king: it appears that the formerly strong friendship between these two men suffered from then until Cromwell’s death in 1658.<sup>41</sup> After Oliver’s death and the fumbled leadership of his son Richard, Charles II returned to England and was crowned in 1660.

Removed from his political and academic positions of leadership, Owen henceforth doubled his efforts to push for religious toleration on behalf of nonconformists, as well as spending considerable time pastoring and writing. Demonstrating the high regard in which he was held in New England, Owen was recruited during this time for positions at both the First Church of Boston (John Cotton’s former church), and later the Third Church.<sup>42</sup> Owen did not accept either offer, deciding instead to use his new freedom from academic administration to pour himself into his studies and sermons. Already prolific, Owen produced a mountain of learned theology and biblical exposition during the last twenty-five years of his life, including the massive *Theologoumena pantodapa* and his multivolume sets on the *Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* and the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. One of the memorable endeavors Owen engaged in at this time was helping John Bunyan find a publisher for *Pilgrim’s Progress*. He persuaded his own publisher, Nathaniel Ponder, thus making the volume available to the populace. History has judged Owen’s enthusiasm and Ponder’s risk as most justified.

This man who wore so many hats during his life, from army chaplain and country pastor to leading scholar and religious adviser to the political authorities of his day, faced death with a quiet confidence in 1683. Although the practice of leaving property to women was not very

40. *Ibid.*, 327.

41. For the best handling of this complex story, see Williams, “God and Nation,” 155–67.

42. Mark A. Peterson, *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 31, 123; cf. Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 124.

common, Owen left his estate to his wife: only after she died was it to be passed along to his brother Harry.<sup>43</sup> But more than his estate, this man had left his greatest legacy in his writings, which, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, were consistently read and wrestled with from the seventeenth century unto our own.

Owen wrote to his friends Mr. and Mrs. Hartopp several years before his death, encouraging them—and himself—to find their true humanity, their meaning, in terms of their interaction with God, rather than merely in self-absorption: “Strive to love Christ more, to abide more with him, and to be less in our selves: He is our best friend and ere long will be our only friend. I pray God with all my heart that I may be weary of every thing else but converse and communion with him.”<sup>44</sup> In his life Owen witnessed incredible social upheaval, the painful loss of numerous children, a first wife, and countless friends; hence, we should not dismiss his words as a simple devaluing of the physical world. Instead, here we find the thoughtful conclusion reached by a theologian nearing the end of his life. Our study will explore the theology behind Owen’s conclusion.

### **Intellectual Context and the Direction of Our Examination**

Because experiences shape the thinker, we cannot divorce Owen’s thought from his life and the influences upon him. He struggled with pride, ambition, numerous painful family deaths, a disrupted academic and political career, and so on. Historical background provides some insight into the existential roots of Owen’s anthropological reflections. What consistently emerges is a picture of a talented and influential man of his times who believed and proclaimed that communion with God defines who we are.

Owen self-consciously viewed himself as part of a generation of English Puritans seeking to continue the “unfinished reformation.”<sup>45</sup> Defining “Puritan” is notoriously difficult because those who receive this label greatly differed in such key areas as theology, politics, and church government. However, the term in its broadest sense (as necessary if one is to include all identified with this label) includes some general characteristics, such as (1) an uncompromising commitment to the authority of the Bible as guiding *all* of life; (2) a heavy Augustinian ac-

43. Cook, “Political Biography,” 382.

44. “Letter #86, To Sir John Hartopp,” in *Correspondence of John Owen*, ed. Toon, 160.

45. Cf. his comment from 1655 in Owen, *Works* 12:595: “I have no singular opinion of my own, but embrace the common, known doctrine of the reformed churches.”

cent on human sin and divine grace; (3) an intense focus on spirituality, especially communion with God; and (4) a persistent prominence given to the Spirit's role in the Christian's life.<sup>46</sup> These key concerns are, as one might expect, exemplified in Owen's thought.

