

Henry M. Knapp. "Review of *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, edited by Robert W. Oliver." In *Calvin Theological Journal* 39 (2004): 444-446.

John Owen: The Man and His Theology, edited by Robert W. Oliver. Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2002. Pp. 190. Price \$17.00.

It has almost become a truism to note that the life and work of the great Puritan John Owen (1616-1683) has been neglected in the past two centuries. However, thanks in part to the work of the scholars contributing to this volume, the preceding three decades have witnessed a revival of interest in this seventeenth-century thinker. Owen served as a country pastor, the chaplain to Oliver Cromwell and the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University; he was a prominent voice for Independents, a prolific Puritan author, and defender of orthodox Christianity against the rise of Arminianism, Socinianism, and the radical sectarianism which appeared in England during his lifetime. His writings, while deeply theological and frequently polemic, exhibit a genuine pastoral heart, the combination of which continue to commend his work to future generations.

The six essays collected in this book, originally delivered as papers at a symposium on the life and work of Owen at the John Owen Centre for Theological Study in London, were written by some of the leading scholars in post-Reformation studies. The opening chapter by Robert Oliver, "The Life and Times of John Owen," provides a very rudimentary overview of Owen's life. The essay does not break new ground and avoids some of the more controversial questions concerning Owen's life (speculation concerning his associates' involvement in the Rye House Plot, the emotional and theological impact of the collapse of the Cromwellian government, the comparatively minimal personal persecution suffered following the Restoration, etc.). The condensed biographical information Oliver offers can be found in various places, but in the absence of a current full biography (the most recent being *God's Statesman* by Peter Toon in 1971), the contribution is timely and helpful.

Graham Harrison's essay on "John Owen's Doctrine of the Church" is a summary of two treatises by Owen on the nature of the church, and as such it lacks any analysis or evaluation. Owen's first book is in response to contemporary accusations that nonconformity is schismatic, while the second, with direct relevance to modern ecclesiastical discussions, argues that the only appropriate form of the visible church is a particular congregation headed by elders.

The most original essay in the collection addresses Owen's response to the rising Quaker movement. Michael Haykin provides a brief sketch of the early stages of the Quaker phenomenon, then examines a little known Latin treatise by Owen where the author challenges the biblical interpretive methods of "enthusiasts."

The value of this collection, however, is found in the three essays by Carl Trueman and Sinclair Ferguson. Trueman's analysis of Owen as a theologian who was well-educated and learned, vigorously anti-Pelagian, and firmly Trinitarian, is a wonderful example of the kind of faithful historiography which prioritizes the academic, social, and theological milieu of the subject as the basis of one's evaluation. Trueman asserts that Owen was thoroughly immersed in the best of the intellectual climate of his times, and shows how that climate impacted his theological formulations. Owen's avid rejection of any form of a Pelagian-based salvation dominated his polemical writings; he makes clear that the differences between Reformed Orthodoxy and classical Arminianism we frequently gloss over function at a very profound

level, one which impacts all aspects of our faith and dogma. Finally, Trueman stresses the Trinitarian dimension of the Reformed faith which lay at the heart of Owen's theology.

Two essays are included in the book by Sinclair Ferguson, who has been instrumental in the revival of interest in John Owen. The first essay focuses on the Person of Christ; Ferguson asserts that Owen's Christology is distinct in modern times for its deeply evangelical and biblical convictions, and the combination of keen intellect and largeness of heart and spirit evidenced in his theological expositions. Whereas many may see Owen simply as a polemical writer, Ferguson believes that his christological orientation—with its emphasis on the deity of Christ, the personal relationships within the Trinity, the incarnation, and the inseparable link between Christ's person and work—provides a more balanced view of Owen's theology as a whole.

In "John Owen and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," Ferguson shows that this doctrine was of crucial importance to Owen, and that his thinking on the person and work of the Holy Spirit well reflects the greatness of his systematic thinking as well as his outstanding pastoral convictions. Owen approaches his subject through positive construction and exposition, negatively through polemical rejection of theological error, and consistently with a deep concern for Christian experience.

The essays are well researched and, in the most part, well documented. Though just touching on the depth of Owen's corpus, the authors have provided a valuable introduction into the background, thought, and commitments of this significant theologian.

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