

THE PNEUMATOLOGY OF JOHN OWEN:
A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT
IN RELATION TO THE SHAPE OF A THEOLOGY

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PREFACE

This is meant to be a study in theology. It is also a historical study, but that fact is secondary. Its being historical happens to be the mode in which this theological study is conducted. Therefore, the study does not pretend to focus upon biographical detail. Nevertheless, it does claim to be genuinely historical in a way that many biographical studies are not, because it seeks above all else an interpretive position in regard to the historical subject matter-- which in this case is theological history. A historical study cannot avoid being interpretive, and this study is openly carried on with the critical viewpoint as the uppermost consideration.

Because this study in theology with its historical focus in John Owen operates with a specific approach, there has been an attempt to provide a check upon the critical viewpoint by looking at the larger historical context of the theological movements which impinge upon Owen. Therefore, the study has approached nearly every section of Owen's pneumatology with historical sketches which supply perspective depth and an orientation check upon the interpretive position. These sketches cover extensive fields of research and the study has been selective in its use of modern scholarship in these

areas. The selectivity has been dialectical; that is, the contributions of these studies have assisted in the understanding of Owen, but the study of Owen has been, in turn, the guide in selecting which contributions were meaningful. The contribution of the study, then, to these larger areas-- Calvin, Calvinism, Ramism, Augustinianism, Puritanism--comes by way of this study of Owen and from the force of its analysis of him.

One of these larger fields of study deserves special mention. The study found itself drawn progressively into a dialogue between Calvin and Owen. Upon reflection this is not so surprising, since the study was of a theological nature and proceeded on the basis of a critical viewpoint. With such an aim and methodology, one might be expected to arrive inevitably at the original Calvinist (if one may really call him that). This dialogue with Calvin is undoubtedly one of the major contributions of the study and one of the major confirmations of the methodology, since it simultaneously joins together the great deficiency in Puritanism scholarship-- which has been a lack of attention to the Calvin behind Calvinism--with the more appreciative, dynamic interpretations of Calvin by recent Calvin scholarship.¹

The dialogue between Owen and Calvin proved illuminating and valuable especially because the study suggested fundamental

¹This is, perhaps, the greatest shortcoming of Perry Miller's outstanding work--his stereotype of Calvin. Leonard J. Trinterud and William H. Chalker are two who have preceded me in connecting these two fields of scholarship by way of stressing the differences.

differences between them--differences of crucial significance for pneumatology. A careful distinction must be observed at this point. The study is not a comparison of Owen and Calvin; but it is first of all a study in pneumatology and of the pneumatology of John Owen, and for that reason it becomes imperative--for the sake of historical perspective and a genuinely interpretive approach--to deal with Calvin to some extent, to come to some sort of interpretive position concerning him. I am painfully aware of the extensive research involved in presenting a thorough case for a given interpretation of Calvin. The most that can be hoped for within the limits of this study is to present Calvin in a way that is generally agreeable to the conclusions of responsible modern scholarship. I do not pretend to have confronted all of the evidence in Calvin which might mitigate the force of the points I have emphasized. Indeed, I have not attempted a critique in his case, believing that my study would then have shifted from its central focus.

Whether or nor the interpretation of Calvin on the points referred to in this study can be fully defended is a question apart from the basic thesis of the study. It is a separate study in itself. Even if I were wrong about Calvin, my position concerning Owen would remain the same. A change in alignment caused by a different assessment of Calvin would mean either that Calvin was really a Calvinist like Owen or

that he was something altogether different--a third type. However, any different assessment than I have suggested would have to deal with the crucial differences as well as the vital connections between Calvin and Owen which I have indicated and would have to reinterpret, resolve, or minimize them in some fashion. As for the present study, the dialogue with Calvin has invigorated and clarified the approach to Owen and to pneumatology, but the analysis rests finally on the evidence in Owen himself and on the cogency of my handling of it.

It is comparatively easy to stake a claim to original scholarship in relation to a man like Owen since scholars have so completely passed over him. While a few studies have recently appeared, none of them attempt the level of analysis aimed at in this study--one being decidedly biographical and the other pointing up the central themes in recent Puritanism scholarship. Furthermore, while Nuttall has supposedly studied Puritan pneumatology, my work is more apart from his than anyone could possibly suppose on the basis of the topic we ostensibly hold in common. What is decidedly without parallel is the analytical approach by way of pneumatology to the main theological arteries of English Calvinistic Puritanism.

In the field of pneumatology as such I also claim a special place for my study. Surely a work like Owen's Pneumatologia, holding what is possibly a unique place in the history of Christian thought, might be considered as deserving of a full assessment. Moreover, I offer the very conception of the thesis in its critical method of approaching the

study of the nature of theology by way of pneumatology as a creative contribution in this case-study application of it.

I must acknowledge indebtedness first of all to Professor Gerald R. Cragg, who some years ago introduced me to John Owen and guided me to his Pneumatologia in particular. My appreciation is also due to Professor Joseph C. McLelland for several helpful conversations. I owe many thanks to Professor J. Arthur Boorman for his patient listening, his careful reading of drafts of the thesis, and his sympathetic criticism. My final acknowledgment is not strictly in terms of scholarship--although she sometimes served as my chief critic. That final tribute belongs to my wife, Doralee. Her many hours of typing could only be a labor of love, but more important has been her personal supportiveness. Beyond saying these simple words, prose is clearly not suited for expressing the dimension of this indebtedness.

Concerning italics: The extensive use of italics by Owen has been faithfully reproduced in all quotations, except in some few instances in which the whole of the section quoted was in italics (in which case the italics have been omitted altogether). All italics in all quotations appearing in this study belong to the original author.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: PNEUMATOLOGY AND JOHN OWEN

A. Pneumatology and Revelational Theology

Pneumatology is a twentieth century frontier of Christian theology. This is not due to any latter day Pentecost; nor is it the result of some recent and revolutionary breakthrough in matters theological. It is in fact a reflection of the fundamental theological movements of the era. Contemporary theologians are finding in pneumatology--the doctrine of the being and work of the Holy Spirit--an arena for pressing their diverse claims about the very nature of theology.

Arnold B. Come in a recent effort wants his pneumatology to establish the independence of anthropology vis à vis Christology.¹ He specifically opposes Karl Barth's theological treatment of man's role as the prime example of a theological direction which is debilitating.

In their tendency to ignore or to override the whole story of God's patient and painstaking accommodation to man's frailty so as not to crush the tender shoots of human spirit (Kierkegaard), contemporary "trinitarian theology" and "Christocentrism" contain a real threat to a truly Biblical anthropology.²

¹Arnold B. Come, Human Spirit and Holy Spirit, (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1959), p. 26.

²Ibid., p. 27.

Come is concerned with not only "a truly Biblical anthropology", but a modern one. He contends that "the utterly ambiguous and hopelessly contradictory statements about Holy Spirit in much of Christian theology can be brought to some clarity and consistency only through the approach of a thoroughly Biblical and thoroughly contemporary Christian anthropology."³ By "thoroughly contemporary", Come means according to existential interpretation.⁴

In contrast to this anthropological concern, T. F. Torrance, in an even more recent contribution, stresses the primal importance of the sovereign objectivity of God as the only foundation for true theology. He suggests that the conflict between this starting point and an anthropocentric approach is most sharply realized in the matter of pneumatology.

The problem is perhaps most acute or at least most apparent in modern Protestantism's doctrine of the Spirit of God, for "the Spirit" has come to mean little more than our subjective awareness of God or our religious self-understanding, and has very little if anything to do with the objective reality of the Being and living presence and action of God himself in the world.⁵

Both Come and Torrance offer vigorous presentations of pneumatology, which are of the Biblical-existential and of the trinitarian-Christocentric varieties, respectively.

³Ibid., p. 29.

⁴Ibid., p. 31.

⁵T. F. Torrance, Theology in Reconstruction, (S.C.M. Press: London, 1965), p. 270.

The present, and indeed perennial, interest in pneumatology seems to inhere in the revelational nature of Christian faith. To those for whom the Christian faith has no revelational character (if there can be such men), pneumatology in any sense of Holy Spirit is irrelevant, even embarrassing, perhaps. To those for whom the mode, extent, and authority of revelation has been well-defined and widely accepted--as in the instance of the identification of revelation with the institutional-hierarchical church, or of the identification of revelation with the verbally-inspired, infallible Scripture--pneumatology is a fixed science. However, to those for whom revelation is a divine-human event, encounter, or act, pneumatology becomes a vital science. At least, that will be so when the divine side of the event is understood as genuinely transcendent, so that the event is fully contingent; and when the human side of the event is understood as effectively historical so that the event is susceptible of actual knowledge.

In the above description the inherent problem of revelation is immediately felt. Being susceptible of knowledge appears to imply that the transcendent can become a known and, consequently, no longer transcendent. Dietrich Bonhoeffer connects this problem of revelation with pneumatology.

God can never become the object of consciousness. Revelation can only be understood in such a way that God must be borne in mind as a subject; but this is possible only if God is also the subject of the knowing of

revelation, since if man knew, then it was not God that he knew. But this knowing of revelation is called "believing", what is revealed has the name of Christ, the subject of the understanding is God as Holy Spirit. So in revelation God is in the act of understanding himself.

Thus, it might be said that for God to be truly objective he must be existentially understood, that knowledge of him is necessarily existential; and this may be said only as long as it is also said that such existential knowledge has its provenance and very existence in the utter objectivity of God so that he is the chief knower in the knowing. Here is the theological frontier, the place where God and man may truly meet, the place where pneumatology is the relevant science. In pneumatology one must grapple with this abiding tension between the objective and the subjective, the transcendent and the existential, which is the mystery and truth of revelation.

When one recognizes the Christian faith as being revelational in its fundamental nature, and when one recognizes further that this revelational character necessarily involves the tension just noted between its objective and subjective foci, then one may forthrightly assert, as we do here, that pneumatology marks this perpetual frontier of Christian theology. Torrance maintains that just this sort of frontier is apparent in the writings of the Greek Fathers of the Church.

⁶Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Act and Being, Tr. by Bernard Noble, (Collins: London, 1962), p. 92.

Only by God is God known--that was an insight that Irenaeus early injected into patristic theology, recalling the biblical statements that only God can finally bear witness to himself. This was taken up later by Athanasius and Basil in their doctrine of the Spirit, for as it is only the Spirit of God who knows the things of God, it is only in the Spirit and by his power that we may really know God and apprehend his Truth.⁷

One might look back and notice Paul saying to the Corinthians that "no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God" (I Cor. ii, 11-RSV); or one could look ahead and see Luther and Calvin grappling with the very nature of theology right at this point.

The reality of this pneumatological frontier for the theology of Martin Luther is precisely the basic contention of Regin Prenter in his revolutionary presentation of Luther's pneumatology, Spiritus Creator. What is vitally important for Luther, says Prenter, is the real presence of Christ. This concept of the real presence of Christ is meant to bridge the gap between objective and subjective.

But it is the work of the Spirit to realize this real presence of Christ. . . . Luther holds that the Spirit is God himself who is near and struggling in us right in the midst of our condemnation and death. He is near in the sense that he takes the crucified and risen Christ out of the remoteness of history and heavenly glory and places him as a living and redeeming reality in the midst of our life with its suffering, inner conflict, and death. . . . The Spirit always works by making Christ present. But the Spirit is not identical with Christ. For it is the Spirit alone who makes a distinction between Christ and Christ--between the distant Christ of imitation and history and the present Christ of faith and conformity.⁸

⁷Torrance, op. cit., p. 30.

⁸Regin Prenter, Spiritus Creator, Tr. by John M. Jensen, (Muhlenberg Press: Philadelphia, 1953), pp. 53-54.

The Holy Spirit is united to the objective content of revelation which is the Christ so as to make the Christ truly knowable in the existential present. Yet, that existential present in no way contains the Christ in and of itself.

The difference between the true faith and the mere form of imitation, between the truly present Christ and the Christ who is only imagined, is a difference which in no way can be demonstrated psychologically and experimentally. It is a difference which in no way is open to observation or feeling. The Holy Spirit alone by its presence makes this difference. It is this that Luther describes by the concept "experience".⁹

Here we see the Holy Spirit in action on the frontier of revelation, not only holding firmly on to the objective side, the Christ, but being genuinely subjective as well, being involved in actual human experience.

Experience means a proof of reality in opposition to a dream, word, fancy. Thus when Christ by the witness of the Spirit is proven to be reality as apart from a mere idea (thought, word, fancy), this is the experience of faith. But since the object of faith is Christ as God's revelation in the flesh, the experience of faith must necessarily appear as a contrast to all other experience. In the experience of faith the witness of God's Spirit struggles with our own reason and senses. But the experience of faith is a true experience. In the man in whom the experience of faith by the witness of the Spirit is produced, there is no doubt that he is face to face with reality, yes, face to face with a reality which is over and above all other reality. Therefore Luther does not hesitate to say that he who believes in Christ shall feel the Holy Spirit in himself.¹⁰

Probably we could say that Luther comes dangerously close to overstating the subjective without, perhaps, ever

⁹Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 57.

really losing the objective. On the other hand, John Calvin comes dangerously close to overstating the objective aspect of revelation without quite losing the subjective side of faith. Wilhelm Niesel points to this objective focus in Calvin as finding its immediate anchorage in the authority of Scripture, which is set over against all merely human knowledge.¹¹ Niesel also notes the vital role of the Holy Spirit as the true expositor of Scripture.

It is not enough that God has revealed Himself to us in Jesus Christ and wishes to speak to us to-day in the testimony to this revelation. Again, it is not enough that He wills to confront us in this sacrament of Holy Scripture. However much we assert that Scripture alone is for us the ground of our recognition of God, it avails nothing. . . . We can understand Scripture, says Calvin, only when God Himself makes His divine presence manifest to us therein. And this is ever afresh a divine action and event. The Holy Spirit who used prophets and apostles as His instruments and still to-day uses and quickens their word to ever new purposes, to make the voice of the Lord audible to us, must also perform His work in our hearts and must Himself speak in us the response to the word by which we are addressed.¹²

The full objectiveness of revelation has reality only in Christ, but its reality in him may be realized in us insofar as the Spirit binds us to Christ.¹³

He in whom God uniquely revealed His goodness takes the initiative in order to bring us into union with Himself. In Him, the Crucified and Risen Lord, God reveals Himself to us also to-day. Christ ever confronts us in the power of the Holy Ghost and bestows Himself upon us.¹⁴

Niesel's presentation of Calvin points up the absolutely crucial role of pneumatology for the possibility of

¹¹Wilhelm Niesel, The Theology of Calvin, Tr. by Harold Knight, (The Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1956), pp. 50-51.

¹²Ibid., p. 37.

¹³Ibid., p. 128.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 180.

revelational theology. Pneumatology plays such a vital role in Calvin's theology that Werner Krusche thinks he may be judged to be overly pneumatological "nicht ohne Grund."¹⁵ On the other hand, Torrance exults in the pneumatological stress he finds in Calvin, and he speaks of "the epistemological relevance of the doctrine of the Spirit for Calvin's theology."¹⁶

The action of God is the action of his Holy Spirit, the unique causality of his Being as he presents himself to us as the object of our knowledge--but it is a unique causality determined by the nature of God as Creator Spirit and as grace. This action takes the form of Word and of personal communion--Word establishing the relation between our language and God's Being, and personalizing presence establishing man as a person whom God takes into communion with himself. It is through the Word and the Spirit that God sets up the relation of knowledge between man and God which we speak of as involving subject-object, yet I-Thou relation.¹⁷

Torrance believes it is specifically Calvin's emphasis on pneumatology that enables him to hold together effectively the divine-human aspects of revelation, so that his theology is fully personal, and at the same time fully dependent upon the sovereignty of God.

Because the Spirit of God is God's personal presence and is yet God's living creative action, his impact upon us creates personal relations, posits us as subjects over against the divine Subject, and at the same time gives us God as the Object of our knowing in such a way that God remains in control by presiding in all our judgments about him. Therein lies his implacable objectivity even when we are personally and intimately related to him through the Communion of the Spirit.¹⁸

¹⁵Werner Krusche, Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin, (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1957), p. 12.

¹⁶Torrance, op. cit., p. 93.

¹⁷Ibid.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 97.

Our study finds its ultimate direction according to the critical assumption that pneumatology marks a perpetual frontier of Christian theology, a frontier where the very nature of theology is being determined, a frontier where the dialectical tension centers about the transcendent provenance and the existential relevance of revealed religion. We do not claim already to have analyzed that frontier as though having discovered the perfect resolution of the objective-subjective tension. We have simply pointed to the reality of the frontier, and we have averred that it must be approached pneumatologically in Christian theology in order to deal genuinely with both objective and subjective factors. We further maintain that the manner in which the tension between the transcendent and the existential is handled, pneumatologically, influences the whole shape of any given theological undertaking. The corollary of this would allow us to state that a study of pneumatology enables one to come to grips with the fundamental shape of any given theology. In other words, we are claiming that there is a direct and significant relationship between pneumatology and the shape of a theology. This, of course, implies a definition of the shape of a theology that is dependent upon the objective-subjective tension inherent in revelation.

While our methodology posits on the one hand an explicit critical position (rather than an assumption of objectivity which is a non-existent ideal, and therefore deceptive), it exercises on the other hand a certain caution

aimed toward correcting the bias in our structured approach. This caution is expressed by the selection of phrases that tend to be neutral, such as "the role of," "in relation to," and "the shape of." Indeed, "the shape of a theology," for example, cannot claim to be a fully neutral expression (nor should we want such in the enterprise of human communication). It immediately supposes that theology has configuration, but it does not preclude the possible variations of that configuration. Within the limits of our critical framework we are interested in letting our results have an inductive flavor, in letting John Owen's theology take shape before us as systematic or as unsystematic, as lucid or as contradictory. The central question to be asked is whether John Owen somehow successfully straddles the frontier tension between objective and subjective demands--and, if so, how he does it--or whether we find him either veering far to the objective side or slipping off toward the subjective--and, if so, what are the causes and results.¹⁹ Whatever the variations, we are nevertheless certain that he must rank somewhere on our objective-subjective scale which marks the frontier of revelational theology; and we are claiming that this is the place for judging the real significance of a man's pneumatology.

Our critical assumption provides the framework for our study of the pneumatology of John Owen. We have selected his pneumatology, not with the prior assumption that his

¹⁹Those who have studied Owen's theological position, viz. Vose, Wallace, and Nuttall (to be noticed in the course of our introduction), have been concerned to place him clearly toward the objective side.

theology is intrinsically great, but because he has set down a fully and consciously developed pneumatology as an erudite and mature theologian representing the center position--as we shall notice shortly--of a significant theological movement known as seventeenth-century, English Calvinistic Puritanism. Particularly in this case, where his pneumatology is extensive and centrally related to his whole theological position,²⁰ there is good reason to believe that our procedure is valid and will prove fruitful. Our immediate aim will be to examine the relation between John Owen's pneumatology and the shape of his theology. At first, this task will demand some acquaintance with Owen's theological inheritance for the sake of genuine historical perspective. Eventually, however, we expect our study to offer some reflections about the basic character of the theology of the period; and, ultimately, we are interested in seeking new and deeper understanding of the very nature of Christian theology.

B. John Owen and the Puritan Scene

Geoffrey F. Nuttall, in his book, The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience, would have us believe not only that pneumatology was of central importance for Puritan theology, but that Puritan pneumatology was of central importance for the

²⁰One biographer notes that Owen had a literary habit, which was "that of making the particular subject on which he treats the centre around which he gathers all the great truths of the Gospel" (Andrew Thomson, "Life of Dr. Owen" in The Works of John Owen, D.D., ed. by William H. Goold, [T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1862], I, lxxii). While the biographer counts this habit and also Owen's tendency toward exhaustiveness (p. cix) as defects, they are decided assets for the purposes of this study.

history of pneumatology. He cites the lack of development in pneumatology from the early fathers of the church to the Reformers. He claims that the initial interest in pneumatology for both Luther and Calvin was subsequently de-emphasized by these men. He plays down the Anabaptist contribution as superficial. Finally, "with the growth and increasing power of Puritanism in the seventeenth century, the way was clear for some pioneer thinking about the doctrine of the Holy Spirit."²¹ This is an attractive hypothesis, but grossly exaggerated. It has already been refuted by what we have noted in the studies by Prenter, Niesel, Krusche, and Torrance.

What helps to explain Nuttall's statement is his interest in Quaker pneumatology which is the true focus of his book. He notes that Quakers are not true Puritans, and yet he holds that they are a real part of the continuum which Puritanism represents.²² While he does not explicitly defend the thesis, he fundamentally assumes that Quakerism is a genuine and logical development of the Puritan doctrine of the Holy Spirit.²³ Nuttall is really assuming that his attention to Quaker pneumatology is a grappling with the heart of Puritan theology. No wonder, then, that "throughout this study the Puritan movement, in its various phases, has evinced itself to be a movement towards immediacy in relation to God."²⁴

²¹Geoffrey F. Nuttall, The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience, (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1946), p. 6.

²²Ibid., pp. 13, 151.

²³Ibid., pp. 14, 151.

²⁴Ibid., p. 134.

This bias accounts for the amazing statement that John Owen in the past "has received perhaps somewhat excessive attention."²⁵ While we appreciate Nuttall's exposition of Quaker pneumatology, we must say that he handles Puritan pneumatology only as a foil for presenting the former.

Nuttall notwithstanding, John Owen has his own not inconsiderable place in the history of pneumatology. That much might be said simply on the basis of the length and scope of his Pneumatologia, which represent two volumes in The Works of John Owen, D.D.²⁶ Jerald C. Brauer claims for him that "John Owen wrote the most comprehensive treatise on the Spirit since the days of the Church fathers."²⁷ By his own statement Owen considered himself to be something of a pioneer in pneumatology.

Whereas I know not any who ever went before me in this design of representing the whole economy of the Holy Spirit, with all his adjuncts, operations, and effects, whereof this is the first part, . . . as the difficulty of my work was increased thereby so it may plead my excuse if anything be found not to answer so regular a projection or just a method as the nature of the subject requireth and as was aimed at.²⁸

Indeed, the very fact that Owen even attempted such a project says much about his understanding of the nature of theology, as will be discovered in due course.

²⁵Ibid., p. 11. By contrast Godfrey Noel Vose in "Profile of a Puritan: John Owen (1616-1683)," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, State University of Iowa, 1963), points to the enigma of the scholarly silence about this most learned of Puritan theologians (pp. 29-30).

²⁶John Owen, The Works of John Owen, D.D., ed. by William H. Goold, 24 vols., (T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1862). Hereafter referred to as Works.

²⁷Jerald C. Brauer, "Reflections on the Nature of English Puritanism," Church History, XXIII, (June, 1954), 102.

²⁸Owen, Works, III, 7.

Owen, however pioneering his pneumatological effort might prove to be, appears today as a somewhat obscure figure on the stage of the history of Christian theology. Only in the last decade has any full-scale study been devoted to assessing Owen theologically. Two recent dissertations deserve our attention.²⁹ The first of these, "Profile of a Puritan: John Owen (1616-1683)," by Godfrey Noel Vose, argues that Owen and Puritanism mutually define one another. The work of Vose is handicapped by a failure to deal definitively with either Puritanism or Owen. He selects the four themes of Scripture, Holy Spirit, covenant, and the holy community as being significant for the study of Puritanism. Conveniently, they are also major themes in Owen's theological contributions. Because the selection of these four themes does not issue from any carefully defined procedure or critical position, and because the author never comes to the point of assessing the significance of these four themes for a comprehensive understanding of either Puritanism or John Owen, the entire enterprise suffers from methodological crippling. Having said that, it must be admitted that Vose has indeed dealt with what appear to be four of the most important areas of thought in Owen and Puritanism. Moreover, we are encouraged by hearing

²⁹A third study, "The Puritan Theology of John Owen" by Don Marvin Everson, (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1959), scarcely deserves mention since it is little more than an attempt to collate and describe Owen's works. There is no real effort to understand Owen historically in relation to his contemporaries or antecedents. The author is unable to establish a critical viewpoint from which and by which to approach Owen, and he becomes hopelessly lost in an effort to arrange logically (which, curiously, is Owen's own difficulty of scholasticizing).

Vose declare the Holy Spirit to be at the very heart of Owen's theology. Owen, he says, "deserves to be called the Protestant theologian of the Holy Spirit."³⁰

The most recent work on Owen, "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism," by Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., must be accounted as an exceptionally fine piece of historical research, certainly the most significant contribution to date toward a genetic understanding of Owen's life and thought. From now on, this must be reckoned as the basic biographical work in any study of Owen.

Wallace, like Vose, insists that Puritanism is not fundamentally untheological. Unlike Vose, Wallace proceeds to indicate the vital theological nerve in the growth of Puritanism and traces it painstakingly through the early decades of the seventeenth century as a conflict between Calvinist and Arminian. Wallace relies heavily on his definition of Calvinism as an adherence to the "Protestant core." He relates this most fundamentally to the issue of justification by faith.³¹ The defense of this position was symbolically represented for English Calvinism in the historical form of the Synod of Dort. In the various later skirmishes the conflict centered chiefly around predestination, which Wallace regards as being the symbolic safeguard of

³⁰Vose, op. cit., pp. 313-314. Vose has a tendency to embellish Owen's theological stature.

³¹Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., "The Life and Thought of John Owen to 1660: A Study of the Significance of Calvinist Theology in English Puritanism," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1965), p. 78.

justification by faith.³² At other times Wallace sees the same struggle being centered on issues like sanctification, assurance, or perseverance.

Wallace establishes the fact of the conservatively Puritan environment of Owen's early life in Oxfordshire, where his father was the vicar of Stadham.³³ He demonstrates that the chief issue at Oxford during Owen's student days there was the strife between Calvinism and Laudian Arminianism.³⁴ Owen as the young Puritan who in 1637 leaves Oxford in rebellion from Laud and Arminian thought, thereby forfeiting his opportunity for ecclesiastical preferment and the family inheritance of his wealthy uncle in Wales, is only conforming to what proves to be his life pattern. Wallace consistently and convincingly holds that "Owen was above all the 'theological puritan' who saw the real issues clearly at their theological focal points,"³⁵ so that his complete life and thought can be understood as a defense of the "Protestant core" position. His first published work, The Display of Arminianism, 1642, demonstrates this thesis about Owen; and Wallace's contention about Puritanism being vitally, though by no means completely, understood as a theological struggle with Arminianism is reinforced when we see the chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on the Ministry respond to Owen's work by presenting him with the

³²Ibid., p. 82.

³³Ibid., pp. 11-13.

³⁴Ibid., pp. 17-33.

³⁵Ibid., p. 113.

living of Fordham, probably in July of 1643.³⁶ Just as Owen at the beginning of his ministry attacks the Arminianism of the Laudians, so Wallace finds him at the close of his ministry (now at Coggeshall) employed in attacking the Arminianism of the sectarians with his Salus Electorum, Sanguis Iesu; or the Death of Death in the Death of Christ, 1648. In both cases Owen is seen defending the Calvinism of the "Protestant core."

Somewhere in between 1642 and 1648, Owen became an Independent. In his shift from Fordham to Coggeshall he left Presbyterian polity for Congregational. Perry Miller has argued, notes Wallace, that Independency as a polity was related to the concern for predestination,³⁷ and so Wallace is able to correlate Owen's Independency with his interpretive theme of the "Protestant core."³⁸ Furthermore, says Wallace, Owen held millenarian views which inclined him to consider polity as a matter to be kept flexible over against the Presbyterians who wanted to set up a fairly rigid and complete ecclesiastical system.³⁹ Wallace, of course, interprets Owen's millennial faith as a sign of his full commitment to God's free and sovereign grace,⁴⁰ a central Calvinist concern. This picture of Independency enables Wallace to

³⁶Ibid., p. 119.

³⁷Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts (1630-1650), (Beacon Press: Boston, 1959), pp. 55f.

³⁸Wallace, op. cit., p. 155.

³⁹Ibid., p. 179.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 180.

touch skillfully on the nuances of the Independent position at different points of time, now against Presbyterians and with sectarians, next against sectarians and for an establishment, and finally at Savoy in 1658 as a "proto-denomination."⁴¹

Wallace brilliantly relates the surprising rise of Owen as a prominent figure to his consistent defense of the Calvinist theological fortress. As an Independent he was not one of the Dissenting Brethren nor even a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines, and yet he rose into a position of pre-eminence over his senior colleagues. One of Wallace's strong points is his use of Owen's sermons before Parliament, and to the army, and in special situations with political import. He makes clear from these that Owen's political base of power was his theological orthodoxy.⁴² As a conservative Independent, Owen represented a compromise between a rigid, authoritarian establishment and the enthusiasm of the sects, so that his position was congruous with the political position of the army officers, the parliamentary leaders, and Cromwell himself. Wallace has attractively related the two major and apparently disparate facts about Owen. On the one hand, he is the clergyman who plays the most prominent political role during the ascendancy of Oliver Cromwell, preaching on almost all state occasions such as the King's execution, the victory over the Levellers, the victory over the Scots,

⁴¹Ibid., p. 303.

⁴²Ibid., pp. 196-197.

and the Dutch war; serving as dean of Christ Church and vice-chancellor of Oxford; playing a leading role in all the church settlement plans and programs; and advising Cromwell continually in all religious matters. On the other hand, there is Owen as the author of numerous, weighty theological tomes, who seems always to have been far removed from the practical exigencies of political turmoil. Wallace's thesis that Owen's political value was precisely his orthodox Calvinism draws its real strength from a frank appraisal of every significant treatise and sermon and catechism produced by Owen during this period--an appraisal which strikingly supports his argument.

Wallace's treatment of the relationship between Owen and Richard Baxter is significant. Baxter, he says, was no true Puritan,⁴³ precisely because he was not an orthodox Calvinistic defender of the "Protestant core." Baxter, in his anxiety about antinomianism, wanted to make atonement only an enabling act so that man's role in justification and sanctification might be emphasized. Baxter had attacked Owen as an antinomian, and Owen counter-attacked Baxter as a traitor to orthodoxy. Baxter was the one generally judged heterodox by his contemporaries.⁴⁴ Wallace clinches his point by reference to the Presbyterians and Congregationalists "founded" by Baxter and Owen, respectively.⁴⁵ The Presbyterians became heterodox Calvinists, and the Congregationalists remained orthodox Calvinists.

⁴³Ibid., p. 256.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 257.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 258.

The Baxter-Owen example indicates John Owen as being the representative Puritan. This can be seen more clearly over against Baxter who has sometimes been cast as the typical Puritan.⁴⁶ It was Owen who held the center ground, the Calvinistically sound position, and he held it uncompromisingly. Wallace's stress on Owen's Calvinistic orthodoxy has been cogently expressed, and we tend to agree with that view, although not thereby agreeing with him as to the real nature of that orthodoxy. In Owen, then, we do not expect to find a daring innovator, but a mature spokesman for the more permanent and abiding virtues of English Calvinistic Puritanism.

By placing Owen in the mainstream of a half-century of Puritanism, Wallace has actually defined Puritanism as Calvinistic. Puritanism is a term with a wide variety of possible meanings--political, social, economic, ethical, and ecclesiastical, as well as theological--and these meanings change with the historical period in question. Nevertheless, it would not be misleading to say that the theological character of mainstream Puritanism was Calvinistic. Since our investigation is chiefly theological, our use of the term Puritanism will be more or less synonymous with English Calvinism, though with a somewhat broader meaning--with more of a cultural reference--than the latter term.

Our most fundamental questioning of Wallace's thesis must be directed at his concept of the "Protestant core."

⁴⁶For example, Nuttall considers Baxter as invariably playing the center position (op. cit., pp. 10, 169).

This is his major critical assumption, and it serves the purposes of his thesis rather well. We can agree with him that Owen's Calvinism is orthodox in the sense of the scholasticized Protestantism of the Synod of Dort. However, that English Calvinism represents the real core position of the Reformation and of Calvin in particular is a judgment which must be substantiated beyond Wallace's generalizations. If we are going to assess the truly fundamental shape of Owen's theology, it will be important for us to open up the real nature of this "Protestant core" position of English Calvinism and to see what its actual foundations prove to be. If they prove to be those laid by Calvin, our study will benefit from an understanding of their original force in the context of Calvin's thought. If they prove to have another origin than in Calvin, our study will be concerned to uncover this parentage and to account for the name of "Calvinist" being attached to this thought. Only by thus laying bare the theological make-up of this "Protestant core" of English Calvinistic orthodoxy--which is, presumably, Owen's own position--can we pursue our task of defining the basic structure and logic--the theological shape--of Owen's theology.

Two of the four major themes in Puritanism as outlined by Vose are missing in Wallace's assessment of Calvinistic Puritanism. His failure to deal seriously with covenant theology or pneumatology suggests that they do not reinforce his central presupposition about the "Protestant core." For that reason they would provide us with the beginnings of a critical

standpoint in relation to his "Protestant" interpretation of English Calvinism.

Wallace takes notice of covenant theology in a footnote. He appears to argue against himself by first saying that Calvinists would not use covenant theology in such a way as to reduce emphasis on God's sovereignty--since they were first of all anti-Arminian--and by then saying that covenant theology was only anthropologically oriented (if it was) as a way of meeting the Arminians on their own ground.⁴⁷ Why should Wallace be allowed to argue in opposite directions simultaneously? Either covenant theology is a threat to God's sovereign and electing grace and therefore to be shunned by Wallace's type of Calvinist, or covenant theology is supportive of God's initiative and therefore to be blessed by Wallace as illustrative of his thesis, to be embraced by Wallace's type of Calvinist as a valuable weapon in his warfare, and to be shunned or even castigated by Arminians. Because his cardinal assumption is that Puritanism should be understood as Calvinism in a life or death struggle with Arminianism, Wallace has sloughed over the significance of studies in covenant theology which point to a de-emphasis of God's sovereignty and a definite leaning toward the Arminian position. The further fact that the Puritan victory produced as its fruits such a wealth of sectarian forms of Arminianism also suggests that Calvinist and Arminian may be more akin than Wallace allows. It just could be that

⁴⁷Wallace, op. cit., pp. 111-112.

Arminians and Calvinists fought so ferociously because they were so close together theologically,⁴⁸ and that the Calvinist triumph spawned the sectarians because of inherent tendencies in that Calvinism. At any rate covenant theology is writ large on the history of Calvinistic Puritanism, and it would seem to demand serious consideration from any scholar of Puritanism.

The second gap in Wallace's study is pneumatology. It might be contended that Owen's Pneumatologia was written after 1660 and does not fall within the scope of that study. Yet, certainly Owen had to face the issue of the Holy Spirit with the sectaries before 1660; and there is also the central concern with experience for the whole movement of Puritanism, which may be a more fundamental category for considering Puritanism than Wallace's "Protestant core," and which for Puritanism is intimately bound up with the activity of the Spirit. Jerald C. Brauer makes this very point quite emphatically.

The personal or experiential nature of Puritanism resulted in a concern with the doctrine of the Holy Spirit which is unparalleled in Christian history.

⁴⁸"For if the war between the Puritans and the Church of England was an engagement between men who, from our point of view at least, were agreed on the larger assumptions, the concrete issue must be narrowed down to a difference of deduction from those premises. The evidence of history goes to show that the bitterest and most furious combats are generally fought between those who agree on fundamentals, for there is no greater annoyance that a man can suffer than attack from persons who accord with him in the main, but who apply his principles to conclusions utterly foreign to his liking" (Perry Miller in the "Introduction" to The Puritans, by Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, [American Book Company: New York, 1938], p. 41).

At some point, almost every Puritan preached about the Spirit or attempted to place this doctrine at the center of his religious life.⁴⁹

While Wallace does not take up pneumatology, he does refer to Christian experience, and by so doing he seems to undercut his own position. For example, he writes,

It is also in the light of our understanding of the nature of the "religious" core which he was defending by his theological work that we can understand his total commitment to a rigid Calvinistic theology which, superficially considered, might seem far too abstract and barren and devoid of "religious" dynamic, but which in context is seen to be that theoretical superstructure which guaranteed and even created a type of vital and living piety.⁵⁰

Now we see that the "Protestant core" is not the most fundamental category, but that piety is really more basic. Orthodoxy was only the "theoretical superstructure" which "guaranteed" and "created" the right sort of piety. Does this mean that what really counts is not first the sovereignty of God, but the religiosity of man? Perhaps the Calvinists and Arminians were not really so far apart on fundamentals--on human piety. They only disagreed about secondary matters--about the means of producing piety. Wallace's statement is not a momentary lapse. The same summary explanation is repeated near the end of his line of argument.

Thus at the heart of Owen's concern for the doctrines of God's free grace we find the Puritan concern for and insistence upon godliness of life as that which the theology of free grace promotes and guarantees, in contrast to the Arminian theology by which, in Owen's

⁴⁹Brauer, op. cit., p. 102.

⁵⁰Wallace, op. cit., p. 103.

view, men seek to exalt their own righteousness and declare their independence of the grace of God.⁵¹

And again, somewhat later, he asserts that Owen begins and ends his theological thought with "the central point of Christian piety itself, the sense of the grace of Christ."⁵² Is it significant that not "the grace of Christ," but "the sense of it" appears to be the central focus of this statement? Has anthropocentric concern mastered and manipulated the theological character of the faith for Owen? If so, then Wallace has taught us more truly than he knows, albeit in opposition to his own primary thesis about the "Protestant core" radically separating Calvinist and Arminian. We appreciate his explication of Owen's public and literary career in terms of the Calvinist orthodoxy of the seventeenth century defending itself against Laudians, Levellers, Papists, Baxterites, Socinians, Quakers, etc. However, we must ask whether the similarities between these groups are not more startling and significant than the differences, and whether Wallace himself has not touched on one of these fundamental samenesses--the concern for piety.

The Pneumatologia of Owen will be the work of central interest in the study which now lies before us.⁵³ The fact that

⁵¹Ibid., p. 266.

⁵²Ibid., p. 281.

⁵³The first volume, which forms the bulk of the work, appeared in 1674 and ought to be a reflection of Owen's mature thoughts. The other parts, which comprise the second volume, appeared separately as they were completed--Owen never knowing for certain that providence would allow for the completion of the whole project. "The Reason of Faith" was published in 1677; "The Causes, Ways, and Means of Understanding the Mind of God," in 1678; "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Prayer," in

it is polemical means, as Wallace has shown us, that it is in line with his whole thought, that it represents typically his defense of orthodox Calvinism. His defense in this case was against the two extremes of the Socinians, who rejected pneumatology, and of the Quakers, who were enraptured with it. Moreover, in the description of one who shared Owen's position,

there was a third class of writers at that time, from whom Owen apprehended more danger than either,--men who, in their preaching, dwelt much upon the credentials of the Bible, but little upon its truths,--who would have defended even the doctrine of the Holy Spirit as an article of their creed, and at the same time would have derided all reference to the actual work of divine grace upon a human heart as the "weak imagination of distempered minds." Much of Owen's treatise has reference to these accommodating and courtly divines, and is, in fact, a vindication of the reality of the spiritual life.⁵⁴

This seems to suggest that the concern for piety is at the heart of Owen's pneumatology, as Wallace has suggested it being at the heart of his whole theology. Might we not say that in this combination of Holy Spirit and spiritual life Owen is defending some sort of synthesis between the objective and subjective factors in Christian theology? At any rate, Owen sensed the danger in losing altogether the reality of revelation in the loss of a vital pneumatology.

Take away the dispensation of the Spirit, and his effectual operations in all the intercourse that is between God and man; be ashamed to avow or profess

1682; and "On the Work of the Spirit as a Comforter, and as He Is the Author of Spiritual Gifts" appeared together, posthumously, in 1693. Owen's full outline on the Holy Spirit was thus completed.

⁵⁴Thomson, op. cit., p. cxi.

the work attributed unto him in the gospel,--and Christianity is plucked up by the roots. Yea, this practical contempt of the work of the Holy Spirit being grown the only plausible defiance of religion, is so also to be the most pernicious, beyond all notional mistakes and errors about the same things, being constantly accompanied with profaneness, and commonly issuing in atheism.⁵⁵

William H. Goold, editor of Owen's Works, hints that, in the Pneumatologia, Owen is indeed working at what we have described as the pneumatological frontier of theology, the sphere of divine-human encounter.

No work of the author supplies better evidence of his pre-eminent skill in what may be termed spiritual ethics,--in tracing the effect of religious truth on the conscience, and the varied phases of human feeling as modified by divine grace and tested by the divine word; and his reasonings would have been reputed highly philosophical if they had not been so very scriptural.⁵⁶

Here our author is dealing with the objective side of faith--with "religious truth," "divine grace," "divine word"--and also with the subjective side of faith--with "conscience" and "human feeling." Despite the fact that phrases like "spiritual ethics," "tracing the effect," and "the varied phases" point to a strongly anthropocentric focus, such testimony as Goold's indicates that Owen's pneumatology will present us with a vital treatment of the objective-subjective tensions in revelational theology.

⁵⁵Owen, Works, III, 8.

⁵⁶William H. Goold, "Prefatory Note" to Works, III, 3.

CHAPTER II

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND KNOWLEDGE OF GOD: RATIONAL THEOLOGY

A. Trinitarian Definition of the Spirit

John Owen strongly affirms that the Holy Spirit is God, and in his Pneumatologia he carefully proceeds to establish a claim for the Holy Spirit that is fully trinitarian. Careful procedure clearly means for John Owen exegetical procedure, and so he turns to the bedrock authority of Scripture for the foundation of his claim. He notes the variety and apparent obscurity of the Scriptural uses of the word spirit, but Owen never acknowledges that Holy Scripture is ultimately obscure. Therefore, it is not surprising that its basic rationality eventually makes the matter "clear and evident," at least to Owen's reason.

And notwithstanding the ambiguous use of these words in the Old and New Testament, there are two things clear and evident unto our purpose: --First, that there is in the holy Scriptures a full, distinct revelation or declaration of the Spirit, or the Spirit of God, as one singular, and every way distinct from everything else that is occasionally or constantly signified or denoted by that word "Spirit."¹

¹Owen, Works, III, p. 53.

When Owen goes on to define more precisely what the content of the word spirit is, he supplements--not uncharacteristically--Scripture with some Greek metaphysics.

In the name Spirit two things are included:--First, His nature or essence,--namely, that he is a pure, spiritual, or immaterial substance; for neither the Hebrews nor the Greeks can express such a being in its subsistence but by $\pi \nu \epsilon \tilde{\upsilon} \mu \alpha$ and $\pi \nu \epsilon \tilde{\upsilon} \mu \alpha$, a spirit.²

Although it is doubtful that the Scripture was thus intended to speak about "substance," Owen is in this way asserting that the Holy Spirit as Spirit essentially partakes of what is "the nature of God abstractedly."³ There is a second meaning of spirit, however, so that as the term is "peculiarly and constantly ascribed unto him, it declares his especial manner and order of existence; so that wherever there is mention of the 'Holy Spirit,' his relation unto the Father and Son is included therein; for he is the Spirit of God."⁴

Owen does not attempt to derive the doctrine of the trinity from natural theology. His notion of revelation suggests true contingency, so that God is to be known only and simply according to his manifestation unto us.⁵ Of course, this manifestation is, for us at least, made known through the Scripture.⁶ In fact, i.e. in Scripture, God is revealed to us "as three distinct persons, subsisting in the same infinitely holy, one, undivided essence."⁷ The

²Ibid., p. 54.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 55.

⁵Ibid., pp. 38, 66.

⁶Ibid., p. 38.

⁷Ibid., p. 66.

threeness of God, Owen sees, in true catholic tradition, as intrinsic to God. He specifically states that the internal life of God is expressed in terms of the relationships of the three persons one to another in mutual knowledge and love.⁸ Within this immanent trinity the Holy Spirit plays the role which has been traditional since Augustine.⁹ "So the Spirit is the mutual love of the Father and the Son, knowing them as he is known, and 'searching the deep things of God.'"¹⁰

In the natural order of subsistence in three persons, "which is unalterable," Owen observes that the Holy Spirit is the third person.¹¹ What is true for the immanent trinity determines matters for the economic trinity, "for his working is a consequent of the order of his subsistence."¹² And this relation of external works to internal nature holds true not simply for the matter of order, but also for the quality of mutual dependence.¹³

Within this solidly orthodox formulation of the immanent and economic trinity, Owen proceeds to extend his treatment of the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He argues first for the full personality of the Spirit. His method of relying strictly on Scripture, and on a Scripture which must be exegetically homogeneous, necessitates setting forth two hermeneutical directives.