Contrary to common stereotypes about the Puritans, Owen's intellectual formation is surprisingly broad. Owen's sizable library comprised a quite learned and diverse collection, containing a large number of writings by the early fathers, classic Greek literature and philosophy, philology, medieval scholastics, humanists, the leading Reformers, and obviously seventeenth-century authors.<sup>47</sup> Drawing from these various sources and his conservative education at Queen's College, Oxford, Owen tries to present a theological method that is biblical and ecclesiastical, appreciative yet discerning, intellectually rigorous while experientially oriented. Appreciating the various influences on Owen, Sebastian Rehnman concludes that he was "a typical Renaissance man."<sup>48</sup> The four main "contemporary currents of thought" that Rehnman finds in Owen are Augustinianism, Aristotelianism, scholasticism, and humanism. Reductionistic approaches have all too often simply dismissed Owen as Aristotelian or scholastic, rather than giving due credit to the fullness of his thought and expression.<sup>49</sup> Truly each of these four streams feeds into Owen's own theological formulations, but none so dominates him that it cancels out the others.

Carl R. Trueman similarly attributes a broad intellectual background to Owen's work, and his research makes several points relevant to our study.<sup>50</sup> Arguing against earlier dismissals of Owen's theology, particularly the assessment by Alan Clifford, Trueman warns against treating Owen in an historical vacuum. Clifford believes that Owen greatly distorted Calvin's theology by submitting more to Aristotelian sensitivities than biblical concerns, which in the end led him away from the Reformed heri-

46. For a much fuller discussion and detailed bibliography on the debate about unifying characteristics of Puritanism, see Kelly M. Kopic and Randall C. Gleason, "Who Were the Puritans?" in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 15–37, esp. 23–32.

47. See *Bibliotheca Oweniana, sive, Catalogus librorum* (London: Edward Millington, 1684), which is an exhaustive list of Owen's books composed by the auctioneers who sold Owen's library after his death.

48. Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 25–46.

49. See Sebastian Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. W. J. van Asselt and E. Dekker (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 181–203.

50. Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998).

tage he claimed to represent.<sup>51</sup> Against such claims, Trueman forcefully argues that we should not take Owen's use of Aristotelian language and structure as significantly influencing his theology: this was the common method and language appropriated by seventeenth-century theologians no matter what their theological perspective.<sup>52</sup> Using the atonement as an example, Trueman, contra Clifford, claims that Owen used Aristotelian categories as a heuristic device rather than as the driving theological structure.<sup>53</sup> To illustrate the shared methodology and language of the day, Trueman consistently uses the theologically distinct Richard Baxter as a point of comparison, often arguing that Baxter embodies a more scholastic methodology than Owen.<sup>54</sup> For example, he briefly compares Baxter's faculty psychology with that of Owen, claiming that the former's plays a much greater role in his overall theology. Baxter's "faculty psychology is given a structural importance which is absent from the work of Owen."<sup>55</sup>

Though we will highlight Owen's use of faculty language later, Trueman is correct in claiming that Owen is not slavish to it. Our study demonstrates what Trueman seems to anticipate: the reason faculty psychology is significant for Owen has less to do with a dedication to Aristotle and more to do with Owen's attempt to find adequate language describing how humans may holistically respond to God. Trueman's research further contributes to our study as he lays out the structure of Owen's most systematic work, *Theologoumena pantodapa*, which has a historical framework organized around the covenants:

Underlying this choice of organization is Owen's fundamental belief that theology is *relational*; that is, it depends upon the nature of the *relationship*

51. Alan C. Clifford, *Atonement and Justification: English Evangelical Theology, 1640–1790: An Evaluation* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 98. Simply reporting one of Clifford's conclusions will demonstrate the gravity of his claims: "Whereas Owen seems quite oblivious to Calvin's theology of justification, Wesley derived his knowledge of Calvin via the Arminian Puritan John Goodwin's treatise *Imputatio fidei* (1642). Both Goodwin and Arminius claimed to concur with Calvin's sentiments. This would suggest that the Arminians rather than the scholastic Calvinists were the true heirs of Calvin, a thought which surely demands a redrawing of the theological map" (*ibid.*, 179).

52. Cf. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 11, 38.

53. *Ibid.*, 233–40.

54. E.g., *ibid.*, 32. Cf. Trueman's later essay "A Small Step Towards Rationalism: The Impact of the Metaphysics of Tommaso Campanella on the Theology of Richard Baxter," in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. S. Clark (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1999), 181–95.

55. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 80. Here he is referring to Baxter's *Methodus theologiae christianae* (London, 1684). Trueman later concludes that "Baxter's break with the more traditional faculty psychology of Owen, both in reference to humans and to God, represents a fundamental difference in basic metaphysics" (*Claims of Truth*, 82).