⁸Ibid., p. 67. ⁹Augustine, De Trinitate, xv, 27-39.

¹⁰Owen, Works, III, p. 67.

¹¹Ibid., p. 92.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid.

One consideration, which hath in part been before proposed, I shall premise, to free the subject of our argument from ambiguity; and this is, that this word or name "Spirit" is used sometimes to denote the Spirit of God himself, and sometimes his gifts and graces, the effects of his operations on the souls of men.¹⁴

With this clarification Owen believes he is able to assert "that things are so ordered, in the wisdom of God, that there is no personal property that may be found in an infinite divine nature but it is in one place or other ascribed unto him."¹⁵ Still to be dealt with are the impersonal things attributed to the Spirit in the Scripture and also the personal qualities sometimes attributed in those writings to impersonal things. In the first case the expressions are to be understood as "figurative, as many things are so expressed of God in the Scripture, and that frequently."¹⁶ In the second instance the hermeneutical conclusion again suggests figurative speech, a matter of "metalepsis," "metonymy," and "proso-popoeia."¹⁷

We observe carefully this move by Owen to clear up the Scriptural ambiguity concerning the Holy Spirit, not only because the authority of Scripture is basic to his method (which we will investigate more at length in Chapter III),

¹⁴Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 70.

¹⁷Ibid. Owen's characteristic reliance on reason and the ultimate harmony of Scripture are evident in his careful defense. "Now concerning these things there is no danger of mistake. The light of reason and their own nature therein do give us a sufficient understanding of them; and such figurative expressions as are used concerning them are common in all good authors. Besides, the Scripture itself, in other places innumerable, doth so teach and declare what they are, as that its plain and direct proper assertions do sufficiently expound its own figurative enunciations: for these and such like ascriptions are only occasional; the direct description of the things themselves is given us in other places."

but because there seems to be reflected here a turning point which holds significance for the whole of his pneumatology. In spite of his considered orthodoxy in presenting the doctrine of the Spirit in the context of the doctrine of the trinity, he seems to abandon a rigorously trinitarian development of the Spirit's person and work in favor of an attention to the specific phraseology of Scriptural references, whose selection and interpretation depend upon some other theological principle which is not admitted, nor realized, nor immediately evident.

As Owen pursues his definition of the Spirit's personality, there are hints of his drift from trinitarian doctrine. He finds three decisively personal properties ascribed to the Holy Spirit by the Scripture. The first of these is understanding or wisdom, "which is the first property of an intelligent subsistence."¹⁸ Owen moves smoothly from understanding, or knowledge, to revelation.¹⁹ His insight is solid. The agent of revelation is able to truly reveal because he is also the subject revealed.²⁰ The Spirit is God. What Owen forgets, or omits, is that God is not simply the Spirit. Revelation is attributed directly to the Spirit without reference to that mutual dependence and coinherence of all three persons, both immanently and economically, which is so fundamental to trinitarian theology.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁹Ibid. "God hath revealed these things unto us by his Spirit" (I Cor. ii, 10).

²⁰Ibid., p. 79.

Owen further claims that the Scripture attributes to the Holy Spirit "a will acting with understanding and choice, as the principle and cause of his outward actions."²¹ The Holy Spirit's will is "his own will, his choice and pleasure. What can be spoken more fully and plainly to describe an intelligent person, acting voluntarily with freedom and by choice, I know not."²² Owen has stressed the will of the Spirit without setting that will in the context of the Father's will and the Son's will which all together carry the sovereign force of God's will. The degree of individuality given here by Owen to the Holy Spirit threatens the unity and reality of God.

Again with the third personal property, which Owen designates as power, there is no reference to the power of God understood in a trinitarian way. Power is credited to the Spirit "absolutely," and especially in the event of creation.

Creation is an act of divine power, the highest we are capable to receive any notion of; and it is also an effect of the wisdom and will of him that createth, as being a voluntary act, and designed unto a certain end. All these, therefore, are here [Job xxxiii, 4] ascribed to the Spirit of God.²³

Such voluntariness gives to the Holy Spirit the appearance of an independent agent, and, perhaps, even of a capricious one.

It must be admitted that Owen's strong remarks about the personal properties of the Holy Spirit could be understood

²¹Ibid., p. 81.

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid., p. 82.

as a necessary and orthodox stress on the full personhood of the Spirit. Indeed, his strongest statement about the immanent and economic correlation of the trinity in mutual dependence follows his comments about the individual distinctness of the third person. Nevertheless, we think Owen's treatment of the personality of the Spirit illustrates a fundamental tendency of his pœumatology, which is a willingness to depart from the strict interdependence of the orthodox trinitarian doctrine, and a zeal for an expository development of Scriptural language about the Spirit and his work. Such expository development would be open to a principle or principles of interpretation other than the trinitarian one. Whether this is true and--if so--what sort of new theological principle is actually directing matters are the questions before us.

B. The Pneumatological Principle

Owen begins his discussion of the works of the Holy Spirit with a recital of the trinitarian foundation for the Spirit's work that appears fully catholic.

I say, . . . that all divine operations are usually ascribed unto God absolutely. So it is said God made all things; and so of all other works, whether in nature or in grace. And the reason hereof is, because the several persons are undivided in their operations, acting all by the same will, the same wisdom, the same power. Every person, therefore, is the author of every work of God, because each person is God, and the divine nature is the same undivided principle of all divine operations; and this ariseth from the unity of the persons in the same essence. But as to the manner of subsistence therein, there is distinction, relation, and order between and among them; and

hence there is no divine work but is distinctly assigned unto each person, and eminently unto one. . . .

The reason, therefore, why the works of God are thus distinctly ascribed unto each person is because, in the undivided operation of the divine nature, each person doth the same work in the order of their subsistence; not one as the instrument of the other, or merely employed by the other, but as one common principle of authority, wisdom, love, and power.²⁴

Owen is no stranger to the doctrine of the trinity. He has taken care neither to unduly separate nor to confuse the three persons, and he cites Athanasius, Basil, and Ambrose in his support.

The assignment of each work "eminently" to one of the three persons is the next step for Owen. The opera naturae are assigned to the Father; the opera gratiae procuratae, to the Son; and the opera gratiae applicatae to the Spirit.²⁵ The total work of God is divided by Owen into nature and grace, with the former being assigned to the Father. Grace, however, is subdivided, so that the two parts are assigned separately unto the Son and the Spirit. The significance of this will soon appear.

Finally, Owen comes to the point of stating, not just what the eminent work of the Spirit is, but what part the Spirit plays as the third person in each and every work of God. This role of the Holy Spirit is related to the order of subsistence in the trinity.²⁶ Owen's development follows closely the thought of Basil, whom he cites. In this fashion there is assigned to the Father the original cause, to the Son

²⁴Ibid., p. 93.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Ibid., p. 94.

the establishing work, and to the Holy Spirit the perfecting power.²⁷ We take special notice of Owen's citation of Basil because both men so stress the Holy Spirit as "the perfecting cause" that it becomes thereby a pneumatological principle which is crucial for the whole of their theology. On the one hand we find Owen attributing to the Holy Spirit "in every great work of God, the concluding, completing, perfecting acts" in such a way that "without him no part of any work of God is perfect or complete."²⁸ On the other hand Basil said, "There is not even one single gift which reaches creation without the Holy Ghost."²⁹ Both Owen and Basil take this pneumatological principle with utmost seriousness, applying it to the original creation,³⁰ to the incarnation of Christ,³¹ and to our regeneration and sanctification.³² Indeed, there is no relation of God to the world in which the Holy Spirit is not the proximate cause, the one who finally bridges the gap. Upon reflection, that viewpoint is remarkably parallel to our introductory insistence that pneumatology marks the theological frontier between the objective reality of God and the human knowledge of him. Owen has unmistakably put pneumatology at the very heart of theology.

²⁷Ibid. cf. Basil, De Spiritu Sancto, xvi, 38.

²⁸Owen, Works, III, 94.

²⁹Basil, op. cit., ("A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church," 2nd Series, Ed. by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, VIII; The Christian Literature Co.: New York, 1895), xxiv, 55.

³⁰Owen, Works, III, pp. 95-104. cf. Basil, op. cit., xvi, 38.

³¹Owen, Works, III, pp. 159-83. cf. Basil, op. cit., xvi, 39.

³²Owen, Works, III, pp. 188-206. cf. Basil, op. cit., xix, 49.

There is nothing excellent amongst men, whether it be absolutely extraordinary, and every way above the production of natural principles, or whether it consist in an eminent and peculiar improvement of those principles and abilities, but it is ascribed unto the Holy Spirit of God, as the immediate operator and efficient cause of it.³³

Certainly there can be no knowledge of God without the involvement of the Holy Spirit. Any kind of theological activity can only begin to take place if and when the Spirit acts.

Owen states his pneumatological principle very radically, but we have noticed, thanks to Basil, that it is not something altogether new. In fact, one much closer to Owen than Basil has stated the principle no less radically. Krusche's description of the work of the Holy Spirit in John Calvin sounds strikingly similar when he says,

das das Wirken des Geistes von dem des Vaters und des Sohnes eigentümlich Unterscheidende ist dies, dass es gerade das Wirken des Vaters und des Sohnes zum Ziel bringt. Die eigentümliche Tat des Geistes ist gerade die, dass er nichts Eigenes tut, sondern das Tun des Vaters und des Sohnes verwirklicht. Alles, was Gott wirkt--und er wirkt alles und wirkt immer!--, ist in seiner Wirkung Wirken des Heiligen Geistes. Es gibt schlechterdings kein Handeln des Vaters und des Sohnes, das wirksam würde ohne das Wirken des Geistes. Alles göttliche Handeln ist in seiner Spitze pneumatisch. Der Geist ist die "Dei manus, qua suam potentiam exercet."³⁴

With the pneumatological principle so strongly confirmed by such a weighty authority as Calvin himself, one might think that Owen is proceeding on very solid theological ground. There is, however, a significant difference detected in

³³Owen, Works, III, p. 126.

³⁴Krusche, op. cit., p. 11. Extensive references to this pneumatological principle in Calvin are given by Krusche, pp. 11-12.

Krusche's phrase, "dass er nichts Eigenes tut." For Calvin, all of the Spirit's works are strictly trinitarian, whereas we have already noted Owen's inclination to stress the individuality and distinctness of the Spirit's work as his own.

Something new, indeed, can be claimed for Owen's pneumatological principle when we see the uncharted theological wilderness he claims in the name of the Spirit's freedom for his own work. We have already had occasion to note Owen's subdivision of the work of grace. In his general principles concerning the Holy Spirit and his work, Owen has more explicitly declared,

That the doctrine of the Spirit of God, his work and grace, is the second great head or principle of those gospel truths wherein the glory of God and the good of the souls of men are most eminently concerned. And such also it is, that without it,--without the knowledge of it in its truth, and the improvement of it in its power,--the other will be useless unto those ends. For when God designed the great and glorious work of recovering fallen man and the saving of sinners, to the praise of the glory of his grace, he appointed, in his infinite wisdom, two great means thereof. The one was the giving of his Son for them, and the other was the giving of his Spirit unto them.³⁵

The role of the Holy Spirit has been placed by John Owen alongside the Christ-event as a separate, distinct, and parallel event. To be sure, a certain relation between the two is admitted, but Owen does not shrink from asserting the essential duality of the redemptive work.

Hence, from the first entrance of sin, there were two general heads of the promise of God unto men, concerning the means of their recovery and salvation. The one was that concerning the sending of his Son to be incarnate, to take our nature upon him, and to suffer for us therein;

³⁵Owen, Works, III, 23.

the other, concerning the giving of his Spirit, to make the effects and fruits of the incarnation, obedience, and suffering of his Son, effectual in us and towards us. To these heads may all the promises of God be reduced.³⁶

The Christ-event is the "foundation" of the Spirit-event says Owen, but that foundation will never amount to anything without the latter. Since the Christ-event is already accomplished, the real center of interest is now the sending of the Holy Spirit to be "a most eminent immediate object of the faith of them that do believe."³⁷ As a matter of fact, says Owen, the work of the Son is the main focus of the Old Testament, but the work of the Spirit "is the most peculiar and principle subject of the Scriptures of the New Testament."³⁸ It is not hard to see which event receives the weight of real theological importance.

The duality of God's redemptive activity is not accidentally or superficially set forth by Owen. He consistently maintains the duality throughout the Pneumatologia. It must also be admitted that there are many statements that condition and mollify the extreme implications of this stated duality. It remains for us to examine more closely the ultimate force of this conception of the Spirit's work. It appears as though Owen is flirting with gnosticism and running the risk of casting off the historical moorings of Christian theology for the sake of present spiritual experience. The possibility is implied that God is able to be known and to act redemptively in some other way than strictly in Christ.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Ibid.

³⁸Ibid.

One wonders just how the Holy Spirit can become an "object of faith"? The pneumatological principle served John Calvin as a means of emphasizing the trinitarian quality of all God's action. Is that principle now serving John Owen as a means of circumventing the trinity and of bringing in a substitute theological principle which is unhistorical, extra-Christological, and experience-oriented? Our question can best be answered, perhaps, by considering the nature of the knowledge of God in Calvinism.

C. Knowledge of God in Calvin

On the face of it, a proper understanding of Calvinism ought to begin with a right understanding of Calvin, and that is what we shall attempt. For Calvin, knowledge of God is the form and content of theology. Edward A. Dowey, Jr. has placed us in his debt by his clear and balanced discussion of the double knowledge of God and the double predestination of men. Dowey points convincingly to the duplex cognitio Domini as the basic ordering principle of the 1559 edition of the Institutes.³⁹ There we find Calvin saying that,

First, in the fashioning of the universe and in the general teaching of Scripture the Lord shows himself to be the Creator. Then in the face of Christ he shows himself to be the Redeemer. Of the resulting twofold knowledge of God we shall now discuss the first aspect; the second will be dealt with in its proper place.⁴⁰

³⁹Edward A. Dowey, Jr., The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1952), pp. 41-49.

⁴⁰John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Tr. by Ford Lewis Battles, ("The Library of Christian Classics," XX-XXI; ed. by John T. McNeill; S.C.M. Press Ltd.: London, 1961), I, ii, 1.

The knowledge of God the Creator is for Calvin available from creation and the general doctrine of Scripture. Dowey demonstrates that the knowledge from creation consists in both an innate human sense of God's existence and sovereign holiness, as well as in the fabric of the external world.⁴¹ However, that does not mean that these means of knowing God as Creator actually function in that manner for men today. The revelation remains and continues to be objectively clear, but sin has entered the picture. "Calvin never forgets for a moment that sin has blinded man to the revelation in creation, but since sin does it, the revelation itself is not harmed. Man's receiving apparatus functions wrongly."⁴² Revelation of God in creation had a positive purpose, but in the event of sin it has a judgmental force, continually maintaining man's responsibility for sin.⁴³

The knowledge of God from Scripture includes inspiration and the internal testimony of the Spirit, as well as the external words of the Old and New Testaments.⁴⁴ This knowledge of God from Scripture has two functions. First, it clarifies the revelation made in creation--not by adding to it, but by enabling it to be more clearly seen.⁴⁵ Second, it is a source of new knowledge of God, because it testifies as creation does not to the doctrines of the trinity,

⁴¹Dowey, op. cit., pp. 50-86.

⁴²Ibid., p. 73.

⁴³Ibid., pp. 81-83.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 86-124.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 144-145.

creation itself, and special providence.⁴⁶

The second aspect of the duplex cognitio Domini is the knowledge of God as Redeemer. This knowledge has a completely independent orientation from the first sort of knowledge, and it is expressed as faith.

Now we shall possess a right definition of faith if we call it a firm and certain knowledge of God's benevolence toward us, founded upon the truth of the freely given promise in Christ, both revealed to our minds and sealed upon our hearts through the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷

Dowey gives an exhaustive analysis of this definition of faith. It may suffice for us to stress the following aspects. Faith for Calvin is to be understood fundamentally as knowledge--a knowledge in which there is "the full participation of the mind,"⁴⁸ and yet also a knowledge expressed as trust.⁴⁹ The category of knowledge has the virtue of focusing the attention on the object of faith, which is the mercy of God in Christ, rather than on our experience of faith.⁵⁰ Faith as knowledge of Christ transcends the ordinary category of knowledge, "for the promises offer him, not for us to halt in the appearance and bare knowledge alone, but to enjoy true participation in him."⁵¹ Faith, then, is a vital and personal receiving of Christ expressed as union with him and participation in him.⁵²

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 145.

⁴⁷Calvin, op. cit., III, ii, 7.

⁴⁸Dowey, op. cit., p. 183. ⁴⁹Ibid., p. 192.

⁵⁰Ibid., n. 213.

⁵¹Calvin, op. cit., IV, xvii, 11.

⁵²Ibid., III, xi, 10.

Because faith comes as God's gift, it comes as election. Dowey stresses that for Calvin predestination is a function of soteriology,⁵³ i.e. election and reprobation are only known by faith. Election is meant to express the certainty of faith, since it is founded not upon the oscillations of human experience but upon the sovereign choice of God. As Dowey puts it, predestination "is the very apex of trust in God's trustworthiness, nonarbitrariness, the complete unconditionedness and therefore eternal unchanging truth of what he has revealed, namely, his mercy in Christ."⁵⁴ Difficulty over predestination ensues only when one attempts to look at it outside the context of faith where alone it belongs--as Calvin explicitly warns in an exegetical note.

Whoever is not satisfied with Christ but inquires curiously about eternal predestination desires, as far as lies in him, to be saved contrary to God's purpose. The election of God in itself is hidden and secret. The Lord manifests it by the calling with which He honours us.

Therefore, they are mad who seek their own or others' salvation in the labyrinth of predestination; for if God has elected us to the end that we may believe, take away faith and election will be imperfect. But it is wrong to break the unbroken and ordained order of beginning and end in God's counsel. . . . Every man's faith is an abundant witness to the eternal predestination of God, so that it is sacrilege to inquire further; and whoever refuses to assent to the simple testimony of the Holy Spirit does Him a horrible injury.⁵⁵

⁵³Dowey, op. cit., p. 186.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 210.

⁵⁵Calvin, Commentary on John, Tr. by T. H. L. Parker, ("Calvin's Commentaries," ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas Torrance; Oliver and Boyd: Edinburgh, 1959), vi, 40.

Whereas predestination is meant by Calvin to provide the element of certainty to faith, it produces precisely the opposite effect when it is considered aside from faith. Without faith in Christ, predestination can only suggest some previously decreed choice, which a man recognizes as fixed, although he does not know its secret application to himself.⁵⁶

Predestination is double for Calvin, and Dowey maintains that reprobation in Calvin's theology is also a genuine correlate of faith, although decidedly subordinate to election.⁵⁷ As with election, reprobation can only be known by faith, and, therefore, by one who knows himself as elect, as non-reprobate. There is no reason for the elect to examine the decree of reprobation, and so it is not to be analyzed at all. Furthermore, a man is not to see his neighbor as a reprobate, as though one could divine the secret will of God.⁵⁸ Dowey carefully arrives at a positive assessment of reprobation.

It must be admitted that the doctrine of reprobation, when its theological locus is seen in Calvin's soteriology as a part of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, belongs to the believer's knowledge of God in faith as a limiting concept at the border of the mystery surrounding his own election. By no means does it alter the picture of God as gratuitously merciful as long as we stay within Calvin's formulation of it.⁵⁹

⁵⁶Dowey, op. cit., p. 188.

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 211.

⁵⁸Calvin, Institutes, III, xxiii, 14.

⁵⁹Dowey, op. cit., p. 215.

Because reprobation has no systematic basis in Calvin's thought, "it has no power to do anything but emphasize the incomprehensibility and supernaturalness of the whole work of salvation, that is, the utter gratuitousness of God's love."⁶⁰ Knowledge of God as Redeemer, then, is not based on a metaphysical understanding of the decrees, but on faith which knows God's mercy in Christ.

Now the crucial question about the duplex cognitio Domini must be asked. Can men know God as Creator separately from knowledge of God as Redeemer? Sin may have caused a noetic hindrance to our knowledge of God in creation; but for Calvin does sin also prevent our knowledge of God through Scripture? In other words, is knowledge of God available to us only by faith in Christ? Dowey contends that Calvin did not systematically face this issue and that it remains somewhat unresolved.⁶¹ Nevertheless, knowledge of God by faith in Christ is obviously more central and fundamental to the heart of his theology.⁶² The knowledge of God as Creator and as Redeemer presuppose one another; but, finally, it must be said that "the knowledge of the Redeemer is an epistemological presupposition of the knowledge of the Creator."⁶³ When knowledge of God is not understood

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 217.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 161.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 163, 173, 182.

⁶³Ibid., p. 239.

christologically, then the theology in question is fundamentally different from the theology of Calvin.⁶⁴

D. Knowledge of God
in English Calvinism

As Wallace pointed out in his study of Owen, predestination was the central theological motif in the theological debates of the first half of the seventeenth century. By way of contrast, the doctrine of the knowledge of God was a silent and nearly non-existent issue, claims William H. Chalker in his unpublished doctoral dissertation on the subject.⁶⁵ Chalker claims that the basic difference between Calvin and the English Calvinists whom he studied (William Perkins, William Ames, Thomas Shepard, Elisha Coles,

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 240-41. While it is not the purpose of our study to attempt a defense of a given position concerning Calvin's theology, a responsible historical treatment of an English Calvinist cannot avoid searching for some interpretive position in relation to this great theological ancestor. What we have outlined thus far may need to be supplemented in succeeding chapters, but our fundamental stance in regard to Calvin will remain consonant with what we have set forth here. While we have relied chiefly on Dowey's treatment at this point because of the clarity and balance we find in his handling of the subject--thus helping us to state the position briefly and fairly--nevertheless, we believe this general line of interpretation is widely supported by much of modern scholarship concerning Calvin, and we might refer here to Peter Brunner, Vom Glauben bei Calvin; Wilhelm Niesel, Die Theologie Calvins; T. F. Torrance, Calvin's Doctrine of Man; and T. H. L. Parker, The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God; as well as to Werner Krusche, Das Wirken des Heiligen Geistes nach Calvin, which we consider to be the definitive work concerning Calvin's pneumatology.

⁶⁵William H. Chalker, "Calvin and Some Seventeenth Century English Calvinists--A Comparison of Their Thought Through an Examination of Their Doctrines of the Knowledge of God, Faith, and Assurance," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1961).

and John Howe) was a failure to understand Calvin's trinitarian approach to the knowledge of God and a quiet reliance upon some other and natural knowledge of God.⁶⁶ As a result the doctrines of faith, predestination, knowledge of sin, and the Holy Spirit's work are disastrously distorted, and interminable difficulties are introduced.

Chalker contends that faith for the Calvinists no longer has the content of knowledge, but is basically now an act of will.⁶⁷ It is true that Calvin also included trust in his concept of faith--but never a trust separated from the cognitive function of faith. When this separation happens, then knowledge of God must come from some other, and prior, source than faith. If faith is basically man's act, as a trusting in God, then there must be some sort of information about God and salvation which is reasonably dependable, and upon which a genuine decision of commitment can be made.⁶⁸ It may be granted that the Holy Spirit is at work converting the will, but the faith-event is understood as an appropriative act and not a cognitive one.⁶⁹ What is appropriated was already known in a general and natural way. The knowledge of God in Christ has been separated from faith inasmuch as the promises of Christ or the way of salvation are known beforehand, so that Christ may be known as redeemer apart from knowing him as my redeemer.⁷⁰ Chalker believes that the

⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 38, 84.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 97.

⁶⁸Ibid., pp. 82, 132, 135.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 281.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 57.

Holy Spirit's role has been significantly altered from his function for Calvin of witnessing to Jesus Christ. The Spirit's act of creating faith is no longer illumination as a cognitive function and a revelatory act, but rather persuasion as a contractual matter of entering into a covenant with a Father and Son "who were already known perfectly well, though not vitally, apart from the Spirit."⁷¹ Faith has no epistemological dimension, but is essentially a matter of the affections.⁷²

For Calvin, predestination functioned as a guarantee of assurance, but it was exclusively connected with the doctrine of faith as knowledge of God. "The question of assurance," says Chalker, "is always raised when it is assumed that there is true knowledge of God apart from knowledge of our salvation."⁷³ This was the Calvinists' dilemma. They knew about the double decrees without knowing which applied to them, because they knew them outside of the faith relation in which one knows himself only as elect. Whereas reprobation was for Calvin only an abstract decree which ruled out salvation as being from oneself and pointed to God's will alone--a comforting thought for the elect--for the Calvinists' reprobation was a live personal possibility--a tremendously frightening thought. Chalker observes that the Calvinists distorted Calvin's concept of predestination by opting for a natural knowledge of God which made predestination absurd;

⁷¹Ibid., p. 281.

⁷²Ibid., p. 137.

⁷³Ibid., p. 64.

whereupon the Arminians moved into the gap, keeping the natural knowledge of God while rejecting predestination.⁷⁴

The actual center of English Calvinism on the basis of this analysis becomes anthropocentric rather than Christocentric.⁷⁵ In the first place, there must be an anthropology independent of Christology, i.e. a knowledge of the self as sinful apart from election.⁷⁶ Salvation must be known as a necessity in relation to the self in order to motivate the individual to choose and appropriate that salvation by the act of faith. For the Calvinist, a true knowledge of sin comes by introspection and is a fundamental prelude to faith.⁷⁷ While the knowledge of the sinful self was outside of election, the reality of election was also defined in terms of the self--in terms of the act of the self called faith. Thus, the self became the seat of assurance--which was the role of predestination for Calvin--and introspection again plays the vital epistemological role.⁷⁸ Given this anthropocentric focus of theology, it would not be surprising to find psychology and personal experience becoming major categories of thought.

Chalker emphasizes Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God as trinitarian, and he sometimes speaks of English Calvinist thought as splitting the trinity.⁷⁹ This can be

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 84. ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 74. ⁷⁶Ibid., p. 52.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 120. ⁷⁸Ibid., p. 60.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 115, 216, 223-227.

seen in reference to the work of the Holy Spirit in convicting of sin and in giving faith. The knowledge of sin must necessarily come outside the relation to Christ by faith. For the Calvinist, this knowledge of the self as sinful is based on the law, which is revealed in the Scripture, usually under the enlightening power of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁰ The knowledge of sin, therefore, is based on some activity of God outside of the Christ-event, so that Chalker can declare that, "the Spirit has witnessed to some word other than Jesus Christ."⁸¹ In the case of faith, it is again assumed by the Calvinists that somehow God has been known previously in a neutral way that is independent of the personal knowledge of him in Christ as redeemer. What the Holy Spirit does in giving faith is a work that is separate and isolated from the work of Christ. He does witness to Christ's work, but he performs an additional work with its own initiative and with the aim of bringing man into the covenant with the Father and Son, who are already known in some other way.⁸²

While some of this analysis seems to reinforce what we have already noticed about Owen, we must recognize that Chalker's treatment of Calvinism is stylized according to his particular theme, and we must follow up what he has concluded about the English Calvinists whom he has studied with our own careful scrutiny of Owen's doctrine of the knowledge of God. Before doing this, however, it may be instructive to examine

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 119.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., p. 281.

what the other and natural sources of knowledge of God might possibly be for a seventeenth century English Calvinist.

E. Ramist Logic

Perry Miller has given us, perhaps, the most comprehensive insight into the Weltanschauung of the Calvinistic Puritan. He points out that Puritans were so extensively influenced by medieval scholasticism that it "supplied content for every department of Puritan thought."⁸³ The Puritans did strongly criticize scholasticism on doctrinal and ecclesiastical grounds, but at the same time they accepted rather unquestioningly scholastic premises in physics, metaphysics, logic, etc., so that "at every turn we encounter ideas and themes which descend, by whatever stages, from medieval philosophy."⁸⁴ Scholasticism viewed knowledge as a whole and aimed at systematization by means of logic and method. In the seventeenth century, popular encyclopedias like the Operum Omnium Quae Extant of Bartholomaeus Keckermann and the Encyclopaedia Scientiarum Omnium of Johann Heinrich Alsted provided scholastic treatments of nearly all areas of knowledge and made scholastic thought part of the general philosophical equipment of the age.⁸⁵

Out of this broad, somewhat diffused background of scholasticism Petrus Ramus emerges for the Puritans as the Christian philosopher, par excellence. Ramus was a sixteenth

⁸³Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1939), p. 105.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 104.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 102.

century humanist who claimed to have discovered a new method of logic superior to the Aristotelian syllogism. He spent his life opposing Aristotelianism in all its forms by extending and developing his new logic. He became a Protestant in 1561 and was martyred in the massacre of St. Bartholomew's Day. His credentials were unique. As an anti-Aristotelian and Protestant martyr with a new and simple logic, his influence spread quickly among Protestants. In particular his thought penetrated deeply into English Puritanism, evidencing itself in the Sacra Theologia of Dudley Fenner, appearing in 1585, and in the Armilla Aurea of William Perkins, published in 1590. By way of Alexander Richardson, author of the Ramist commentary, The Logicians School-Master, the new logic reached William Ames, who became the foremost expounder of Ramist thought among the English Puritans. The Medulla Theologiae of Ames represents Puritan theology as worked out by consistently applied Ramist logic, and it must rank as an extremely influential textbook for all subsequent Puritans.

The new logic had at its center the principle of dichotomy. Instead of deducing according to premises as in syllogistic reasoning, the principle of dichotomy relied on the ability of an immediate intuition to distinguish correctly between two alternatives. The principle of dichotomy functioned by disjunction and hypothesis. Disjunction involved setting an idea or argument to be proved alongside its

contrary. Hypothesis came in at that point to suppose one or the other to be true and to see what implications followed. When, upon hypothesis, one of the statements proved to be absurd, its opposite would by virtue of that discovery be proven true.⁸⁶

The genius of this method resided in the infinite possibilities for disjunction. Any idea at all could be tested merely by posing its opposite. The secret was in the arrangement of the opposites, the choice of the pairs, which in its most systematic form was called "method." Miller points out the cosmological scope of this logic.

The Ramean logic therefore was not so much what we think of as logic as it was a grouping of all the ideas, sensations, causes, and perceptions in the world, laying them out in a simple and symmetrical pattern, so that a diagram of the logic with its divisions and subdivisions was practically a blueprint of the universe. . . . The task of the logician. . . was that of arranging everything in pairs under the proper rubrics. Thinking was not conceived as a method by which we compose our knowledge discovery by discovery, but as the unveiling of an ideal form. Knowledge was a schedule to be filled in, and this end, it seemed to Ramus and the Puritans, was best accomplished by pairing every idea and object with its counterpart, sun with moon, man with woman, cause with effect, subject with adjunct. When all existence was thus systematized, the problem of seeing the architecture of the whole, of grasping the diagram of the universe, became relatively simple. It consisted merely of arranging the pairs so that the more general came before the specific, the genus before the species, the important before the subsidiary. The final function of logic, as Ramus taught it, was "method."⁸⁷

Although Miller rightly pronounces the logic of disjunction and hypothesis as "much too facile,"⁸⁸ so that it was

⁸⁶See pp. 33-34 in the "Introduction" by Perry Miller to The Puritans for description of this logical method.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 31-32.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 35.

completely eclipsed by Locke, he notes that it had great usefulness for seventeenth century Puritans.

Puritan preachers and disputants would use the syllogism wherever they found it profitable; more often they would establish their points by the use of disjunction, by ruling out the alternative which all men, on the strength of their native intelligence, would be compelled to admit could not hold water.⁸⁹

The Ramist logic involved some large assumptions. There was included in the notion of disjunction an assumption about the nature of things that allowed for the possibility of genuine opposition between elements. There was included in the notion of hypothesis an assumption about the nature of human judgment that allowed for the possibility of immediate, intuitive recognition of truth. Miller points out that this view of a basic rationality existing both in the fabric of the Universe and in the mind of man is a type of Platonism.⁹⁰ Puritans are Platonic, insofar as they are Ramists, because they see truth as one and ideal; but they are not Platonic in the sense of devaluating the physical world as less than real.⁹¹ The Puritans make what Miller calls the "epistemological leap of Ramism,"⁹² which assumes that the subjective factor of man's knowledge and reason is directly and infallibly related to the objective factor of the real, external world.

Even Calvin might agree to the rationality of the created order and to the same rationality in the mind of man

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 36.

⁹⁰Ibid., pp. 38-39.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 37-39, n. 2.

⁹²Miller, op. cit., p. 149.

before the Fall. Because the power of natural reason plays a central role in the Ramist logic, the effect of sin upon that reason is a crucial problem for the Ramist Puritan. On the one hand, sin does not destroy logic. Reason in the sense of logic is eternally valid, although the reasoner may not always employ the logic correctly, due to sin. On the other hand, logic may be a corrective in relation to sin, according to the following key statement by William Ames. "Seeing, therefore, the powers of logic, let us train ourselves with the aim that we may be able to see distinctly into everything, to judge with certainty and to remember consistently."⁹³ Reason as innate capacity is indeed distorted by sin; but the vestiges of reason remain nevertheless, and Miller sees in Puritanism a constantly increasing emphasis on these vestiges.⁹⁴ For the Puritan, sin and regeneration were focused primarily on the will and the affections. As for the mind or the understanding, faith did not so much offer a contradiction and replacement of reason as an improvement and elevation of it. And not only faith, but simply use and exercise could do wonders for developing the natural powers of reason.⁹⁵ Reason was such a basic and trusted category that Puritans asserted there could not possibly be anything in revealed theology that was contrary

⁹³William Ames, Demonstratio Logicae Verae, 158 (Quoted by Keith L. Sprunger, "Ames, Ramus, and the Method of Puritan Theology," Harvard Theological Review, [April, 1966], p. 144).

⁹⁴Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, p. 186.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 159.

to reason.⁹⁶ It would seem that reason judged revelation more surely than revelation judged reason.

Knowledge of God in the view of the Ramist Puritan was of two sorts. Knowledge of God himself was out of human range; but in creation God could be known genuinely, though not totally, nor directly.⁹⁷ Knowledge of God in Holy Scripture was on a par with that in creation, and it had the virtue of being less ambiguous and more specifically religious in its authority. Happily, the Scripture could be analyzed by logic, since revealed theology was commensurate with the inherent rationality of being.⁹⁸

Here was the respect that gave Puritanism such long life, for the laws of God found in the Bible were hypostatized by the logic of Ramus into never-failing realities, as endurable as facts and from that assurance Puritanism got its strength and its confidence.⁹⁹

If the Scripture is rational, it can be approached by reason; and if its rationality is ultimate and ideal, then its true understanding will be a harmony of the whole in which its basic unity is fully evident. This fundamental rationality of the Scripture is cast into high relief when we learn that for the Ramist Puritan the plan of salvation in the atonement of Christ is not open to natural reason simply because that scheme was devised by God after the original creation.¹⁰⁰ According to this distinction, the rationality of the Scripture, whatever it may prove to be for Puritanism, is most assuredly not soteriological.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 195. ⁹⁷Ibid., p. 163. ⁹⁸Ibid., pp. 189-90.

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 148. ¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 188.

William Ames serves--and serves well--as the classical example for demonstrating both the natural knowledge of God in Calvinist orthodoxy according to Chalker's thesis and the rational world-view in Ramist Puritanism as Miller has portrayed it. Both men can point to other Calvinistic Puritans flanking the position which finds such explicit expression in Ames. John Owen, however, was no common scholar who simply and straightforwardly reflected the theological Zeitgeist. He was always ready to differ with even his closest cohort (Thomas Goodwin, for example)¹⁰¹ when theological truth was at stake. The preceding sketches of the knowledge of God in Calvin and in Calvinism and of the logic of Ramus must be considered only as suggestive and propaedeutic, and not as a definitive analysis of the fundamental nature of John Owen's theology.¹⁰² That must depend upon a thorough expository treatment of Owen himself.

F. Knowledge of God in Owen

The modern reader, with no previous acquaintance with Puritan writings, soon learns the meaning, or at least the force, of the term scholastic. Owen's writings confront the

¹⁰¹Owen opposed Goodwin on the subject of the perseverance of the saints.

¹⁰²William W. Bass in his "Platonic Influences on Seventeenth-Century English Puritan Theology as Expressed in the Thinking of John Owen, Richard Baxter and John Howe" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1958), attempts to demonstrate that Owen's theology is Platonic. He is largely content with pointing to examples of Platonic ways of thought without tracing their true line of descent or analyzing the fundamental raison d'être of Platonism in Calvinistic Puritanism. Vose and Wallace in their work on Owen see him as the theologian of sovereign grace, which fits the picture of Calvin by Dowe, but not that of Calvinist orthodoxy by Chalker or of Ramist Puritanism by Miller.

man of today with a tangled, obscure, and largely meaningless skein of abstruse references, intricate arguments, and unrecognized maneuvers--all of which seem needless and severely out of touch with the rationality of modern communication. The acuity of the foregoing propaedeutic sketches is immediately validated in a perusal of the opening pages of the preface to Owen's Pneumatologia by the clarity which emerges from formerly cryptic material. The first paragraph confronts us with the following statement:

Now, all the concernments of the Holy Spirit are an eminent part of the "mystery" or "deep things of God"; for as the knowledge of them doth wholly depend on and is regulated by divine revelation, so are they in their own nature divine and heavenly,--distant and remote from all things that the heart of man, in the mere exercise of its own reason or understanding, can rise up unto.¹⁰³

This is not to be understood as an absolute rejection of reason, but only the standard insistence that this level of knowledge of God as he is in himself--the "mystery" or "deep things"--is not directly available to man.¹⁰⁴

After the Puritan has paid obeisance to God's infinite mysteriousness, he may proceed to lay out a reasonable manner of gaining whatever knowledge of God is possible and necessary. This is what Owen does in his second paragraph.

For the first thing proposed, it must be granted that the things here treated of are in themselves mysterious and abstruse. But yet, the way whereby we may endeavour an acquaintance with them, "according to the measure of the gift of Christ unto every one," is made plain in the Scriptures of truth. If this way be neglected or despised, all other ways of attempting the same end, be they never so vigorous or promising, will

¹⁰³Owen, Works, III, 5.

¹⁰⁴Supra, p. 58.

prove ineffectual. What belongs unto it as to the inward frame and disposition of mind in them who search after understanding in these things, what unto the outward use of means, what unto the performance of spiritual duties, what unto conformity in the whole soul unto each discovery of truth that is attained, is not my present work to declare, nor shall I divert thereunto.¹⁰⁵

Here is a second level of knowledge of God which is a "way whereby we may endeavour." This knowledge depends upon our ability and effort, which is appropriate since the way is made "plain." If we ask how, or to what or whom, the way is made plain, the answer is only assumed and we might supply it by naming reason. After all, the Scriptures are "Scriptures of truth," and reason is the human instrument for grasping an abstract matter like truth. Reason, we suggest, is also the implication of "the gift of Christ unto every one." Patently, Christ did not give faith unto all, but he gave a "measure" of reason, euphemistically called the "inward frame and disposition of mind." This reason is to be used "to search after understanding in these things [knowledge of God]." Of course, it must be pious reason, using the external "means" of the church, performing "spiritual duties," and above all conforming "the whole soul" unto each bit of "truth" which by reason is "attained."

The first thing that reason attains in the way of knowing about God is the Platonic insight that sees him as the source of all truth.

¹⁰⁵Owen, Works, III, 5.

At present, it may suffice to observe, that God, who in himself is the eternal original spring and fountain of all truth, is also the only sovereign cause and author of its revelation unto us. And whereas that truth, which originally is one in him, is of various sorts and kinds, according to the variety of the things which it respects in its communication unto us, the ways and means of that communication are suited unto the distinct nature of each truth in particular. So the truth of things natural is made known from God by the exercise of reason, or the due application of the understanding that is in man unto their investigation. . . .

But as to things supernatural, the knowledge and truth of them, the teachings of God are of another nature; and, in like manner, a peculiar application of ourselves unto him for instruction is required of us.¹⁰⁶

Truth is originally one in God, but it is also communicated variously to us. Our natural reason is suitable for an understanding of truth, at least of truths natural, and it is not mentioned as being impaired in any way. The unity of truth has been split for Owen. The Socinians, antinomians, Quakers, rationalists, and sectarians of various stripes were a more powerful and ever-present threat for Owen than Ames ever dreamed of. Reason cannot be trusted to deal freely, openly, and surely with theology. Truth might have been one originally, but now supernatural things require a separate order of knowledge. Still, the reason is not disallowed on the basis of impairment from sin or of inappropriateness. As a matter of fact, it is implicitly included, since supernatural knowledge is still knowledge, although of a special kind requiring a higher, "peculiar" level of education, or "instruction." What is to be instructed, if not the reason?

¹⁰⁶Ibid., pp. 5-6.

We are to use all "diligence" in the "pursuit of an acquaintance" (by reason?) with supernatural truth, but finally the special instruction in these matters depends upon the Scripture and the Holy Spirit;

for although the letter of the Scripture and the sense of the propositions are equally exposed to the reason of all mankind, yet the real spiritual knowledge of the things themselves is not communicated unto any but by the especial operation of the Holy Spirit. Now is any considerable degree of insight into the doctrine of the mysteries of them attainable but by a due waiting on Him who alone giveth "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of them"; for "the things of God knoweth no man but the Spirit of God," and they to whom by him they are revealed. Neither can the Scriptures be interpreted aright but by the aid of that Spirit by which they were indited.¹⁰⁷

At this point, Owen seems to have cut us off from any reliance upon natural reason. We are at the mercy of the Holy Spirit's initiative--much as Calvin might have expressed it.

Owen seems to feel the extremity of this position, since he hastens to assure us that we are not merely passive nor incapable in this affair.

But in the use of the means mentioned we need not despond but that, seeing these things themselves are revealed that we may know God in a due manner and live unto him as we ought, we may attain such a measure of spiritual understanding in them as is useful unto our own and others' edification. They may, I say, do so who are not slothful in hearing or learning, but "by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil."¹⁰⁸

The double directive, "know God in a due manner and live unto him as we ought," is a stock phrase of William Ames and

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

embraces the whole of the Ramist scheme of theology. The "means" are the Scriptures and the preaching of them; and by hearing, learning, and the use and exercise of our senses we may "discern" and "attain such a measure of spiritual understanding" as is necessary for pious living. We have here a classic statement of Ramist Puritanism.

In the light of Ramist thought, Owen's whole project of the Pneumatologia becomes clear. It is a systematic treatment in which every possible feature of the Spirit's work is included, and arrangement is the vital method. Therefore, Owen endeavors to deal with "the whole economy of the Holy Spirit, with all his adjuncts, operations, and effects."¹⁰⁹ Not only must everything be included, it must all harmonize as a rational whole. Significantly, Owen excuses himself "if any thing be found not to answer so regular a projection or just a method as the nature of the subject requireth and as was aimed at."¹¹⁰ These are not light or empty words. They are freighted with Ramist logic.

Lest our treatment appear too facile, we must broaden our inquiry to other works of Owen to see there how he treats of the knowledge of God. After all, he himself would bitterly reproach us for indicting him, or crediting him, with natural theology. Two works offer themselves as appropriate loci for a deeper examination of Owen's doctrine of the knowledge of God. A Dissertation on Divine Justice:

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 7.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

Or, the Claims of Vindictory Justice Vindicated; etc. was published in 1653 and aimed at establishing vindictory justice as an essential and necessary property of the divine nature.¹¹¹ A Brief Declaration and Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity; etc. was published in 1669 as a short treatise and was not so expressly polemical as some by his hand. Including the Pneumatologia (1674), these three works represent three separate decades of Owen's authorship. We do not intend in this way to display any particular development of his thought, but only to increase the probability that our conclusions apply to his theology in a broad and fundamental sense.

Owen begins in Divine Justice by referring us, as in the Pneumatologia, to the

great difficulty of the subject itself, which, among the more abstruse points of truth, is by no means the least abstruse: for as every divine truth has a peculiar majesty and reverence belonging to it, which debars from the spiritual knowledge of it (as it is in Christ) the ignorant and unstable,--that is, those who are not taught of God, or become subject to the truth,--so those points which dwell in more intimate recesses, and approach nearer its immense fountain, the "Father of lights," darting brighter rays, by their excess of light present a confounding darkness to the minds of the greatest men. . . . For what we call darkness in divine subjects is nothing else than their celestial glory and splendour striking on the weak ball of our eyes, the rays of which we are not able in this life . . . to bear.¹¹²

Owen's rhetoric about God's essence in terms of light would have suited Plotinus well. When we hear, not that the sinful

¹¹¹It was originally published in Latin. The English translation which appears in Goold's edition of Works is used here.

¹¹²Owen, Works, X, 487.

and unregenerate are cut off from knowing God, but rather "the ignorant and unstable," a form of gnosticism suggests itself. Reason is subsumed by this "spiritual knowledge," but only some are "taught of God, or become subject to the truth." The one caveat is the parenthetical condition, "as it is in Christ." The significance of that phrase is touched on subsequently in Divine Justice, and must be more fully explored in the final section of our chapter.

Again, as before, Owen follows up his extreme statement about God's inaccessibility by referring to the validity of revelation via the Scriptures and the Holy Spirit.

Not, as the Roman Catholics say, that there is any reason that we should blasphemously accuse the holy Scriptures of obscurity. . . . Nor is there reason to complain that any one part of the truth hath been too sparingly or obscurely revealed: for even the smallest portion of the divine word is, by the grace of the Holy Spirit, assisting to dispose and frame either the subject or our hearts, so as to view the bright object of divine truth in its proper and spiritual light, sufficient to communicate the knowledge of truths of the last importance; for it is owing to the nature of the doctrines themselves and their exceeding splendour that there are some things hard to be conceived and interpreted, and which surpass our capacity and comprehension.¹¹³

Thanks to revelation in the Scripture there is no obscurity relating to the knowledge of God; yet the doctrines therein remain above the sure and certain reach of our reason. The vital link in communication must lie with the Holy Spirit, who by his "grace" works on both sides of the epistemological situation with "the subject" and with "our hearts."

¹¹³Ibid.

Pneumatology is somehow the key to the theological mystery of knowing God by revelation.

The Spirit's disposing and framing of the event of knowledge demands closer inspection. At this point in Divine Justice, as in countless other places, Owen makes statements that have the flavor of piety, but lack precise or obvious theological significance. He says, for example, that he does not have knowledge of divine truth, "unless through the Holy Spirit I have had such a taste of it, in its spiritual sense, as that I may be able from the heart to say with the psalmist, 'I have believed, and therefore have I spoken.'"¹¹⁴ Whatever may be the logical content of this statement, it seems evident that Owen's intention is to directly link knowledge of God with religious experience. We might say that, for Owen, knowledge of God in some sense depends upon piety as religious experience, although this may not mean that knowledge of God in any sense depends upon faith as experience of Christ.

This distinction between piety and faith begins to manifest itself in the explication he gives to the statement just quoted.

He who, in the investigation of truth, makes it his chief care to have his mind and will rendered subject to the faith, and obedient to the "Father of lights," and who with attention waits upon Him whose throne is in the heavens; he alone (since the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God) attains to true wisdom,--the other walk in a "vain show." It has, then, been my principal object, in tracing the depths and secret nature of the subject in question,--while I, a

¹¹⁴Ibid., p. 488.

poor worm, contemplated the majesty and glory of Him concerning whose perfections I was treating,--to attend and obey, with all humility and reverence, what the great God the Lord hath spoken in his word; not at all doubting but that, whatever way he should incline my heart, by the power of his Spirit and truth, I should be enabled, in a dependence on his aid, to bear the contradictions of a false knowledge, and all human and philosophical arguments.¹¹⁵

The knowledge of God is not exclusively dependent upon God's initiative in the act of giving the gift of faith. It is something that can be under "investigation," and is, by implication, open to all. However, piety is the only valid method of gaining this knowledge. Human endeavor, albeit pious human endeavor, is the center of this epistemology. The pious man must and, by implication, can render his mind and will subject to the faith (received doctrine) and obedient to the source of all knowledge. Even waiting upon God is an active endeavor, done "with attention." Man attains (by the Spirit, to be sure), traces, contemplates, attends, and obeys. These endeavors are directed towards the "word" of Scripture and rely confidently on the directing force and enabling power of God's Spirit and truth. The Spirit's work in this affair is scarcely expressed beyond the assertion of a pious experience of it. What value the Spirit's work does have is to direct our minds to the knowledge of God in the abstract--not to the object of faith, Jesus Christ.

The knowledge of God via the Holy Spirit is an epistemological event which appears to be divorced from any

¹¹⁵Ibid.

soteriological content beyond a subjective experience having a religious quality. Therefore, Owen claims to have arrived at his stand concerning divine vindictory justice

from a most humble contemplation of the holiness, purity, justice, right, dominion, wisdom, and mercy of God; so by the guidance of his Spirit alone, and power of his heart-changing grace, filling my mind with all the fulness of truth, and striking me with a deep awe and admiration of it, I have been enabled to surmount the difficulty of the research. Theology is the "wisdom that is from above," a habit of grace and spiritual gifts, the manifestation of the Spirit, reporting what is conducive to happiness. It is not a science to be learned from the precepts of man, or from the rules of arts, or method of other sciences, as those represent it who also maintain that a "natural man" may attain all that artificial and methodical theology, even though, in the matters of God and mysteries of the gospel, he be blinder than a mole. What a distinguished theologian must he be "who receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God!"¹¹⁶

Knowledge of God is not natural as in other disciplines. Yet, it is not entirely unnatural. It is simply esoteric, having a special category of its own, being the "wisdom that is from above." It is esoteric particularly in its exclusive dependence upon receiving "the things of the Spirit of God." Theology is, indeed, still wisdom, but only that wisdom which is the fruit of a mind filled with what the Spirit manifests and reports. The epistemological difficulty inheres chiefly in the subject matter rather than in the human knower. It is "the difficulty of the research" which is directed toward "the matters of God and mysteries of the gospel" that must be surmounted. It is Owen's natural mental abilities which have "been enabled to surmount" the difficulty of the research.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

At the same time, the rational enabling is rooted in religious experience. At least, when Owen comes to the point of relating the specifics of the Spirit's work in this respect, he speaks in terms of piety. Knowledge of God which is dependent upon piety takes place in the meeting of the Holy Spirit with men--a religious experience. However, we suggest that knowledge of God which is dependent upon faith takes place in the meeting of Christ with men by the Spirit--a salvation experience. We are suggesting that Owen appears to be saying the first without including the second--piety, but not faith.

While any analysis of such pious-sounding, ambiguous statements as the foregoing must remain indefinite, Owen does offer us in Divine Justice an explicit position with reference to the knowledge of God. There are four ways, he says, in which God makes himself known, and he bases his argument for punitive justice being natural and necessary to God upon these four ways.¹¹⁷ The first way is the written word of Scripture. The interpretation of Scripture is no thorny problem for Owen--its meaning at certain crucial points is "manifest,"¹¹⁸ or "evident."¹¹⁹ He must mean manifest and evident to a man's natural reason.

The second way listed by Owen is a rational conscience, which is "the universal consent of mankind."¹²⁰ Owen here

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 512.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 513.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 515.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 517.

speaks of "innate conceptions" ($\pi\rho\acute{o}\lambda\eta\psi\iota\varsigma$ in the original manuscript). Goold, in a footnote, observes that

it is used by Owen to describe a principle in the human mind which is not created by the evidence of testimony or any course of training, which is naturally and essentially interwoven with our mental constitution, and is ready beforehand, by anticipation, as the word $\pi\rho\acute{o}\lambda\eta\psi\iota\varsigma$ simply means, to respond to the abstract idea of equity, or to confirm the concrete application of it in the common awards of good or evil.¹²¹

To argue from the fundamental nature of man to the essence of the divine is unabashed natural theology. Of course, it is not simply natural theology, since "the holy Scriptures testify that such an innate conception is implanted by God in the minds of men."¹²² Calvin also knew about the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Romans, and Calvin also claimed a role for the conscience in knowing God. However, we noticed that Calvin assigned only a negative role to conscience since the event of sin. Because of the conscience, a man was responsible for his rejection of God, but because of sin he was unable to know God constructively through the conscience. Owen, on the other hand, is able to read aright the truth of God from the conscience by discovering what is universal to the conscience. He is able to assert that "the consciences of all mankind concur to corroborate this truth [the vindictory justice of God]."¹²³

The third way in Owen's argument is the evidence of providence. In good Ramist form, Owen correlates the evidence

¹²¹Ibid., pp. 517-18, n. 2. For further discussion by Owen of innate knowledge, cf. ibid., III, 345; XVI, 310.

¹²²Ibid., pp. 517-18.

¹²³Ibid., p. 519.

from the internal nature of man's rational conscience with the external governance of the world. Providence as a source of knowledge of God is, like conscience, validated by Scriptural references. Like conscience, its meaning can be read directly and clearly by Owen, so that

it is evident that God, by the works of his providence, in the government of this world, gives a most copious testimony to his vindictory justice, not inferior to that given to his goodness, or any other of his attributes; which testimony concerning himself and his nature he makes known, and openly exhibits to all, by innumerable examples, constantly provided and appointed for that purpose.¹²⁴

Of course, when Owen wrote this, Cromwell was in the saddle, and the meaning of providence appeared then more "evident" to a Calvinistic Puritan of Independent connections than it might have appeared to the same man ten years later.

The fourth way of Owen's knowledge of God is the person of Jesus Christ. Our interest is stimulated as we anticipate the proposal of a way of knowing God which is explicitly christological. However, this is the last and the least of Owen's four epistemological bases for knowledge of God. He devotes scarcely a page to its treatment. Christ is important chiefly as an exhibit.

In him God hath fully and clearly exhibited himself to us, to be loved, adored, and known; and that not only in regard of his heavenly doctrine, in which he hath "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel," God finishing the revelation of himself to mankind by the mission and ministry of his Son, but also, exhibiting, both in the person of Christ and in his mediatorial office, the brightness of his own glory and the express image of his person, he

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 546.

glorified his own name and manifested his nature, to all those at least who, being ingrafted into Christ and baptized into his Spirit, enjoy both the Father and Son. But in the whole matter of salvation by the Mediator, God-man, there is no excellence of God, no essential property, no attribute of his nature, the glory of which is the chief end of all his works, that he hath more clearly and eminently displayed than this punitory justice.¹²⁵

If Christ is chiefly a display, he must be displayed to someone. Owen, in asserting that the Christ is above all a display of God's punitive justice, assumes a natural capacity to perceive that display. It is true that he has, by the way, qualified his statement with a reference to those "ingrafted into Christ and baptized into his Spirit." However, that qualifying phrase appears quite incidentally here, and he has by no means systematically incorporated it into his present argument as an epistemological principle. Whether he does this in any place is the very question we are pursuing. We would suggest that Owen is not concerned to assert here that knowledge of God in Christ is dependent upon faith. He is able to say that "it was for the display of his justice that he set forth Christ as a propitiation, through faith in his blood."¹²⁶ Faith here is not fundamental to display, but to propitiation. Christ, as propitiation to some (who have faith), displays God's justice to all (who have natural intelligence). It is this display, "for the satisfaction, manifestation, and glory of which this whole scheme [of a God-man as mediator], pregnant with innumerable mysteries, was instituted."¹²⁷ Owen clearly subordinates every possible

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 547.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid.

work of the Christ to this display of God's vindicatory justice. In the end, faith is dependent upon the display, rather than the display upon faith.

Finally, Owen's case rests with the demonstrative authority of "Scripture and sound reason."¹²⁸ Therefore, his conclusive argument is a logical one. As a Ramist would, he uses hypothesis.

For let us suppose that God hath imposed on mankind a law, ratified by a threatening of eternal death, and that they, by a violation of that law, have deserved the punishment threatened, and consequently are become liable to eternal death; again, let us suppose that God in that threatening did not expressly intend the death of the sinner, but afterward declared what and of what kind he willed that the guilt of sin should be, and what punishment he might justly inflict on the sinner, and what the sinner himself ought to expect (all which things flow from the free determination of God), but that he might by his nod or word, without any trouble, though no satisfaction were either made or received, without the least diminution of his glory, and without any affront or dishonour to any attribute, or any injury or disgrace to himself, consistently with the preservation of his right, dominion, and justice, freely pardon the sins of those whom he might will to save;-- what sufficient reason could be given, pray, then, why he should lay those sins, so easily remissible, to the charge of his most holy Son, and on their account subject him to such dreadful sufferings?¹²⁹

The hypothesis is judged by reason, which is apparently natural and intuitive. The work of Christ must be evaluated and understood according to the standard of "sufficient reason."

In Doctrine of the Trinity, Owen uses only the first of the four ways to support his defense of the trinity. In his opening note to the reader he refers, as we might

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 552.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 556.

expect, to the "infinite, incomprehensible nature of God."¹³⁰ He follows that with a reference to "the plain and obvious sense of Scripture propositions and testimonies."¹³¹ Owen expressly states that knowledge precedes belief. In regard to the truth as it is revealed in the Scripture, "two things are required of us. First, To understand the terms of the propositions, as they are enunciations of truth; and, Secondly, To believe the things taught, revealed, and declared in them."¹³² It is no difficult matter to know God (understand divine truth) before belief (faith), because it is only "required of us, . . . that we assent unto the assertions and testimonies of God concerning himself, according to their natural and genuine sense."¹³³ Natural reason is competent, we must assume, to discern the "natural and genuine sense" (or the "plain and obvious sense") of Scripture. This appeal to "the plain Scriptural revelation"¹³⁴ recurs constantly throughout this treatise in a variety of telling phrases. He speaks about the "direct, express revelations,"¹³⁵ and the "sufficient testimonies of Scripture, or clear and undeniable divine revelation,"¹³⁶ and about understanding the testimony "in a proper, intelligible sense."¹³⁷

In Doctrine of the Trinity it becomes obvious that truth, which is knowledge of God made known through the

¹³⁰Owen, Works, II, 368. ¹³¹Ibid. ¹³²Ibid., p. 377.

¹³³Ibid. ¹³⁴Ibid., p. 380. ¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid., pp. 380-81. ¹³⁷Ibid., p. 390.

Scripture, is propositional for Owen, having the form of doctrine. Perhaps this is inevitable whenever theology is subordinate to logic, and Scripture has a positive and rational meaning.

Let this [doctrine of the trinity] be clearly confirmed by direct and positive divine testimonies, containing the declaration and revelation of God concerning himself, and faith is secured as to all it concerns; for it hath both its proper formal object, and is sufficiently enabled to be directive of divine worship and obedience.¹³⁸

Here, faith depends upon truth, not truth upon faith. The object of faith is not God in Christ, but the doctrine of the trinity. Faith as a personal, redemptive relationship is not even present. Piety plays the important role, for it is human religiosity which is "sufficiently enabled" for worship and obedience by this victory of logical theology.

We might have expected some evangelical flavor when he came to the subject of the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but Owen keeps strictly and severely to his logical method.

This [divinity of Christ] is proposed unto us to be believed upon divine testimony and by divine revelation. And the sole inquiry in this matter is, whether this be proposed in the Scripture as an object of faith, and that which is indispensably necessary for us to believe? Let us, then, nakedly attend unto what the Scripture asserts in this matter.¹³⁹

The object of faith is not Christ himself, but the doctrine of his divinity. This is "proposed" in the Scripture, and we can "nakedly attend" unto what it "asserts." Knowledge of God

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 378.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 383.

is here clearly independent of soteriology. Moreover, Owen deems this epistemology to be necessarily adequate for whatever remains of soteriology.

What now can be required to secure our faith in this matter? In what words possible could a divine revelation of the eternal power and Godhead of the Son of God be made more plain and clear unto the sons of men? or how could the truth of any thing more evidently be represented unto their minds? If we understand not the mind of God and intention of the Holy Ghost in this matter, we may utterly despair ever to come to an acquaintance with any thing that God reveals unto us; or, indeed, with any thing else that is expressed or is to be expressed, by words.¹⁴⁰

What is basic here is "mind" and "intention," not grace and deliverance. Our minds are able to have truths divine "evidently represented" to them. Knowledge of God is an epistemological process of coming to "an acquaintance" with things revealed in words by the Holy Spirit. This process is thoroughly reasonable. Of course, the doctrine of the trinity and such similar knowledge of God is above reason, but not unreasonable.¹⁴¹ As a matter of fact, one of the most serious charges Owen lays against the Socinian position is their destruction of reason.

The very foundation of all their objections and cavils against this truth, is destructive of as fundamental principles of reason as are in the world. . . . So that by a loud, specious, pretence of reason, these men, by a little captious sophistry, endeavour not only to countenance their unbelief, but to evert the greatest principles of reason itself.¹⁴²

We conclude by way of summary that the complexity and obscurity of Owen's rhetoric, when it is examined in the

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 394.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 412.

¹⁴²Ibid.

light of Ramist logic and Calvinistic orthodoxy, can be seen to comprise a fairly definite and consistent approach to the knowledge of God. God in himself is unknowable in any direct fashion. Nevertheless, knowledge adequate for Christian living is very much available. The available knowledge of God is of a different order than natural knowledge.

Nevertheless, reason is the noetic instrument for both kinds of knowledge. In the case of supernatural knowledge, man is limited to Scripture and the Holy Spirit as the controlling factors in the epistemological situation. Scripture is inherently reasonable, however, and a man's natural reason is suited to apprehending its plain and obvious meaning.

Knowledge of God via Scripture is an exegetical process of arrangement according to the genuine and natural sense of the words. Yet, the knowledge of God is not so readily available to all. It depends also on the Holy Spirit's activity. Because the Spirit's actions in this regard are not connected with a soteriological function of conquering sin, Owen's knowledge of God has a gnostic flavor. However, instead of being related exclusively to a mental illumination as in classical gnosticism, the Holy Spirit's epistemological function is connected with piety as religious experience and human effort. This piety seems to be distinct from faith, so that it has its foundation in the natural man rather than in the Saviour Christ. The basic issue turns on this work of the Holy Spirit and whether it is indeed epistemological in a manner divorced from soteriology. Our whole interpretation

of Owen's doctrine of the knowledge of God may be tested by directly confronting this question.

G. Epistemology Independent of
Soteriology

Knowledge of God for Calvin was trinitarian. The work of the Holy Spirit was completely integrated with the work of Christ. Epistemology was grounded in soteriology. Only the man related to Christ in faith was open to the possibility and actuality of the knowledge of God, since only this man was free--in Christ--from the bondage of sin with its epistemological distortion concerning man's relation to God. In order to make a true critical assessment of Owen's doctrine of the knowledge of God, we must examine the specific role of the work of Christ in relation to the epistemological problem. We have already noticed references to Christ in Divine Justice and Doctrine of the Trinity which loosely implied an epistemology independent of soteriology. However, Owen offers us a more complete statement of this issue, and we turn to two of his latest works, The Doctrine of Justification by Faith, through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ; etc. (1677) and Christologia: or, a Declaration of the Glorious Mystery of the Person of Christ--God and Man: etc. (1679), for a treatment of this question in the context of a developed christology.

Owen's handling of justification by faith strongly reinforces the whole trend of our interpretation. Chalker's

description of English Calvinistic orthodoxy seems genuinely appropriate to Owen. For example, Owen bases the whole of his Justification by Faith on the assumption that both the knowledge of the relation between man and God outside of Christ and the knowledge of the plan of salvation prior to the presence of faith are possible and even necessary.

It is in vain to recommend the doctrine of justification unto them who neither desire nor endeavour to be justified. But where any persons are really made sensible of their apostasy from God, of the evil of their natures and lives, with the dreadful consequences that attend thereon in the wrath of God and eternal punishment due unto sin, they cannot well judge themselves more concerned in any thing than in the knowledge of that divine way whereby they may be delivered from this condition. And the minds of such persons stand in no need of arguments to satisfy them in the importance of this doctrine [of justification by faith]; their own concernment in it is sufficient to that purpose.¹⁴³

Knowledge of the pre-salvation situation is apparently available to the natural man, and until he comes to know this situation in a vital way the whole affair of salvation is meaningless to him. However, when he has achieved this first sort of knowledge, then his natural powers of mind are appropriately focused to sense intuitively the force of the doctrine of justification by faith as a suitable remedy for their dilemma. Salvation as a "way" is knowable apart from the personal experience of it and the efficacious acquaintance with it. Once the way is known in an objective manner, a man may endeavor on his own to be justified according to that way. The weight of this approach falls on natural, human reason and natural, human effort. Thus, Owen promises

¹⁴³Owen, Works, V, 3.

a naked inquiry into the nature of the things treated on, as revealed in the Scripture, and as evidencing themselves in their power and efficacy on the minds of them that do believe. It is the practical direction of the consciences of men, in their application unto God by Jesus Christ for deliverance from the curse due unto the apostate state, and peace with him, with the influence of the way thereof unto universal gospel obedience, that is alone to be designed in the handling of this doctrine.¹⁴⁴

The bare Scripture and the religious experience of the pious man supply the subject matter for the natural, human reason, which in turn guides the natural, human effort in its application via Christ for salvation. Certainly, a man cannot nakedly inquire nor be directed unless he have some natural capacity for it.

Because Owen has divorced knowledge of the way of salvation from the experience or appropriation of salvation, the nature of this salvation becomes an abstract truth--a metaphysical entity with a propositional quality--instead of being a personal relation with an historical Saviour which is knowable only in its actuality as faith. Thus, Owen speaks of salvation in terms of doctrine and truth which can be taught in order to direct our efforts in the way.

For the doctrine of justification is directive of Christian practice, and in no other evangelical truth is the whole of our obedience more concerned; for the foundation, reasons, and motives of all our duty towards God are contained therein. Wherefore, in order unto the due improvement of them ought it to be taught, and not otherwise. That which alone we aim (or ought so to do) to learn in it and by it, is how we may get and maintain peace with God, and so to live unto him as to be accepted with him in what we do. To satisfy the minds and consciences of men in these things, is this doctrine to be taught.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 10.

The way of salvation appears to be the way of piety. Instead of a living relation to God in Christ, there is a doctrine which contains "reasons" and "motives" for piety, and that piety appears as a way "to get and maintain peace with God" and "to be accepted with him."

It must be admitted that Owen also speaks of faith.

A diligent attendance unto the revelation made hereof in the Scripture, and an examination of our own experience thereby, is the sum of what is required of us for the right understanding of the truth herein. And every true believer, who is taught of God, knows how to put his whole trust in Christ alone, and the grace of God by him, for mercy, righteousness, and glory, and not at all concern himself with those loads of thorns and briers, which, under the names of definitions, distinctions, accurate notions, in a number of exotic pedagogical and philosophical terms, some pretend to accommodate them withal.¹⁴⁶

Because Owen has made salvation a propositional matter, knowable apart from faith, his problem is to extricate faith from the critical control of linguistic analysis. He manages this by stressing that true believers are taught of God and they indeed are able to have faith. He is relying again on that esoteric way of knowing which is by the Holy Spirit, that epistemology which resembles gnosticism. What is still affirmed is that knowledge (being taught of God) precedes faith (knowing how to trust Christ alone). It would seem that faith is only one individual part of the whole way of salvation by piety. Faith is not so much an event or a relation as it is simply one more human endeavor by the pious man, who "knows how to put his whole trust."

¹⁴⁶Ibid., pp. 11-12.

When man's situation before God and also the plan of salvation are knowable in a natural way outside of faith and the personal reality of salvation, then the assumption has already been made--quietly, if not obviously--that knowledge of God and man is possible for the natural man. Owen gives these assumptions a fairly explicit form.

Secondly, a due consideration of him with whom in this matter we have to do, and that immediately, is necessary unto a right stating of our thoughts about it.

Necessary it is unto any man who is to come unto a trial, in the sentence whereof he is greatly concerned, duly to consider the judge before whom he is to appear, and by whom his cause is finally to be determined. And if we manage our disputes about justification without a continual regard unto him by whom we must be cast or acquitted, we shall not rightly apprehend what our plea ought to be. Wherefore, the greatness, the majesty, the holiness, and sovereign authority of God, are always to be present with us in a due sense of them, when we inquire how we may be justified before him.¹⁴⁷

Not only is a due and immediate consideration of God possible, it is fundamentally necessary to Owen's theology, since salvation is a propositional matter which we must rightly apprehend in order to act upon it and to gain it. No less possible nor essential is the natural knowledge of sin and self.

Thirdly. A clear apprehension and due sense of the greatness of our apostasy from God, of the depravation of our natures thereby, of the power and guilt of sin, of the holiness and severity of the law, are necessary unto a right apprehension of the doctrine of justification.¹⁴⁸

Not only is knowledge of sin and self something which is separate from faith in Christ, but Christ himself will only

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p.13.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 20.

be redemptively known on the condition of this prior knowledge of the sinful self.

And small hope is there to bring such men to value the righteousness of Christ, as imputed to them, who are so unacquainted with their own unrighteousness inherent in them. Until men know themselves better, they will care very little to know Christ at all.¹⁴⁹

[They] will, with an assured confidence, reject and condemn what is offered about justification through the obedience and righteousness of Christ imputed to us.¹⁵⁰

Natural, extra-christological knowledge of God and man needs something more for the system of salvation to be complete. It is essential for us to have "a clear apprehension of, and satisfaction in, the introduction of grace by Jesus Christ into the whole of our relation unto God, with its respect unto all parts of our obedience."¹⁵¹ In complete accord with the position of Ramist Puritanism, Owen holds that the grace of Christ is not naturally known since it was not a part of the first creation.¹⁵² Reason, unaided, cannot handle this particular truth. What is needed for this sort of truth is "spiritual wisdom" which is "taught by the Holy Ghost."¹⁵³ Those who are spiritually wise can see the ultimate harmony of "the whole mystery of God."¹⁵⁴ This is a genuine harmony just like the natural harmony of the created world, since there is a "suitableness of one thing unto another, with their tendency unto the same end"; yet it is "incomparably more excellent and glorious than that which is seen in nature or the works of it."¹⁵⁵

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 21. ¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 22. ¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 44.

¹⁵²Ibid., pp. 44-45. ¹⁵³Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 50. ¹⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 50-51.

Finally, Owen pinpoints what he means concerning this harmony attaching to the grace of Christ by stressing three features.

1. That such an harmony there is in all the parts of the mystery of God, wherein all the blessed properties of the divine nature are glorified, our duty in all instances is directed and engaged, our salvation in the way of obedience secured, and Christ, as the end of all, exalted. Wherefore, we are not only to consider and know the several parts of the doctrine of spiritual truth, but their relation, also, one unto another, their consistency one with another in practice, and their mutual furtherance of one another unto their common end. And a disorder in our apprehensions about any part of that whose beauty and use ariseth from its harmony, gives some confusion of mind with respect unto the whole.

2. That unto a comprehension of this harmony in a due measure, it is necessary that we be taught of God; without which we can never be wise in the knowledge of the mystery of his grace. And herein ought we to place the principal part of our diligence, in our inquiries into the truths of the gospel.

3. All those who are taught of God to know his will, unless it be when their minds are disordered by prejudices, false opinions, or temptations, have an experience in themselves and their own practical obedience, of the consistency of all parts of the mystery of God's grace and truth in Christ among themselves,--of their spiritual harmony and cogent tendency unto the same end. The introduction of the grace of Christ into our relation unto God, makes no confusion or disorder in their minds, by the conflict of the principles of natural reason, with respect unto our first relation unto God, and those of grace, with respect unto that whereunto we are renewed.¹⁵⁶

Owen's chief concern is to maintain the consistency of the whole economy of salvation. When we ask what sort of harmony or consistency he is concerned about, the reply is a rational consistency which is harmonious to the mind.

Indeed, when salvation is understood as abstract truth and specific doctrines, then there is a danger of rational con-

¹⁵⁶Ibid., p. 51.

tradiction--as there would not be in the case of faith as a personal relationship. One must be taught of God to know this rational harmony. This knowledge can be pursued by diligence and inquiries into the rational propositions of the gospel. To be taught of God is clearly something other than and independent of justification. It is not dependent on the new creation, but man is naturally able to perceive the specific subject matter involved. It is only an epistemological shortcoming that is troubling man, only minds "disordered by prejudices, false opinions, or temptations" which fail to perceive the harmony of God's salvation in Christ. There is no absolute hindrance like the sinfulness of man to be dealt with. The epistemological shortcoming can be solved by a bit of divine teaching enabling us to discern the harmony of creation and grace. Above all, Owen labors to portray grace as reasonable. Grace fits with the first creation, and it fits very well--perfectly, in fact. He does not begin with grace as the sole foundation of all divine truth. Quite to the contrary, grace is something introduced into a system of divine truth already known on other grounds--and known more certainly than grace. It is grace which must harmonize with this system. Grace must not conflict with what is known by natural reason.

Owen's Christologia probably represents his most strongly christological statement. We find there the

characteristic assertion that "God, in his own essence, being, and existence, is absolutely incomprehensible."¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, knowledge of God is possible by means of "reflections of his glory on other things, and representations of his divine excellencies in the effects of them."¹⁵⁸ The world of created things, therefore, plays a true epistemological role, so that "the invisible things of God, even his eternal power and Godhead, are clearly seen."¹⁵⁹ Despite the clarity of this natural knowledge, it must be confessed "that no mere creature, not the angels above, not the heaven of heavens, are meet or able to receive upon them such characters of the divine excellencies, as to be a complete, satisfactory representation of the being and properties of God unto us."¹⁶⁰ It is Christ alone who is "the complete image and perfect representation of the Divine Being and excellencies."¹⁶¹

One can hardly quarrel with Owen about the statement that Christ is the complete image of God; and yet, if one confesses in the relation of faith that Christ is God (as well as man), is not Owen's statement quite superfluous? As a matter of fact, Owen's statement has placed Christ on a continuum where he is the conclusive link. He is not really different from the other modes of knowing God, but only more complete. He serves simply an epistemological function. Indeed, Owen first demonstrates the logical necessity of this

¹⁵⁷Owen, Works, I, 65.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 69.

sort of representation and the natural place it was meant to fill according to the very fabric of the created order and the rationality of man.

Mankind seem to have always had a common apprehension that there was need of a nearer and more full representation of God unto them, than was made in any of the works of creation or providence. The heavens, indeed, declared his glory, and the firmament always showed his handy-work--the invisible things of his eternal power and Godhead were continually made known by the things that are made; but men generally miscarried and missed it in the contemplation of them, as the apostle declares, Rom. i. For still they were influenced by a common presumption, that there must be a nearer and more evident manifestation of God--that made by the works of creation and providence being not sufficient to guide them unto him.¹⁶²

The revelation of God in Christ is far from being contingent for John Owen. Christ is a logical necessity, able to be deduced from the natural order and the minds of men.

Owen lays down what is "required" of such a representation of God to men.

(1.) That all the properties of the divine nature--the knowledge whereof is necessary unto our present obedience and future blessedness--be expressed in it, and manifested unto us. (2.) That there be, therein, the nearest approach of the divine nature made unto us, whereof it is capable, and which we can receive. And both these are found in the person of Christ, and therein alone.¹⁶³

The evidence accumulates that Christ fills for Owen an epistemological role that is cut off from any soteriological content. Christ must, if he is to play his role, express and manifest all the properties of the divine nature. Owen apparently knows apart from Christ what all the properties of the divine nature are. Christ is a full and perfect

¹⁶²Ibid., pp. 67-68.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 69.

exhibit. In making the nearest approach to us of which we are capable of receiving, there is no redemptive dealing with sin, no soteriology, but only epistemology. In fact, we have almost lost sight of the incarnation, in which there was not just a near approach but a radical identification. A Platonic world-view appears as the overshadowing background of Owen's thought.

We must frankly face the fact that Owen also says in Christologia that "faith in Christ is the only means of the true knowledge of God."¹⁶⁴ However, Owen is here using faith in only a noetic sense. He affirms that the revelations of God in the natural creation "are, in themselves, clear, plain, and manifest."¹⁶⁵ Reason is effective on this level, but the revelation in Christ is separate and above the first creation and natural reason. Faith serves the function in relation to Christ which reason serves in relation to creation. We are still on an epistemological continuum, and Owen would exhort us "to rise up unto the more full, perfect, and evident manifestation of himself that he hath made in Christ."¹⁶⁶

We are assured that our assignment of a purely noetic value to faith in Owen's use of the term is not mistaken when we see that his summary and further development are both powerfully Platonic.

First, God himself is the first and only essential Truth, in whose being and nature the springs of all truth do lie. Whatever is truth--so far as it is so, derives from him, is an emanation from that eternal fountain of it. Being, truth, and goodness, is the principal notion of God; and in him they are all the

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 77. ¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 76. ¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 78.

same. How this is represented in Christ--as in himself he is the essential image of the Father, and as incarnate the representative image of him unto us--hath been declared.

Secondly, The counsels of God are the next spring and cause--as also the subject-matter or substance--of all truth that is so declaratively. Divine truth is "the declaration of the counsels of God:" Acts xx. 27. Of them all the person of Christ is the sacred repository and treasury--in him are they to be learned. All their efficacy and use depend on their relation unto him. He is the centre and circumference of all the lines of truth--that is, which is divine, spiritual, and supernatural. And the beauty of it is presented unto us only in his face or person.¹⁶⁷

Emanation involves reception, but who among sinful men is able to receive? What we have here is clearly an eidetic relation to Christ, not a regenerative one. It is not as Saviour that Christ makes God known to us, but he is merely a "repository and treasury" of divine truths. Owen can speak about Christ being formed in the heart, but this is accomplished by the operation of the divine truths when they "put forth their proper power and efficacy."¹⁶⁸ It is not our relation to Christ that counts so that truth might be based upon Christ being in our hearts, but it is the relation of the truths to Christ as the deposit of truth which matters so that these truths may work their epistemological work. When Christ is not believed as central to divine truth, warns Owen, then "all other sacred truths are removed from their basis and centre, [from] that which gives them their unity and harmony."¹⁶⁹ Faith in Christ means here, for Owen, simply belief in him as central to divine truth. He is merely the central link in "the whole system of evangelical truths."¹⁷⁰ Christ himself

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 81.

¹⁶⁹Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁷⁰Ibid., p. 84.

and faith in him are subordinated by Owen to an epistemological process which is independent of any soteriological significance.

While we have not given exhaustive treatment to every phrase and all the innumerable arguments in Owen's works that might appear at first sight to mitigate this judgment of Owen, we consider it to be evident that our analysis of the significant passages selected has reached to the center of his method in this respect and that our interpretation can be maintained in every instance by the same critical approach we have followed in the above exposition. Ultimately, of course, the tenability of our interpretation will depend upon its ratification by the nature of the conclusions reached in the remainder of our study.

H. Rational Theology

However much John Owen may exalt the majesty of God, the pre-eminence of Christ, and the authority of Scripture, we must conclude that the shape of his theology is, most fundamentally, rational. We have noticed his radical emphasis on the Holy Spirit as expressing God's proximate sovereignty and ~~personal~~ activity in creation, providence, and redemption. However, we have also noticed that Owen opens for the work of the Spirit vistas uncharted by trinitarian principles. Specifically, we observed that Owen claimed for the Spirit a work separate and independent of the work of Christ. We feared that the work of the Holy Spirit in this freedom of individual activity might come under the control of some

other principle than a rigorously trinitarian one. Our study has borne this out, and the pneumatological principle has become for Owen a means of subverting strictly christological knowledge of God in favor of a natural and logical knowledge of God. Owen's pneumatology has enabled epistemology to be independent of soteriology.

This extra-christological, non-trinitarian, unkerygmatic foundation for theology finds at every turn its ultimate governing principle to be rationality. No matter how much Owen may assert that there are realms of theology beyond the reach of man's reason, finally there is no other epistemological principle by which he proceeds than a rationality which is genuinely and naturally human. The rationality may inhere in creation, God, and Christ, but it must be in the end a rationality suitable to, perceived by, and judged according to human reason. The sovereign freedom of the Holy Spirit provides dynamic and experiential dimensions to Owen's theology, but that sovereignty is limited and has been gained at the expense of bondage to rational principles, which in Owen's day happened to be Ramist principles. Little wonder that with the advent of John Locke, not only Ramism but John Owen slipped into obscurity. A new set of rational principles demanded a new formulation of a theology whose shape was fundamentally rational.

CHAPTER III

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SCRIPTURE: AUTHORITATIVE THEOLOGY

Already we have had occasion to note that Scripture plays a vital role in John Owen's rational theology. From the investigations of our preceding chapter, it would be logical for us to judge the role of Scripture to be patently rational for Owen. However, the matter is considerably more complex than it has yet appeared in our treatment of it. Indeed, the doctrine of Scripture is the chief means by which Owen seeks to avoid the evident danger for theology of falling into the grasp of natural reason. The role of Scripture is so crucial that our judgment about the rational shape of Owen's theology is at stake.

The doctrine of Scripture was clearly fundamental to English Calvinism of the seventeenth century. Its place as the first article of the Westminster Confession is a genuine expression of its importance. Its place there might also be thought to be a symptom of a rationally systematic type of theology in which the authoritative word is first established, so that theological method can proceed by deduction. While that caricature may not be too far off the mark in the case

of much of Calvinistic orthodoxy, we ought not to make a presumption in the case of Owen which is too facile. That caution needs to be expressed especially when our modern ears--attuned to a thorough-going, widely-accepted, historical-critical approach to Scripture--first hear the word infallible.

Our caution ought to be awakened further by the reminder that Calvin was also concerned about the infallible quality of Scripture. In fact, Calvin's emphatic thought upon this matter may be seen as the original source of the view which found such expression in that first article of the Westminster Confession. He is the one who is probably more responsible than any other man for the bequeathal of the view of the binding authority of Scripture as a written book to Calvinistic posterity. In our preceding chapter we found Owen's doctrine of the knowledge of God to be essentially rational in contrast to Calvin's faith-centered view. For that reason, it might prove especially instructive to search for the true temper of Owen's thought concerning the Spirit and the Scripture by looking at it from the perspective of Calvin's thought on the same subject.

The interpretation of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture has been a matter of sharp dispute in the past and is by no means a settled issue today. Reinhold Seeberg (Lehrbuch der Dogmengeschichte) and Otto Ritschl (Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus) were two of the more noted authorities who,

in the early decades of the twentieth century, held that Calvin's doctrine of Scripture was based on the theory of verbal inspiration. Others in those years, like Emil Doumergue (Jean Calvin: Les hommes et les choses de son temps), argued against such an interpretation. In the past three decades there have been some vigorous attempts to present Calvin's view of Scripture as dynamic--a Christ-centered testimony--and these have emphasized the role of the Holy Spirit.¹

We have noticed that Dowey prefers not to press Calvin's doctrine of Scripture into an ultimate harmony with his christological theology, holding that there is a basic, unresolved conflict in Calvin's thought at this point.² Dowey nevertheless holds that there is a vast difference between the significance of Calvin's doctrine of Scripture for his theology and the place which this doctrine holds in later Calvinism.³ It is this interpretive position which we are inclined to favor--that subsequent Calvinistic theology lost "the vital christocentric character [of Calvin's theology] by making the verbally infallible book an epistemological axiom of theology."⁴

¹E.g. Wilhelm Niesel, Die Theologie Calvins; Theo Preiss, Das Innere Zeugnis des Heiligen Geistes; Hermann Noltensmeier, Reformatische Einheit: Das Schrift verstandnis bei Luther und Calvin; and J. K. S. Reid, The Authority of Scripture: A Study of the Reformation and Post-Reformation Understanding of the Bible.

²Supra, p. 45.

³Dowey, op. cit., pp. 240-41.

⁴Ibid., p. 241.

We intend to profit, in our analysis of Owen concerning the Spirit and Scripture, from the study of Calvin on this topic by Werner Krusche. On the one hand, it must be admitted that Krusche is thoroughly convinced of the ultimate harmony of Calvin's theological thought in relation to this question--he is clearly an apologist at this point. On the other hand, Krusche is not a blind apologist, and his virtue for us is precisely his frankness in confronting all the evidence--even that evidence which at first sight appears to openly repudiate his thesis. If Krusche can fearlessly face even the most discouraging sort of evidence and yet insist on a dynamic, faith-centered interpretation of Calvin's theology even at this point, then perhaps the apparent rigidity in Owen's view of the inspired book can also be interpreted as harmonious with a vital theology. Krusche's approach to this question of Scripture in Calvin is by way of pneumatology--as is ours--and he sets forth in the course of his analysis some critical principles which mark the crucial line between a vital, dynamic interpretation of Scripture and a scholastic one. We propose to use his analytic principles--not to argue a case for Calvin, although we think Krusche makes a powerful case, which boasts massive documentation and which is in line with the general view of Calvin which we accept in this study--as a way of applying a critical test to Owen.⁵

⁵By using Krusche's framework--which goes further than any other argument of which we are aware toward exonerating Calvin's dictation theory of inspiration of the charge of biblicism and giving it a positive virtue within a christo-centric theology--we feel we are enabled to give Owen every possible benefit of the doubt in evaluating the true nature of his position on this question.

A. Inspiration by the Holy Spirit

Owen's treatment of the doctrine of Scripture in the Pneumatologia lacks a methodical presentation. The term inspiration is never precisely and unambiguously defined, although the word itself is used often and variously. Owen deals with the general subject of inspiration at the beginning of Book II under the rubric of prophecy, although we must look to Book VI for his thought concerning the subjective illumination of Scripture by the Holy Spirit. In a broad sense we are clearly justified by Owen's own development in making the division between inspiration and internal testimony; but the subdivisions of our chapter owe more in their specific wording to Krusche's study of Calvin's position than they do to any clarity deriving from Owen's organization.

1. Dictation as obedience or stenography.

In a work of Owen's on the Scripture, dated 1659, we may swiftly come up against the very blunt statement about inspiration of the Scripture in the manner of dictation.

God was so with them, and by the Holy Ghost so spake in them--as to their receiving of the Word from him, and their delivering of it unto others by speaking or writing--as that they were not themselves enabled, by any habitual light, knowledge, or conviction of truth, to declare his mind and will, but only acted as they were immediately moved by him. Their tongue in what they said, or their hand in what they wrote, was עט סופר, no more at their own disposal than the pen is in the hand of an expert writer.⁶

These penmen of Scripture appear not so much as authors, but as stenographers, since "they were but as an instrument of

⁶Owen, Works, XVI, 298.

music, giving a sound according to the hand, intention, and skill of him that strikes it."⁷

Krusche notes that Calvin not only speaks of the writers of Scripture as organs and instruments of the Holy Spirit,⁸ but expressly and repeatedly refers to the dictation of the words of Scripture to the Biblical witnesses.⁹ Krusche is concerned to face honestly the significance for Calvin of this apparently extreme position. It is quite clear, he claims,

dass Calvin . . . dieses dictare des Heiligen Geistes nicht nur auf den Inhalt, sondern auch auf die Form der Heiligen Schrift bezieht; bestimmte Redewendungen, Ausdrucksweisen, Stileigentümlichkeiten werden ausdrücklich auf den Heiligen Geist zurückgeführt.¹⁰

Nevertheless, Krusche is unwilling to admit that Calvin has a starkly literal doctrine of Scriptural inspiration. He argues that for Calvin minister is a more fundamental term for the Biblical witnesses than Schreiber; and that minister is coordinated with the term autor by Calvin, who in this way points to the Holy Spirit as the principal author, authoritatively and genuinely working through his ministers as secondary authors.¹¹ Krusche maintains that this understanding directs us to the positive virtue of the concept of dictation.

Denn diese Schreiber sind ja doch nicht etwa Klipp-schüler, denen der Lehrer Sätze und Wörter oder gar Buchstaben zur Niederschrift diktiert, sondern es sind bevollmächtigte Amtsschreiber, die auf Anordnung Urkunden auszufertigen haben. War der Begriff des

⁷Ibid., p. 299.

⁸Krusche, op. cit., p. 162.

⁹Ibid., p. 163.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 164-65.

minister bestimmt von dem Gegenbegriff des autor, so bildet der Begriff des Schreibers den Gegenbegriff zu Privatmann. Die Inspiration reisst den Zeugen aus seiner privaten und stellt ihn sozusagen in eine amtliche Sphäre. Bei der Interpretation der Begriffe amanuensis, notaire, ecrivain, greffier hätte man darauf achten sollen, dass der Ton dabei gar nicht zunächst auf der schreibenden Tätigkeit liegt, sondern darauf, dass ihr Tun ein amtliches, nicht lediglich ein privates ist.¹²

However much dictation may connote stenography to us, Krusche maintains that for Calvin this concept refers to something other than the mere activity of writing words.