*that exists between God the revealer and the one revealed, and humans, the recipients of that revelation.* In this context, the progressive nature of the covenant scheme serves to take account of the fact that *theology requires a divine-human relationship*, and that the biblical record shows that relationship has itself not been static but subject to historical movement, a movement which can be articulated by setting forth in order the key points at which God has explicitly defined his relationship with humanity: the various covenants which are found within the Bible.<sup>56</sup>

The relational emphasis is rightly highlighted here, since Owen's theology can never be divorced from his anthropology. Humanity's relationship to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was a dynamic concern for Owen, not an irrelevant point of theological debate. How creation, the fall, and redemption have affected this relationship will be explored in our investigation of Owen's view of the *imago Dei*.

Finally, brief interaction with Dale A. Stover's research provides a bridge to our investigation. His slightly older study not only addresses anthropology, it also voices many misunderstandings that persist to this day. Concentrating upon Owen's view of the Holy Spirit, Stover examines how this Puritan divine handles the subjective/objective dimensions of the Christian faith.<sup>57</sup> His study leads him to the "revolutionary conclusion" that Owen and English Calvinists held "an anthropological theology," whereas Calvin clearly represented a christocentric theology.<sup>58</sup> Stover maintains that the extensive pneumatology and covenantal emphasis in Owen's theology inevitably leads him to become anthropocentric.<sup>59</sup> Additionally, Owen's trinitarian thought tended to emphasize the distinct role of each person of the Trinity to the neglect of a coherent unified Triune God christologically grounded.<sup>60</sup> Stover says that because Owen was concerned with how each person of the Trinity *distinctly related to the believer*, his theology was generated from an anthropocentric base. He claims that Owen "omitted the humanity of Christ," whereas Calvin emphasized "the body of Christ as the ground of the Spirit's relation to believers."<sup>61</sup> Likewise, he believed that Owen divorced the Spirit from his incarnational theology. This divorce wrought havoc on Owen's anthropology, according to Stover, leading to an "emphasis on the spiritual

56. Trueman, *Claims of Truth*, 49, emphasis added.

57. Dale Arden Stover currently is a professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, although his research interests have significantly changed since his original work: "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD diss., McGill University, Montreal, 1967), 10.

58. *Ibid.*, 303, 46–49.

59. *Ibid.*, 211, 301.

60. E.g., *ibid.*, 304. Cf. 209, where the Spirit "has usurped the role of Christ."

61. *Ibid.*, 304.

side of man's being—a stress on the soul at the expense of the body.” For Stover, this ultimately leads to man's “dehumanization.”<sup>62</sup> Throughout Stover's work one finds references to human faculties. He argues that sin primarily focuses on the will and affections, rather than the mind.<sup>63</sup> One particularly insightful comment that Stover contributes regarding human faculties is that they serve as the “locus” for the similarity that exists between man and God in Owen's theology, but Stover leaves the idea somewhat undeveloped.<sup>64</sup>

The anthropology in Stover's study is not without problems. Joel Beeke flatly and consciously contradicts Stover by arguing that Owen's theology is “theocentric” rather than anthropocentric.<sup>65</sup> Both authors may be closer than they realize, each acknowledging Owen's obvious concern for the human condition. They differ about what *drives* Owen's theology: is it an overriding concern for the glory of God or for the salvation and sanctification of humanity? Obviously the two ideas have tremendous overlap, and nuance becomes all the more important to avoid confusion. Suffice it to say, Stover has marked the importance of an anthropological perspective in Owen's work. Any study of Owen's anthropology must address Stover's concerns: human interaction with the Triune God, the humanity of Christ, humanity's supposed “dehumanization,” and the leading role of human faculties.

This study seeks to demonstrate many conclusions that are directly opposed to Stover's analysis. Owen is not “anthropological” without being christocentric: rather, his robust Christology permeates every aspect of his thought, including his conception that we must understand being human primarily in terms of relations with God. Contrary to Stover's belief, Owen does not neglect the humanity of Christ; instead, he stands in awe of how the incarnation affirms Christ's true solidarity with the rest of humanity. Rather than dehumanizing humanity, we see Owen trying to arrange a holistic anthropology by using the intellectual furniture available to him in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, against the charge of Stover, Owen's trinitarian emphasis on the distinct roles of the three divine persons does not weaken his Christology, but actually may be understood as strengthening it. This will quickly become

62. *Ibid.*, 305. Cf. William Ward Bass, “Platonic Influences on Seventeenth-Century English Puritan Theology as Expressed in the Thinking of John Owen, Richard Baxter, and John Howe” (PhD diss., University of Southern California, 1958), 117.