Der Sinngehalt von dictare ist hier: dem Menschen, der unter das Diktat des Heiligen Geistes zu stehen kommt, ist sein Tun und Verhalten nicht mehr in eigenes Belieben gestellt. Er tritt in ein unausweichliches und unbedingtes Gehorsamsverhältnis ein.¹³

Obedience is thus the real thrust of Calvin's dictation concept. Dictation can therefore be applied by Calvin to oral confessions of faith and oral tradition as instances where the Holy Spirit provides words to obedient men, so that it is not simply a stenographic operation.¹⁴ Dictation was not intended by Calvin to suggest a mechanical operation. "Calvin würde heute sagen: die biblischen Zeugen waren keine Schallplatten, die besprochen wurden, um dann im vorgesehenen Moment einfach abzulaufen."¹⁵ Dictation was oriented toward the human factor. It was concerned with the relation of human obedience to divine initiative. It was meant to express the fact that Holy Scripture was authentically of God, a word

¹²Ibid., p. 166.

¹³Ibid., p. 167.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 167-68.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 171.

spoken faithfully rather than imaginatively. "Wo der Heilige Geist diktiert, ist für Spontaneität und Originalität kein Raum da."¹⁶

The obedience, however, is not due to the initiative of men, nor is it simply the obedience of faith. It is characterized by the governing power of the Holy Spirit, which reins in our sinful inclinations.¹⁷ What is ruled out in dictation by the Holy Spirit is not all humanness as such, but only humanness as the origin of Scripture and humanness as a sinful interpreter of revelation. What is included in dictation by the Holy Spirit is

ein geschichtliches, personales Geschehen, das nirgendwo aus der Relation: Befehlen und Gehorchen, Vorsagen und Weitersagen herausfällt. Das dictare meint, dass Gott, nachdem er einem Menschen sein Wort gesagt und es ihm erhellt hat, in einem herrschaftlichen Akte durch seinen Heiligen Geist diesen Menschen in seiner ganzen konkreten Geschichtlichkeit so in Beschlag nimmt und sein Reden so regiert, dass er das an ihn ergangene Wort gehorsam und getreu, frei von allem eigenem Zusatz und ohne eigenmächtige Verkürzung, wiedergeben und weitersagen kann und muss. Unter dem pneumatischen Herrschaftsakt der Inspiration ereignet es sich, dass Gottes Wort und Menschenwort identisch sind, wobei diese Identität freilich nicht als eine direkte, sondern als eine gebrochene zu verstehen ist.¹⁸

Dictation by the Holy Spirit, as Krusche portrays Calvin's view, provides identity enough between God's direct word and Scripture for men to trust that Scripture, but not so much identity as to assert a literal and mechanical quality to the process of inspiration. If Krusche can find this depth of meaning in Calvin's dictation concept, then we are well-

¹⁶Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 169.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 175.

advised to search carefully for positive meaning in Owen's pronouncements on inspiration, no matter how crude they may initially appear to be.

While Owen does not use the term dictation, he nevertheless states the same basic concept quite as definitely as Calvin.

He spake to them, or in them, by his holy inspirations; and he spake by them in his effectual infallible guidance of them, to utter, declare, and write what they received from him, without mistake or variation.¹⁹

Infallibility may be attributed to Scripture because "this gift of prophecy was always the immediate effect of the operation of the Holy Spirit."²⁰ The word of prophecy

was not a fruit of any men's private conceptions, nor was subject to the wills of men, so as to attain it or exercise it by their own ability; but it was given by "inspiration of God," 2 Tim. iii. 16: for the Holy Ghost, by acting, moving, guiding the minds of holy men, enabled them thereunto. This was the sole fountain and cause of all true divine prophecy that ever was given or granted to the use of the church.²¹

Infallibility is in this way no more than what Calvin was aiming for, an assurance that Scripture is trustworthy as God's word, and not the product of human subjectivity in origin or transmission.

Owen describes infallible inspiration as effecting itself in two ways. First, the Spirit works in relation to the "intellectual faculties" of the prophetic men. This does not mean that they fully understood all that they received and prophesied.

¹⁹Owen, Works, III, 129. ²⁰Ibid., p. 128. ²¹Ibid., p. 129.

But he so raised and prepared their minds as that they might be capable to receive and retain those impressions of things which he communicated unto them. So a man tunes the strings of an instrument, that it may in a due manner receive the impressions of his finger, and give out the sound he intends. He did not speak in them or by them, and leave it unto the use of their natural faculties, their minds, or memories, to understand and remember the things spoken by him, and so declare them to others; but he himself acted their faculties, making use of them to express his words, not their own conceptions.²²

The Holy Spirit uses the human faculties while powerfully controlling them. Owen is very deliberately expressing the work of inspiration as both authoritatively divine and genuinely human, and he has taken pains to express this very carefully and genuinely in the contemporary psychology of intellectual faculties.

The second and further effect of inspiration applies to the very body organs of the prophets.

They spake as they were acted by the Holy Ghost. He guided their tongues in the declaration of his revelations, as the mind of a man guideth his hand in writing to express its conceptions. . . . For whatever they received by revelation, they were but the pipes through which the waters of it were conveyed, without the least mixture with any alloy from their frailties or infirmities. . . . The Spirit of God not only revealed it unto him [David], but so guided him in the writing of it down as that he might understand the mind of God out of what he himself had written; or, he gave it him so plainly and evidently as if every particular had been expressed in writing by the finger of God.²³

Owen's careful description of the Spirit's use of the human mental equipment appears somewhat irrelevant when the human

²²Ibid., pp. 132-33.

²³Ibid., p. 134.

function is rated as a literary plumbing system. For Calvin, as seen by Krusche, the line between obedient ministers and mere stenographers is a thin one. It is so thin that it is difficult to determine whether Owen has crossed it. Certainly he has moved very near asserting a direct and complete identity between man's word and God's speech in the Scripture. He has crucially directed our consideration to the activity of writing as such.

The writing of Scripture is distinguished by Owen as a gift apart from prophecy in general.²⁴ A prophet might not be a writer, and a writer of Scripture might not be a prophet. This distinction accounts for men like Balaam and Caiaphas. They may have prophesied, but the really vital act was the writing of Scripture. The office of Scripture writer was filled only with holy men. Here is Owen's keenest interest. Here is the heart of his concept of inspiration. It is focused upon the "penmen of the holy Scripture," who received "immediate revelations from God," and "their words which they wrote were under the especial care of the same Spirit, and were of his suggestion or inditing."²⁵ Yet, the inspiration of the penmen was not merely mechanical, even though it seems weighted toward the stenographic function.

There were, therefore, three things concurring in this work:--First, The inspiration of the minds of these prophets [penmen] with the knowledge and apprehension of the things communicated unto them. Secondly, The suggestion of words unto them to express what their minds conceived. Thirdly, The guidance of their hands

²⁴Ibid., p. 143.

²⁵Ibid., p. 144.

in setting down the words suggested. . . . If either of these were wanting, the Scripture could not be absolutely and every way divine and infallible; for if the penmen of it were left unto themselves in any thing wherein that writing was concerned, who can secure us that nihil humani, no human imperfection, mixed itself therewithal?²⁶

Indeed, the penmen used their minds in this whole procedure to the extent of actively co-operating in the choice of words and expressions.

But the Holy Spirit, who is more intimate unto the minds and skill of men than they are themselves, did so guide, act, and operate in them, as that the words they fixed upon were as directly and certainly from him as if they had been spoken to them by an audible voice. . . . This must be so, or they could not speak as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, nor could their writing be said to be of divine inspiration.²⁷

It is clear that Owen has a strongly stenographic interest in the inspiration of Scripture, but we see him continually groping for an expression of that interest which will be more than merely stenographic, which will portray men as obedient under the powerful government of the Spirit.

Owen appears fully as subtle as Calvin at this point. His fundamental concern is to guard the trustworthiness or infallibility of Scripture as being God's authoritative word. This concern underlies his prohibition concerning human influence on the Scripture. It leads him to stress the activity of writing itself, while he nevertheless pictures the whole event of inspiration as a divine-human relationship which attributes to the mental faculties a genuine, though Spirit-ruled role. We must seek some further distinction between a broken and a direct identity of man's writing and

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 145.

God's speaking, in order to assess correctly the significance of Owen's doctrine of inspiration.

2. Inspiration as revelation or as testimony.

In his analysis of Calvin's concept of inspiration Krusche enlarges upon the difference between a direct identity of God's speech and human words and a broken--though trust-worthy--correspondence. Inspiration is not identical with revelation. It is not the form of revelation for Calvin as Krusche claims it came to be for the later Calvinists.²⁸

Für Calvin fällt also der Akt des göttlichen Sprechens nicht mit unter die Inspiration. Die Inspiration ist ausschliesslich auf das Weitergeben des von Gott Übergebenen bezogen; sie ist der pneumatische Herrschaftsakt, der das menschliche Nachsagen des von Gott Vorgesagten regiert. Zwischen Übergabe und Weitergabe des göttlichen Wortes, zwischen Offenbarung und Inspiration, fällt die Erleuchtung, die das übergebene Wort zum Verständnis bringt, so dass es als ein verstandenes wieder--und weitergegeben werden kann.²⁹

For Calvinistic orthodoxy, claims Krusche, inspiration tends to be a single event including original revelation and enlightenment along with the prophesying or writing, but for Calvin, "Gott offenbart und erleuchtet, ehe er inspiriert. Die Inspiration bezieht sich auf ein Vorgegebenes, aber sie ist nicht selbst das Vorgeben."³⁰

This break between Übergabe and Weitergabe in which enlightenment has its necessary place is characterized by the accommodation of the Spirit to human capacities, individual peculiarities, and historical situations.

²⁸Krusche, op. cit., p. 171.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.

Der Zeuge wird nicht ohne, sondern mit seiner ihm eigentümlichen Denkform und Vorstellungsweise und seinem geschichtlichen Wissen in die Verfügung des Heiligen Geistes genommen; er wird nicht abgesehen von seinem Verhaftetsein an einem bestimmten geschichtlichen und vor allem heilsgeschichtlichen Ort, sondern in dieser Bindung dem Zeugnis dienstbar gemacht. Inspiration bedeutet nicht Überhöhung des Zeugen über seine konkrete Menschlichkeit, sondern deren Indienstnahme für das Zeugnis. Darin, dass der Geist sich geschichtsgebundener Menschen und ihres Sprechens bedient, liegt seine accomodatio.³¹

That the historical limitations of the Biblical witnesses are a virtue for Calvin, means in turn that the content of revelation is for him in the category--not of eternal truth, of timeless ideals--but of redemptive acts within the human-historical dimension.³² What these witnesses say and write is a testimony to the revelation and not that revelation itself.

At the same time, Calvin's view of inspiration does not allow for human influence upon the Scripture. The witnesses are obedient in the sense of being under the strict direction of the Spirit. Calvin is aware of the historical factor involved in the oral tradition, and he recognizes the possibility of human influence being included in that transmission.³³ Therefore, says Krusche, he sees inspiration as applying not only to the first prophesying of the Scripture, but also to the final writing of it at the end of its oral transmission.³⁴ We must be careful, however, to see this further inspiration, not as a new revelation, but as a distinct and definite

³¹Ibid., p. 174.

³²Ibid., pp. 174-75.

³³Ibid., pp. 176-77.

³⁴Ibid., p. 177.

moment of efficacious guidance by the Holy Spirit in relation to the previous event of revelation.

As for John Owen, we have already noticed his inclusion of enlightenment as a work of the Holy Spirit between the reception of revelation as such and the activity of prophesying or writing down Scripture.³⁵ This enlightenment had more than simply a cerebral effect. It wrought a type of personal conviction, an "infallible assurance," that they were dealing with supernatural revelation.³⁶ However, both this supernatural revelation and the enlightenment are referred to as inspiration. Indeed, when Owen comes to speak about the actual writing of Scripture, instead of this act of expression itself being the focus of inspiration, it turns out that the Holy Spirit's guidance of mind, tongue, and hand only serves to express "the revelation which they had received by inspiration from him."³⁷ Here, inspiration is considered to be the form of the initial revelation so that revelation and inspiration appear to be identical, and Owen makes remarks that clearly reinforce that conclusion. He writes, for example, that inspiration is the Holy Spirit's "immediate actings on the minds of men, in the supernatural communication of divine revelations unto them."³⁸ This view would make revelation as such to be a matter of mental concepts, rather than historical events. The identity between human thought and divine word would be direct.

³⁵Supra, pp. 100-101.

³⁶Owen, Works, III, 133.

³⁷Ibid., p. 134.

³⁸Ibid., p. 131.

However, Owen himself at another point repudiates this definition of inspiration. Enlightenment is properly inspiration, he says, and it is not "a distinct way of revelation by itself, for it was that which was absolutely necessary to give an infallible assurance of mind in the other ways [of revelation] also; and setting that aside, there is none of them but is obnoxious to delusion."³⁹ Owen thus senses the danger of subjectivity in immediate revelation and recognizes the importance of distinguishing between revelation and enlightenment. Nevertheless, he can still speak in the next paragraph of an immediate revelation as a "secret effectual impression on their minds."⁴⁰

Owen proceeds to set forth how revelation is mediated to the Old Testament prophets, which affords us a glimpse at his conception of the nature of revelation. In the first place, "God sometimes made use of an articulate voice, speaking out those things which he did intend to declare in words significant of them."⁴¹ These are real words, "formed miraculously by God," and heard by empirical ears.⁴²

In the second place, God used dreams, which included also all visions occurring during sleep.⁴³ Now, this "revelation in sleep" was not so external as the first audible means, so that it was more a matter of "the immediate operation of the Holy Ghost, as to the divine and infallible impressions

³⁹Ibid., p. 135.

⁴⁰Ibid.

⁴¹Ibid.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., p. 136.

they conveyed to the minds of men."⁴⁴ No wonder Owen's witnesses to revelation need infallible assurances, when subjectivity looms so menacingly over his mediate means.

Thirdly and finally, God used visions to reveal himself, and these were either externally revealed to the eye or internally represented to the mind.⁴⁵ Of course, a vision is not verbal, and that may be why Owen adds that two things were required before these visions were effectually revelation. "This was the peculiar work of the Holy Ghost,-- namely, to implant and preserve the idea presented unto him on his mind, and to enable him accurately and infallibly to declare it."⁴⁶ That expresses well our judgment about these means of revelation. They are ideational. They are not testimonies to historical events. They are the subjective experience of an individual man in which there is an "idea presented unto him." What is important is not to interpret the meaning of an external happening with its historical setting but "to implant and preserve on his mind."

Owen speaks of the Holy Spirit's accommodation. Most of the variety in the style of Scripture is due to the variety in subject matter. Nevertheless,

the Holy Ghost in his work on the minds of men doth not put a force upon them, nor act them any otherwise than they are in their own natures, and with their present endowments and qualifications, meet to be acted and used. He leads and conducts them in such paths as wherein they are able to walk. The words, therefore,

⁴⁴Ibid.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 136-37.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 138.

which he suggests unto them are such as they are accustomed unto, and he causeth them to make use of such expressions as were familiar unto themselves. So he that useth diverse seals maketh different impressions, though the guidance of them all be equal and the same; and he that toucheth skilfully several musical instruments, variously tuned, maketh several notes of music.⁴⁷

This expresses the characteristic ambiguity of Owen in relation to what Krusche has taught us about Calvin. He neither advocates an accommodation which is genuinely and admittedly historical, nor abolishes the human dimension altogether.

Owen speaks also of oral tradition. Some books of Scripture, he notes, were written down long after the historical events spoken of had occurred. Neither memory, tradition, nor written records, however, sufficed for the writing of the Scripture itself, but only "the inspiration, guidance, and direction of the Holy Ghost."⁴⁸ Here, again, he somewhat parallels Calvin, although this latter inspiration for Owen has the nature of "immediate revelations from God."⁴⁹

Is inspiration revelation or testimony for Owen? The question itself remains in ambiguity because Owen has so variously employed the term inspiration. Revelation and enlightenment continually threaten to coalesce in a subjective mental experience. The activity of prophesying and writing of Scripture have a low level of human ingredient, which seems largely divorced from historical contexts. What is transmitted is more in the dimension of timeless truth than real happenings. All of these things suggest that inspiration

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 144-45.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 144.

⁴⁹Ibid.

for Owen is more of a direct revelation than a testimony to revelation. A more decisive plotting of Owen's position than this must depend upon a further point of reference.

3. Infallible text or trustworthy message.

Calvin, claims Krusche, does not have an exclusively grammatical concern for the testimony of the Biblical witnesses.

"Calvin spricht nirgends von einem wörtlichen Weitergeben des empfangenen Gotteswortes, sondern von einem gewissenhaften, zuverlässigen bzw. gehorsamen Weitergeben des Empfangenen."⁵⁰

A trustworthy message differs from an infallible text, and the difference comes to the fore when the question of textual errors is raised. Krusche observes that Calvin admits the possibility of inconsequential mistakes in numbers or temporal sequences.⁵¹ These minor errors do not effect the trustworthiness of the message for Calvin, "aber wenn graphische Inspiration gelehrt wird, ist grundsätzlich jede Kleinigkeit wesentlich."⁵² The distinction between infallible text and trustworthy message which the question of textual errors illuminates is a distinction between a stenographic reduplication of detail and a conceptual grasp of fundamental themes.⁵³

Those who are interested in an infallible text are thinking about an inspired Bible as such rather than inspired witnesses who were actual men, says Krusche.⁵⁴ Calvin, he

⁵⁰Krusche, op. cit., p. 172. ⁵¹Ibid., pp. 180-81.

⁵²Ibid., p. 180. ⁵³Ibid., p. 181. ⁵⁴Ibid., p. 182.

notes, did not consider it necessary to distinguish between an inspired text and supposedly uninspired additions or mistakes.⁵⁵ Krusche interprets Calvin's indifference as a demonstration that inspiration was for him "ein pneumatischer Akt," rather than "die supranaturale Qualität eines Buches."⁵⁶

Calvin ist es aber nie eingefallen, was später für die Orthodoxie selbstverständlich war, zwischen der Heiligen Schrift und anderem Schrifttum einen ontologischen Unterschied auf Grund ihrer Inspiriertheit zu behaupten. Die Unvergleichlichkeit der Heiligen Schrift beruht nicht auf ihrer unvergleichlichen Hervorbringung, sondern auf der unvergleichlichen Sache, als deren Zeügnis sie hervorgebracht ist.⁵⁷

The form of the text and specification of words are not thereby set aside as unimportant. Inspiration refers also to the form of the text for Calvin, says Krusche, but only "insofern sie die Form dieser Sache ist."⁵⁸ Inspiration refers even to the choice of particular words for Calvin, but only "darum, dass diese Worte die Sache getreulich (fideliter) ausrichten."⁵⁹ Trustworthiness is the key concept, and not infallibility.

In the late 1650's, when the last volume of the London Biblia Polyglotta, edited by Brian Walton, was issued, containing a great number of various readings as well as critical hypotheses, John Owen was the first to issue a protest. Walton represented the vanguard of British Biblical scholarship. Owen was already about to publish his treatise,

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 182.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 182-83.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 183.

⁵⁹Ibid.

Of the Divine Original, Authority, Self-evidencing Light and Power of the Scriptures; etc., when he came upon this sixth volume of the Polyglotta. What he read prompted him to add another treatise, Of the Integrity and Purity of the Hebrew and Greek Text of the Scripture; with Considerations on the Prolegomena and Appendix to the Late "Biblia Polyglotta", to his first and issue them as a double-barrelled blast of dissent. These two treatises provide us with an opportunity to examine Owen's position on the vital issue of textual criticism.

Owen perceived that the danger of textual criticism was the possibility that the inclination of the critic would gain ascendancy over the text. Then, new meanings might appear by virtue of critical hypotheses alone.

If by this means [hypothesis] any new sense that is tolerable and pleaseth the critic doth emerge, it is but saying the scribe was mistaken in the likeness of the letters or in the affinity of the sound, and then it is no matter though all the copies in the world agree to the contrary, without the least variation.⁶⁰

Goold suggests that Owen's criticism in this respect was probably justified.⁶¹ Owen bitterly opposed the piling up of various readings which were largely dependent on the conjectures of critics whose procedure was simply to "aver it to yield the more convenient sense, and a various lection is found out."⁶² As a matter of fact, Owen set down some

⁶⁰Owen, Works, XVI, 290.

⁶¹Goold, "Prefatory Note" in Owen's Works, XVI, 346.

⁶²Owen, Works, XVI, 291.

trenchant principles of textual criticism,⁶³ and we must give him all due credit for that.

Owen needs all the credit he can obtain concerning the principles of textual criticism, because his reputation suffered severely from his mistaken judgment concerning Hebrew vowel pointing. The Polyglotta had put forward the view of late vowel pointing which has since been widely and firmly accepted. The indefiniteness of a Hebrew text without vowel points so threatened John Owen that he rejected the theory entirely. The various readings presented in the Polyglotta had taken advantage of this indefiniteness and had made the threat to an infallible text a very real force. As John Owen saw it, to yield to the theory of vowel points as a late addition, coupled with the permission to gather various readings from translations (especially those made prior to the vowel pointing, such as the LXX), would leave men without "any means of being delivered from utter uncertainty in and about all sacred truth."⁶⁴

In the face of the threat to an infallible text, John Owen did two things--besides criticizing the critics. On the one hand, he candidly affirmed the existence of various readings, both in the Old Testament⁶⁵ and in the New Testament.⁶⁶ These various readings which he conceded, he claimed to be of little significance.

⁶³Ibid., pp. 366-67.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 291.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 301.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 363.

Where there is any variety it is always in things of less, indeed of no, importance. God by his providence preserving the whole entire, suffered this lesser variety to fall out, in or among the copies we have, for the quickening and exercising of our diligence in our search into his Word.⁶⁷

On the other hand, Owen in the very same breath stoutly maintained that the original text had been preserved, pure and entire. "But yet we affirm, that the whole Word of God, in every letter and tittle, as given from him by inspiration, is preserved without corruption."⁶⁸ He makes the same unconditional statement in the second treatise, immediately after he has affirmed the existence of various readings. "All that yet appears impairs not in the least the truth of our assertion, that every letter and tittle of the word of God remains in the copies preserved by his merciful providence for the use of his church."⁶⁹

Owen is concerned to defend the providential preservation of an infallible text because he holds that to be the very form of revelation. He says as much quite unmistakably. "Thus, the word that came unto them was a book which they took in and gave out without any alteration of one tittle or syllable."⁷⁰ This statement makes explicit what has been continually implied, and according to it Owen stands indicted. His focus is upon exact transmission of grammatical detail, not upon a message which is trustworthy

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 301; cf. pp. 359, 363.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 301. ⁶⁹Ibid., p. 359. ⁷⁰Ibid., p. 299.

in its meaning-content. What is inspired is the book as such, not witnesses to events. Revelation has taken the form of a book--a book which is ontologically distinct from all other books.

B. Internal Testimony of the Holy Spirit

Inspiration is the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the writers of Scripture. Inspiration may have had its subjective aspect for the writers themselves, but for us it is an external affair. There is an importance to inspiration, since the possibility and promise of the Scripture being God's authentic word to us in an objective fashion depends upon the validity of inspiration. However, inspiration holds only preliminary importance in relation to that other work of the Holy Spirit in regard to Scripture--his internal testimony. From the human standpoint this subjective issue is the really vital one. It is the question about how the Scripture becomes God's own word for me. It is the question about the subjective reality of authority. It is the question about certainty.

Owen faced a situation in regard to the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit that was similar to the one Calvin was up against. Calvin faced both the Anabaptist type of enthusiasts who emphasized the internal testimony at the expense of the Scripture, and also the Roman Church which depreciated the internal testimony as sheer subjectivity.

Owen faced on the one hand the Quakers as latter-day enthusiasts, and on the other hand the rational and prelatival divines as well as representatives of Rome. This setting no doubt stimulated both Calvin and Owen to steer a careful and balanced course between the Scylla and Charbydis before them.

1. Subjective response or objective ground.

The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit for Calvin is a way of making the external authority of Scripture subjectively realized, says Krusche.⁷¹ The difficulty immediately raised concerns the nature of the internal testimony. Does the authority of Scripture depend ultimately upon subjective judgment, or how can one be assured that the internal testimony given is really by the Holy Spirit? Is not a man left in an abyss of subjectivity unless also the Spirit can be measured and objectively certified? The Romans would claim that the church--their church--plays that objective role of judging the Spirit and certifying the authority of Scripture; but Calvin sees the church as itself subject to the authority of Scripture.⁷² The church may point toward the authority of Scripture, but it can never be the ground of that authority.⁷³

The ground of certainty concerning the authority of Scripture for Calvin is not the church, nor the internal

⁷¹Krusche, op. cit., p. 204.

⁷²Calvin, Institutes, I, vii, 1-2. ⁷³Ibid., I, vii, 3.

testimony of the Holy Spirit, but the Scripture itself. The Scripture is self-authenticating.⁷⁴ Its evidence comes from itself as clearly as color comes from objects seen or as taste comes from things tasted.⁷⁵ Any other ground for the judgment of Scripture's provenance than its own evidence would be a dependence upon human subjective judgment.⁷⁶ Calvin does admit the value of rational proofs, but he makes clear that they are no ground for certainty.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, the problem still remains of our seeing and tasting, which is the problem of the way the self-evidence of Scripture is recognized by us. This is the problem which is solved by the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit, so that the Scripture "seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit."⁷⁸ The problem is not the objective truth of Scripture, but the problem lies with our defective receiving apparatus. Human reason is an untrustworthy means of perceiving directly and immediately what is the obvious truth, namely that the Scripture is God's word. The inspiration of Scripture, which is the ground of its authority as being from God, requires a subjective response in us which authenticates it for us. "The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us

⁷⁴Ibid., I, vii, 5.

⁷⁵Ibid., I, vii, 2.

⁷⁶Ibid., I, vii, 5.

⁷⁷Ibid., I, viii.

⁷⁸Ibid., I, vii, 5.

that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded."⁷⁹

Inspiration and internal testimony are works by the same Spirit, and for that reason they are complementary, but they have different functions for Calvin. Inspiration is related to the Scripture as the self-authenticating, objective ground of certainty; and internal testimony has to do with our subjective recognition and realization of the authority of Scripture as God's word. To make the internal testimony the ground of certainty would be to make certainty fully subjective, founded upon the self alone.

Dann wäre hier von einem Erfahrungsbeweis zu sprechen: das Zeugnis des Heiligen Geistes, das ein Moment meines Bewusstseins bildet, wäre die Instanz, die meine Gewissheit, es in der Schrift mit den ipsissima verba Dei zu tun zu haben, begründete, auf die ich mich also zu berufen hätte.⁸⁰

The enthusiasts have made a mistake by assigning the value of revelation to the internal testimony so that it forms a material content existing in the consciousness.⁸¹ The internal testimony of the Spirit, in Calvin's view, has no material content of its own, no new revelation of its own, but only creates certainty of the Scripture as the word of God.⁸² The internal testimony is therefore tested by the Scripture itself as the objective ground.⁸³ We recognize the internal

⁷⁹Ibid., I, vii, 4.

⁸⁰Krusche, op. cit., pp. 212-13. Krusche, in regard to this conception, acknowledges his dependence upon S. P. Dee in his dissertation, "Het Geloofsbegrip van Calvijn" (V. U., Kampen 1918).

⁸¹Ibid., p. 214.

⁸²Calvin, Institutes, I, ix, 1.

⁸³Ibid., I, ix, 2-3.

testimony as being that of the Holy Spirit because it agrees with the basic character of the Scriptures which the same Holy Spirit has authored by inspiration.⁸⁴ "He sent down the same Spirit by whose power he had dispensed the Word, to complete his work by the efficacious confirmation of the Word."⁸⁵

Owen speaks about this subject in a way remarkably parallel to Calvin. Especially in The Reason of Faith; or, the Grounds Whereon the Scripture Is Believed to Be the Word of God with Faith Divine and Supernatural, which is the first part of Book VI in his Pneumatologia, he treats of the whole matter. His basic principle is that "supernatural revelation is the only objective cause and means of supernatural illumination."⁸⁶ Further, this "supernatural illumination"--or certainty, as we might express it more simply--must be "wrought in us by a supernatural efficiency, or the immediate efficacy of the Spirit of God."⁸⁷ Owen has a keen appreciation for the fact that absolute certainty necessarily requires a ground which is self-evident.

When we inquire after faith that is infallible, or believing infallibly,--which, as we shall show hereafter, is necessary in this case,--we do not intend an inherent quality in the subject, as though he that believes with faith infallible must himself also be infallible; much less do we speak of infallibility absolutely, which is a property of God, who alone, from the perfection of his nature, can neither deceive nor be deceived: but it is that property or adjunct of the assent of our minds unto divine truths or supernatural revelations, whereby it is differenced from all

⁸⁴Ibid., I, ix, 2.

⁸⁵Ibid., I, ix, 3.

⁸⁶Owen, Works, IV, 7.

⁸⁷Ibid., p. 8.

other kinds of assent whatever. And this it hath from its formal object, or the evidence whereon we give this assent; for the nature of every assent is given unto it by the nature of the evidence which it proceedeth from or relieth on. This in divine faith is divine revelation; which, being infallible, renders the faith that rests on it and is resolved into it infallible also.⁸⁸

Owen, therefore, rejects human authority, church authority, or any authority other than the revelation itself.⁸⁹

Owen does take special notice of certain external arguments which certify the divine origin of Scripture. He mentions the antiquity of the writings,⁹⁰ the providential preservation of the Bible,⁹¹ the design of the whole,⁹² the testimony of the church,⁹³ and the success of Scriptural doctrine,⁹⁴ thus covering much the same items as Calvin had. These external arguments

neither are, nor is it possible they ever should be, the ground and reason whereon we believe it [Scripture] so to be [the Word of God] with faith divine and supernatural, yet are they necessary unto the confirmation of our faith herein against temptations, oppositions, and objections.⁹⁵

Properly used, such rational considerations may "remove the rubbish of our objections"⁹⁶ and strengthen the faith of a believer, but to place faith solely upon them is destructive.⁹⁷

In light of the prominent role that miracles were to play in evaluating Scripture a few decades later during the rise of Deism, it is noteworthy that Owen carefully subordinated them as a proof. He considered them under the heading of the

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 17. ⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 17-20. ⁹⁰Ibid., p. 21.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 23. ⁹²Ibid., p. 26. ⁹³Ibid., p. 30.

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 38. ⁹⁵Ibid., p. 20. ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 21.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 47.

testimony of the church. He specifically states that "these miracles were not wrought immediately to confirm this single truth, that the Scripture was given by inspiration of God."⁹⁸ Miracles had their particular value only at that point in time and only as a confirmation of the ministry of the Biblical witnesses.⁹⁹ Miracles depended upon the certain ground of Scripture itself for their credibility, and not vice versa.¹⁰⁰

The Scripture alone, says John Owen, is an external, divine revelation. As such it can only be validated by its own evidence, so that "the ground and reason whereon we believe the Scripture to be the word of God are the authority and truth of God evidencing themselves in and by it unto the minds and consciences of men."¹⁰¹ The self-authenticating power of Scripture is Owen's fundamental thesis, and he describes it, not unlike Calvin, in terms of the forceful analogy of direct sense experience.

So when God by his word reveals himself unto the minds of men, thereby exciting and bringing forth faith into exercise, or the power of the soul to assent unto truth upon testimony, that revelation doth no less infallibly evidence itself to be divine or from God, without any external arguments to prove it so to be. If I shall say unto a man that the sun is risen and shineth on the earth, if he question or deny it, and ask how I shall prove it, it is a sufficient answer to say that it manifesteth itself in and by its own light. And if he add that this is no proof to him, for he doth not discern it; suppose that to be so, it is a satisfactory answer to tell him that he is blind; and if he be not so, that it is to no purpose to argue with him who contradicts his own sense, for he leaves no rule whereby what is spoken may be tried orrjudged on.¹⁰²

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 36. ⁹⁹Ibid.; cf. IV, 93, 108; III, 146; XVI, 330f.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 36. ¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 20; cf. IV, 70, 76; XVI, 322.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 89.

Of course, Owen recognizes that the natural man does not automatically affirm the divine origin of the Scripture, and he finds relevant at this point the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit. However, only by way of firmly anchoring the ground of certainty in the self-authenticating quality of Scripture does Owen approach the definition of the internal testimony.¹⁰³

The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is necessary, says Owen, to enable us to believe the Scripture, because the natural powers and faculties of man are not alone sufficient for this matter.¹⁰⁴ However, this testimony itself is not the formal ground of our certainty, because "this reason must be something external and evidently proposed unto us."¹⁰⁵ He notes that some "protestant divines" make this testimony the whole ground of certainty in and of itself, and he carefully describes this misconception so that he may avoid it.

By an internal testimony of the Spirit, an extraordinary afflatus or new immediate revelation may be intended. Men may suppose they have, or ought to have, an internal particular testimony that the Scripture is the word of God, whereby, and whereby alone, they may be infallibly assured that so it is. And this is supposed to be of the same nature with the revelation made unto the prophets and penmen of the Scripture; for it is neither an external proposition of truth nor an internal ability to assent unto such

¹⁰³What follows here concerning the internal testimony of the Spirit is taken from Book VI of the Pneumatologia. Substantially the same position had been set forth by Owen fifteen years earlier in his Divine Original; see XVI, 326-29.

¹⁰⁴Owen, Works, IV, 60.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

a proposition, and besides these there is no divine operation in this kind but an immediate prophetical inspiration or revelation. Wherefore, as such a revelation or immediate testimony of the Spirit is the only reason why we do believe, so it is that alone which our faith rests on and is resolved into.¹⁰⁶

Owen denies that the internal testimony of the Spirit brings any new revelation, but affirms that revelation is found only within canonical Scripture. He asserts that the internal testimony must be tested by the ground of Scripture itself. Otherwise,

it must declare what are the grounds and evidences of its own αὐτοπιστία, or "self-credibility," and how it may be infallibly or assuredly distinguished from all delusions; which can never be done. And if any tolerable countenance could be given unto these things, yet we shall show immediately that no such private testimony, though real, can be the formal object of faith or reason of believing.¹⁰⁷

Owen sees that anything which is not objective in an external way cannot be the ground of certainty.¹⁰⁸

When the Holy Spirit works by his internal testimony, he enables men "to discern the evidences that are in the Scripture of its own divine original."¹⁰⁹ It has an effect analogous to sense experience, being in this case a real perception of spiritual evidence.¹¹⁰ However, it is not an entity in itself, such as can "rationally be contended about."¹¹¹

The internal work of the Spirit in the believer coincides with his external work in the Scripture. The former is

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 61. ¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 62. ¹⁰⁸Ibid., p. 63.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 64. ¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Ibid.; cf. pp. 68-69. It is of interest to note that Owen, in summarizing his argument up to this point, quotes Calvin at length from the Institutes, I, vii, 5.

"in the minds of men enabling them to believe," and the latter gives "evidence in and by the Scripture unto its own divine original."¹¹² Whereas the Holy Spirit leaves signs of his testimony on the written Scripture itself as an external evidence,¹¹³ he also "doth secretly and effectually persuade and satisfy the minds and souls of believers in the divine truth and authority of the Scriptures."¹¹⁴

2. Real certainty or new incarnation.

While Owen shows that he has a masterful grasp of the issue in his insistence upon the self-authenticating nature of Scripture and in his delicate assessment of the internal testimony as a genuine subjective response to this objective ground of Scripture, the total effect of his position demands more thorough evaluation. It must be remembered that his doctrine of inspiration finally resolved itself into support for an infallible text in the form of an ontologically distinct book. We may ask the question whether Owen, in his concern for self-authentication, has gone so far as to make Scripture the locus of revelation. It is one thing to emphasize our dependence upon Scripture as the sole witness to historic events--even as the authentic witness to those events--to the extent that the force of their meaning has the potential of establishing real certainty by itself and with the Holy Spirit's testimony; it may be another thing to describe Scripture as a witness to itself, so that it is

¹¹²Ibid., p. 102. ¹¹³Ibid., p. 91. ¹¹⁴Ibid., pp. 99-100.

not of the nature of a witness at all, but revelation as such.

As Krusche began his discussion of the Holy Spirit's work in relation to the Scripture for Calvin, he stressed this understanding of Scripture as an historical witness.

Das Christus-Werk--die zu unserem Heil geschehene Menschwerdung, Passion, Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt Christi--kommt zu uns nur durch Bezeugung. Nur die Zeit Jesu Christi selbst ist unmittelbar Zeit der Offenbarung, weil er Gottes Wort nicht nur verkündigte, sondern Gottes Wort selber ist. Alle andere Zeit steht um diese Offenbarungszeit herum, ~~sie~~ erwartend oder an sie erinnernd, und im Erwarten oder Erinnern: zeugend von der Offenbarung. Die Offenbarung begründet so selbst einen Bezeugungszusammenhang, insofern alles vorausliegende und alles nachfolgende Zeugnis eben Zeugnis von der Offenbarung ist. Ist die Offenbarung selbst--Jesus Christus--Grund aller Bezeugung, so ist der Heilige Geist, der Zeuge par excellence, Urheber aller Zeugenschaft.¹¹⁵

Krusche scrupulously follows out this distinction. His section heading reads "Der Heilige Geist und das Zeugnis vom Heil" instead of "Der Heilige Geist und die Heilige Schrift." He observes the danger of forgetting the witness-character of Scripture--as he claims later Protestant orthodoxy forgot it--so that the Scripture becomes a new incarnation. "Dem ho logos sarx egeneto entspricht kein to pneuma graphe egeneto."¹¹⁶

Owen gives us a clue to his fundamental conception of Scripture when he states that the Scripture is an anthology of all divine revelations, or at least all that are useful.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵Krusche, op. cit., p. 160.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

¹¹⁷Owen, Works, IV, 11.

Revelations may not have been originally in written form, but God saw that they were eventually gathered out of "the unfaithful repository of tradition" and cast into a fixed, written form.¹¹⁸ Therefore, "the Scripture is now become the only external means of divine supernatural illumination, because it is the only repository of all divine supernatural revelation."¹¹⁹ What sort of external means? If Owen intends to say that the Scripture is the only historical testimony to revelation which is available to us, that is one meaning; but it is quite another meaning to claim Scripture as the ground of its own testimony. Is the incarnate life of Jesus Christ the ground of Scriptural testimony in an historical way, or is the Scripture itself the only means by which divine revelation has properly taken incarnate form? Our initial evidence suggests that we must attribute the latter view to John Owen.

Admittedly, "the full revelation of the whole mind of God, . . . was committed unto and perfected by Jesus Christ."¹²⁰ This, however, is not seeing Jesus Christ as the center and actuality of revelation, but only as a megaphone for "the revelations of God made by him."¹²¹ This megaphone simile reflects the root concept of revelation held by Owen. Because revelation is ideational, propositional, abstract, non-historical, and impersonal, it can be

¹¹⁸Ibid.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 12.

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 11.

¹²¹Ibid.

incarnated in written form. In fact, it must have written form before it can have any precision--before it can have any more definiteness than the whimsical caprice of a cortical synapse. The propositions which constitute revelation must be collected into an unchangeable, infallible text.

One of the major critical distinctions which Owen puts forth in his presentation of Scripture as the new incarnation is that between the material object and the formal object of belief.

And in our believing, or our faith, two things are to be considered:--(1.) What it is that we do believe; and, (2)) Wherefore we do so believe it. The first is the material object of our faith,--namely, the things which we do believe; the latter, the formal object of it, or the cause and reason why we do believe them. And these things are distinct. The material object of our faith is the things revealed in the Scripture, declared unto us in propositions of truth; for things must be so proposed unto us, or we cannot believe them. That God is one in three persons, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the like propositions of truth, are the material object of our faith, or the things that we do believe; and the reason why we do believe them is, because they are proposed in the Scripture.¹²²

The material object is not Christ himself, but propositions, or doctrines, "the articles of our creed."¹²³ At any rate, Owen intends by this designation the content of Scripture, and this content is not historical testimony, but abstract truth. Because it is abstract truth, it must be believed on some other grounds than its content, or Owen must lay open his doctrines to the vagaries of natural reason.

¹²²Ibid., p. 16.

¹²³Ibid.

Owen faces precisely this difficulty in his treatment of external, rational arguments, and he solves it by making the formal object of belief the ground of the material object.

For instance, a man professeth that he believes Jesus Christ to be the Son of God. Demand the reason why he doth so, and he will say, "Because God, who cannot lie, hath revealed and declared him so to be." Proceed yet farther, and ask him where or how God hath revealed and declared this so to be; and he will answer, "In the Scripture, which is his word." Inquire now farther of him (which is necessary) wherefore he believes this Scripture to be the word of God, or an immediate revelation given out from him,--for hereunto we must come, and have somewhat that we may ultimately rest in, excluding in its own nature all farther inquiries, or we can have neither certainty nor stability in our faith.¹²⁴

Only if we believe that the Scripture is a new incarnation, the final ground of faith, can we have a real certainty; "for the faith whereby we believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God is on all occasions absolutely melted down into that whereby we believe the Scriptures to be the word of God."¹²⁵ This unabashed statement dramatically reveals the real foundation of Owen's position, and its awful implications must be examined.

Owen is fully aware of the distinction he has made between form and content. He even goes so far as to describe with real perception the opposite viewpoint which sees authority inhering in the content rather than the form, so that the content is the true ground of the form. According to this point of view, he says, it is not external, rational arguments which are the ground of belief, but

¹²⁴Ibid., pp. 50-51.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 52.

it is the truth itself, or doctrine contained in the Scripture, which they testify unto, that animates them and gives them their efficacy; for there is such a majesty, holiness, and excellency, in the doctrines of the gospel, and, moreover, such a suitability in them unto unprejudiced reason, and such an answerableness unto all the rational desires and expectations of the soul, as evidence their procedure from the fountain of infinite wisdom and goodness. It cannot but be conceived impossible that such excellent, heavenly mysteries, of such use and benefit unto all mankind, should be the product of any created industry. Let but a man know himself, his state and condition, in any measure, with a desire of that blessedness which his nature is capable of, and which he cannot but design, when the Scripture is proposed unto him in the ministry of the church, attested by the arguments insisted on, there will appear unto him in the truths and doctrines of it, or in the things contained in it, such an evidence of the majesty and authority of God as will prevail with him to believe it to be a divine revelation.¹²⁶

Owen affirms that this reasoning is not altogether mistaken, but he senses a weakness in that approach. He states two objections. Amazingly, he says that faith must be based on testimony, but that the content of Scripture is not testimony!¹²⁷ Owen has given his own rational meaning to the concepts of testimony and content. Testimony functions in such a way that "if this testimony be divine, so is that faith whereby we give assent unto it, on the part of the object."¹²⁸ Testimony for Owen does not function in the historical dimension, but it must operate on a different ontological level. It must "be divine." Content for Owen is not the person of Christ as the object of Scriptural testimony, but propositional truth in the form of doctrines.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 53.

¹²⁸Ibid.

But the doctrines contained in the Scripture, or the subject-matter of the truth to be believed, have not in them the nature of a testimony, but are the material, not formal, objects of faith, which must always differ. If it be said that these truths or doctrines do so evidence themselves to be from God, as that in and by them we have the witness and authority of God himself proposed unto us to resolve our faith into, I will not farther contend about it, but only say that the authority of God, and so his veracity, do manifest themselves primarily in the revelation itself, before they do so in the things revealed; which is that we plead for.¹²⁹

Scripture as such, in its written form, is "the revelation itself."

In his second objection, Owen radically separates form and content.

The excellency of the doctrine, or things revealed in the Scriptures, respects not so much the truth of them in speculation as their goodness and suitableness unto the souls of men as to their present condition and eternal end. Now, things under that consideration respect not so much faith as spiritual sense and experience. Neither can any man have a due apprehension of such a goodness suitable unto our constitution and condition, with absolute usefulness in the truth of the Scriptures, but on a supposition of that antecedent assent of the mind unto them which is believing; which, therefore, cannot be the reason why we do believe.¹³⁰

The content may do good things for us, but it cannot do them until we believe it. We do not believe the content because of its power making itself evident through the form, but we believe the form only for its own sake.

These two objections taken together prompt us to review Owen's neat statements about the internal testimony

¹²⁹Ibid.

¹³⁰Ibid.

of the Spirit in relation to the self-authenticating power of the Scripture. If a testimony is to be believed for its own sake and not ultimately measured against the content of Scripture, then there is no objective aspect connected with the testimony and Owen's insistence upon an objective ground is overthrown. If the content of Scripture is not the basic evidence--the ground of our belief which shows itself forth, convincing us by its own power--but we must instead believe that message on some other external grounds such as an infallible text, then Owen's grandiloquent pronouncements about the self-authenticating quality of Scripture are nullified.

Neither the form nor the content of Scripture are related by Owen to the true ground of faith, Jesus Christ himself. Belief is not in Christ, but in doctrines which are in an infallible text. The Scripture in Owen's eyes--far from being an historical testimony--is an incarnation of eternal truth. He stresses the verbal rather than the personal, the propositional rather than the relational. Scripture is a rational formulation rather than a narrative report. In the Divine Original it becomes plain that this is why he distrusts tradition. It is not simply because men are untrustworthy; for the doctrine of inspiration and the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit may be used--as by Calvin--to affirm a transcendence of that human fallibility. With Calvin, however--as Krusche defends him--the Holy Spirit uses the human testimony as an historical witness. Owen wants to eradicate the humanness and historical quality altogether. "The things

whereof we speak being heavenly, spiritual, mysterious, and supernatural, there cannot be any knowledge obtained of them but by the Word itself."¹³¹

To be sure, Owen does recognize the possibility of an historical understanding of the Scripture.

I confess the argument is of great force and efficacy which hath, not long since, been singled out, and dexterously managed, by an able and learned pen, viz., of proving the truth of the doctrine of the Scripture from the truth of the story, and the truth of the story from the certainty there is that the writers of the books of the Bible were those persons whose names and inscriptions they bear; so pursuing the evidence, that what they wrote was true and known to them so to be, from all requisita that may possibly be sought after for the strengthening of such evidence. It is, I say, of great force and efficacy as to the end for which it is insisted on--that is, to satisfy men's rational inquiries; but as to a ground of faith, it hath the same insufficiency with all other arguments of the like kind. Though I should grant that the apostles and penmen of the Scripture were persons of the greatest industry, honesty, integrity, faithfulness, holiness, that ever lived in the world, as they were; and that they wrote nothing but what themselves had as good assurance of as what men by their senses of seeing and hearing are able to attain; yet such a knowledge or assurance is not a sufficient foundation for the faith of the church of God. If they received not every word by inspiration, and that evidencing itself unto us otherwise than by the authority of their integrity, it can be no foundation for us to build our faith upon.¹³²

We have to admire the profound grasp of Owen's mind in assessing the power of the historical-critical approach at this primitive stage, while instinctively sensing its insufficiency for faith. Faith cannot be founded upon the subjectivity of someone else. Owen, however, has overlooked the possibility that the Holy Spirit could use human subjectivity

¹³¹Owen, Works, XVI, 333.

¹³²Ibid., p. 334.

and authenticate it--the possibility that the event itself might have the power of meaning to evidence itself with real certainty through the subjective witness of men, especially when God himself is in the event in a personal and crucial way. Owen overlooked this possibility, because he conceived of faith and the object of faith in a rational and unhistorical way.

Faith for Owen is, first and foremost, faith in the Scripture. Indeed, faith could be said--and said emphatically--by Calvin, to be founded on the Scripture. However, as Krusche sees Calvin, Scripture must here be understood as an authoritative, historical testimony by the Biblical witnesses. Owen, on the other hand, sees this foundation in an absolute sense. Scripture "is proposed unto us as the object of our faith and obedience, which we are to receive and believe with faith divine and supernatural."¹³³ The Scripture has usurped the place of the Christ. It is a new incarnation.

3. Illumination or faith.

Krusche admits that Calvin's Institutes may appear to suggest that the doctrine of Scripture is separate from, or prior to, the doctrine of salvation.¹³⁴ However, he asserts that Calvin's commentaries give a different impression.¹³⁵ There, it is clear that Calvin is not simply concerned with

¹³³Owen, Works, IV, 78. ¹³⁴Krusche, op. cit., p. 216.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 217.

the form of Scripture as such, but along with the form he is concerned with the content and its effect.

Und zwar macht das testimonium nicht nur der objektiven Wahrheit des Verheissungsinhaltes, sondern ebenso der Gemeinschaft andem Inhalt der Verheissung gewiss. Calvin hat Schriftgewissheit und Heilsgewissheit nicht-- wie es dann in der Orthodoxie geschieht-- auseinandergerissen.¹³⁶

This unity of the Holy Spirit's work in the form and content of Scripture together with the effect in fellowship and salvation is crucial and is founded on the unity which is Christ. The work of the Holy Spirit in illumination is not separated from his work in faith, precisely because illumination is directed toward the object of faith which is Christ, not the Scripture. The importance of the Scripture is only its connection to Christ, and therefore primarily its quality as gospel.¹³⁷

Krusche observes that for Calvin the work of the Spirit in terms of faith has a double action of illuminating the mind and sealing the heart, thus overcoming our spiritual blindness and hard-heartedness.¹³⁸ These are not separated, but together as knowledge and trust they are incorporated in the single effect of faith which is unity with Christ.¹³⁹ Faith is not directed toward doctrine or even a message as such, but to a person and to fellowship with him.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶Ibid. ¹³⁷Ibid., p. 257. ¹³⁸Ibid., p. 259.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 265. We have already had occasion in the foregoing chapter to note Dowey's similar appraisal of this unity with Christ (Supra, p. 42).

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

Und wie die Glaubenserkenntnis das besondere Werk des Heiligen Geistes ist, so ist auch die Herstellung dieser personalen Gemeinschaft des Glaubenden mit dem Herrn seine Tat. . . . Zugleich mit der Erleuchtung durch den Heiligen Geist geschieht die Einpflanzung in das sooma Christou.¹⁴¹

Krusche's portrayal of Calvin not only unites the doctrine of Scripture with the doctrine of salvation, and the internal testimony of the Spirit in illumination with his action in sealing the heart of the believer in faith, but he has highlighted the totality of this work as unity with Christ in integral fellowship.

We have already noticed that for Owen the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit included illumination. For Owen, this work of illumination is directed at the Scripture as such, not at Christ as the object and ground of Scripture and faith; and illumination for Owen is a special and distinct work of the Spirit, not vitally related to saving faith.¹⁴² This logically agrees with our conclusion in the previous chapter that epistemology was independent of soteriology for Owen. Revelation, defined by Owen in terms of an infallible text of Scripture, becomes for the believer an illumination process without becoming at the same time a redemption-event.

When Owen speaks of faith in relation to illumination, he does not mean the redemptive relation to Jesus Christ. Faith is a mental act, inasmuch as it

¹⁴¹Ibid.

¹⁴²Owen, Works, IV, pp. 124-25.

respects that power of our minds whereby we are able to assent unto any thing as true which we have no first principles concerning, no inbred notions of, nor can from more known principles make unto ourselves, any certain rational conclusions concerning them.¹⁴³

While faith is not identical with the rational mind, it is nevertheless a natural faculty, says Owen, which is his way of playing a semantic trick. Owen is relying on natural reason while calling it the faculty of faith. It is fully natural, human, and subjective. The revelation of God in Scripture, says Owen, does have,

indeed, such external evidences accompanying it as make a great impression on reason itself; but the power of our souls whereunto it is proposed is that whereby we can give an assent unto the truth upon the testimony of the proposer, whereof we have no other evidence. And this is the principal and most noble faculty and power of our nature. There is an instinct in brute creatures that hath some resemblance unto our inbred natural principles, and they will act that instinct, improved by experience, into a great likeness of reason in its exercise, although it be not so; but as unto the power or faculty of giving an assent unto things on witness or testimony, there is nothing in the nature of irrational creatures that hath the least shadow of it or likeness unto it. And if our souls did want but this one faculty of assenting unto truth upon testimony, all that remains would not be sufficient to conduct us through the affairs of this natural life. This, therefore, being the most noble faculty of our minds is that whereunto the highest way of divine revelation is proposed.¹⁴⁴

This might be thought to have a kinship with some modern existential definitions of man's potential for decision, if it were not understood by Owen so strictly in terms of abstract, impersonal, literal propositions.

What occurs in this faith-event is not faith in the sense of a relationship, but only illumination in the sense

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 83.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 88.

of mental comprehension. This illumination is, of course, the work of the Holy Spirit. A man's natural reason cannot arrive at this faith--defined as assent--simply by considering the grammatical constructions in the Scripture.¹⁴⁵

Illumination means that the Holy Spirit must enable the mind to discern the truth, so that "there is an especial work of the Spirit of God, in the enlightening the eyes of our understandings, necessary unto our discerning of the mysteries of the gospel in a due manner."¹⁴⁶

The work of the Holy Spirit is internal only in us, and its designation as special confirms this. Being special, it is not integrally related to, or intimately dependent upon, the whole work of the Holy Spirit as a witness to Christ--as an engrafting of us into the body of Christ, as a reconciliation in which we are adopted as sons through the Son in his relation to the Father. Illumination as internal to us is only a pedagogical work of the Spirit. It is an absolutely crucial work since no man may know "the mysteries of the gospel" except he be taught it by God, the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁷ The goal and purpose of this work is, indeed, "our abiding in Christ."¹⁴⁸

Wherefore, the all things here mentioned [I John ii, 20, 27] are all things necessary unto our ingrafting into and continuance in Christ. Such are all the fundamental, yea, important truths of the gospel. Whatever is needful unto our communion with Christ and our obedience to him, this all true believers are taught. However they may mistake in things of

¹⁴⁵Ibid., p. 137.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 139.

¹⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 139-41.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 146.

lesser moment, and be ignorant in the doctrine of some truths, or have but mean degrees of knowledge in any thing, yet shall they all know the mind and will of God as revealed in the Scripture, in all those things and truths which are necessary that they may believe unto righteousness and make confession unto salvation.¹⁴⁹

Illumination is pedagogically related to being in Christ, but not integrally so related. The Holy Spirit's work in this regard is specifically described as "teaching";¹⁵⁰ but it is "internal teaching."¹⁵¹ It is internal in us as an isolated act. It teaches what is necessary for becoming an integral part of the whole drama of salvation in Christ, but it bears no direct and immediate relationship to that involvement. Whether or not those who are taught by the Holy Spirit ever do actually become engrafted into Christ is a separate matter--a matter dependent upon human application of the rational knowledge of propositional truths.

The separation of illumination from faith as a saving relation does indeed correspond to the split between epistemology and soteriology which we examined in the foregoing chapter. It means also a split in the testimony of the Holy Spirit, resulting in a testimony to Scripture in its written and rational sense as well as a testimony to Christ as Lord. However, since Owen's grasp of the kerygma is propositional, it really means a subordinating of soteriology, of the testimony to Christ as Lord, to an illumination-epistemology, to the testimony of the Spirit certifying an infallible text.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 148.

¹⁵¹Ibid., p. 144.

It means that the internal testimony refers primarily and determinatively to our private knowledge rather than to our actual being in Christ--to a subjective noetic event rather than to the objective Christ-event.

The meaning of Scripture is not directly and immediately open to the rationality of men, according to Owen. Human inability in the form of spiritual blindness prohibits this possibility. The illumination-work of the Spirit is indispensable; but when that special work has been performed, then the relation of Scripture to human reason becomes, not that of a witness to historical events nor that of a testimony to a person, but that of propositional truth. Owen in this way posits a direct correspondence between human language and the being of God, since the propositional truth is divine in its form as propositional truth. This is emphatically shown by Owen's complete subordination of the meaning and actuality of the incarnate Christ himself to the propositional form of Scriptural revelation. He writes that by the illumination-work of the Spirit

whatever is necessary for us to believe concerning these things is plainly and clearly revealed in the Scripture, and that revelation declared in such propositions and expressions as are obvious unto our understandings. And he who thinks we can believe nothing as unto its truth but what we can comprehend as unto its nature overthrows all faith and reason also; and propositions may be clear unto us in their sense, when their subject-matter is incomprehensible. For instance, consider the incarnation of the Son of God, and the hypostatical union therein of the divine and human natures; it is a thing above our reason and comprehension: but in the Scripture it is plainly asserted and declared that "the Word, which

was God, and was with God," was "made flesh"; that "God was manifest in the flesh"; that "the Son of God was made of a woman, made under the law"; that "he took on him the seed of Abraham"; that "he came of the Jews according to the flesh," and "is over all, God blessed for ever"; and that so "God redeemed his church with his own blood." Thus plainly and perspicuously is this great matter, as it is the object of our faith, as it is proposed unto us to be believed, declared and expressed unto us. If any one shall now say that he will not believe that to be the sense of these expressions which the words do plainly and undeniably manifest so to be, and are withal incapable of any other sense or construction, because he cannot understand or comprehend the thing itself which is signified thereby, it is plainly to say that he will believe nothing on the authority and veracity of God revealing it, but what he can comprehend by his own reason that he will believe; which is to overthrow all faith divine. The reason of our believing, if we believe at all, is God's revelation of the truth, and not our understanding of the nature of the things revealed.¹⁵²

Although Owen thinks he is defending faith against reason, he has thereby delivered faith from out of the historical and personal dimension to be fully bound and contained within the dimension of human rationality. It is the Scripture, understood in this propositional way according to the illumination-work of the Holy Spirit, which reveals things "plainly and clearly," "plainly and perspicuously," "plainly and undeniably," as we had occasion to note repeatedly in chapter two. Scripture is thus a marvelous bulwark for a rational theology.

C. Authoritative Theology

Our examination of John Owen's doctrine of Scripture in relation to the inspiring and testifying work of the Holy Spirit demonstrates that Owen is fundamentally within the

¹⁵²Ibid., p. 195.

stream of Calvinistic orthodoxy in this respect, but not in any simple fashion. He parallels much of the subtle treatment of Calvin on this subject. He is aware of the far-reaching implications of how the question of authority is answered. One suspects that Owen, whose scholarly reputation suffered a severe setback in the Biblia Polyglotta affair, was really one of the towering figures of the age in this matter of assessing the real nature of Scriptural authority. Nevertheless, he was also a man of his age, and he failed finally to transcend the scholasticism of post-Calvin Protestantism.

Owen could speak about inspiration by the Holy Spirit in a way that suggested the human and historical dimension. He referred to the role of the enlightened mind and the environmental conditioning of the individual writers. Moreover, Owen's concept of the efficaciously powerful guidance of the Holy Spirit in the act of writing established the authority of this testimony over against sheer subjectivity. Krusche's remark in this respect is highly appropriate: "es war sicher kein Fortschritt, als man die Kategorie des 'religiösen Genies' zur Bezeichnung der Offenbarungszeugen meinte anwenden zu sollen!"¹⁵³ However, the inspiration was predicated of the written product rather than of the human writers. The identity of God's speech and Scriptural testimony was seen as direct and complete by Owen. The inspired words as such became the very form of revelation.

¹⁵³Krusche, op. cit., p. 168.

A necessarily infallible text acquired the nature of an ontologically new book so that the book itself was a new incarnation.

Owen could demonstrate a keen perception for the mutual balance between a self-authenticating Scripture as the objective ground of certainty and the internal testimony of the Spirit as the subjective response to that external authority. This formulation appeared to avoid both an objectivity that was unrelated to people, and also a subjectivity that was unrelated to the external world. However, when Owen made the testimony of the Spirit apply to the form of the text as such, there was no longer an objective ground which had the quality of self-authentication. The form of the text might be external, but it could not really serve as a ground of certainty. As a mere form it could not function as a transcendent subject in relation to human subjects. By definition as formal, verbal, and infallibly fixed, the text as such could possess no principle of autonomously grounded action. Nevertheless, Owen made the form the ground of his authority. With authority vested in a verbal formulation, the nature of its message had to be essentially propositional. Since the form of the Scripture itself was the object of faith, Owen logically stressed the work of the Spirit in illumination as the basic and fundamental work. Faith itself came to be defined primarily in terms of mental assent--as a function of illumination.

The Holy Spirit's work in relation to Scripture reveals the authoritative facet of Owen's theology. This authoritative note does not contradict the rational shape we attributed to his theology in our second chapter. It is, perhaps, this rational quality itself which requires the authoritative stress Owen gives to Scripture. The rational shape of his theology does not refer to an objective rationality--to a rationality inhering in the revealing subject; but to a subjective rationality--to the natural rationality of the human mind with the power of evaluating and judging revelation. This dependence on human rationality brings with it perpetual bondage to subjectivity.

The authoritative shape of Owen's theology as expressed in his doctrine of Scripture is a powerful buttress to his rational superstructure. It tends to bolster the subjectivity of human rationality with the external objectivity of a written word. In this way the rational shape which is foundational to his theology does not appear to be either so obvious or so dangerous. The threat of the subjective dominance of reason is clearly a powerful stimulus in Owen's search for a thoroughly objective authority. Nevertheless, even this authoritative element of an inspired Scripture is ultimately subjective, because the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is judged by Scripture as an infallible text; and finally the meaning of an infallible text can only be propositional in a way determined by subjective human reason.

The internal testimony of the Spirit remains internal to human reason and experience. It does not finally testify to being in Christ--in one who transcends and transforms human reason and experience. Owen's authoritative theology is ultimately of the same brand as his rational theology, so that their respective contributions to the shape of his theology are fully complementary.

CHAPTER IV

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND JESUS CHRIST: SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

The special dispensation of the Holy Spirit in relation to the new creation through Jesus Christ is the most "important principle and head of that religion which we do profess,"¹ and it forms the next major theme in Owen's Pneumatologia. We have already had occasion to note the distinct separation made by Owen between the work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.² He has set them in tandem, with a resultant emphasis on the latter. Their roles are at once distinct from each other as well as dependent upon one another. Owen has characteristically defined Christ's work as procuring and the Spirit's work as application, with the former being a completed event in the past and the latter being a current event now in progress. The division between the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit is connected with the separation between epistemology and soteriology noted in Chapter II, and between illumination and faith noted in Chapter III.

¹Owen, Works, III, 152.

²Supra, p. 38.

This chapter necessarily deals in some way with the nature of soteriology and with the object of faith as it examines the relation of the Holy Spirit to Jesus Christ. That does not mean that Jesus Christ takes the center of the stage in Owen's treatment at this point. On the contrary, the whole thrust of soteriology and the only relevance of the object of faith appear to belong to the Spirit's work-- "this was that good wine which was kept until the last."³ The Spirit's work not only comes last; it is contemporary.

It is true, in the continuation of his work he ceaseth from putting forth those extraordinary effects of his power which were needful for the laying the foundation of the church in the world; but the whole work of his grace, according to the promise of the covenant, is no less truly and really carried on at this day, in and towards all the elect of God, than it was on the day of Pentecost and onwards. . . . The owning, therefore, and avowing the work of the Holy Ghost in the hearts and on the minds of men, according to the tenor of the covenant of grace, is the principal part of that profession which at this day all believers are called unto.⁴

In this passage can be found all the major themes of our chapter. The work of the Spirit is described in terms of grace--the Spirit's grace. This work of grace by the Spirit is now in progress; it is happening "at this day." It happens in relation to the elect; and it happens to them subjectively, in the heart and on the mind. This subjective work of the Spirit becomes an object of faith, and the believer's act of recognition and response directed toward this object of faith is the essence of Christian confession. All of this process

³Owen, Works, III, 153.

⁴Ibid., pp. 154-55.

happens "according to" the covenant, described more fully as the covenant of grace. It is the covenant that provides the systematic framework which combines for Owen the concepts of election and grace in a way that presumes the work of Christ and focuses upon the present work of the Spirit with its emphatically subjective character. Our study of the role which Owen attributes to the Holy Spirit in relation to Jesus Christ must necessarily proceed as a study of covenant theology.

A. Covenant Theology according
to the Reformed Tradition

Covenant theology is first of all Hebrew theology. The covenant concept is fundamental to Old Testament thought, and for that reason it also plays a significant role in the New Testament. The above statement, by its very form, acknowledges the division of the holy Scriptures into an old and a new covenant. One might legitimately expect Christian theology to be always covenant theology. Perhaps that is true implicitly. Explicitly, however, theology which employed the covenant theme in a significant and conscious way developed only with the Reformation, and particularly in the Reformed tradition. John Owen stands in this tradition, and his understanding of covenant theology must be sought first in relation to its historical-theological ancestry.

1. Continental development.

a. The universal covenant according to the early reformers.--The covenant concept in the Reformed tradition is

generally traced to Zwingli as the first theologian to give it explicit--if rudimentary--articulation. Zwingli was engaged in a dispute with Anabaptists at Zurich which broke out in 1525. He used the concept of the covenant to demonstrate the importance of infant baptism. The new covenant of the gospel, said Zwingli, was not separate and distinct from the old Abrahamic covenant, and the Abrahamic covenant was really of one piece with the former covenants with Adam and Noah. From beginning to end there was really one covenant which was fulfilled in Christ.⁵ On this basis Zwingli could argue that there was a genuine correspondence between infant baptism and circumcision.

Some would like to find in Zwingli the germ of all subsequent covenant theology. In particular, Leonard J. Trinterud, in his influential article, "The Origins of Puritanism," links Zwingli with what he calls "the Reformers of the Rhineland," and he tries to establish this group as the source of the covenant thought of English Puritanism.⁶ At the same time, Trinterud labors to isolate Calvin as being distinct from the Rhineland group and as having negligible influence on English theology. Trinterud's thesis has a certain validity and deserves closer evaluation in relation to our discussion of the English development of covenant

⁵This is the analysis of Karl Barth (Church Dogmatics, IV/1, Tr. by G. W. Bromiley, [T. & T. Clark: Edinburgh, 1956], pp. 56-57), who bases his study on De peccato originali (1526) and In catabaptistarum strophas elenchus (1527) by Zwingli.

⁶Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," Church History, XX (March, 1951), pp. 37-57.

theology. For the present discussion, it is of interest to note that Barth makes a very different assessment of Zwingli. He finds the covenant concept of Zwingli and his successor Bullinger to be comparable to that of Calvin, and he sharply contrasts their notion of the covenant to the subsequent development of covenant thought among the later Rhineland men.⁷

What Barth finds to be distinctive about Zwingli's covenant thought is its universalism. The covenant is in this way a mode of thought reflecting the way God deals with men. To the extent that God's dealing with men has a permanent, single, unrelenting purpose--finally expressed and fulfilled in Christ--the covenant is single, unchanging, and comprehensive. Thus, the unity of the covenant which Barth observes in Zwingli and Bullinger is a correlate of its universalism. Moreover, this one covenant--one at least in its origin and basic character--with its universal reference was necessarily understood as a covenant of grace, inasmuch as it reflected God's most fundamental and abiding movement toward us. Undergirding this analysis is the basic premise that God's will is indeed single.

Calvin also conceived of the covenant as one, universal, and gracious, Barth claims, so that the covenant with the patriarchs of Israel was already of the same substance as the covenant fulfilled and established in Christ--the difference being only administrative.⁸ William W. McKee in his doctoral

⁷Barth, op. cit., pp. 57-58.

⁸Ibid., p. 58.

study on the covenant idea corroborates this assessment of Calvin's position. With him, says McKee, the covenant is a one-sided affair in which the sovereign mercy of God plays the dominant role.⁹ McKee really means to say that Calvin has an inadequate covenant concept because it is not a fully two-way relationship.¹⁰ Indeed, Calvin's idea of the covenant was evidently different from that of the English Puritans McKee is studying, but it remains to be seen what the consequences of those differences are for the shape of a theology.

What McKee has in mind as the genuine covenant idea is the concept of contract as a mutual and conditional agreement of God and man. This concept of contract is what Trinterud calls the law-covenant principle and what he sees to be characteristic of both Rhineland and English covenant theology. Trinterud, however, recognizes the genuinely different meaning of covenant for Calvin.

Calvin indeed used the word "covenant" very frequently. He could not have written on Biblical topics without so doing. But, . . . a meaning and interpretation are given to this term "covenant" which can in no manner be compatible with that meaning of "treaty," "alliance," "bargain," "compact," "conditional promise," "mutual agreement," "reciprocal agreement," "confederacy," "federation," etc. which were essential to the Rhineland-Puritan covenant theology from its beginning in Oecolampadius, Zwingli, Bucer, et. al., up until its final flowering in the later seventeenth century.¹¹

⁹William Wakefield McKee, "The Idea of the Covenant in Early English Puritanism (1580-1643)," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1948), p. 18.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 19.

¹¹Trinterud, op. cit., p. 56, n. 27.

We heartily agree with this vigorous statement in respect to Calvin, while expressing our hesitation about the unstudied inclusion of Zwingli in the opposite camp of covenant thought.

Trinterud touches the very heart of covenant thought in Calvin's theology by identifying the definitive covenant relation of God with man as that realized in the God-man. It is therefore a covenant already enacted. Trinterud sets this concept of the covenant in relief by a pointed contrast with the contract theory.

For Calvin, . . . the covenant of God is God's promise to man, which obligates God to fulfill. Moreover, in the incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ God did actually fulfill that promise to which his covenant bound him. Therefore, the sacraments are witnesses, attestations, or seals to the effect that God has long since fulfilled his covenant, his promise. Therefore, covenant and testament are identical. In the covenant theory of the Rhineland and of the English reformers the covenant is a conditional promise on God's part, which has the effect of drawing out of man a responding promise of obedience, thus creating a mutual pact or treaty. The burden of fulfillment rests upon man, for he must first obey in order to bring God's reciprocal obligation into force.¹²

These crucial contrasts between unconditional and conditional, fulfilled and unfulfilled, God's part and man's part, the good news of the Christ-event and the legal obedience required of man are the vital differences which determine the shape of a theology.

The universalism of the covenant idea for Calvin is not quite so untrammelled as so far presented. Joseph C.

¹²Ibid., p. 45.

McLelland reminds us that Calvin used the concept of covenant in yet another way, which

unfortunately became central in subsequent Calvinism. This is Calvin's relating the "principle of the gracious covenant" to a supralapsarian scheme of double predestination (Inst. 3.21.5). That is, he understands the Divine activity of covenant-making only as derivative from the Divine activity of decree-making. The latter has priority, and atonement is subordinately related to its secret mystery.¹³

McLelland notes two things at this point which are instructive for our understanding and treatment of covenant theology in the remainder of this chapter. First, he observes that Calvin's successors emphasized this connection of the covenant idea with double predestination (citing the case of Beza's supralapsarian system), so that subsequent Reformed theology must be understood in relation to this point of reference.¹⁴ Second, he notices that Calvin, at the same time that he speaks about the covenant in the context of predestination, also speaks about union with Christ;¹⁵ and this latter concept must fundamentally qualify the understanding of covenant and election for Calvin.¹⁶

b. The double covenant according to the later reformers.--The development of the covenant concept from the universalism of the early reformers to the duality of the later reformers is diffuse and not clearly traceable. Barth claims that the principle of duality first emerges with Wolfgang Musculus of Berne and Stephan Szegedin of Hungary,

¹³Joseph C. McLelland, "Covenant Theology--A Re-evaluation," Canadian Journal of Theology, III (July, 1957), pp. 183-84.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 186.

who divide the covenant into a foedus generale and a foedus speciale.¹⁷ The latter is subdivided into three periods, ante legem, sub lege, and post legem, so that the law is the "principle of order."¹⁸

It is more evident that Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) played a central and decisive role in the double covenant development. In his Summa Theologica (1584) he distinguished between the foedus naturae, established at creation upon the principle of man's obedience, and the foedus gratiae, established only in Christ.¹⁹ Barth believes that Ursinus was influenced by Melanchthon,²⁰ and that Melanchthon was responsible for introducing into Reformed covenant theology the concept of a primordial law of nature.²¹

How much the double covenant concept in Ursinus and other early representatives of this idea owes to the above mentioned concept of Melanchthon, to Melanchthon's idea of free will, to Biblical influence, or to sheer inventiveness is difficult to judge. However, two factors seem to clearly influence the ongoing development of the covenant concept, if not its very inception. On the one hand, there is the political, social, economic, and philosophical spirit of the times which undoubtedly contributed considerable content to this theological idea. For example, the legal-contract

¹⁷Barth, op. cit., p. 58.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Our description follows Barth's analysis, ibid., p. 59.

²⁰Ibid., p. 54.

²¹Ibid., p. 58.

flavor of the double covenant has an affinity to political and social ideas of the period. Thus, Trinterud reasons:

In the Rhineland, an area in which more liberal views of freedom and liberty had long been prevalent, recourse had often been had by many political thinkers to the idea of authority grounded in natural law and social contract. So also the religious reformers of the Rhineland had recourse to an authority grounded in the divine law and a covenant between God and man.²²

In a similar vein Charles S. McCoy, in his study of the covenant theology of Johannes Cocceius, points to the parallel development between the concept of trust and covenant in the social and economic world of the Dutch bourgeoisie and in the theology of Dutch Reformed scholars.²³

The second factor in the development of the double covenant idea is the Calvinistic doctrine of double predestination. The duality of the one is reflected in the duality of the other. Basil Hall places the blame for the scholasticizing of predestination chiefly on Theodore Beza.

It was Beza who reverted to the medieval scholastic device of placing predestination under the doctrines of God and providence--the position in which St. Thomas Aquinas discussed it--whereas Calvin had placed it eventually and deliberately under the doctrine of salvation. By doing so, although he was not alone in this, Beza re-opened the road to speculative determinism which Calvin had attempted to close.²⁴

Hall goes on to indict Beza for teaching explicit supralapsarianism, the precise imputation of Adam's sin to all

²²Trinterud, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

²³Charles Sherwood McCoy, "The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius," (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1957), pp. 89-90.

²⁴Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," (John Calvin, ed. by G. E. Duffield; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.: Grand Rapids, 1966), p. 27.

mankind, and limitation of the efficacy of Christ's atoning death to the elect alone--all of which extremes Calvin avoided.²⁵

Beza did not develop any covenant thought of his own, but he represents the direction in which Reformed theology moved as it became systematized around the doctrine of double predestination, understood as an abstract principle. As McLelland points out, the reaction of an Arminius became almost inevitable.²⁶ Covenant theology subsequently reflects the tension between the rigidity of predestinarian Calvinism and the humanistic liberality of Arminianism. One can find supralapsarian covenant thought in Franz Gomarus (1563-1641), the bitter enemy of James Arminius; but the classical form of continental covenant theology comes through the mediating position of the Herborn School and finds supreme expression in Johannes Cocceius.²⁷

While Cocceius was an older contemporary of Owen and probably did not directly influence the covenant theology which Owen inherited (Cocceius' Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei appeared in 1648), nevertheless Barth's perceptive analysis of his classical position enables us to

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶McLelland, op. cit., p. 184.

²⁷Barth lists Martini, Crocius, Cloppenburg, and Amesius in this school, op. cit., p. 54. We would prefer to include William Ames in the English development, and we would hold that the continental and English developments are not fully identical in their covenant thought. Behind the Herborn School stand Kaspar Olevianus of Heidelberg and Amandus Polanus and Johannes Wolleb of Basél in the line of covenant tradition. Polanus contributed the phrase foedus operum.

gain an insight into the basic dynamics of all covenant thought founded on the double covenant pattern. In the first place, Barth speaks a word of praise for Cocceius regarding his dynamic view of Scripture as a history of God's dealing with man.²⁸ While this may be an advancement, Barth is not at all happy with the resultant relativizing of the event of Jesus Christ so as to make it simply one event in a series of covenant acts, instead of seeing it as the supreme event to which all other covenant relationships attest. The covenant, claims Barth, becomes a conceptual standpoint for judging the Christ-event, instead of vice versa. Barth's analysis seems to suggest that a dynamic and controlling concept like that of the covenant results in a correspondingly static and easily manipulated christology.

The covenant of nature (or works or law) comes first, so that the covenant of grace is understood by Cocceius only in antithesis to this first covenant. As a result, the whole covenant theology is understood negatively by Cocceius, as being a series of abrogations of the first covenant. Barth notes that Cocceius was criticized for the antithetical form of his covenant theology, but Barth credits Cocceius with the perception that the covenant of grace was not really a progression or development of the covenant of works. For Cocceius, then, "the doctrine of the covenant of grace was developed in relation, but only in this negative relation,

²⁸Barth, op. cit., p. 55.

to a covenant of works."²⁹ Barth's analysis emphasizes the definitive role of the first covenant in any double covenant theology.

The covenant of grace is portrayed by Cocceius as a non-temporal event (although conforming to a temporal scheme of abrogations of the first covenant) in the form of a covenant between the Father and Son within the Godhead. In this way, Barth declares, grace appears as an expedient of God and not as his essential purpose toward us from the beginning.³⁰ Creation is thus consigned to some other purpose and foundation than grace. This other ground, says Barth, proves to be an abstraction of a legal relation between God and man according to which God is seen as righteous in an abstract sense.³¹ The covenant between Father and Son is conceived as a means of reconciling the abstract righteousness of God so as to introduce the possibility of mercy. Barth sees this conception as implying that God is essentially not merciful--that the God of abstract righteousness is the determinative idea.³² The covenant of works and the covenant between Father and Son are mere fabrications of covenant theology, says Barth, which are only possible because christology has been subordinated to the covenant system instead of the other way around.³³

²⁹Ibid., p. 61.

³⁰Ibid., p. 64.

³¹Ibid., pp. 64-65.

³²Ibid., p. 65.

³³Ibid.

The result of the double covenant system as Barth sees it is an unresolved duality in the nature of God. God is righteous as Father and merciful as Son. The will of the Father is sharply antithetical to the will of the Son. The question arises as to whether such theological thinking can be subsumed under trinitarian doctrine. Barth claims that the Father and the Son cannot be separate partners to a covenant, but only man and God can so be.³⁴

How can even the most perfect decision in the bosom of the Godhead, if the Godhead remains alone, be the origin of the covenant, if it is made in the absence of the one who must be present as the second partner at the institution of the covenant to make it a real covenant, that is, man?³⁵

Barth's analysis of the implications of the double covenant theology points to a duality in the nature of God, with righteousness as the primary force, and hints at the non-participation of man in the covenant of grace. He finds both of these developments becoming possible because a covenant system has replaced an incarnational christology.

2. English development.

a. Contract theory according to Tyndale.--Perry Miller in The Marrow of Puritan Divinity and The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century has probably played the major role in recent scholarship in bringing to attention the ideological significance of covenant theology for English Puritanism. However, Miller leaves the impression that covenant theology

³⁴Ibid., p. 65.

³⁵Ibid., p. 66.

was entirely an English development and largely a seventeenth century phenomenon. By contrast, Barth's presentation of covenant theology completely overlooked any English involvement (except for listing Amesius). Trinterud has performed the valuable service of indicating the very early connections between Rhineland thought and the first English reformers. However, what Trinterud said was extremely generalized and lacked solid evidence. A recent study by William A. Clebsch has clarified this early development by a careful assessment of the evidence.

The only substantial evidence Trinterud presented in his brief article was a quotation from Oecolampadius of Basel (In Jesiam, 1525) to the effect that the "covenant of God with man was the law of love. This law was written on man's heart at creation, and was only expounded by the written law of the Bible. To be blessed of God man must keep this covenant by obeying this law."³⁶ From what Clebsch describes to us concerning Tyndale's covenant theology of legal contract, Trinterud had every right to see a very close parallel between Oecolampadius and Tyndale.³⁷ However, Clebsch makes clear that Trinterud was only guessing, and he maintains that any evidence of an actual dependence of Tyndale upon Oecolampadius or any other Rhineland reformer is still lacking.³⁸

³⁶Trinterud, op. cit., p. 41.

³⁷Trinterud did not single out Tyndale in order to make the comparison we have suggested. In fact, Clebsch softly rebukes him for not distinguishing between Tyndale and John Frith (William A. Clebsch, England's Earliest Protestants 1520-1535, [Yale University Press: New Haven, 1964], p. 199).

³⁸Ibid.

In any case, Trinterud's Rhineland theory is greatly oversimplified. There may in fact be more influence flowing from England to the continent in this matter of covenant theology than vice versa, because what Clebsch shows us is a well-developed covenant theology by William Tyndale before John Calvin even wrote the first edition of the Institutes.

The first Reformation influence in England was clearly and overwhelmingly that of Luther. William Tyndale's early work of translating the New Testament into the vernacular demonstrates his indebtedness to Luther. However, Clebsch portrays a powerful change of theological orientation in Tyndale which occurred in two stages. The first shift coincided with his work of translating the Pentateuch (1528-1530), and was characterized by a growing emphasis on the law as a second focus alongside the Lutheran emphasis on the gospel.³⁹ His Answer to More's Dialogue, printed in the summer of 1531, reflects a growing concern with moralistic legalism.⁴⁰ The following September, he published an exposition of I John, in which "for the first time the steadfastness of God came to be interpreted by Tyndale explicitly as that of a reliable negotiator of agreements who bound himself to the terms of a contract."⁴¹ From then to the end of his life, Clebsch maintains that Tyndale's theology was clearly "nomocentric."⁴²

³⁹Ibid., p. 154.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 168.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 172.

⁴²Ibid., p. 174.

Clebsch attempts to understand this extreme reversal in terms of Tyndale's personal career. His goal had been the official availability in England of the Scripture in the English language. His hopes for reformation were centered in the reforming power of the Scripture itself. However, this motivating aim had been undercut in two ways. Officially, the monarch had not yielded his consent to the project. Empirically, the Scripture had not produced the powerful reformation with those Englishmen whom it had reached in the vernacular--in contrast to the continental experience.⁴³ Tyndale thus revised his theology, argues Clebsch, with two purposes in mind. His covenant legalism would contain retribution for those rejecting God's law--even certain monarchs--and it would provide an unmistakable key to the interpretation of Scripture.⁴⁴

From September 1531 to November 1534, Tyndale published nothing; but everything he published afterward manifested a thorough-going contract theory of the covenant relation between man and God.⁴⁵ In November of 1534, he issued a revision of his 1530 Genesis along with the rest of his 1530 Pentateuch. The revised preface to Genesis and prologue to the whole Pentateuch in this 1534 edition is a fully developed "contractual theology."⁴⁶ The term covenant was now uniformly used to translate berith, and all covenant activity was stylized as

⁴³Ibid., p. 171.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 189, 197.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 181.

⁴⁶Ibid.

making covenants.⁴⁷ In an exposition of the sermon on the mount--perhaps preceding the 1534 Pentateuch in publication--Tyndale portrayed Christ's law as a restoration of the Mosaic law.⁴⁸ Above all there was the 1534 revision of his 1526 English New Testament. Its theological impact was mostly contained in the marginal notes, prefaces, and prologues, which continually pointed to the covenant as the clue to the Scripture; and the covenant was a matter of obeying God's law in order to receive mercy.

The generall covenaut wherin all other are comprehended and included, is this. If we meke oure selves to god, to kepe all his lawes, after the ensample of Christ: then God hath bounde him selfe vnto vs to kepe and make good all the mercies promysed in Christ, thorowout all the scripture.⁴⁹

We have looked at Tyndale's development of the contract theory of the covenant in some detail for two reasons. The most obvious reason is the abiding presence of the contract theory throughout Puritan theology.

Tyndale gave to Puritanism its first English theological expression. He founded the theology upon which seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English-speaking Calvinists built Bible commonwealths in Cromwell's England and in the New England of the Mathers. Quite unequivocally Tyndale made prosperity or poverty on earth the visible tokens of men's consignment to heaven or hell. Theology became handmaid to morality.⁵⁰

We suspect that what Tyndale has given first expression to in terms of covenant theology has an older heritage.

Trinterud first speculated in this vein. "What seems to be

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 183.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 184.

⁴⁹From preface of 1534 New Testament, p. 4. Quoted by Clebsch, ibid., pp. 192-93.

⁵⁰Clebsch, op. cit., p. 203.

emerging is an account of Puritanism in which the heritage from medieval English thought and life is the controlling element. Puritanism was indigenous, not exotic, to England."⁵¹ "The covenant or federal theology was only an intellectual formulation into which the older English piety, practice and preaching was fitted."⁵²

The second reason for Tyndale's crucial importance for subsequent Puritanism is not generally recognized. This is the far-reaching influence of his Scriptural translations, especially his New Testament. Clebsch observes that "the theological context set by the marginal notes, and most pointedly by the preface, continued for many years to provide the matrix in which Englishmen understood the New Testament."⁵³ Moreover, Clebsch goes on to maintain that

the theological context in which "testament" means "contract," binding equally upon God as party of the first part and man as party of the second part, remained that in which the English Bible was read long after other translators and revisers superseded Tyndale's own work.⁵⁴

He notes that Coverdale followed Tyndale's covenant theology, that the Matthew Bible of 1537 used many of his marginal notes, that the Great Bible of 1540-41 extended Tyndale's legalistic heritage, and that his text has remained the basis for English translations right up to and including the Revised Standard Version of 1946-52.⁵⁵

⁵¹Trinterud, op. cit., p. 37.

⁵²Ibid., p. 50.

⁵³Clebsch, op. cit., p. 188.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 193.

⁵⁵Ibid., pp. 193-94.

The second decade of the English Reformation already saw in Tyndale the complete reversal of Luther's faith-theology into the more familiar pattern of works-theology, styled around the idea of a covenant as a contract; and this religion of piety came to exert a powerful and diffuse influence throughout English theology by means of the very Scripture itself. "Tyndale fashioned the spectacles through which generations of Englishmen read their Bibles. One lens, of theological legalism, made the New Testament look like the Old. The other lens, of religious moralism, made the Bible everyman's book of prudential ethics."⁵⁶ This primal thrust of piety is what forever distinguishes English covenant theology from its continental counterpart.

b. Eternal bargain according to Perkins.--Later English covenant theology might be characterized as the contract theory of Tyndale married to the Calvinistic predestinarianism of Beza. William Perkins might be said to have performed the wedding ceremony. McKee, who aimed his study at the period 1580-1643, could discover no particular school or clear-cut distinctions among those holding covenant ideas. He claims that it was such a broadly accepted concept that it never occasioned dispute.⁵⁷ By the same token he might also have discovered broad acceptance of the concept of piety.

Nevertheless, there was a theological struggle in England which is related to the final shape of the covenant

⁵⁶Ibid., p. 197. ⁵⁷McKee, op. cit., pp. 38-40.

theology. Trinterud bills it as the struggle between Geneva and the Rhineland, which is partly true. It is seen more vividly according to Hall's portrayal of Calvin against the Calvinists. Hall considers that Beza and Perkins managed the fundamental distortion of Calvin's theology that became known as Calvinism.⁵⁸ Just as this systematizing of theology into a predestinarian determinism influenced the shape of covenant theology on the continent, so also it affected the direction of the English development. Both Trinterud and Hall claim that Calvin himself exercised very little influence on the course of the English Reformation. However, Hall goes on to say that, in the form of Beza's distorted Calvinism, Calvin was a powerful force in English theology. Hall produces a variety of evidence from the period in support of this distinction between the real Calvin and the image of Calvin according to the English Calvinists.⁵⁹ He even appears to suggest that pre-Laudian Anglicans were nearer to Calvin than the Beza-influenced Puritans.⁶⁰

William Perkins fits in as the key figure in the shaping of later English covenant theology,⁶¹ because he was the man who joined Beza-type Calvinism with the covenant ideology. His influential Armilla Aurea was published in 1590. Tyndale's covenant theology had contained an incipient

⁵⁸Hall, op. cit., p. 26. Hall also mentions Zanchius of Heidelberg (ibid., p. 25).