63. Stover, “Pneumatology of John Owen,” 55. He has overestimated the Puritan value placed on reason when he later states, “It would seem that reason judged revelation more surely than revelation judged reason” (56); cf. his later more guarded statement (224).

64. *Ibid.*, 246.

65. Joel Beeke, *Assurance of Faith: Calvin, English Puritanism, and the Dutch Second Reformation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 221.

apparent in the emphasis he gives to communion with the Son in his book *Communion with God*.<sup>66</sup> Christ is the mediator between God and humanity, and only through him are relations between the divine and human secure.

### Owen's Anthroposensitivity and an Outline of Our Study

Our investigation of the primary sources in chapters 2 through 6 demonstrates Owen's conception of human relations with God, seeking to provide a fresh analysis of his theological anthropology. The theologian we encounter here is somewhat different from the one commonly associated with the name John Owen: he is not a rationalist, nor a theologian simply interested in abstract speculations, nor is he easily labeled anthropocentric—since that term gives humanity a position that Owen consistently believes is reserved only for God. Instead, throughout our study we will observe Owen as an *anthroposensitive* theologian.

Since the following chapters—especially beginning in chapter 4—deal with this idea more fully, at this point we will simply define “anthroposensitive” as *a refusal to divorce theological considerations from practical human application, since theological reflections are always interwoven with anthropological concerns*. The combination of “anthropo-” (human; relating to human beings: from [Greek] *anthrōpos*) and “sensitive” is an attempt to avoid a simplistic classification of Owen as either theocentric or anthropocentric. If one had to choose between these options, Owen would be theocentric, but such a conclusion can be used to diminish the anthropological emphasis seen throughout Owen's corpus. Other common terms, such as “pastoral” or “experiential,” often carry with them unnecessarily negative connotations or represent a notion of what is done *after* theological reflection, rather than informing that reflection. In other words, according to Owen's methodology, theological reflections must entail anthropological implications; otherwise there is something wrong with the theology that results.<sup>67</sup> For this reason we will see Owen consistently move between divine action and human response. Since humanity was created to commune with God, the theological enterprise

66. Owen, *Works* 2:5–274.

67. Cf. Owen's comments on the methodology of the author of Hebrews: “In the midst of his [the author's] reasonings and testimonies for the explanation or confirmation of what he delivers dogmatically, he lays hold on some occasion or other to press his exhortations unto faith, obedience, with constancy and perseverance in the profession of the gospel. . . . So insensibly passing from one thing unto another, that he might at the same time inform the minds and work upon the affections of them with whom he dealt” (*Works* 20:320; BE 19:320). We believe Owen, consciously or unconsciously, tries to follow this pattern himself.

must be primarily concerned with understanding humanity in its relation with God. As we see at the very end of our study, being made in God's image is primarily about loving Jesus Christ, who is the mediator between God and humanity. This unique relationship is ultimately what defines being in communion with God.

We begin the next chapter by exploring humanity as made in the image of God. Here we will focus on Owen's employment of what is commonly called faculty psychology, the grammar he uses to describe relations. Chapter 2 ends with a brief survey of humanity through history, providing a framework for fitting creation, fall, and redemption into Owen's conception of relations between God and humanity. In chapter 3 our attention turns from humanity in general to the God-man Jesus Christ in specific. Questions explored here include: Why the incarnation? How does the humiliation of the Son comfort struggling believers? Are there continuities and discontinuities between Christ's humanity and fallen humanity? After considering the incarnation, in chapter 4 our study next moves to the question of justification. Special attention will be given to Owen's anthroposensitive approach. We cover his understanding of faith, some important disagreements he has with his Roman Catholic opponents, and how he understands negative and positive imputation. Chapter 5 takes us to the core of our study: human communion with the Triune God. Here we discover Owen's creative attempt to view the Trinity within the context of worship. Owen describes in detail the Father's love, the Son's grace, and the Spirit's consolation. Finally, in chapter 6 we conclude our study by looking at the Lord's day and Lord's supper. In these two examples we find Owen pointing toward signs, the experience of which fosters the human interface with God as realized in Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of the day and Lord of the supper. Throughout the entire study we will observe Owen's consistent movement between theology and anthropology, made possible and based in his Christology.