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 33-36. ⁶⁰Ibid., p. 35.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 28-30. Miller also sees Perkins as the real founder of this Puritan covenant theology; cf. The New England Mind: Seventeenth Century, p. 374; and The New England Mind: From Colony to Province, p. 55.

dualism with respect to the obedient and the disobedient, but this dualism had not been linked with a scheme of double predestination. As a matter of fact, Tyndale's legalistic piety was essentially inimical to a strict predestinarianism. Perkins performs the theological marvel of welding the Calvinistic predestination scheme together with the ancient English piety expressed in the contract theory. Hall observes that Perkins was not only acquainted with the works of Beza and Zanchius, but he translated and appended to his own works something from each of them. His moralistic concern is demonstrated in his book, The Whole Treatise of the Cases of Conscience, which began a tradition of casuistry in English Puritanism. Hall points to The Christian Warfare in which Perkins deals with the pietistic view of grace along with an involved treatment of decrees and double predestination. "What Calvin had described as a profound mystery, a labyrinth, to be avoided in ordinary pastoral oversight, Perkins has made into a common place of the religious life."⁶²

The theological system, then, of which Perkins was the chief architect, was built upon the twin principles of election and piety. Grace served as the mediating concept, and the eternal bargain of Father and Son was the founding event. The bargain feature of the divine covenant meant that atonement would apply only to the elect who had been

⁶²Ibid., p. 30.

agreed upon. On the one hand, it lent a strong support to the subjective assurance of the believer since God was bound by the bargain to produce the salvation agreed upon. On the other hand, it unnerved the individual man since there was the ultimate possibility that he might not be one of those bargained for. At this point the contract aspect inherited from Tyndale proved helpful. God's sovereignty was not completely inscrutable and capricious. He enters into covenants, which, McKee points out, is a more rational and dependable approach than a sheer election.⁶³ McKee cites Perkins in support of the rationale that there can be complete predestination at the same time that men must endeavor and make diligent use of the means which God has ordained.⁶⁴ McKee suggests that the doctrine of predestination subsequently receded into the theological background, while the covenant idea took the forefront as the means of expressing the sovereignty of God in the whole matter of salvation in a more rational and acceptable mode of thought.⁶⁵

Jerald Brauer has caught something of the systematic significance of this covenant scheme.

In one respect Covenant Theology was an ideal theological structure to bear the Puritan religiousness. It contained within it the possibility of stressing both the emotional and the rational, the

⁶³McKee, op. cit., p. 94.

⁶⁴William Perkins, Workes, (London, 1608-1618), I, 144.

⁶⁵McKee, op. cit., p. 145.

subjective and the objective. It provided Puritanism with an intellectual framework that managed to hold in tension those two sides of the movement that constantly threatened to separate and finally did--covenant theology or no!

The objective was preserved in the structuring of God's initiative in a definite form, but the subjective was protected in that man had to enter this relationship personally through an experience of forgiveness and faith.⁶⁶

Indeed, the system served well. Perkins' pupil, William Ames, the apostle of Ramist method, polished its systematic form.⁶⁷ Prominent Puritan preachers like Richard Sibbes and John Preston forged it into a compelling, evangelistic style. The Westminster divines willed it to posterity as the structural framework of their historic Confession. John Ball in 1645 gave us its classic portrait in A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace. It became John Owen's lot to courageously hold together this system at the moment when its inherent tensions had sundered under the pressure of historical events.

Certain points of stress in the system deserve mention. One of the chief of these can be seen in the issue of man's natural ability to enter into a covenant. Perry Miller has given sharp expression to the inherent difficulty.

By putting the relationship between God and man into contractual terms, they found themselves blessed with the corollary that the terms could be known in advance.

⁶⁶Brauer, op. cit., p. 104.

⁶⁷While Ames mingled with continental covenant theologians, we see his heritage more strictly through Perkins. Ames had the characteristically English orientation toward pragmatism in terms of Puritan piety. Whereas the continental development moved toward what Barth called historicism, the English development tended to psychologize theology.

If a Sovereign proposes conditions, there must be a moment in time, however infinitesimal, between absolute depravity and concluding the bond. If election be a flash of lightning which strikes without warning, men cannot place themselves in its path, nor cultivate anticipatory attitudes, but when it comes as chance to take up a contract, they must first of all learn what is to be contracted. By treating with men through negotiation, the Almighty seeks "that we might know what to expect from God, and upon what termes."⁶⁸

Contractual theology thus conditions and qualifies the divine electing will. The ravages of sin have not wiped out all human understanding and initiative. McKee notes this paradox of the depraved man having yet freedom and ability to enter into a covenant, and he points to the Puritan reliance upon a vestige of reason which has somehow survived the fall.⁶⁹ This natural knowledge of God which is valid both prior to and outside of the covenant relation is familiar to us as the main feature of our second chapter.

Such contractual theology may have virtually repudiated pristine Calvinist theology--at least on the point of man's total depravity--but it proved very useful in avoiding the extremes of Arminianism and antinomianism. Election and sovereign grace could be invoked against the Arminians in order to deny any prideful freedom to man in the affair of salvation; and the necessity of the dutiful

⁶⁸Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province, p. 55.

⁶⁹McKee, op. cit., pp. 155-56.

exercise of piety and human responsibility could be emphasized in the face of the antinomians.⁷⁰

The covenant ideology required belief in the natural ability to enter into covenants. This ideology along with its basic premise of natural contracting ability was such an unchallenged conception that it even supported the popular belief in witches. Perry Miller has made this clear in his analysis of the witch trials on the New England scene. A witch's covenant was a covenant in reverse, but very much a covenant. It was based on the same rationale as the covenant of grace, which was a natural ability to contract covenants.⁷¹

The gap in the covenant system between sovereign election and human contracting was characteristically filled by the Holy Spirit. Via pneumatology the human activity of entering into covenants could also be seen as a result of divine electing activity. William Ames, for example, can say "that truly Christian Faith which hath place in the understanding doth alwayes leane upon a Divine testimony, as it is Divine: yet this testimony cannot be received without a pious

⁷⁰Miller gives us a perceptive account of the theological crisis in New England over the antinomianism of Anne Hutchinson. Her appeal to John Cotton was an appeal to a doctrine of Unconditional election. Thomas Hooker and Thomas Shepard understood the magnitude of the threat she represented to their whole theological system and saw to it that the movement was crushed. It was crushed simply because she denied a period of preparation as part of conversion--because she denied the contractual, natural, pious, human focus of covenant theology. The New England Mind: From Colony to Province, pp. 57-60.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 251.

affection of the will towards God."⁷² This duality is neatly explained as a matter of perspective. With relation to God it is objective revelation. With relation to the believer it is a subjective act of believing. Pneumatology spans the two.

Hence, the last resolution of Faith as it sets forth a thing to be believed, is into the authority of God, or Divine revelation. . . . As the last resolution of it as it notes the act of believing, is into the operation, and inward perswasion of the Holy Spirit.⁷³

Pneumatology tied together the conflicting themes of the covenant theology under the rubric of application. What was applied was grace. Grace was what had been procured by Christ. The effect of such a systematic understanding of salvation was an enhancement of the dynamic element of pneumatology and a neglect of what was the static element of christology. William Haller in The Rise of Puritanism notes the lack of emphasis by the Puritans on the atonement,⁷⁴ and observes that the psychological drama of election in the present moment stole the show from the long ago atonement in Christ.⁷⁵ It is this relationship of pneumatology to the person and work of Jesus Christ in the context of the covenant which we intend to examine in John Owen. It will be of interest

⁷²William Ames, The Marrow of Sacred Divinity, etc., (Printed by Edward Griffin for Henry Overton in Popes-Head-ally next Lumberd-Streete: London, 1642), p. 5.

⁷³Ibid., p. 6.

⁷⁴William Haller, The Rise of Puritanism, (Columbia University Press: New York, 1938), p. 150; cf. McKee, op. cit., p. 171.

⁷⁵Haller, op. cit., p. 192.

to see whether his pneumatology is able to circumvent or transcend what have appeared from our preliminary review of covenant theology to be inherent conflicts in the system--namely, the divine dualism of mercy and justice, the concern for present human involvement in the covenant although it was originally and properly a covenant without man (between Father and Son), and the simultaneous stress on both sovereign divine election and natural human ability to contract covenants. Because we see these central issues of covenant thought as crucially revolving around the relation of pneumatology to the person and work of Christ, we expect our study of Owen at this point to offer some fundamental conclusions concerning the nature of covenant theology--at least, in its English tradition.

B. Covenant Theology according
to John Owen

John Owen did not write any treatises on the covenant as such. It was rather the systematic theme which served as the background and chief presupposition for all his writings. It informed his entire theological approach. His covenant thought was not notably novel or controversial. It was solidly based on the fruits of a half-century (since Perkins) of theological development. What we find, therefore, is the standard outline of the two covenants. John Owen, however--as probably the most theologically sophisticated Puritan of the age--pushed the covenant theology into ever greater

subtleties. This may have answered the more obvious disputes of the moment, but it only manifested more clearly the deeper difficulties in the system. We see this happening when Owen's two covenants split into four.

1. The two covenants.

a. The covenant of works.--The covenant of works is the first, or old, covenant. It was made with Adam at creation. Admittedly, this original covenant is not spoken of in the Scriptures as a covenant, which was a serious defect for the whole covenant theology in that era of the authority of the literal Scripture. Of course, this defect had been circumvented by learned divines for several generations, and so it troubled John Owen very little to fall back on the accepted explanation that this original covenant, though undesignated as such, nevertheless "contained the express nature of a covenant; for it was the agreement of God and man concerning obedience and disobedience, rewards and punishments. Where there is a law concerning these things, and an agreement upon it by all parties concerned, there is a formal covenant."⁷⁶ This helpful explanation comes from Owen's incredible, six-volume exposition on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Chapter eight of that epistle confronts him with the task of explaining the reference there to the two covenants. He begins by giving an explicit description of the covenant of works.

⁷⁶Owen, Works, XXIII, 60.

In the very heart of the covenant of works is the law, which

proceeded from, and was a consequent of the nature of God and man, with their mutual relation unto one another. God being considered as the creator, governor, and benefactor of man; and man as an intellectual creature, capable of moral obedience; this law was necessary, and is eternally indispensable.⁷⁷

This law contained definite commands which were

all suited unto the principles of the nature of man created by God, and in the regular acting whereof consisted his perfection. God in the first covenant required nothing of man, prescribed nothing unto him, but what there was a principle for the doing and accomplishing of it ingrafted and implanted on his nature, which rendered all those commands equal, holy, and good; for what need any man complain of that which requires nothing of him but what he is from his own frame and principles inclined unto?⁷⁸

Not only were these commands agreeable to man, but he was also given the necessary ability to obey them.⁷⁹ On God's part, the commands were related to a system of rewards and punishments. If man obeyed, God would reward him. If he disobeyed, God would punish him. In either case, the glory of God would be preserved and manifested.⁸⁰

The promise of reward and the threat of punishment corresponded to the grace and justice of God which were thus bound into the covenant system.⁸¹ Like any complete and formal covenant, these aspects of grace and justice were expressed in the form of visible signs. The promise

⁷⁷Ibid.

⁷⁸Owen, Works, VI, 472.

⁷⁹Ibid., pp. 472-73.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 473.

⁸¹Owen, Works, XXIII, 60.

containing grace was signified by the tree of life, and the threat containing justice was signified by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁸² By these conditions and signs "did God establish the original law of creation as a covenant, gave it the nature of a covenant."⁸³ Man completed the two-sided compact by accepting both the law "by the innate principles of light and obedience concreated with his nature,"⁸⁴ and also the external signs of the covenant. "So was it established as a covenant between God and man, without the interposition of any mediator."⁸⁵ This first covenant was an immediate covenant.

The covenant of works is still in effect for the non-elect.⁸⁶ For the elect it has been perfectly fulfilled by Jesus Christ. No one else has fulfilled the covenant of works, and the fall of Adam marked man's failure to keep this covenant. The penalty of this first covenant was death. This was its defect, says Owen,⁸⁷ because death was final and it had no provision for forgiveness. Therefore, God resolved after the fall to make a new covenant which would correct the defect of the original. The new covenant retained all of the terms of the first covenant, but made above and beyond them a provision for forgiveness.⁸⁸

The covenant of works expresses the normative relation between God and man--normative, because it reflects the

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Ibid.

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 61.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., pp. 61-62.

⁸⁷Owen, Works, VI, 474.

⁸⁸Ibid.

very nature of our createdness. It is not cast aside, but remains definitive for the new covenant in Christ--in Christ who fulfilled the first covenant. In this very first covenant are found the primary characteristics of a duality in God--expressed in the antithetical qualities of mercy and wrath--and of a legal relation between God and man--expressed in a system of reward and punishment. Finally, if the question is pushed, man is a non-participant in the covenant, since it is made simultaneously with, and is established by, his creation--which was clearly not an act of his own.

Owen's covenant-of-works concept comes into rough waters as he faces the task of matching his system to the Scriptural record. As a matter of fact, the difficulties are so great as to be insurmountable for lesser men, but Owen's immense powers of rationalization produce an almost plausible harmonization of contradictory evidence. The eighth chapter of Hebrews does indeed speak of two covenants; but, alas! the first covenant is clearly identified by context as the Mosaic covenant at Sinai.

Owen's explanation is labyrinthine. He first asserts that the covenant at Sinai was clearly not identical with the original covenant of works. The end result of that first covenant was death only; but the covenant at Sinai was made under the promise of the covenant of grace. The dilemma was sharpened because Owen, according to the most widely accepted scheme of covenant theology, considered the promise of the

covenant of grace to have been given already to Abraham, and even to Noah, and actually to Adam himself after the fall.⁸⁹ He could not connect the covenant at Sinai with the covenant of works without obliterating, or at least confusing, the promise of grace already given. On the other hand, he could not connect the covenant at Sinai with the covenant of grace because of the explicit testimony of Hebrews in which these two covenants are contrasted.

The dilemma faced by Owen's system arises from the duality of the covenant theology. The covenant scheme portrayed the covenant of works and the covenant of grace as antithetical; "for these two, grace and works, do divide the ways of our relation unto God, being diametrically opposite, and every way inconsistent."⁹⁰ Indeed, grace and works may be opposing concepts; but to frame the whole of God's relation to man in such an antithetical scheme is another matter. It necessarily imposes upon the Scriptural evidence a view of God which is radically ambivalent. God himself is of two minds. Now, in the dilemma facing Owen, the Scriptural evidence itself appears to be rising up in testimony against the impropriety of the system.

What Owen offers at this point is a rather miserable construct. He attempts to present the covenant at Sinai as an intermediate covenant. He explains that the text of Hebrews does not refer to the new covenant "absolutely,"

⁸⁹Owen, Works, XIX, 79.

⁹⁰Owen, Works, XXIII, 63.

because as such it is naturally consistent with the covenant of grace.⁹¹ Rather, the text is referring to the new covenant only in the sense of its being for the first time formally "established."⁹² Formerly--as at Sinai--it had only been a promise, which was not a fully completed covenant.⁹³ In particular, the ceremonial forms of worship which were connected with the covenant at Sinai are explained as having no integral relation to the new covenant.⁹⁴ These rites had not belonged to the promise. They had been a form of bondage. Now that the new covenant was established, the old covenant as the covenant at Sinai was annulled, since as a promise it was no longer necessary, and as an institutional form of worship it was to be cast off.⁹⁵ The established new covenant brought with it in its establishment its own form of institution and worship.⁹⁶ Therefore, Owen has to say simultaneously that the ceremonies of the Sinai covenant did not conflict with the new covenant as a promise, and that they did conflict with it when it was completed as an established covenant.⁹⁷ Finally, this interpretation is really claiming that Hebrews viii refers, not really to two distinct covenants, but only to two different administrations of the same covenant.⁹⁸

⁹¹Ibid., p. 64.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Ibid.

⁹⁷Ibid., p. 65.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 70.

John Owen, sophisticated theologian that he is, realizes that he has twisted the Scripture beyond all acceptable limits. There is something more in the sense of the Scripture, he confesses, than a reference merely to two different administrations of a single covenant.⁹⁹ Accordingly, he launches his exposition in a new direction. The covenant at Sinai did not replace the covenant of works, but it did give it a new and full expression in the decalogue.¹⁰⁰ In another place, he speaks of the Mosaic covenant as "a solemn revival and representation of the first covenant and its sanction."¹⁰¹ This covenant at Sinai, "in the preceptive part of it, renewed the commands of the covenant of works, and that on their original terms."¹⁰² Nevertheless, it did not in any way affect the promise already given concerning the covenant of grace.¹⁰³

This is John Owen's solution for making the Scriptural evidence fit his system. His intermediate covenant is both a revival of the covenant of works and a guide toward the covenant of grace.¹⁰⁴ It is both of them and neither of them. It is somewhere in between these terrible opposites. It is intermediate. It reflects God's movement from justice to mercy.¹⁰⁵ While it controls sin by the law, it also prepares for grace by the law.¹⁰⁶ Between these two eternal poles of

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 76.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 77.

¹⁰¹Owen, Works, VI, 471.

¹⁰²Owen, Works, XXIII, 89.

¹⁰³Ibid., p. 78.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 80.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 81.

God's attitude toward us, this intermediate covenant is hardly a covenant at all; for "as unto what it had of its own, it was confined unto things temporal. Believers were saved under it, but not by virtue of it. Sinners perished eternally under it, but by the curse of the original law of works."¹⁰⁷

John Owen was as honest and sincere a scholar as his theological presuppositions would allow him to be; but he could not perceive what his own exposition of the intermediate covenant suggested--that the duality of the covenant system was insupportable.

b. The covenant of grace.--The covenant of grace is the new covenant. Covenant theologians had long featured this new covenant as a transaction between the divine Father and Son. This general conception of an eternal bargain dominated Owen's earliest treatments of the covenant of grace, as seen in The Death of Death in the Death of Christ (1648) and Vindiciae Evangelicae, etc. (1655). Nevertheless, even in these early efforts there is evidence of the tension in the scheme which later caused Owen to divide the new covenant into two distinct covenants, both of which retained the essential character of a contract.

The general nature of the new covenant is determined by its infralapsarian character. While taking its basic definition from the first covenant, it necessarily has certain differences which are meant to resolve the difficulties of the

¹⁰⁷Ibid., pp. 85-86.

old covenant. It must not be based on our own works of obedience. Instead, it has a mediator, and for that reason it is a covenant of grace.¹⁰⁸ The new covenant is a mediated covenant.

Of course, the mediated covenant is nevertheless a covenant, and as a covenant it must have the fundamental nature of a contract. "Distinct persons are required unto a covenant, for it is a mutual compact."¹⁰⁹ To be truly mutual, it must be "voluntary and of choice upon the election of the terms convented about."¹¹⁰

The terms of such a covenant are clearly laid down by Owen.¹¹¹ The two persons must agree voluntarily to the following sequence. (1) One person requires the other person to do a certain thing. (2) The first person promises a reward for the doing of this thing. (3) The first person promises support for the second person in doing the thing. (4) The second person agrees to do the thing, and does it. (5) The second person asks for the reward. (6) The first person approves the performance of the task and grants the reward. These things, says Owen, are all "to be found in the compact between the Father and the Son whereof we speak."¹¹² The Father proposes the work and the Son undertakes it, with its purpose being that of "bringing sons unto God."¹¹³

¹⁰⁸Owen, Works, V, 276.

¹⁰⁹Owen, Works, XIX, 82.

¹¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹¹Owen, Works, XII, 498-99.

¹¹²Ibid., p. 499.

¹¹³Owen, Works, X, 168-71.

The foregoing view of the new covenant poses two problems. Is God dualistic enough to make covenants within himself? Can a covenant in which man has no part have any validity for him? Owen is not unaware of these difficulties. In particular, he is conscious of the first and attempts to answer it. The Father and Son are distinct persons, he asserts, and are consequently able to engage in federal transactions.¹¹⁴ Can it be that there are two opposing wills in God, he asks.

This difficulty may be solved from what hath been already declared; for such is the distinction of the persons in the unity of the divine essence, as that they act in natural and essential acts reciprocally one towards another,--namely, in understanding, love, and the like; they know and mutually love each other. And as they subsist distinctly, so they also act distinctly in those works which are of external operation. And whereas all these acts and operations, whether reciprocal or external, are either with a will or from a freedom of will and choice, the will of God in each person, as to the peculiar acts ascribed unto him, is his will therein peculiarly and eminently, though not exclusively to the other persons, by reason of their mutual in-being. The will of God as to the peculiar actings of the Father in this matter is the will of the Father, and the will of God with regard unto the peculiar actings of the Son is the will of the Son; not by a distinction of sundry wills, but by the distinct application of the same will unto its distinct acts in the persons of the Father and the Son. And in this respect the covenant whereof we treat differeth from a pure decree; for from these distinct actings of the will of God in the Father and the Son there doth arise a new habitude or relation, which is not natural or necessary unto them, but freely taken on them.¹¹⁵

Trinitarian thought may allow men to speak of the Father's will and the Son's will, but it is another matter when these two wills are portrayed as such distinct and opposing entities

¹¹⁴Owen, Works, XIX, 77, 84.

¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 87-88.

that their mutuality must be grounded in a contract. If God's will is essentially the same in Father and Son, then there is no real basis for a covenant. Owen himself, speaking later about the true duality of God and man in the mediator, Jesus Christ, admits that God, being singular, cannot covenant with himself.

That unto the office of a mediator it is required that there be different persons concerned in the covenant, and that by their own wills; as it must be in every compact, of what sort soever. So saith our apostle, "A mediator is not of one, but God is one," Gal. iii. 20; that is, if there were none but God concerned in this matter, as it is in an absolute promise or sovereign precept, there would be no need of, no place for a mediator, such a mediator as Christ is. Wherefore our consent in and unto the covenant is required in the very notion of a mediator.¹¹⁶

Owen's refusal to designate the will of God in this matter as a decree is a further indication of the incompatibility between the contract concept and the nature of God. Owen attempts to style this covenant as more than a decree because of its contingency.

Thus, though this covenant be eternal, and the object of it be that which might not have been, and so it hath the nature of the residue of God's decrees in these regards, yet because of this distinct acting of the will of the Father and the will of the Son with regard to each other, it is more than a decree, and hath the proper nature of a covenant or compact. Hence, from the moment of it (I speak not of time), there is a new habitude of will in the Father and Son towards each other that is not in them essentially; I call it new, as being in God freely, not naturally.¹¹⁷

In fact, this covenant is much less than a decree. In the first place, it implies that grace is not natural to God.

¹¹⁶Owen, Works, XXIII, 55.

¹¹⁷Owen, Works, XII, 497.

Secondly, we do not know what the will of God essentially is beyond and behind the ambivalence expressed in the covenant agreement.¹¹⁸ We must assume, however, that it is some will other than a straightforwardly gracious one.

The polarity between the two persons in the covenant is emphasized by Owen's description of it as a transaction concerning a matter of indebtedness. The Son received to himself the indebtedness of sinful men.

He made himself surety of the covenant, and so was to pay what he never took. He voluntarily engaged himself into this sponson; but when he had so done, he was legally subject to all that attended it,--when he had put his name into the obligation, he became responsible for the whole debt.¹¹⁹

After the Son had suffered the penalty and accomplished the covenant conditions, the indebtedness was reversed. Now, the Son was to "demand and lay claim to the promises made."¹²⁰ Classical atonement theory might allow such terminology if the indebtedness were clearly predicated of the relation between God and man; but the indebtedness in this case is not genuinely related to a mediatorial role in which man is fully included,¹²¹ with the result that the indebtedness is alternately owed by God to God.

¹¹⁸These are also two of the objections Barth raises against Cocceius (Supra, p. 156).

¹¹⁹Owen, Works, XII, 505.

¹²⁰Ibid.

¹²¹In the two works mentioned as early treatments Owen continually confuses the Father with God and the Son with Christ; cf. Works, X, 168, 171, 176; XII, 497, 501, 504, 505. Later, when the twofold new covenant has evolved in his thought, he speaks with more clarity in this respect, but our charge still remains valid as will be seen in our analysis of the divided covenant.

Because the covenant transaction is essentially viewed as a debt relation between Father and Son, the reconciliation that takes place is between God and God and not between God and man. The effect of the blood of Christ which is paid as a price to God is to reconcile God's love to God's justice.¹²² Owen sincerely tries to put the concept of reconciliation in terms of the enmity between God and man which God has removed by reconciling us to him in Christ.

It is not said anywhere expressly that God is reconciled to us, but that we are reconciled to God; and the sole reason thereof is, because he is the party offended, and we are the parties offending. Now, the party offending is always said to be reconciled to the party offended, and not on the contrary.¹²³

Regrettably, the duality of God inherent in his covenant theology persists in dominating his perspective, and he proceeds to describe how God is the one reconciled. Thus, he amazingly contradicts himself within the same breath, as in the following statement. "Being the parties offending, we are said to be reconciled to God when his anger is turned away and we are admitted into his favour."¹²⁴ Truly, for Owen, it is God's anger which is reconciled. "By Christ his anger is pacified, his justice satisfied, and himself appeased or reconciled to us."¹²⁵ The wrath of God the Father is placated by the grace of God the Son according to the terms of the eternal covenant. Although God may still be essentially wrathful, he is bound by the covenant terms.

¹²²Owen, Works, XII, 522-23.

¹²³Ibid., p. 535.

¹²⁴Ibid.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 537.

Indeed, God is essentially wrathful for this wrath of his is what must be reconciled; yet God is not totally wrathful, or he would not have proposed the covenant at all. However, wrath is a vital factor in the system of predestination, since God's wrath continues to express its potency toward all those who are not included in the covenant terms--the non-elect.

It is the necessity of a connection with man that brings Owen to redraft the new covenant format. In a backhanded way he acknowledges that the covenant is not really a covenant without man. It is backhanded because it occurs in the course of his defense of the ability of the Father and Son to enter into a covenant as distinct persons;

for although it should seem that because they [the mutual agreement of Father and Son] are single acts of the same divine understanding and will, they cannot be properly federal, yet because those properties of the divine nature are acted distinctly in the distinct persons, they have in them the nature of a covenant. Besides, there is in them a supposition of the susception of our human nature into personal union with the Son.¹²⁶

In order to make this participation of man in the new covenant more than suppositional, Owen divides it into two separate covenants. This innovation appears in his work on Hebrews (this part published in 1674) and was given more precise treatment in Justification by Faith (1677).

Owen differentiates the two covenants according to the parties involved. "We must distinguish between the

¹²⁶Owen, Works, XIX, 77.

covenant that God made with men concerning Christ, and the covenant that he made with his Son concerning men."¹²⁷

It is evident by his emphasis on the middle terms of men and Christ that he does not intend an absolute distinction. He hints at the connection without being overly specific.

Man having utterly lost himself by sin, coming short thereby of the glory of God, and being made obnoxious unto everlasting destruction, the prevision whereof was in order of nature antecedent unto this covenant, as hath been declared, the Father and Son do enter into a holy mutual agreement concerning the recovery and salvation of the elect in a way of grace. This we place as the matter of this covenant, the thing contracted and agreed about. The distinction of the parts of it into persons and things, the order and respect in it of one thing unto another, are not of our present consideration; the explanation of them belongs unto the covenant of grace which God is pleased to enter into with believers by Jesus Christ. But this was that in general that was to be disposed of unto the mutual complacency and satisfaction of Father and Son.¹²⁸

The covenant with men in Christ is an extension and ultimate effect of the covenant between Father and Son. Because man's sin according to the covenant of works was the original object which stimulated the new covenant, it must eventually have its application there--in man. The Father-Son covenant takes on an intermediate quality between the two covenants of God with man--much as the covenant at Sinai proved to be an intermediate covenant between works and grace.

The covenant between the Father and Son is named the covenant of the mediator by Owen.¹²⁹ Its primary aim was the

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 78. Notice that his confusion of God with the Father persists.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 90.

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 78.

provision of a mediator for the subsequent covenant with men in Christ which he designated the covenant of grace. The intermediate stage of the first named is reflected by the attribution of the traditional name for the new covenant to this second relationship between God and men in Christ. Intermediate though the covenant of the mediator may be, it is the ground of the covenant of grace. The really crucial transaction is that between Father and Son and not that between God and man in the death of Christ. To ascribe the ground of the covenant to the atonement event "is to overthrow the whole freedom of eternal grace and love. Neither can any thing that is absolutely eternal, as is this decree and counsel of God, be the effect of, or procured by, any thing that is external and temporal."¹³⁰ Owen reacts so sharply in clinging to the priority of the covenant of the mediator because it is this which gives to the whole the character of a contract. "Who can conceive that Christ by his death should procure the agreement between God and him that he should die?"¹³¹ The contract must be preserved in the eternal sphere, where the duality in God must first be dealt with.

In repudiating the historical dimension as the locus of covenant-making, Owen thrusts man out of the real orbit of the covenant conditions. This explains his bifocal portrayal of Christ's role. One would suppose that Christ was the primary connecting link between the two covenants. "But in the covenant of the mediator, Christ stands alone

¹³⁰Owen, Works, V, 191.

¹³¹Ibid.

for himself, and undertakes for himself alone, and not as the representative of the church; but this he is in the covenant of grace."¹³² Because Christ on his own--being unconnected with us, we may wonder whither his humanity has gone--reconciles the justice and mercy (Father and Son) of God, he has subsequently procured grace.¹³³ The covenant of grace is concerned only with this latter phase of the procurement of grace. Its precondition is not the identification of men with Christ in the event of atonement, but the fulfilled agreement of Father with Son. "Hence, although he procured not the covenant for us by his death, yet he was, in his person, mediation, life, and death, the only cause and means whereby the whole grace of the covenant is made effectual unto us."¹³⁴

The covenant of grace is rightly named. Grace is its controlling concept--not grace as a personal relationship, but as a metaphysical quantity. What Christ procured for believers was "the Holy Spirit, and all needful supplies of grace."¹³⁵ Christ does not have a free hand in this covenant. He is a static figure. The extent of the covenant of grace is fixed by the terms of the covenant between the Father and Son.¹³⁶ It refers exclusively to the elect. The only dynamic factor is the actual application of this grace, and this is attributed to the Holy Spirit. Any union of Christ with believers must center in pneumatology.¹³⁷

¹³²Ibid. ¹³³Ibid. ¹³⁴Ibid., p. 193.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 188. ¹³⁶Ibid., pp. 192-93. ¹³⁷Ibid., p. 196.

2. The covenant mediator.

As we examine the nature of our union with Christ in the theology of John Owen, there is a special value in first orienting ourselves according to the position of John Calvin. He is the great progenitor whence came the elements of the predestination system of salvation, though not the system itself. His doctrine of the believer's union with Christ is not only classical, but it stands free of the covenant theology schema--predating it.

We have already been referred by Dowey to the union with Christ as the personal, dynamic dimension in which Calvin understands the meaning of faith.¹³⁸ This union is absolutely crucial for Christian faith, for "as long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value for us."¹³⁹ Two things are decisive for Calvin about this union--the body of Christ and the Holy Spirit. "All that he possesses is nothing to us until we grow into one body with him," and "the Holy Spirit is the bond by which Christ effectually unites us to himself."¹⁴⁰

The real presence of Christ for Calvin is a bodily presence, and the ascension is the decisive event conditioning this presence--the body of Christ is now at the right hand of God.¹⁴¹ Calvin is deeply concerned to maintain the real

¹³⁸Supra, p. 42.

¹³⁹Calvin, Institutes, III, i. 1.

¹⁴⁰Ibid.

¹⁴¹Ibid., IV, xvii, 18, 27.

humanity of the risen and ascended Christ. Flesh is flesh and not spirit, and the body of Christ in heaven is flesh.¹⁴² This is the ground of our hope--that this very flesh of ours has been actually raised up in Christ.¹⁴³

It is the humanity of Christ which is the particular ground of our connection with him. "Since he entered heaven in our flesh, as if in our name, it follows, as the apostle says, that in a sense we already 'sit with God in the heavenly places in him' (Eph. 2:6), so that we do not await heaven with a bare hope, but in our Head already possess it."¹⁴⁴ Particularly against Osiander, Calvin insists on the very flesh of Christ as the foundation of our faith. "Paul," he claims, "has established the source of righteousness in the flesh of Christ alone."¹⁴⁵ Without the flesh we have only a half-Christ, which would be of no avail to us since "the matter both of righteousness and of salvation resides in the flesh."¹⁴⁶

Calvin speaks of our union with Christ as a mystical union which is an engrafting into his body.

That joining together of Head and members, that indwelling of Christ in our hearts--in short, that mystical union--are accorded by us the highest degree of importance, so that Christ, having been made ours, makes us sharers with him in the gifts with which he has been endowed. We do not, therefore, contemplate him outside ourselves from afar in order that his righteousness may be imputed to us but

¹⁴²Ibid., IV, xvii, 24.

¹⁴³Ibid., IV, xvii, 29.

¹⁴⁴Ibid., II, xvi, 16.

¹⁴⁵Ibid., III, xi, 9.

¹⁴⁶Ibid.

because we put on Christ and are engrafted into his body--
in short, because he deigns to make us one with him.¹⁴⁷

While this union has the dimension of fellowship with Christ, it is based on more of a fundamental, substantial bond, which the term engrafting and the concept of flesh both imply. When he considers what it is to be members of Christ's body he speaks of "that sacred wedlock through which we are made flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone (Eph. 5:30), and thus one with him."¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the unity of Christ with the believer does not mean complete identity. "Für ihn sagt der Glaubende nicht wie der Mystiker: 'Ich bin du', sondern: 'Ich bin dein'."¹⁴⁹ It is not a unity which subsists in a common substance, but which depends entirely on the Holy Spirit. Thus, immediately after his reference to the sacred wedlock, he says, "But he unites himself to us by the Spirit alone."¹⁵⁰ However, the activity of the Holy Spirit is fully defined by that controlling concept of the union with Christ. All that the Spirit does is understood under the heading of the uniting of believers with Christ, and that union is with his body. Christ's body may be in heaven, but through the Spirit's "incomprehensible power . . . we come to partake of Christ's flesh and blood" in the Lord's Supper.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷Ibid., III, xi, 10. ¹⁴⁸Ibid., III, i, 3.

¹⁴⁹Krusche, op. cit., p. 269.

¹⁵⁰Calvin, Institutes, III, i, 3.

¹⁵¹Ibid., IV, xvii, 33.

Even though it seems unbelievable that Christ's flesh, separated from us by such great distance, penetrates to us, so that it becomes our food, let us remember how far the secret power of the Holy Spirit towers above all our senses, and how foolish it is to wish to measure his immeasurableness by our measure. What, then, our mind does not comprehend, let faith conceive: that the Spirit truly unites things separated in space.¹⁵²

That the Holy Spirit represents Christ and his salvation to us does not mean for Calvin that Christ is absent, but that Christ truly represents himself and his salvation through the Holy Spirit.

For though he has taken his flesh away from us, and in the body has ascended into heaven, yet he sits at the right hand of the Father--that is, he reigns in the Father's power and majesty and glory. This Kingdom is neither bounded by location in space nor circumscribed by any limits. Thus Christ is not prevented from exerting his power wherever he pleases, in heaven and on earth. He shows his presence in power and strength, is always among his own people, and breathes his life upon them, and lives in them, sustaining them, strengthening, quickening, keeping them unharmed, as if he were present in the body. In short, he feeds his people with his own body, the communion of which he bestows upon them by the power of his Spirit.¹⁵³

Calvin's doctrine of the believer's union with Christ has both a prominent physical dimension and a pronounced pneumatological dimension. The former is the ground of the latter, but the latter makes the former effective to and in us. Faith is coincident with this union, and on the basis of the union with Christ one also becomes a participant in the fruits of salvation. The two decisive modes of considering the physical ground of our union with Christ are the incarnation and the exaltation;

¹⁵²Ibid., IV, xvii, 10.

¹⁵³Ibid., IV, xvii, 18.

and that we may have union with the exalted body of Christ, first depends on the union of human nature with the eternal Son in the incarnate Christ.

a. The Holy Spirit and the incarnate Christ.--These are the two main divisions Owen makes in his discussion of the Holy Spirit's relation to Christ--namely, that concerning the relation of the human nature of Christ to the eternal Son and that concerning the relation of believers to the exalted Christ. He begins by invoking his pneumatological principle that the Holy Spirit "is the immediate, peculiar, efficient cause of all external divine operations."¹⁵⁴ As the Spirit of the Son and the Father in their economic activity, he is as a matter of course the instrument by which the Son acts toward the human nature of Jesus in accomplishing the incarnation of the Christ.¹⁵⁵ This is, at first glance, a thoroughly traditional approach. However, Krusche reminds us that Calvin never attributed to the Holy Spirit a work of his own, but only the accomplishing of the work of the Father and the Son.¹⁵⁶ More explicit than that, however, is the filioque provision. Calvin, says Krusche, never allowed the Spirit to have an economic potency absolutely separate from the Christ, even in the Spirit's pre-incarnation activity.

Calvin unterscheidet also hinsichtlich der beiden Wirkweisen nicht zwischen dem Geiste Gottes und dem Geiste Christi, sondern zwischen dem Geist des ewigen

¹⁵⁴Owen, Works, III, 161.

¹⁵⁵Ibid., p. 162.

¹⁵⁶Krusche, op. cit., p. 152.

Sermo und dem Geist des Mittlers: es gibt zwei unterschiedliche Wirkkräfte (virtutes) des Sohnes Gottes; die eine zeigt sich im Weltenbau und im ordo naturae, die andere in der Erneuerung der gefallenen Natur.¹⁵⁷

Herein may lie a significant difference, for Owen by virtue of his pneumatological principle appears to separate the work of the Spirit from the work of the Son.

The crucial point of distinction comes most naturally at the moment of conception--the moment of beginning. "The framing, forming, and miraculous conception of the body of Christ in the womb of the blessed Virgin was the peculiar and especial work of the Holy Ghost."¹⁵⁸ As for the Son, he is separately involved in this event. To him is ascribed the "voluntary assumption" of the human nature thus formed by the Spirit.¹⁵⁹ The economic operation is the independent sphere of the Spirit's potency. He formed the body of Christ "by his omnipotent power."¹⁶⁰ What Owen envisions is two quite separate acts of Son and Spirit in the incarnation.

This act of the Holy Ghost, in forming of the body of Christ, differs from the act of the Son in assuming the human nature into personal union with himself: for this act of the Son was not a creating act, producing a being out of nothing, or making any thing by the same power to be what in its own nature it was not; but it was an ineffable act of love and wisdom, taking the nature so formed by the Holy Ghost, so prepared for him, to be his own in the instant of its formation, and thereby preventing the singular and individual subsistence of that nature in and by itself.¹⁶¹

What Owen describes for us as the union of the eternal Son with the human Jesus does not appear to be an immediately

¹⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 126-27. ¹⁵⁸Owen, Works, III, 162.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 163. ¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 164. ¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 165.

personal union. It is mediated by a third, relatively independent force--the Holy Spirit. Indeed, the traditional and Biblical view of the incarnation might genuinely include the expression of this union of the eternal Son with the human Jesus as a pneumatological union--thus expressing the ineffability of such a union of two natures in one person. For Owen, however, the union of God and man in Christ is not so much a directly personal and physical union of two natures in one person as it is a pneumatological union of the Spirit with the human Jesus.

This pneumatological union, lacking the objective ground which the classical view has in the personal-physical union of the Son of God with the son of Mary, operates on the metaphysical ground of the concept of quantitative grace. In the first place, the human nature of Christ was created without sin.

But this was not all; it was by the Holy Spirit positively endowed with all grace. And hereof it was afterward only capable of farther degrees as to actual exercise, but not of any new kind of grace. And this work of sanctification, or the original infusion of all grace into the human nature of Christ, was the immediate work of the Holy Spirit; which was necessary unto him: for let the natural faculties of the soul, the mind, will, and affections, be created pure, innocent, undefiled,--as they cannot be otherwise immediately created of God,--yet there is not enough to enable any rational creature to live to God; much less was it all that was in Jesus Christ. There is, moreover, required hereunto supernatural endowments of grace, superadded unto the natural faculties of our souls.¹⁶²

¹⁶²Ibid., pp. 168-69.

Such infusion of supernatural additives leaves us wondering what remains of the humanness of Owen's Christ. It certainly appears to have been bypassed, if not nullified in this pneumatological union.

Owen traces the character of this pneumatological union throughout the historical career of the one named Christ. The Holy Spirit carries on the work of grace through his childhood, baptism, temptation, ministry, sacrificial self-offering, death, and resurrection.¹⁶³ Owen's self-consistency of viewpoint is seldom more rigorously evident than in this conscientious portrayal of the completeness of the pneumatological union. What he has given us in this exhaustive account of the union of grace between the Holy Spirit and the human Christ (in which the eternal Son has dropped out of view) is the story of the incarnation of the Holy Spirit. He is the true mediator.

The definition of christology by this pneumatological union has some definite consequences. For one thing, its focus is subjective. The union which hinges on grace is located in the soul where the grace is infused. Because pneumatology is the subjective principle of classical christology, its substitution in Owen's christology for the divine aspect of the union results in a subjectivization of the whole incarnation. As a result, this incarnation is only an individual affair. There is no ontological connection between the humanity of Christ and our humanity. Thus, for

¹⁶³Ibid., pp. 169-82.

example, the resurrection does not have any more than an individual reference. Its only significance for us is that there is the future possibility of the Spirit performing the same work in us--presumably new individual incarnations of the Spirit. In accordance with this view, Owen represents Christ praying for men also to be made partakers of the Spirit, so that "by the work of the Spirit of God in themselves, renewing and quickening them, they might have an experience of that exceeding greatness of his power which he put forth in the Lord Christ when he raised him from the dead."¹⁶⁴

Owen does present the life of Christ as something more than the life of any other individual. Christ is the one designated in the covenant of the mediator, which is a reflection of that other, supposed union with the Son. Although that union with the Son is really non-existent in Owen's christology, nevertheless Christ as an individual does perform something unusual in his obedience and crucifixion. What he fulfills are the terms of the covenant, which consequently have only an individual reference. As an individual accomplishment the life and death of Christ makes atonement--an atonement which reconciles God. The efficacious force of the atonement depends on the union of the Spirit and the man Jesus so that he is seen as an unusual individual. As an individual man he makes a reconciling impact upon God.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 182.

God was so absolutely delighted and pleased with these high and glorious acts of grace and obedience in Jesus Christ that he smelled, as it were, a "savour of rest" towards mankind, or those for whom he offered himself, so that he would be angry with them no more, curse them no more, as it is said of the type of it in the sacrifice of Noah, Gen. viii. 20, 21. God was more pleased with the obedience of Christ than he was displeased with the sin and disobedience of Adam, Rom. v. 17-21. It was not, then, [by] the outward suffering of a violent and bloody death, which was inflicted on him by the most horrible wickedness that ever human nature brake forth into, that God was atoned, Acts ii. 23; nor yet was it merely his enduring the penalty of the law that was the means of our deliverance; but the voluntary giving up of himself to be a sacrifice in these holy acts of obedience was that upon which, in an especial manner, God was reconciled unto us.¹⁶⁵

Our criticism is directed not at the anthropomorphic description of God, for such language has a certain necessity and value in such a testimony. We are concerned that Christ is portrayed in the atonement as an individual over against God. This Christ has no objective participation in God himself, which he ought to have on the basis of the union with the eternal Son. That would seem to be because Owen's christology attributes to the Christ only a subjective participation in God on the basis of the union with the Holy Spirit.

The whole of our foregoing analysis of Owen is especially validated on this point about the atonement. As at the conception of Christ, so at the end of his life in this matter of his atoning death Owen radically separates the relation of the Son to Christ from the relation of the Holy Spirit to Christ. Owen actually debates whether Christ offered himself up to God through the Son or through the Spirit. He

¹⁶⁵Ibid., p. 180.

hesitates to deny the Son's role, but he comes down clearly in favor of the Spirit.¹⁶⁶

One further thing must be said about the uniqueness of the incarnate Christ for Owen. His obedience unto death not only reconciled God, it obtained merit. Because Christ has reconciled God only as an individual, there must be some principle whereby his reconciliation is able to be extended to others. This principle is merit, and it was an integral part of the covenant terms. Calvin, too, had spoken of Christ's merit, but he was careful to speak of it only as founded on God's mercy and never as autonomous in relation to that mercy.¹⁶⁷ The view of merit that Calvin scrupled against is the view Owen proposes. In so doing he perverts what he otherwise calls the obvious sense of Scripture in order to style everything according to the contract principle.

The apostle tells us, Rom. iv. 4, what merit is: it is such an adjunct of obedience as whereby "the reward is not reckoned of grace, but of debt." God having proposed unto Christ a law for obedience, with promises of such and such rewards upon condition of fulfilling the obedience required, he performing that obedience, the reward is reckoned to him of debt, or he righteously merited whatever was so promised to him. Though the compact was of grace, yet the reward is of debt. Look, then, whatever God promised Christ upon his undertaking to be a Saviour, that, upon the fulfilling of his will, he merited.¹⁶⁸

Merit is not essentially the grace of God, because God is not essentially gracious. He is only gracious within the

¹⁶⁶Ibid., pp. 176-77.

¹⁶⁷Calvin, Institutes, II, xvii, 1.

¹⁶⁸Owen, Works, XII, 508.

terms of the covenant. Merit is an indebtedness which can be contractually pleaded over against the essential wrath of God. Merit is a necessary component of a christology which is set in the context of a covenant theology, since that theology posits a conflicting duality between an unconditional wrathfulness and a conditional graciousness in the nature of God.

The merit of Christ is what serves for an objective basis of salvation in Christ. Ultimately, however, merit itself is subjective for us. Our salvation is not directly related to that historically objective event of the death of Christ.

Hence our reconciliation, justification, yea, our salvation, are in the Scripture spoken of as things actually done and accomplished in the death and bloodshedding of Jesus Christ. Not as though we were all then actually justified and saved, but upon the account of the certainty of the performance and accomplishment of those things in their due time towards us and upon us are these things so delivered: for in reference to the undertaking of Christ in this covenant is he called "The second Adam," becoming a common head to his people (with this difference, that Adam was a common head to all that came of him necessarily, and, as I may so say, naturally, and whether he would or no; Christ is so to his voluntarily, and by his own consent and undertaking, as hath been demonstrated); now, as we all die in Adam federally and meritoriously, yet the several individuals are not in their persons actually dead in sin and obnoxious to eternal death before they are by natural generation united to Adam, their first head; so, though all the elect be made alive and saved federally and meritoriously in the death of Christ, wherein also a certain foundation is laid of that efficacy which works all these things in us and for us, yet we are not viritim made partakers of the good things mentioned before we are united to Christ by the communication of his Spirit to us.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹Ibid., pp. 506-507.

Our connection with Christ has no ontological dimension, no natural, physical foundation to it. He is an individual, and we are other individuals. He may voluntarily connect us to him, but the entire effecting of this is a future matter whose only ground is the merit of Christ and the mystery of the covenant terms of election. Owen may speak of union with Christ, but it remains to be seen whether that means our real participation in him and engrafting into his body, or only another subjective incarnation of the Holy Spirit. The lack of a complete and personal union between the eternal Son and the human Christ causes us to suspect the failure of any real union between the exalted Christ and believers. Indeed, in the light of this lack there is no real ground for the latter union.

b. The Holy Spirit and the exalted Christ.--The most prominent feature of this phase of Owen's christology is the absence of Christ. He spots the weakness in the Lutheran doctrine of ubiquity. "The Lutherans fancy an omnipresence, or ubiquity of his human nature, by virtue of its personal union; but this is destructive of that nature itself, which being made to be everywhere, as such a nature, is truly nowhere."¹⁷⁰ He also lays the axe to Calvin's emphasis on word and sacraments, although wrongly shifting the focus to the subjective human element of the minister so as to afford himself a valid objection. "Some say he is present with us by his ministers and ordinances; but how, then, is he present with those ministers themselves, unto whom the

¹⁷⁰Owen, Works, III, pp. 194-95.

promise of his presence is made in an especial manner?"¹⁷¹
The fact is that Christ is absent in that he is not bodily or personally present; for "in his own person he is exalted at the right hand of God, far above all principalities and powers, so that nothing of ours can immediately reach him or affect him."¹⁷²

As an exalted individual, Christ is a pattern for believers.

It was the Holy Spirit that glorified the human nature [of Christ], and made it every way meet for its eternal residence at the right hand of God, and a pattern of the glorification of the bodies of them that believe on him. He who first made his nature holy, now made it glorious. And as we are made conformable unto him in our souls here, his image being renewed in us by the Spirit, so he is in his body, now glorified by the effectual operation of the same Spirit, the exemplar and pattern of that glory which in our mortal bodies we shall receive by the same Spirit.¹⁷³

The pattern is individual and has a subjective impact since its point of reference is the soul. The Spirit is the real mediator for he makes us conform to the pattern in much the same way that he first made the pattern. The relation between the body of Christ and our real humanity is not one of personal union, but the former serves only as a model for the latter. "Of this state whereinto we shall be changed by the power of Christ, his own body is the pattern and example. A similitude of it is all that we shall attain unto."¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 194.

¹⁷²Ibid., p. 156.

¹⁷³Owen, Works, III, 183.

¹⁷⁴Owen, Works, I, 246.

While Christ, on his part, serves as a pattern in a faraway place, we, on our part, are to meditate on the great example of his human nature.¹⁷⁵ We are to consider and have affection toward "the blessed union of his two natures in one person," "the uncreated glories of the divine nature," and "that perfection and fulness of grace which dwelt in his human nature."¹⁷⁶ This Platonic exercise is a long way from the vital participation in Christ--and in his flesh--of which Calvin spoke. A nearer approach is made to the idea of participation when Owen speaks about laboring after conformity to Christ. "And this conformity consists only in a participation of those graces whose fulness dwells in him."¹⁷⁷ What is proposed here is not personal union, but union in the metaphysical dimension of grace--quantitatively understood. This grace is grounded in Christ's merit, which is in turn grounded in the Holy Spirit's action toward the human Christ. Owen speaks of the exalted Christ in his mediatorial office as prophet, priest, and king; and he speaks of the heavenly transactions and administrations there.¹⁷⁸ Finally, however, there is no objective relation between Christ and us, and the only relevance these offices have for us is both grounded upon and communicated by the Holy Spirit alone.

In the absence of Christ, the Holy Spirit becomes the only real actor on the human scene. Owen attempts to say that the Holy Spirit accomplishes the presence of Christ for us;

¹⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 243-44. ¹⁷⁶Owen, Works, III, 188.

¹⁷⁷Ibid. ¹⁷⁸Owen, Works, I, 252-54; cf. X, 92.

but his words deceive him, and he unconsciously says what by now his system demands--that "it is the Holy Spirit who supplies the bodily absence of Christ."¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the Holy Spirit's presence for Owen means Christ's absence, not the realization of his presence.

Accordingly, what the Holy Spirit does in relation to the exalted Christ is to take over the work of Christ. He does not create personal participation in Christ, because Christ is not personally present; but his work does have a relation to Christ. "As he represents the person and supplies the room and place of Jesus Christ, so he worketh and effecteth whatever the Lord Christ hath taken upon himself to work and effect towards his disciples."¹⁸⁰ The Holy Spirit reveals the truth of Christ and communicates the grace of Christ. "The first he shows by revelation, the latter by effectual communication."¹⁸¹ The work of revelation by the Scripture has a real importance for Owen; but its task of bearing witness to the objective ground of faith, Jesus Christ himself, is not organically connected to the work of making the atonement effective. This latter task is not seen in the context of personal union with the Christ; rather it is seen as the great and distinctive work of the Holy Spirit by which Owen has defined the very nature of his subsistence in the economic trinity--application.

¹⁷⁹Owen, Works, III, 193.

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 195.

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 197.

The Son's work of procurement and the Spirit's work of application are both defined by Owen's metaphysical conception of grace. Procurement and application are terms that apply to quantities, not to persons. One might go further and say that for Owen the whole trinitarian economy is centered about this concept of grace. He speaks about the Holy Spirit's work as "the actual application of all to the souls of men, that they may be partakers of the grace designed in the counsel of the Father, and prepared in the mediation of the Son."¹⁸² Here the whole economy of God comes to a focus in the Holy Spirit's work. So important is it that Owen speaks of it as a special and independent work; and--while he does not use the word itself--it has the nature of a distinct covenant. "Herein is the Holy Spirit to be manifested and glorified, that he also, together with the Father and the Son, may be known, adored, worshipped, according unto his own will. This is the work that he hath undertaken."¹⁸³ The divided covenant of grace really deserves to be subdivided into the Son's work of procurement and the Spirit's work of application. The main features of the covenant are there: the promise, the sending, the undertaking, and the performing.

From the nature and order of this work of God it is, that after the Son was actually exhibited in the flesh, according to the promise, and had fulfilled what he had taken upon him to do in his own person, the great promise of carrying on and finishing the whole work

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 190; cf. pp. 158, 199.

¹⁸³Ibid.

of the grace of God in our salvation concerns the sending of the Holy Spirit to do and perform what he also had undertaken.¹⁸⁴

The promising and performing are not to be understood as a participation in the promise and performance of Christ. They are distinctly that of the Spirit.

He is promised and given as the sole cause and author of all the good that in this world we are or can be made partakers of; for, (1.) there is no good communicated unto us from God, but it is bestowed on us or wrought in us by the Holy Ghost. No gift, no grace, no mercy, no privilege, no consolation, do we receive, possess, or use, but it is wrought in us, collated on us, or manifested unto us, by him alone. Nor, (2.) is there any good in us towards God, any faith, love, duty, obedience, but what is effectually wrought in us by him, by him alone; for "in us, that is, in our flesh" (and by nature we are but flesh), "there dwelleth no good thing." All these things are from him and by him.¹⁸⁵

In the context of the covenant of application by the Holy Spirit, by whom and from whom are all divine benefits, Owen can disparage the flesh. In the covenant of procurement the body had a role of some sort, even if truncated; but all thought of any objective physical relation--as between the flesh of Christ and our flesh--can be put aside as irrelevant in the Holy Spirit's covenant. He works subjectively in the soul. "It is the peculiar work of the Holy Spirit to make those things [purpose and mediation] of the Father and Son effectual unto the souls of the elect."¹⁸⁶ The subjective contract of the Holy Spirit is especially suitable to the limited atonement. If atonement were related to an objective covenant on the ground of a common humanity between Christ

¹⁸⁴Ibid.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., p. 157.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 189.

and us, it would have a universal reference. However, such a covenant would not have the basic feature of a contract so dear to English tradition. A contract allows for individual engagement on mutual terms. Who is God, to think to complete the whole contract in Christ without my individual participation in the negotiations? Such a declarative gospel is inconsistent with the contract-definition of covenant. A subjective contract, however, is an individual contract, and the covenant of the Holy Spirit is a fully subjective covenant. The Holy Spirit does not do anything externally objective. He does it all in the soul, and what he does there are "real internal operations."¹⁸⁷

The new subjective contract has a semblance of an objective ground in the merited grace of Christ. The Son, indeed, is likened to a great wholesaler. "With him, as the great treasurer of heavenly things, are all grace and mercy intrusted."¹⁸⁸ The Spirit is the ubiquitous retailer. "The Holy Spirit, therefore, shows them unto us, works them in us, bestows them on us, as they are the fruits of the mediation of Christ."¹⁸⁹ The system breaks down over the fact that the Holy Spirit was also subjectively the giver of grace to the son of Mary; and the failure of objective union between the Son of God and the son of Mary means that the believer's union with the exalted Christ is only a new subjective contract.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 200. ¹⁸⁸Ibid., p. 199. ¹⁸⁹Ibid.

In Owen's system the Holy Spirit himself is the ground for our belief in Christ as he bears witness to him.

The first principal end why God gave the Holy Spirit to work all those miraculous effects in them that believed in Jesus, was, to bear witness unto his person that he was indeed the Son of God, owned and exalted by him; for no man not utterly forsaken of all reason and understanding, not utterly blinded, would once imagine that the Holy Spirit of God would work such marvellous operations in and by them who believed on him [Jesus], if he [Holy Spirit] designed not to justify his [Jesus'] person, work, and doctrine thereby. And this in a short time, together with that effectual power which he [Holy Spirit] put forth in and by the preaching of the word, carried not only his [Jesus'] vindication against all the machinations of Satan and his instruments throughout the world, but also subdued the generality of mankind unto faith in him and obedience unto him [Jesus], 2 Cor. x. 4, 5. And upon this testimony it is that there is real faith in him [Jesus] yet maintained in the world.¹⁹⁰

This is the whole question of the objective, self-authenticating Scripture and the internal testimony of the Spirit all over again. The same analysis holds good. The Spirit has a genuine role in bearing subjective witness to the objective ground. Owen, however, has put forth the Spirit's work itself as the objective evidence for believing in Christ. The Holy Spirit's testimony has become a ground, not a testimony. As a ground it is, of course, quite subjective, and therefore it is improperly and inadequately a ground for faith. What ought to be the objective ground is the body of Christ, and it is nowhere in view. As a result, the Holy Spirit in Owen's system really doesn't have anything to which he may witness.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 184.

Finally, the Holy Spirit really does not have any intimate connection with the exalted Christ. He exalted him and glorified him; and now that he is out of the way the Holy Spirit can settle down to the real business at hand--which is to put us through the same treatment. "And this belongs unto the establishment of our faith, that he who prepared, sanctified, and glorified the human nature, the natural body of Jesus Christ, the head of the church, hath undertaken to prepare, sanctify, and glorify his mystical body, or all the elect given unto him of the Father."¹⁹¹ The body of Christ is in no way the mediating ground of this salvation. His body and our bodies are two entirely separate things. The Holy Spirit acts toward both and unites with both--separately. He is the covenant mediator. He has usurped the role of Christ. He is sovereign in this twofold transaction. He is "the Spirit of grace, and the immediate efficient cause of all grace and gracious effects in men. . . . As to our participation of it [grace], it is of the Holy Spirit, and of him alone."¹⁹² "In whatever he doth, he acts, works, and distributes according to his own will."¹⁹³

C. Systematic Theology

Christology takes the form of covenant theology for John Owen, and as such it provides a systematic quality for the whole shape of his theology. By virtue of its framework we can rightly see the mutual relation of all

¹⁹¹Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁹²Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁹³Ibid.

the major features of his theology. The rational shape discussed in the second chapter plays its vital role in providing the very possibility for human participation in a covenant--which is so essential when the nature of a covenant requires mutual negotiation in the process of contracting, and when that contract is understood as being formed with each man individually. The system, for its part, keeps the rational factor in its well-established niche, safeguarding against any extreme claims from that potentially dangerous factor.

The authoritative shape discussed in the third chapter takes its indispensable place as the source of the very idea of covenant. The system, in turn, acts as the key hermeneutical principle which opens up the whole meaning of Scripture and gives it a consistent and unified impact. Moreover, it prevents the rise of any conflicting theological positions by choking them off at the very source of authority. Whenever the Scripture poses difficulties for the exegete, the flexibility and sophistication of the system comprehend and incorporate them. Finally, the two chapters that follow are unthinkable apart from the system of covenant theology, and they logically follow from the subjective nature of our union with Christ by the Spirit (which is for Owen, more simply, union with the Spirit).

We have presented the covenant theology of John Owen as being founded upon a union of two streams of tradition.

The first and primary stream was the contract theory of covenant theology according to William Tyndale. The pietistic, man-centered focus of this theology has to be accounted one of the most fundamental forces in Owen's thought, as well as in the whole of English religious life. The second determinative stream in this covenant theology was its Calvinistic doctrinal content. The predestination theme may have had its provenance in Calvin, but it was given an essentially different sense by Beza and others. Plucked out of its original context where it was a sign of grace and a correlate of faith understood as personal union with Christ, it was made to serve as the schema for a deterministic system. The anthropological emphasis of the contract theory and the ideological thrust of predestinarianism were first welded together as English covenant theology by William Perkins. This double heritage is evident in, and confirmed by, the covenant thought of John Owen.

The anthropological emphasis of covenant theology conditions the absolute sovereignty of a predestinating God. The contract feature is an ineradicable part of the definition of covenant for Owen. The distance between the humanity of Christ and our humanity is always maintained, so that we retain the individual right to bargain. The concept of grace fills the gap between the body of Christ and our physical existence. This grace does not entail personal union. It is a thing of itself, having personal overtones, but able to move between persons without implying mutual participation

in one another. This view of grace corresponds with the subjective focus of contract theory. The covenant of grace is not a participation in something objective--fleshly--but an internal happening in the soul. While contract theory may lend a more personal touch to the cold determinism of a predestination system, its personal reference is entirely subjective and seems inevitably to tend toward a subordination of theology to psychology.

The ideological thrust of predestinarianism contributes systematic form to the pietistic force of the contract theory. The principles of election and reprobation are now cast in an infralapsarian scheme which reduces their rigidity. The nature of God is consequently viewed more dynamically, but with more ambivalence. This is a philosophical theology constructed around two principles, which are the duality in the nature of God, and the law as determinative of relations between God and man. Salvation is what saves the system; that is, it resolves all the logical issues. It reconciles the inherent duality of God, and it provides a legal solution to man's crime which applies only to the elect.

The contract theory nicely matches the predestination system on the item of a covenant between the Father and Son. The one difficulty is the omission of man from this transaction. The subjective contract with the individual believer completes the system, but this is dependent upon pneumatology. Owen's pneumatology is the cohesive factor in this system,

binding together contract theory with predestination scheme. The Holy Spirit dynamically manages the whole affair so that the various and somewhat disparate parts function in a plausible and evangelical fashion.

Soteriology which is based on its natural foundation in the death of Christ is necessarily event-centered. Owen makes it into schematic, rationally abstract truth by pressing it into the ideological framework of covenant theology. He systematizes it. At the same time he gives it a personal dimension by emphasizing the subsequent, private, and subjective experience the individual may have in terms of grace. The Holy Spirit, who makes the system work, also applies the grace within the soul, so that pneumatology has replaced christology.

CHAPTER V

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHRISTIAN MAN: METAPHYSICAL THEOLOGY

Whereas the preceding chapter focused on the dynamic relation between the Christ and the Spirit in terms of the dialectic between procurement and application, our present concern focuses exclusively upon that activity of the Spirit known as application--so primary in Owen's view. Here, then, we look at the practical results of his christology for the believer--at the experiential, personal dimension of salvation for which the system has set the stage. Here is Owen's real center of interest, reflected in the fact that his discussions of regeneration and sanctification (along with a special section on holiness) cover 450 pages in his Pneumatologia. Here is the heart and the bulk of his pneumatology.

The principal elements in this affair of application have already been made obvious by the foregoing chapter. The Holy Spirit will be the chief actor, notwithstanding our own participation. The action will take place in the soul; and the principle of action will be the concept of grace. At stake is salvation; so that soteriology for Owen finally and properly belongs to this theological arena where the action

is understood as a Spirit-event. All of these things are expressed in the following quotation from Owen.

"There is no going to the Father," saith Christ, "but by me," John xiv. 6. "By him we believe in God," 1 Pet. i. 21. But yet neither can we do so unless we are enabled thereunto by the Spirit, the author in us of faith, prayer, praise, obedience, and whatever our souls tend unto God by. As the descending of God towards us in love and grace issues or ends in the work of the Spirit in us and on us, so all our ascending toward him begins therein; and as the first instance of the proceeding of grace and love towards us from the Father is in and by the Son, so the first step that we take towards God, even the Father, is in and by the Son.¹

What begins and ends in God (the Father) has its point of contact in the Spirit. It may appear that Owen has made our relation to God dependent upon the Son; but, in fact, the Son serves only as a link in the whole movement. What is distinctive is the movement itself. It is reciprocal, descending and ascending. The descending movement is characterized by grace. The ascending movement is described as the movement of our souls. In both, the Spirit's action is pivotal. This descending and ascending interaction between God and man, with all of its implications, sets the mood and conceptual framework for the whole of our chapter.

In order to move intelligibly into Owen's own treatment of our theme, a prior understanding of at least three subjects appears indispensable for our frame of reference. There must be a consideration of the concept of grace which was operative among the English Calvinistic Puritans. There must also be an elucidation of their contemporary science of psychology.

¹Owen, Works, III, 200.

Finally, a brief look at Calvin will acquaint us with his classical and influential doctrine of sanctification.

A. Augustinian Grace

Piety, as we noticed in the course of the previous chapter,² was traditional and deeply rooted in English religious life. We have suggested that it was the primal force of this piety that asserted itself in Tyndale's covenant theology and in the succeeding, systematic development of the covenant scheme. Trinterud connects this piety with the name of Augustine, saying that "this covenant scheme had its great appeal in that it could so readily and simply give intellectual expression to the Augustinian theology, the lush, warm flow of mystical piety and devotion."³ Perry Miller also pays homage to this fundamental force by treating it first in his volume on the Puritan intellectual history.⁴ He dubs it Augustinian piety, which "flows from man's desire to transcend his imperfect self, to open channels for the influx of energy which pervades the world, but with which he himself is inadequately supplied."⁵ If we name that pervasive energy grace and understand the direction of transcendence as towards God, we are well on our way towards defining the Augustinian concept of grace.

Regin Prenter portrays Luther's theology as involving a fundamental conflict with Augustinian thought. Prenter's

²Supra, pp. 161-62. ³Trinterud, op. cit., p. 50.

⁴Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, Chap. I.

⁵Ibid., p. 8.

analysis has a particular significance for our study, since it was Luther's influence that first brought the reformation to England and that subsequently lost the theological contest to English piety in the person of Tyndale.

Luther used Augustinian terms, says Prenter, but with a meaning which was ultimately inimical to the Augustinian theology.⁶ Prenter expresses the difference as that between confrontation and co-operation. Confrontation means the reality of God standing over against man in a total way, with the effect of judgment. Co-operation implies "the natural, idealistic struggle of man"⁷ as part of God's whole work with man. In confrontation, God "exposes everything in man,"⁸ and leads him into darkness. In co-operation, man uses his own resources in a religious effort. Prenter singles out Luther's emphasis on Romans viii, 26 as expressing the crux of the issue, since there the work of the Holy Spirit is seen in stark contrast to our own complete inability.⁹ What Luther sees as the work of the Spirit in this confrontation is diametrically opposed to the Augustinian metaphysics, claims Prenter.

Luther no longer thinks of the Holy Spirit in terms of the scholastic tradition as a transcendent cause of a new (supernatural) nature in man producing infused grace (i.e. caritas- the sublimated idealistic urge). The Holy Spirit is instead proclaimed as the real presence of God.¹⁰

⁶Prenter, op. cit., pp. 3-4, 17-18. ⁷Ibid., p. 12.

⁸Ibid., p. 13.

⁹Ibid., pp. 16-18.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 18-19.

The Augustinian view of grace, says Prenter, is couched in the scholastic thinking of "idealistic metaphysics."¹¹ God is the highest good. He represents the fixed point of the metaphysical structure, and he is a distant and final goal with respect to man.¹² Man is also viewed idealistically as composed of a lower, sensible nature and a higher, spiritual nature, with the spiritual nature of man having an affinity to the nature of God as Spirit.¹³

The scholastic system holds that God is the distant one, but the distant one toward whom man as man is going. The upward line characterizes the structure of this concept of God. The fellowship with God is brought about when man in harmony with his inner idealistic urge is lifted upward till he reaches God. In this sublimation the grace of God acts as a means. Grace is the God-given power to strive forward and upward to the distant goal of salvation.¹⁴

Grace is the key to the system and merit is the key to grace. Prenter sees merit as cast in the form of the law. "That man merits salvation means that with the aid of grace he has effectively accomplished the claim of the law and thus gained access to God. But the way of the law to God is the same as the way of the natural striving."¹⁵ Incarnation and atonement are made part of the system, for they provide the objective ground for the supply of grace to be infused.¹⁶

Grace is the gift of God. Prenter notes the anti-Pelagian intent of this doctrine of grace, for man, according to the system, could not take even the first step toward

¹¹Ibid., p. 20.

¹²Ibid., pp. 19-20.

¹³Ibid., pp. 22-23.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid.

God.¹⁷ However, the system was thoroughly idealistic, so that God remained always the distant goal, even as the giver of grace. There was no real presence. The historic Christ was only a pattern. "And the Spirit is moved back into the metaphysical distance of transcendent causality."¹⁸ The movement that happens must be a movement of man toward God, and in this connection Prenter points to the phrase from Augustine that the heart is restless until it finds rest in God.¹⁹ It is only at the fixed point of the highest good that God and man truly meet for Augustinian metaphysics; whereas Luther sees God meeting man only at the nadir of man's plight.²⁰

The direction in the relation of God and man is here viewed in exact contrast to caritas idealism. There God was considered as the fixed point toward which man was constantly struggling. Here it is man who in his perdition is dead and motionless, while it is God who struggles for man and who seeks man in his distress.²¹

Prenter's analysis has been mainly focused upon the medieval form of Augustinianism which Luther faced. T. F. Torrance assists us in understanding more adequately the genesis and development of this way of thought. He points to ancient Hellenistic ideas of grace as a "cosmic potency at work in nature."²² He observes the connection made in the course of theological development between this pneumatic

¹⁷Ibid., p. 22. ¹⁸Ibid. ¹⁹Ibid., p. 23.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 23-24. ²¹Ibid., p. 25.

²²Torrance, op. cit., p. 172.

potency and the doctrine of the Spirit.²³ He places heavy responsibility on Augustine for viewing grace "as the interiorizing of a divine power within us."²⁴ While Augustine intended to emphasize the role of grace against the Pelagians, he actually opened up a conception of co-operation between man and God on the ground of grace. Torrance sees this element of co-operation blossoming in medieval Roman theology when it was "set in the context of a doctrine of the hierarchy of being or a metaphysic of the relation of nature to supernature in which the relation between the two becomes a sort of inclined plane leading gradually and easily from the one to the other."²⁵

Torrance does not want to deny that there must be for the Christian some relation between nature and grace, but he warns that this relation must be understood christologically on the ground of the incarnation.²⁶ By contrast, Augustine radically separated the mundus sensibilis from the mundus intelligibilis. This conception tended to rule out incarnational theology altogether. Torrance goes on to indicate how the Roman view of a sacramental church as a sort of present incarnation bridged the Augustinian disjunction of the two levels of reality and defined grace in terms of a sacramental system. For this synthesis he gives chief credit to Aquinas, while he notes that Aristotelian realism gave to Augustinian grace more of an ontological aspect.

²³Ibid. ²⁴Ibid., p. 173. ²⁵Ibid., p. 174. ²⁶Ibid.

No longer was it merely the "inward grace" mediated by an outward sign, but a divine power at work in human being transforming and changing it invisibly and visibly, grace actualizing itself within the physical as well as the spiritual, metaphysically heightening and exalting creaturely existence.²⁷

Grace in this view operated as an ontological causality with the effect of "deifying man or heightening his being until he attains the level of a supernatural order."²⁸

As we move from the medieval concept of grace with its Augustinian heritage into seventeenth century Puritan piety, the following summary may serve as our points of reference. Augustinian metaphysics feature a union of God with man on God's level, rather than at man's level. Man must move towards God. Grace as a metaphysical substance enables man to make this movement. The Spirit is the transcendent causality underlying this grace. The effect of grace takes the form of supernaturalizing man. The whole relation has the characteristic of an inclined plane, since man moves gradually towards God. While man and God are distinct, they are enough alike to fit into the continuum of the inclined plane.

This inclined plane relation between God and man characterizes the English Puritan piety. Trinterud calls it the "pilgrimage pattern."²⁹ Its classical form found expression in John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, but William Haller demonstrates the pervasiveness of this pilgrimage pattern throughout more than one generation of Puritan preaching,³⁰ and Trinterud

²⁷Ibid., p. 179.

²⁸Ibid., p. 180.

²⁹Trinterud, op. cit., p. 54.

³⁰Haller, op. cit., pp. 142ff.

asserts that the same pattern characterized English medieval preaching.³¹ Basic to this pattern were the various stages of man's conversion and salvation, called the ordo salutis. Miller observes that grace for the Puritan was not altogether alien to men, but God worked in men by degrees.³² Miller cites the statement of the Massachusetts Synod of 1637 to the Hutchinsonians, "In the ordinary course of his dispensation, the more wee indeavour, the more assistance and help wee find from him."³³ According to this pattern the Puritan made his gradual, but definite, progress towards God, and the underlying ideology was the metaphysics of Augustinian grace. All of this bears a marked resemblance to Owen's conception of grace descending to man and of man ascending to God. Consequently, it is not strange that Owen should summarize his discussion of regeneration by recounting the spiritual pilgrimage of a former saint--Augustine.³⁴

B. Puritan Psychology

The pilgrimage pattern with its ordo salutis focuses on the individual and upon his soul. As Miller puts it, the Puritan "could not describe the method of grace without

³¹Trinterud, op. cit., p. 54.

³²Miller, The New England Mind: From Colony to Province, p. 65.

³³Quoted by Miller, Ibid., p. 56.

³⁴Owen, Works, III, pp. 337-66.

presupposing a certain method of the soul."³⁵ Haller, in the same vein, observes that for the Puritan his "doctrine became in fact a theory of human behavior, a system of psychology."³⁶

The Puritan's psychology was the traditional psychology of medieval scholasticism, claims Miller.³⁷ Being Aristotelian, it operated on the basis of sense experience. Between the external object and the sensible soul were the senses and the animal spirits. The sensible soul was divided into common sense, imagination, and memory. There were three faculties in the rational soul--the reason or understanding, the will or heart, and the affections or passions. All of these elements were combined into a clearly mechanistic system. An external object would impress a phantasm upon the body's senses, which the animal spirits transferred to the common sense. The common sense sent the phantasm on to the imagination which in turn stored the phantasm in the memory. The reason might select either a phantasm in the imagination or memory, so as to see it rightly and understand its significance. The information of the reason is sent to the will which responds and commands the passions, which in turn excite the body to action.³⁸

³⁵Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, p. 239.

³⁶Haller, op. cit., p. 135.

³⁷Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, p. 245.

³⁸The foregoing description is dependent upon Miller, ibid., pp. 240-41.

This mechanistic psychology has some definite consequences for the Puritan theologian. Sin and regeneration can both be described in phenomenological terms. What happens is a concrete process--the unfolding of the drama of salvation within the very being of a man. What happens can be described and catalogued in diaries.³⁹

However, there was a looseness and flexibility in the mechanism that defied strict definitions. Was it the imagination, or the reason, or the will, or the passions themselves, that were responsible for sin? Did regeneration begin with one faculty rather than another? Miller's account indicates that the Puritans could variously emphasize one or the other of the faculties. In fact, both sin and regeneration could be described faculty by faculty. Ideal human behavior was the proper functioning of each faculty in the traditional order. The passions were given perhaps the slightest role, since the ideal was a state of control in which the passions were strictly subject to the reason and the will. In the situation of sin the faculties still functioned, but not in the proper manner or order. Man still operated his own psyche, though always wrongly, and therefore he was responsible for his sin. The malignancy of sin, however, had a general effect, and it could not be finally attributed to any specific faculty.⁴⁰

³⁹Haller notes the stress on diaries for Puritans with the intention of recording God's specific dealing with them. op. cit., pp. 96-97.

⁴⁰The foregoing description is dependent upon Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, pp. 246-65.

The Puritans further escaped the limitations of their psychological system by including the category of conscience. Aristotelian psychology limited all knowledge to the medium of sense impressions. Conscience represented a Platonic addition to the system. By conscience the Puritans included an element of innate ideas which did not need to be gained by external sensory experience. They understood these "inborn moral certainties" as the remnants of the image of God. In this way knowledge was also possible in a direct fashion within the soul itself.⁴¹

Nevertheless, the grace of God normally works according to the sensational psychology. Grace therefore comes via concrete phantasms. It must also renovate the faculties themselves, and there may be separate graces for each faculty.

Sinful man tries all his life to see things as they are, to apprehend truth and to act by it, but at every endeavor his senses blur, his imagination deceives, his reason fails, his will rebels, his passions run riot. As soon as he receives grace, the phantasms generated by his senses go step by step through the sure and infallible route; the one combination of his faculties which he has striven in vain to achieve is suddenly achieved for him, and thereafter the species of things run the short and smooth course through his spirit, to eventuate in sanctified conduct.⁴²

The mechanistic psychology involves an understanding of grace in terms of means. Means might be sermons, sacraments, or providential occurrences. They were external events, but they were only gracious as the Spirit himself used them

⁴¹The foregoing description is dependent upon Miller, ibid., pp. 270-72.

⁴²Ibid., p. 284.

and made themmmore than external. This conception of the means of grace had the twofold virtue of preventing spiritual enthusiasm and of making "grace compatible with nature without doing violence to nature or reducing grace to a natural influence."⁴³

Puritan psychology correlates with the pilgrimage pattern by providing a conceptual apparatus for describing that process as it takes place within the soul. It provides a distinct and primary role for the exterior stimulus, giving an access route to the Holy Spirit by the means of grace. The event itself, however, is internal, entirely in terms of the human machinery. As a result, there could be an explicit phenomenology of regeneration and sanctification--at least within the tolerances of the human mechanism. Sanctification could be taken as a clear sign of justification.⁴⁴ Furthermore, sanctification could be directly gauged by evaluation of conduct, since the mechanistic scheme necessarily required external human behavior to be the automatic result of the soul's directing through its faculties. The Puritans' intense interest in casuistry can be understood in the light of this nearly closed system, where conduct, motive, and grace have direct connections. Here is explained the anomaly of their religious life which was the dual and simultaneous obsession with introspection and, unlike the later Pietists, with the course of worldly events. By introspection they could study

⁴³Ibid., p. 293.

⁴⁴Cf. Ibid., p. 388.

the process of salvation. By attention to external events they could study both the providential occurrences which served as means of grace because they were external stimuli and also the outward conduct which served as evidence of the inward, spiritual state of affairs. At the center of it all was the subjective experience of the individual, although the mechanistic psychology contributed the illusion of a degree of objectivity to this supremely subjective event.

C. Calvin's Doctrine of Sanctification

The final reference point in setting our perspective for the study of Owen's account of the Holy Spirit and the Christian man is the doctrine of sanctification according to Calvin. He is the theological patriarch of these English Calvinists, and in the light of his thought the measure of his offspring may be more fitly gauged. Particularly in this matter of sanctification, Calvin and the later English Calvinists were close to one another, and yet the difference is fundamental.

The similarities are readily noticed, and Ronald S. Wallace in Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life has taken full cognizance of these kinds of elements. Sanctification for Calvin is a gradual process, and it may have something of the nature of actual progression toward perfection.⁴⁵ Our good works can even serve as evidence of election.⁴⁶

⁴⁵Ronald S. Wallace, Calvin's Doctrine of the Christian Life, pp. 325-26.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 301.

He places great stress on the role of mortification in sanctifying the Christian man.⁴⁷ Meditation upon the ascended Christ, with all of its Platonic overtones, has its definite place in our Christian life; and Calvin can even speak of our ascending in some way during our present life to enjoy heavenly communion with Christ.⁴⁸ He talks about an imitation of Christ who serves as our pattern.⁴⁹ The Law, too, is a fundamental pattern, since it expresses the image of God for us.⁵⁰ A degree of detachment from, and contempt for, this world is emphasized by Calvin, so that the Christian man is supposed to live like a pilgrim on this earth.⁵¹ In all of these and not least in his espousal of moderation, which includes the banishment of all excess and the rational control of the passions,⁵² Calvin appears as the genuine progenitor of English Puritanism.

While all of the above things may be said of Calvin's doctrine of sanctification, their meaning will be fundamentally misunderstood unless we understand sanctification strictly according to its basis in the believer's union with Christ. This christological basis for sanctification is maintained by Calvin through his consistent conjoining of sanctification with justification. These both have full and direct reality only in Christ, although they have a broken and indirect reality also in us by virtue of our union with him.⁵³

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 51-52. ⁴⁸Ibid., p. 87. ⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁵⁰Ibid., pp. 112-13. ⁵¹Ibid., pp. 123-29. ⁵²Ibid., p. 109.

⁵³Cf. François Wendel, Calvin: The Origin and Development of His Religious Thought, Tr. by Philip Mairet, (Harper and Row Publishers: New York, 1963), p. 243.

Justification, however, always has a completely imputed quality for us, because it is always located outside of us.⁵⁴ Calvin came into controversy with Andreas Osiander over this view of justification, and their differences highlight the significance of Calvin's doctrine of justification. Calvin believed that Osiander was confusing justification and sanctification. His confusion of the two involved overstepping the notion of imputation so that justification was no longer strictly outside of us and in Christ alone, but was in us as the indwelling Christ. Thus, we were made essentially righteous in ourselves, and our justification was based upon, or was the same as, our sanctification.⁵⁵ To say with Osiander that we are righteous by virtue of the divine nature of Christ in us clashes with Calvin's insistence on the centrality of the human nature in our union with him.⁵⁶ Krusche reminds us that "Calvin die Rechtfertigung gerade nicht mit dem ewigen Sohn, sondern mit der Person des Mittlers--und zwar genauer mit dessen dem Vater dargebrachten menschlichen Gehorsam--in Zusammenhang bringt; die Quelle der Gerechtigkeit ist das Fleisch Christi."⁵⁷

Justification belongs to us in so far as we participate in the humanity of Christ by the Holy Spirit. Real participation in Christ, however, inevitably involves participation in his sanctification. Apart from this, justification would appear as

⁵⁴Calvin, Institutes, III, xi, 4, 23.

⁵⁵Ibid., III, xi, 5-6. ⁵⁶Ibid., III, xi, 8.

⁵⁷Krusche, op. cit., pp. 276-77; cf. Calvin, Institutes, III, xi, 9.

a mere sham--something unconnected to us in any vital way. While justification is always outside of us and in Christ alone, sanctification may come to have something of its own reality in us. What is complete in Christ is reflected in us in a fragmentary way. It includes mortification of the flesh and vivification of the spirit, but these are not primarily events which occur in the individual believer as such--they are the results of participating in a crucified and risen Christ.

Both things happen to us by participation in Christ. For if we truly partake in his death, "our old man is crucified by his power, and the body of sin perishes" [Rom. 6:6], that the corruption of original nature may no longer thrive. If we share in his resurrection, through it we are raised up into newness of life to correspond with the righteousness of God.⁵⁸

If sanctification is to be understood as participation in Christ, then Calvin characteristically emphasizes the human nature of Christ as the ground of that sanctification in which we participate.

And this remains for us an established fact: whenever Scripture calls our attention to the purity of Christ, it is to be understood of his true human nature, for it would have been superfluous to say that God is pure. Also, the sanctification of which John, ch. 17, speaks would have no place in divine nature [John 17:19].⁵⁹

When his humanness is seen as the central focus of our sanctification then we can see the true significance for Calvin of emphasis upon moderation and other such apparently moralistic values. Thus, Wallace points out that Calvin's stress

⁵⁸Calvin, Institutes, III, iii, 9.

⁵⁹Ibid., II, xiii, 4.

on moderation is not an example of his dependence upon natural law or abstract ethical principles, but only a reflection of the order and harmony of the incarnate life of Christ.⁶⁰ The Christian man is also to suffer patiently, not in a supposed heroism or martyr-complex, but only as a way of confirming our fellowship with Christ, the man of the cross.⁶¹

Sanctification has a progressive quality for Calvin, although this progression must be strictly understood in terms of fellowship with Christ.⁶² It is not something that grows in us independently, and to stress this Calvin states that repentance does not so much refer to a moment in time when something is born as to the dawning recognition of God's grace as an already established relation.⁶³ The progression ought to be understood only in terms of growth in Christ--where the fulness of sanctification is and whence it comes to us--and not in terms of a growth in man himself.

For we await salvation from him not because he appears to us afar off, but because he makes us, ingrafted into his body, participants not only in all his benefits but also in himself. . . . If you contemplate yourself, that is sure damnation. But since Christ has been so imparted to you with all his benefits that all his things are made yours, that you are made a member of him, indeed one with him, his righteousness overwhelms your sins; his salvation wipes out your condemnation; with his worthiness he intercedes that your unworthiness may not come before God's sight. Surely this is so: We ought not to separate Christ from ourselves or

⁶⁰Wallace, op. cit., pp. vi, 109, 170; cf. Calvin, Institutes, II, xvi, 12.

⁶¹Calvin, Institutes, III, viii, 1.

⁶²Ibid., III, ii, 24.

⁶³Ibid., III, iii, 2.

ourselves from him. Rather we ought to hold fast bravely with both hands to that fellowship by which he has bound himself to us.⁶⁴

Sanctification may have a greater or lesser effect in us, relatively speaking, but this progression never arrives for us at the point of perfection--within the bounds of our human-historical existence.⁶⁵

In Calvin's view we are saved in Christ rather than by Christ.⁶⁶ He is not the divine agent of a salvation which takes place in us.

What sort of foundation have we in Christ? Was he the beginning of our salvation in order that its fulfillment might follow from ourselves? Did he only open the way by which we might proceed under our own power? Certainly not. . . . Ingrafted into him we are already, in a manner, partakers of eternal life, having entered in the Kingdom of God through hope. Yet more: we experience such participation in him that, . . . while we are sinners, he is our righteousness; while we are unclean, he is our purity. . . . In brief, because all his things are ours and we have all things in him, in us there is nothing. Upon this foundation, I say, we must be built if we would grow into a holy temple to the Lord.⁶⁷

It is only Christ's holiness and his obedience that afford any basis for sanctification, and we may have them in him. Our having them in him is by participatory fellowship with him--"not by an inflowing of substance, but by the grace and power of the Spirit."⁶⁸ The Spirit works in us by binding us to Christ in all of his ascended humanity--not by "rendering us consubstantial with God."⁶⁹

⁶⁴Ibid., III, ii, 24. ⁶⁵Ibid., III, iii, 9; III, xvii, 15.

⁶⁶Calvin, Commentary on Romans and Thessalonians, Tr. by Ross Mackenzie, ("Calvin's Commentaries," ed. by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance; Oliver and Boyd: Edinburgh, 1961), vi, 11.

⁶⁷Calvin, Institutes, III, xv, 5.

⁶⁸Ibid., I, xv, 5.

⁶⁹Ibid.

D. Owen's Doctrine of Regeneration

Immediately we become aware of a fundamental shift from Calvin's doctrine of sanctification when we are confronted by Owen's division of the Holy Spirit's work in relation to the Christian man into the two parts of regeneration and sanctification. For Calvin, regeneration and sanctification were basically interchangeable terms.⁷⁰ Owen has made them into two separate concepts. The explanation for this becomes clearer when we notice that in the Pneumatologia any real discussion of a doctrine of justification has been omitted by Owen. His doctrine of regeneration replaces the doctrine of justification. Consequently, the whole shape of his theology is something quite different from that of Calvin's theology. A radical change in orientation has occurred.

Owen does indeed have a doctrine of justification. It is a vital part of his covenant system; in fact, it is the crux of the transaction--"the whole work of justification, with all that belongeth thereunto, is represented after the manner of a juridical proceeding before God's tribunal."⁷¹ However, as we observed in the preceding chapter, Christ was justified only as an individual, and not as our representative.⁷² This corresponds with our observation in the second chapter that justification in Christ had for Owen only an epistemological relation to us, and not a soteriological relation.⁷³

⁷⁰Cf. Krusche, op. cit., p. 276; Wallace, op. cit., p. 94.

⁷¹Owen, Works, V, 13. ⁷²Supra, pp. 196-98.

⁷³Supra, pp. 86-88.

Regeneration is Owen's means of making justification relevant to us. It corresponds to the function of justification in Calvin's theology by its character as a total rather than progressive relation to God. It does not consist in anything so suggestive of Pelagianism as mere "reformation of life" and "improvement of natural abilities."⁷⁴ On the contrary, "all our faith and obedience to God, and all our acceptance with him, depend on our regeneration."⁷⁵ "The natural and carnal means of blood, flesh and the will of man, are rejected wholly in this matter, and the whole efficiency of the new birth is ascribed unto God alone."⁷⁶

While Owen's doctrine of regeneration enables him to refer to salvation as being by grace alone, and not by works, it is clear that the locus of salvation has been shifted from Christ alone to ourselves. Whereas justification for Calvin belonged only to Christ and was related to us only by our being united to him, Owen by his concept of regeneration has brought Christ's justification to us, and into us, as our possession. In this way justification and sanctification become merged in us. The Holy Spirit plays the role of divine agent who does what God alone could do--regenerates us by bringing the justification of Christ to us and making it effective in us.

And the immediate efficient cause in the communication of the love and kindness of the Father, through the mediation of the Son, unto us, is the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁴Owen, Works, III, 211. ⁷⁵Ibid., p. 208. ⁷⁶Ibid.

And this he doth in the renovation of our natures,
by the washing of regeneration, wherein we are
purged from our sins, and sanctified unto God.⁷⁷

Regeneration is consequently the very heart of the drama of salvation from the human point of view. It is wrought in men as "the proper and peculiar work of the Holy Spirit,"⁷⁸ and it has both a psychological and a metaphysical dimension.

1. Preparatory grace and the psychology of regeneration.

To speak of preparatory grace necessarily involves some metaphysical notions, but the emphasis in this aspect of Owen's doctrine of regeneration falls upon psychology. Likewise, when we proceed to look at saving grace in our next section, the emphasis will be upon metaphysics, but Owen's psychological theories will be necessarily implicated as well. What is decisive for our procedure is the distinction drawn by Owen between preparatory and saving grace. It is a distinction which Owen finds to be rooted in his pneumatology, in which the Spirit is a sovereignly independent agent.

Thus we shall find some of the works of the Holy Spirit to be such as may be perfect in their kind, and men may be made partakers of the whole end and intention of them, and yet no saving grace be wrought in them; such are his works of illumination, conviction, and sundry others. Men, I say, may have a work of the Holy Spirit on their hearts and minds, and yet not be sanctified and converted unto God; for the nature and kind of his works are regulated by his own will and purpose. If he intend no more but their conviction and illumination, no more shall be effected; for he works not by a necessity of nature, so that all his operations should be of the same kind, and have their especial form from his nature, and not from his will.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 209.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 207.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 202.

It may be convenient for Owen to attribute the variety in the types of works merely to the inscrutable sovereignty of the Spirit, so that in this matter "there neither is nor can be any other rule but his own infinite wisdom,"⁸⁰ but he clearly does not reject a pattern and principle of order for the way which grace takes with us. Indeed, he has already given us a fundamental principle of order in this matter by distinguishing between saving grace and all other preparatory works of the Spirit. We shall be interested to discover what foundation he is relying upon in making this distinction, for assuredly his reference to pneumatology has not in any way clarified or justified his reason for dividing regeneration into preparatory and saving grace.

Owen begins his discussion of preparatory grace by sharpening its distinction from saving grace. The former is related to regeneration in that "ordinarily there are certain previous and preparatory works, or workings in and upon the souls of men, that are antecedent and dispositive unto it [regeneration]."⁸¹ While these preparatory works are of fundamental importance in making possible the actual occurrence of regeneration, they are not to be identified as regeneration, but only as a receptiveness for it. Whereas regeneration involves a change affecting the nature of the soul, preparation is confined to the ordinary psychological functioning of the soul.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 203.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 229.

This preparatory work begins with our own moral resolve.

There are some things required of us in a way of duty in order unto our regeneration, which are so in the power of our own natural abilities as that nothing but corrupt prejudices and stubbornness in sinning do keep or hinder men from the performance of them.⁸²

What Owen has in mind is man's responsibility for putting himself in the position where grace can gain access to his psychological apparatus. Because this psychological access must be sensory, grace is dependent upon external means. Owen holds that a man must himself do two things. First, he must make "an outward attendance unto the dispensation of the word of God, with those other external means of grace which accompany it or are appointed therein."⁸³ Second, there must be, besides physically attending at the occasion of preaching, a real activity of the mind concerning that which is received by the psyche. Owen describes this as "a diligent intension of mind, in attendance on the means of grace, to understand and receive the things revealed and declared as the mind and will of God."⁸⁴

By resting the initiative for the preparatory work upon our own abilities and actions, Owen might seem to be founding regeneration upon a theology of works. He strongly emphasizes the crucial character of this starting point in our natural ability.

These things are required of us in order unto our regeneration, and it is in the power of our own wills to comply with them. . . . The omission of them, the neglect of men in them, is the principal occasion

⁸²Ibid., pp. 229-30.

⁸³Ibid., p. 230.

⁸⁴Ibid.

and cause of the eternal ruin of the souls of the generality of them to whom or amongst whom the gospel is preached.⁸⁵

On the other hand, Owen emphasizes that men are not able thereby to save themselves. Regeneration is still dependent upon the subsequent work of the Holy Spirit.⁸⁶ Nevertheless, this work of ours has genuine importance, since "ordinarily, God, in the effectual dispensation of his grace, meeteth with them who attend with diligence on the outward administration of the means of it."⁸⁷ Owen has not made an absolute correspondence between piety and regeneration; but, under the qualification of the concept expressed by the word "ordinarily," he has given to that correspondence of piety with regeneration a very high importance indeed. We are, after all, capable of this degree of piety, since we are not totally depraved.

Under the ashes of our collapsed nature there are yet remaining certain sparks of celestial fire, consisting in inbred notices of good and evil, of rewards and punishments, of the presence and all-seeing eye of God, of help and assistance to be had from him, with a dread of his excellencies where any thing is apprehended unworthy of him or provoking unto him; and where there are any means of instruction from supernatural revelation, by the word preached, or the care of parents in private, there they are insensibly improved and increased.⁸⁸

When the pious man has attended the sermon and listened with diligence, then there may be "certain internal spiritual effects wrought in and upon the souls of men, whereof the word preached is the immediate instrumental cause."⁸⁹ Again,

⁸⁵Ibid. ⁸⁶Ibid., p. 231. ⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 345. ⁸⁹Ibid., p. 231.

these "ordinarily do precede the work of regeneration, or real conversion unto God."⁹⁰ Owen here mentions three results, which correspond in their order to the sequential theories of Puritan psychology.

The first of the internal effects is illumination of the mind, where any orderly psychological change begins. This beginning point corresponds with our observations in the second and third chapters concerning the emphasis upon the initial role of epistemology (Ch. II) and of illumination (Ch. III). Owen accordingly gives first place to our natural reason, to "an industrious application of the rational faculties of our souls to know, perceive, and understand the doctrines of truth as revealed unto us."⁹¹ When the natural reason is applied to this rational information of the Scripture, which is in the form of "doctrines of truth," then something happens which is called illumination--"that is, a light superadded to the innate conceptions of men's minds."⁹² No matter how "super" this knowledge is, it is fully open to natural reason, since "within the compass of this degree I comprise all knowledge of spiritual things that is merely natural."⁹³

Illumination has two more dimensions. After our natural reason there is a special work of the Holy Spirit "by the word on the minds of men. . . . This light variously affects the mind, and makes a great addition unto what is

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹Ibid.

⁹²Ibid., pp. 231-32.

⁹³Ibid., p. 232.

purely natural, or attainable by the mere exercise of our natural abilities."⁹⁴ In general, it adds a certain "perspicuity" to the natural knowledge of Scripture,⁹⁵ so that the latter is clearly more fundamental. Neither the natural knowledge nor the spiritual enhancement of it produce regeneration, but they are of extreme importance in preparing the way since regeneration itself operates psychologically-- "for saving grace enters the soul by light."⁹⁶ The third and final dimension of illumination is bound up with regeneration itself, and it is not part of preparation.⁹⁷

Conviction of sin follows illumination as the second internal effect in Owen's psychological sequence. Conviction of sin begins with the rational faculty, so that in the mind there is made "a discovery of the true nature of sin by the ministry of the law."⁹⁸ What is learned must then be applied to the conscience and finally expressed in the affections.⁹⁹ The results of conviction of sin are a sense of guilt, fear, and outward acts of humiliation.¹⁰⁰ Owen does not refer to the will, although his psychology would seem to have called for it at this particular stage. The reason for the omission will appear subsequently.

The third internal effect centered in the affections, and it had an external aspect as the actual reformation of life. This is the natural and rather inevitable result of a

⁹⁴Ibid. ⁹⁵Ibid. ⁹⁶Ibid., p. 233.

⁹⁷Ibid. ⁹⁸Ibid., p. 301. ⁹⁹Ibid.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., pp. 233-34.

change begun in the understanding and effected in the conscience. Owen goes so far as to say that this reformation may be great, yet it is not to be equated with real sanctification.¹⁰¹

All of the effects of this preparatory work stimulated by the word of God are really the results of the Spirit's power, because the word does not automatically produce them. Owen comes to this conclusion on the basis of phenomenological evidence and not because his pneumatology demands it.

Many amongst ourselves sit all their days under the preaching of the word, and yet have none of the effects mentioned wrought upon them, when others, their associates in hearing, are really affected, convinced, and converted. It is, therefore, the ministration of the Spirit, in and by the word, which produceth all or any of these effects on the minds of men.¹⁰²

To imply that pneumatology can be evaluated by a study of human behavior includes the assumption that the two are directly related according to a mechanistic psychology. In Owen's hands it means that pneumatology explains the phenomena of human conduct. The latter thus supplies the primary data for theological formulation on this subject.

Owen recognizes that this pragmatism may appear to contradict the very sovereignty of the Spirit which he is emphasizing. In other words, if the Spirit is doing this preparatory work, why does it not infallibly lead to actual regeneration? Can the Spirit's work come to nought? He offers an explanation about these works of the Spirit, saying that "wherever they fail and come short of what in their own

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 234.

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 236.

nature they have a tendency unto, it is not from any weakness and imperfection in themselves, but from the sins of them in whom they are wrought."¹⁰³ Since it might still appear that the Spirit's efficacy has been conditioned, Owen adds a second and further clarification, stating that these preliminary activities of the Spirit are "effectual as unto the ends whereunto by him they are designed."¹⁰⁴ In this case, the Spirit's purpose was not to save men, but only to stir up the souls of men so that they might "seek after deliverance."¹⁰⁵ In order to give primary emphasis to the role of pious human endeavor in the scheme of salvation, Owen has attributed two wills to the Spirit. Only the second will of the Spirit which works regeneration is his will to save. The first will of the Spirit, since it is not properly the will to save men, must be consigned to the category of sport. Owen calls it the Spirit's "management of the law."¹⁰⁶

This legal game which the Spirit plays with men is characteristic of Owen's constant effort to include both God and man--actively--in his program of regeneration-sanctification. Since, for Owen, God and man join their forces at a location in the individual soul--instead of uniquely in Christ--psychology sets the rules for the game. It makes possible Owen's insistence on the simultaneous activity of man and the Spirit, because that activity is interior for us.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 237.

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

The Holy Spirit so worketh in us as that he worketh by us, and what he doth in us is done by us. . . . And whereas he acts us no otherwise but in and by the faculties of our own minds, it is ridiculous, and implies a contradiction, for a man to say he will do nothing, because the Spirit of God doth all; for where he doth nothing, the Spirit of God doth nothing.¹⁰⁷

The work of grace and the works of human duty fully coincide in this preliminary engagement; yet, to identify the Spirit's work too absolutely with our duty would destroy the dialectical tension in Owen's synthesis. Owen's concept of grace nicely maintains the distinctness and necessity of the two partners in this undertaking.

For although there is no grace nor degree of grace or holiness in believers but what is wrought in them by the Spirit of God, yet, ordinarily and regularly, the increase and growth of grace, and their thriving in holiness and righteousness, depend upon the use and improvement of grace received, in a diligent attendance unto all those duties of obedience which are required of us.¹⁰⁸

Having made a place for human piety within the concept of preparatory grace, Owen carefully proceeds to circumscribe it and to distinguish it from actual regeneration. The difference must be sought by introspection--examination of the psychological state of the soul.¹⁰⁹ Owen calls attention to the fact that his description of the preparatory stage of regeneration has not included the will, which is "the ruling, governing faculty of the soul."¹¹⁰ Preparatory grace may have tamed the will to some degree, but it has not crucially redirected it. The truth is that, still, "the bent and

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁰⁸Ibid.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., p. 237.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 238.

inclination of the will itself is to sin and evil always and continually."¹¹¹ Furthermore, the mind has not been illumined so far as to be transformed by the "spiritual excellency" of its discoveries.¹¹² As for the conscience, while it may have been sharpened in its moral insight, it has not been radically cleansed.¹¹³ Finally, the affections may have been quickened, but not thoroughly stabilized and spiritualized.¹¹⁴ Therefore, a full assessment of preparatory grace, although recognizing the possibility of reformation so great "that it will express the whole form of godliness therein," must finally admit that there is in it no firm foundation for a sanctified life, and that it will not endure for long.¹¹⁵ The happy combination of the Spirit's "extra-curricular" activity and men's moral striving do not infallibly lead to regeneration, but neither is there any other access--ordinarily--to that destination.

2. Saving grace and the metaphysics of regeneration.

The actual moment of regeneration in the individual soul is the one act of grace which is attributed to the Spirit alone.¹¹⁶ We have no active part in this. Consequently, Owen exerts himself to contrast the supernatural power of saving grace to the natural power of unregenerate men. Typically, he describes the inability of men, which is the result of

¹¹¹Ibid. ¹¹²Ibid. ¹¹³Ibid., p. 239.

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp. 239-40. ¹¹⁵Ibid., pp. 240-41.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 204.

sin, in psychological terms. The mind is corrupt, and the will and affections are depraved.¹¹⁷ However, what Owen expresses in psychological terms rests on a metaphysical judgment. All unregenerate men have the same ontological status. "And it is a sottish supposition, that there is a sort of unregenerate, rational men who are not under the power of corrupt affections in and about spiritual things."¹¹⁸ All men who have not received the Spirit of God are natural men, and "the natural man neither can, nor will, nor doth, receive the things of the Spirit of God."¹¹⁹

Two of the areas in which Owen delineates the contrast between natural and supernatural (or spiritual) are of interest to us--natural knowledge of spiritual things and good works by natural men. The natural man can only know divine truth "notionally," not "really."¹²⁰ The good works of the natural man are "materially" good, but "formally" sinful.¹²¹

Once Owen has expressed the contrast between the natural and the supernatural, he begins to qualify it. After all, if grace and nature are too disparate, there can be no real point of contact. As for the natural mind, "none pretend that men are, in their conversion to God, like stocks and stones, or brute beasts, that have no understanding."¹²² Therefore, we do have a natural power of reason by which to receive the rational proposal of spiritual things.¹²³ Because of the

¹¹⁷Ibid., p. 244. ¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 258; cf. p. 215.

¹¹⁹Ibid., pp. 259-60. ¹²⁰Ibid., p. 260.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 293. ¹²²Ibid., p. 261. ¹²³Ibid.

supernatural quality of the subject matter, a work of the Spirit must be in some way indispensable for our knowing, but it is the natural equipment of the mind which actually discerns.

Good works by the natural man also have some likeness to true holiness. While sinful, they are not "every way sinful."¹²⁴ They prevent men from taking "such courses of sin as would harden them, and so render their conversion more difficult, if not desperate."¹²⁵ They also serve as "a means appointed of God for their conversion, or the communication of saving grace unto them."¹²⁶

There is a real affinity between man and God, between natural and supernatural, although only grace can actually regenerate men. Especially there are the faculties of the soul--the mind, will, and affections--so that "there is in man a natural, remote, passive power to yield obedience unto God, which yet can never actually put forth itself without the effectual working of the grace of God, not only enabling but working in them to will and to do."¹²⁷ Some degree of affinity between man and God might be considered essential to any theology, but what is crucial is Owen's pointing to the faculties of the soul as the locus of this similarity.

There is, therefore, in us that which may be quickened and saved; and this is all we have to boast of by nature. Though man by sin be made like the beasts that perish,

¹²⁴Ibid., p. 293.

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 295.

¹²⁶Ibid.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 289.

being brutish and foolish in his mind and affections, yet he is not so absolutely; he retains that living soul, those intellectual faculties, which were the subject of original righteousness, and are meet to receive again the renovation of the image of God by Jesus Christ.¹²⁸

Christ appears to be the intermediate instrument of the renovation of particular, individual men, and not the unique realization of it--as in Calvin.

Having shown the necessity of regeneration because of the contrast between unregenerate men and the spiritual realm, and having declared the possibility of regeneration because of the affinity between natural man and supernatural grace, Owen is in a position to propound his doctrine of the Holy Spirit's saving work. In this saving work there will be normal psychological processes. Thus, Owen affirms concerning the word of God,

that the Holy Spirit doth make use of it in the regeneration or conversion of all that are adult, and that either immediately in and by the preaching of it, or by some other application of light and truth unto the mind derived from the word; for by the reasons, motives, and persuasive arguments which the word affords are our minds affected, and our souls wrought upon in our conversion unto God, whence it becomes our reasonable obedience. And there are none ordinarily converted, but they are able to give some account by what considerations they were prevailed on thereunto.¹²⁹

However, regeneration in its essence is not a psychological matter. It is a metaphysical event which transcends mere psychology.

We say that the whole work, or the whole of the work of the Holy Ghost in our conversion, doth not consist herein [psychological effects of the word]; but there is a real physical work, whereby he infuseth a gracious principle of spiritual life into all that are effectually converted and really regenerated, and without which there is no deliverance from the state of sin and death.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Ibid., p. 296. ¹²⁹ Ibid., p. 307. ¹³⁰ Ibid.

The significance of this conception for Owen's theology can hardly be overstated. It is the very heart of the whole. It is the moment of election. It is the drama of incarnation, of Immanuel--God-with-us--the moment of his descent. However, this incarnation is a union of the Holy Spirit with the soul of the individual (God in me), and not of the eternal Son with the man Jesus (God in Christ).

"A real physical work" by a non-empirical agent requires a special metaphysical view of reality. The concept of grace is the metaphysical principle which bridges the gap between the spiritual agent and the physical effect. Grace is a supernatural substance which may be infused into the soul, acting there as the quickening principle which is distinct from the natural faculties.¹³¹ Originally, it was the grace of Christ, though now it is dispensed by the hand of the Holy Spirit.¹³²

When this supernatural substance comes into man, the metaphysical effect is an ontological change in man. There is wrought in us a divine nature, though not exactly the nature of God; "and yet a nature it is which is a principle of operation, and that divine or spiritual,--namely an habitual holy principle, wrought in us by God, and bearing his image."¹³³ Because it is an ontological change, and not just a natural process, it is not consistent with our former level of being and it must be an instantaneous transformation. "Whatever

¹³¹Ibid., p. 287.

¹³²Ibid., pp. 287, 299.

¹³³Ibid., p. 221.

preparations there may be for it and dispositions unto it, the bringing forth of a new form and being by creation is in an instant."¹³⁴ Regeneration is utterly distinct from mere moral reformation. It is a new being.

Christ is not uniquely the new being. He is only the pattern for the new being. Our new birth is analogous to his virgin birth.¹³⁵ Undisturbed by the shift in analogy, Owen can point in the same way to Christ's resurrection as similar to our regeneration.¹³⁶ This makes plain that for Owen the ontological reality of the new being is not located exclusively in Christ, but in any number of individual men.

While Owen emphasizes regeneration as an ontological change, he is also concerned to keep the radical break with the past within the bounds of sobriety. "The work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration doth not consist in enthusiastical raptures, ecstasies, voices, or any thing of the like kind."¹³⁷ Instead, the Spirit ordinarily uses external means, especially the word and the ministry.¹³⁸ In addition to the external means, he stresses again that the Spirit uses the internal faculties.

He worketh also on men suitably unto their natures, even as the faculties of their souls, their minds, wills, and affections, are meet to be affected and wrought upon. . . . His whole work, therefore, is rationally to be accounted for by and unto them who believe the Scripture, and have received the Spirit of truth.¹³⁹

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 222.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 311.

¹³⁶Ibid., p. 317.

¹³⁷Ibid., p. 224.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 316.

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 225.

Regeneration may be a metaphysical event, but since it takes place in the soul its enactment can also be expressed psychologically in orderly and human terms. The change wrought in the understanding "consists in the participation of a new, saving, supernatural light, to enable the mind unto spiritual actings, and to guide it therein."¹⁴⁰ The will, which is in many ways the heart of unregeneracy, poses the delicate question of the irresistibility of grace. Owen attempts to argue that the will is conquered without being compelled.

There is, therefore, herein an inward almighty secret act of the power of the Holy Ghost, producing or effecting in us the will of conversion unto God, so acting our wills as that they also act themselves, and that freely. . . . The Holy Spirit, who in his power and operation is more intimate, as it were, unto the principles of our souls than they are to themselves, doth, with the preservation and in the exercise of the liberty of our wills, effectually work our regeneration and conversion unto God.¹⁴¹

Finally, regeneration in regard to the affections means "not changing the being of our affections, but sanctifying and guiding them by the principle of saving light and knowledge before described, and uniting them unto their proper object in a due manner."¹⁴² Indeed, regeneration "consists in the universal change of the whole soul, as it is the principle of all spiritual and moral action."¹⁴³

The effects of regeneration in the soul provide a phenomenological measurement of this metaphysical happening.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 221.

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 320.

¹⁴²Ibid., p. 335.

¹⁴³Ibid., p. 222.

Introspection is the method, and the soul is the object. "It is the concernment of all individual Christians, or professors of Christian religion, to try and examine themselves what work of the Spirit of God there hath been upon their hearts."¹⁴⁴

Regeneration is objective enough that it will even admit of one man, such as a minister, being able to discover its presence or absence in another man.¹⁴⁵ The task is crucial because it concerns the reality of salvation. Whereas Calvin placed justification always outside of us and only in Christ, Owen locates this decisive work of regeneration explicitly, completely, and objectively in the individual human soul. Because regeneration for Owen is objectively within us, it infallibly produces reformation of life, or sanctification.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, that progressive work of sanctification, which grows out of regeneration, has in some respects an even greater importance since it is the fulness of which regeneration is but the beginning. The real significance of regeneration can only be appreciated by seeing its final results in sanctification.

E. Owen's Doctrine of Sanctification

Sanctification is not an automatic result of regeneration, even though Owen may use the term infallible. The ontological change in us has not made us permanently holy by nature. The new, supernatural principle of life in us is continually

¹⁴⁴Ibid., p. 228. ¹⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 226-27.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 219.

dependent upon grace.¹⁴⁷ We do not make ourselves holy. Sanctification is properly God's work as much as regeneration is. In fact, regeneration and sanctification are finally the same work. Regeneration marks the crucial point of its initiation in us, and sanctification describes its progress in the whole of our nature to the point of completion and perfection.¹⁴⁸

Owen favors us with a formal definition.

Sanctification, as here described, is the immediate work of God by his Spirit upon our whole nature, proceeding from the peace made for us by Jesus Christ, whereby, being changed into his likeness, we are kept entirely in peace with God, and are preserved unblamable, or in a state of gracious acceptation with him, according to the terms of the covenant, unto the end.¹⁴⁹

If regeneration marks the crucial point in the whole concept of the Christian life, sanctification represents the broad horizons of that new view of life. The pneumatological principle pervades the whole of it. Christ serves as the systematic key and the true pattern. Our relation to God is ultimately based upon the covenant terms. We are at the focal point, and sanctification takes place--not uniquely in Christ, as Calvin would have it--in each man's individual nature. We propose to look at this doctrine of sanctification, first, in the reference it has to the individual, and, second, in the reference it has to Christ.

1. Actual holiness versus imputed righteousness.

Owen begins his discussion of sanctification by distinguishing between the Old Testament idea of consecration, in

¹⁴⁷Ibid., p. 368.

¹⁴⁸Ibid., p. 369.

¹⁴⁹Ibid.

which men were made holy simply by the appointment of God, and the metaphysical idea of holiness, in which sanctification is "real and internal, by the communicating of a principle of holiness unto our natures, attended with its exercise in acts and duties of holy obedience unto God."¹⁵⁰ For Owen, sanctification is not genuine for men until it is internal to them, "for holiness is nothing but the implanting, writing, and realizing of the gospel in our souls."¹⁵¹ Righteousness that is outside of us can only have the value of being an example for our own moral virtue.¹⁵² Real holiness in us has the value of a psycho-physical force with a supernatural essence.¹⁵³

There is in this holiness, . . . a ray of eternal light, a principle of eternal life, and the entire nature of that love whereby we shall eternally adhere unto God. The divine nature, the new immortal creature, the life of God, the life of Christ, are all comprised in it.¹⁵⁴

It is therefore the "glorious work of the Holy Spirit" in us, and not to be thought of as mere "legal righteousness."¹⁵⁵

Owen recognizes the dangers involved in stressing an actual holiness in us, and he asserts that our holiness is not atonement, nor justification, nor merit, nor supererogation.¹⁵⁶ It is only a form of thanksgiving and a way of glorifying God, both of which are strikingly similar to Calvin's representation of our sanctification.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Owen has a quite different understanding of the matter. Our sanctification is

¹⁵⁰Ibid., p. 370. ¹⁵¹Ibid., pp. 370-71.

¹⁵²Ibid., pp. 371-72. ¹⁵³Ibid., pp. 373-75.

¹⁵⁴Ibid., p. 376. ¹⁵⁵Ibid. ¹⁵⁶Ibid., pp. 377-80.

¹⁵⁷Ibid., p. 381; cf. Wallace, op. cit., p. 34.

not really a gratuitous affair. God requires holiness of us!¹⁵⁸ However, holiness being impossible by our own performance, God also promises to work the holiness in us himself.¹⁵⁹ Real sanctification in us is still the crucial center of salvation, but Owen sees it in the context of grace--metaphysically conceived as a supernatural substance capable of being infused into us.

Because sanctification is dependent upon grace, it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who is "the immediate dispenser of all divine grace, or the immediate operator of all divine gracious effects in us, whereof this [holiness] is the chief."¹⁶⁰ The principle of grace which the Holy Spirit first put in us by regeneration is likened by Owen to a seed--"namely, the seed of God, whereby we are born again."¹⁶¹ The gradual growth in grace which is the progressive work of sanctification is characterized as nourishment of the seed so as to bear the fruit of holiness.¹⁶² The Holy Spirit is the chief actor in this process, and Owen variously describes his cultivation of holiness in us. Pre-eminently, he operates "by working immediately an actual increase of these graces in us."¹⁶³ Consequently, Owen can stress that sanctification, while actual in us, is not absolute with regard to us, because it is always pneumatologically dependent upon God.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 382.

¹⁵⁹Ibid.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 385.

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 388, cf. p. 409.

¹⁶²Ibid., pp. 388, 396.

¹⁶³Ibid., p. 391.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 394.

Although sanctification is of grace by the Holy Spirit, Owen insists that our full participation is also essential.¹⁶⁵

Whatever, therefore, God worketh in us in a way of grace, he prescribeth unto us in a way of duty, and that because although he do it in us, yet he also doth it by us, so as that the same work is an act of his Spirit and of our wills as acted thereby.¹⁶⁶

There is one very essential thing which must be done completely on our own--that is, to attend unto the appointed means of grace.¹⁶⁷ Having done that, grace will do the rest, although the working of grace is an actual holiness in and by us.

The idea of a justification which is only in Christ and always outside of us troubles Owen. Our relation to this justification can only be for him "a mere external imputation of righteousness."¹⁶⁸ He does not conceive of the possibility of a real participation in the righteousness of Christ. For him, the reality of righteousness must be within us "as a real being and existence, so [having] a constant abiding or residence in us."¹⁶⁹ This is a true, actual holiness which "consists in the renovation of our whole persons."¹⁷⁰ This real holiness in us is "the indispensable means for the attaining of the end of salvation and glory."¹⁷¹ Our holiness is not to be understood as the ground of our salvation--that would be a theology of works. However, that actual

¹⁶⁵Ibid.

¹⁶⁶Ibid., p. 433.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 617.

¹⁶⁸Ibid., p. 417.

¹⁶⁹Ibid.

¹⁷⁰Ibid.

¹⁷¹Ibid., p. 592.

holiness is, by grace and the Spirit, the only method of salvation.

Chosen we are unto salvation by the free, sovereign grace of God. But how may this salvation be actually obtained? how may we be brought into the actual possession of it? Through the sanctification of the Spirit, and no otherwise. Whom God doth not sanctify and make holy by his Spirit, he never chose unto salvation from the beginning. The counsels of God, therefore, concerning us do not depend on our holiness; but upon our holiness our future happiness depends in the counsels of God.¹⁷²

Such actual holiness in us has a phenomenological quality. Most naturally for Owen, its effects are best described in psychological terms. "There is a saving light in the mind, and life in the will, and love in the affections, and grace in the conscience, suited to its nature; there is nothing in us whereunto the power of holiness doth not reach according to its measure."¹⁷³ Owen is subtle enough to say that sanctification is somewhat "secret and mysterious," nevertheless we are all the more exhorted to examine ourselves diligently for evidence of this actual holiness.¹⁷⁴ There are some fairly definite negative signs.

If men do indulge unto any predominant lust, if they live in the neglect of any known duty or in the practice of any way of deceit, if they suffer the world to devour the choicest increase of their souls, and formality to eat out the spirit, vigour, and life of holy duties, or any of these in a remarkable manner, I have nothing to offer unto them to manifest that holiness may thrive in them although they discern it not; for undoubtedly it

¹⁷²Ibid.

¹⁷³Ibid., p. 421. Owen devotes a detailed description to these psychological effects. pp. 493-96.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 402.

doth not do so, nor are they to entertain any hopes but that whilst they abide in such a condition it will decay more and more.¹⁷⁵

Where such clear obstructions to holiness are not present, it is difficult to judge. There may be a real degree of sanctification in some who are not sensible of it. There is great variety in the actual progress, and even temporary setbacks.

God, who in infinite wisdom manageth the new creature or whole life of grace by his Spirit, doth so turn the streams of it, and so renew and change the especial kinds of its operations, as that we cannot easily trace his paths therein, and may, therefore, be often at a loss about it, as not knowing well what he is doing with us.¹⁷⁶

Owen is even skilled in depth psychology, for he observes that a quiet disposition is no sure sign of sanctification-- "the less troublesome waves they have on the surface, the more mire and dirt ofttimes they have at the bottom."¹⁷⁷

Perfection is not the final standard for measuring this actual holiness. In the covenant of grace God does not require our absolute fulfilment of the law, but only our "universal sincerity."¹⁷⁸ God, according to this covenant, mixes grace and mercy with his commands, so that wherever we fall short, "unavoidably," Christ makes up the difference.¹⁷⁹ Thus, finally, are God's grace and our duty combined. God is a wonderful manager, and Owen's doctrines of grace and the Spirit are so conveniently flexible.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 400-401.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 403.

¹⁷⁷Ibid., p. 643.

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 607.

¹⁷⁹Ibid., p. 608.

Since the focus of salvation for John Owen is the regeneration and sanctification in the soul of man, and since phenomenologically there is great variety therein, there must be great variety in the types and degrees of grace and the Spirit's work. On the other hand, when, as for Calvin, justification and sanctification are seen to be centered in and really possessed by Jesus Christ alone, then grace is single and the Spirit's work can be solely defined as the binding of believers into union with Christ.

2. Deification of men versus participation in Christ.

a. Union with Christ.--Owen does speak very positively about the believer's union with Christ. He speaks so emphatically as to say that "we receive nothing by him but by virtue of relation unto him, or especial interest in him, or union with him."¹⁸⁰ It will be crucial for our assessment of his theology to discover the nature and significance of this idea for Owen and to evaluate its theological implications in relation to Calvin's teaching about the union with Christ.

Owen appears to speak of our union with Christ as more of a goal for our sanctification than a ground of it. He speaks about the design of the gospel as (1) beginning with revelation in Christ, which (2) leads to repentance and then to faith, which in turn (3) becomes the means of receiving grace and righteousness, by which (4) there is communication

¹⁸⁰Ibid., p. 414.

of the Spirit, who (5) enables us to receive the atonement and, finally, (6) "hereby to give them union with Christ as their spiritual and mystical head."¹⁸¹ When union with Christ is seen thus as the final destination of the Christian life instead of its beginning point, the idea of man's ascent becomes fundamental and the union tends to feature the spiritual nature of Christ rather than his humanity. The remainder of our examination of Owen's doctrine of sanctification will be directed toward determining the presence and importance of these distinguishing characteristics in his conception of the union with Christ.

In this union with Christ one of the basic elements is the believer's faith. "Faith is the instrumental cause of our sanctification," and "our being in Christ and abiding in him is by faith."¹⁸² A kind of efficacy--"purifying virtue"--is attributed to the blood of Christ, and we become related to it by an act of faith.¹⁸³ Faith approaches the blood of Christ by a series of four steps.¹⁸⁴ First, faith views the blood of Christ spiritually and contemplates it. Second, faith actually relies on this blood for its promised effect. Third, faith works by prayer, and "by this means the soul brings itself nigh unto its own mercy." Finally, faith ~~assents~~ to the reality of God's promises as made true in

¹⁸¹Ibid., p. 377. This same basic plan of an ordo salutis which ends in union with Christ can be found in Works, V, 98-104.

¹⁸²Ibid., p. 414.

¹⁸³Ibid., pp. 443-44.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 444-45.

Christ's blood. The Holy Spirit both works this faith in us and, afterwards, "actually communicates the cleansing, purifying virtue of the blood of Christ unto our souls and consciences."¹⁸⁵

Whether or not Owen's concept of the blood of Christ is in any way comparable to Calvin's stress on the human body of Christ in the believer's union with him can only be asked and not really answered at this point. Owen's language about faith does suggest more of a metaphysical-psychological union with Christ than a pneumatological-physical union with him. To discover more exactly the nature of the union in question, we must examine further the kind of efficacy granted to the blood of Christ.

b. Grace from Christ.--The efficacy of Christ's blood which the Spirit applies has the form--now familiar to us in its metaphysical character--of grace. "All grace is originally intrusted in and with Jesus Christ."¹⁸⁶ In this statement the word "originally" is crucial. Grace is not always "in and with Jesus Christ." He may be the "spring and fountain of it," but the Holy Spirit transports "continual supplies" of this matériel to "the sons of men."¹⁸⁷

Owen appears to qualify the metaphysical view by claiming--contrary to his portrayal of union with Christ as the goal of salvation--that the communication of grace is dependent upon our union with Christ. "Whatever is wrought

¹⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 443, 445.

¹⁸⁶Ibid., p. 414.

¹⁸⁷Ibid., p. 393.

in believers by the Spirit of Christ, it is in their union to the person of Christ, and by virtue thereof."¹⁸⁸ Perhaps it is not surprising that Owen should say this, since his major source book is the New Testament. It is more surprising to hear him saying that the basis of grace to us through Christ is his human nature.¹⁸⁹ However, our analysis of the incarnation of Christ in the preceding chapter has taught us that there is for Owen no genuine union of the human Jesus with the eternal Son, but that the special status of the human Jesus actually depended on his union with the Holy Spirit by the principle of grace. The humanity of Jesus is therefore not really the ground of grace for us. It is only the first fruit of a grace which works now in us like it worked then in him. The source of grace behind the source-for-us in the human Christ is the Spirit, or--ultimately--the absolutely mysterious Deity, who has bound himself in a covenant. Therefore, union with Christ and with his human nature does not derive its importance for Owen from his being the only real and proper possessor of grace, "for if he were, then it would not be our life, but his only."¹⁹⁰ What matters is that Christ is the intermediate cause of a grace that really becomes ours.¹⁹¹

Owen also appears very near to Calvin when he speaks about our union with Christ as partaking of his nature, except--and this is the crucial point--for Owen that does not mean

¹⁸⁸Ibid., p. 516.

¹⁸⁹Ibid., pp. 521-22.

¹⁹⁰Ibid., p. 522.

¹⁹¹Ibid.

partaking of Christ's human nature, but to be "partakers of the same divine nature with him."¹⁹² What Owen means by participation is participation in grace itself. Instead of uniting us to the humanity of Christ as the one ground of divine grace, "the Spirit of God createth a new nature in us, which is the principle and next cause of all acts of the life of God."¹⁹³ We and Christ participate in the same divine nature, which is grace, because we are both objects of the Spirit's sovereign action. "This [principle of grace] is that whereby we have union with Jesus Christ, the head of the church. Originally and efficiently the Holy Spirit dwelling in him and in us is the cause of this union; but formally this new principle of grace is so."¹⁹⁴

The role of Christ in his humanness is decidedly static in this whole affair. The action takes place in our individual human souls. There sin is actually fought, and the battle is focused on the moment when grace enters the soul.¹⁹⁵ There, in the soul, grace increases,¹⁹⁶ for there is where a daily provision is made.¹⁹⁷ There, within us, grace is exercised;¹⁹⁸ for, although Christ gives grace, we must dutifully use it in order to receive any real measure of it.¹⁹⁹ While grace works finally a conformity to Christ,²⁰⁰ it is not because victory is full and final only in him and

¹⁹²Ibid., p. 478. ¹⁹³Ibid., p. 477. ¹⁹⁴Ibid., p. 478.

¹⁹⁵Ibid., p. 545. ¹⁹⁶Ibid., p. 505. ¹⁹⁷Ibid., p. 553.

¹⁹⁸Ibid., p. 505. ¹⁹⁹Ibid., p. 554. ²⁰⁰Ibid., p. 506.

in us by being implanted in him, but because the Holy Spirit accomplishes the mortification of sin in our souls "by implanting in our minds and all their faculties a contrary habit and principle, with contrary inclinations, dispositions, and actings,--namely, a principle of spiritual life and holiness, bringing forth the fruits thereof."²⁰¹

c. Holiness apart from Christ.--In contrast to the idea of union with Christ as participation in his sanctified humanity, Owen appears to advance the notion of a principle of holiness which is established by grace and subsists in us quite independently of Christ. Even before grace does its work, "there are some seeds and sparks of moral virtue remaining in the ruins of depraved nature."²⁰² Real holiness, however, must involve a supernatural element.

This, therefore, is that which I intend,--a virtue, a power, a principle of spiritual life and grace, wrought, created, infused into our souls, and inlaid in all the faculties of them, constantly abiding and unchangeably residing in them, which is antecedent unto, and the next cause of, all acts of true holiness whatever.²⁰³

This actual holiness, which we have already examined in its reference to the individual, seems to form for Owen a supernatural ground for our sanctification. Our individual humanness is in the central focus and not the humanity of Christ. Christ may be the "spring" of this holiness, but it "emanates" from him into us by the Spirit and becomes "a spiritual habit or principle of spiritual life wrought in believers, wherein their holiness doth consist."²⁰⁴

²⁰¹Ibid., p. 551.

²⁰²Ibid., p. 474.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 475.

²⁰⁴Ibid., p. 476.

The crucial question about our sanctification as resulting in an actual holiness in us is whether this sanctification is an effect of our union with Christ or the ground of it. The evidence suggests that for Owen our holiness is the foundation rather than the fruit.

Our union with Christ is immediately in and by the new creature in us, by the divine nature which is from the Spirit of holiness, and is pure and holy. Hereunto and hereby doth the Lord Christ communicate himself unto our souls and consciences, and hereby have we all our intercourse with him.²⁰⁵

We are united with Christ only by the new creation part of us, by the pure and holy nature created by the Spirit. "No unholy person hath any communion with Christ."²⁰⁶ On the basis of this divinized nature we have communication with Christ, and by this sanctified existence of ours he carries on his sanctifying work in the whole of us. "Where the work of sanctification and spiritual cleansing is really begun in any, there ~~the~~ whole person is, and is thence denominated, holy."²⁰⁷

Our actual holiness which is a metaphysical quality and an ontological distinction is the necessary basis for any intercourse between God and man.²⁰⁸ God is holy, and therefore holiness is indispensable for his people. Whomever God elects to bring to himself must first be made holy.²⁰⁹ Owen does not see our holiness as consisting only in the holiness of the human Christ and belonging to us only by virtue of our union with him. Instead, the holiness of Christ is the

²⁰⁵Ibid., p. 465.

²⁰⁶Ibid.

²⁰⁷Ibid.

²⁰⁸Ibid., p. 568.

²⁰⁹Ibid., p. 591.

way in which God shows us "what holiness in us he doth require and will accept."²¹⁰ Of course, by Christ comes "a spiritual power of grace, which shall work this holiness in us, or that conformity unto the holiness of God which he doth require."²¹¹ As a result of Owen's focusing the whole of reconciliation upon the principle of holiness in us, the entire work of Christ is subordinated to it. He says, therefore, that the one, central design of Christ's coming was to renew in us a principle of holiness, and to this end his atonement was but a preliminary step.²¹²

d. Ascent to Christ.--Because Owen grounds salvation upon the principle of holiness in us, independently of a participation in the holiness of Christ by union with him, he styles sanctification as an ascent to Christ by way of our deification. In the grace of Christ, God has found out a way for us, and he has provided this way of sanctification for us to come to him.²¹³ What happened in Christ's death and resurrection was not directly determinative for us; it was only a sign.²¹⁴ He is the exemplar, and we are to resemble him in our own sanctification. The Holy Spirit will deify us in the same pattern; for "the same Spirit which wrought these things in Christ will, in the pursuit of his design, work that which answers unto them in all his members."²¹⁵

²¹⁰Ibid., p. 571. ²¹¹Ibid. ²¹²Ibid., pp. 628-29.

²¹³Cr. ibid., p. 458. ²¹⁴Ibid., p. 560.

²¹⁵Ibid., p. 561.

Admittedly, Christ is more than just a pattern. There is also a sort of efficacious power in his death, and by this power we are enabled to ascend. He not only teaches us the way to go, but gives us strength so to follow.²¹⁶

Christ as pattern and Christ as power coalesce for Owen in a distinctly Platonic fashion that is suggestive of the movement of ascent to God. Faith and love play the central role in this conception. Faith is a beholding of Christ, "and that which we peculiarly behold, we are peculiarly transformed into the likeness of."²¹⁷ Love is a movement of the soul toward Christ. Since love "begets a likeness between the mind loving and the object beloved," it follows that "a mind filled with the love of Christ as crucified, . . . will be changed into his image and likeness by the effectual mortification of sin, through a derivation of power and grace from thence for that purpose."²¹⁸ Christ in his divinity is the great goal of our sanctification, and by the divine effect of his power we are being deified in his pattern. By faith and love we are "assimilating" his holiness.²¹⁹

The meeting place of God with man in the incarnate Christ which was so central for Calvin is nowhere in view. Owen has directed our idea of union with Christ to the divine level. Our problem is to ascend there, and he will graciously

²¹⁶Ibid., p. 562. ²¹⁷Ibid., p. 563. Cf. p. 584.

²¹⁸Ibid., p. 564. Cf. pp. 585-86. ²¹⁹Ibid., p. 584.

assist us. Man's life is a pilgrimage toward that great summum bonum, and when we are in the process of sanctification we know that we are on the way. Sanctification is a genuine progress because it is a union of the divine nature, as represented by the Spirit, with our human nature. The final union will be the completion of our deification, when our human nature is fully joined with the nature of God. The humanity of Christ has no real place in this union (other than being an intermediate channel of grace), which finally is based on our personal holiness by which we have ascended into union with a divine Christ (or, more simply, with the Spirit). The distance between God and us may be great; but the beauty of God attracts the soul, and every approach unto him is "transfiguring."²²⁰ We, for our part, if we have any expectation of receiving grace for the work of sanctification-deification, must labor to be holy.²²¹

F. Metaphysical Theology

Every theology necessarily has a sort of metaphysics, but not every theology would be designated metaphysical. We designate Owen's theology as metaphysical because it depends upon a metaphysical theory as its very foundation--in contrast to our picture of Calvin's theology as dependent upon the historical ground of the Christ-event. Owen's metaphysical theology intends to have an empirical, objective ground in the grace-event within the human soul. However, neither grace nor soul are empirical or objective to us. The grace-event

²²⁰Ibid., pp. 585-86.

²²¹Ibid., p. 651.

in the soul is not strictly physical or concrete, but truly meta physical and supernatural.

The descending-ascending pattern of salvation is not alien to Biblical thought. It relates to the determinative form of the Christ-event in incarnation, death, and resurrection. Owen, however, attributes the really crucial descent to the supernatural substance, called grace, coming into our souls, rather than to the incarnation of Christ. The all important ascent for Owen is the rising of our soul in deification, rather than the resurrection of Christ. T. F. Torrance calls attention to this

notion of event-grace, in which the centre of gravity is translated to man's own decisions and acts, so that Pelagian notions of co-operation and co-redemption are still rife within Protestantism. This involves a failure to distinguish the objective reality of grace from the individual believer's subjective states, and so a tendency, if it may be so expressed, to replace the filioque by a homineque.²²²

We believe this describes quite precisely the state of John Owen's theology and explains the overwhelming importance he gives to this work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian man. This homineque pneumatology is reflected in the psychological, pietistic, and mystical emphases of Owen's theology.

Psychology becomes a major theological discipline for Owen because the grace-event takes place in the soul. The human part of this God-man relation is our humanity, but not our physical humanity. The human participation is

²²²Torrance, op. cit., p. 190.

fully in terms of the soul. Owen may wish to attribute a genuine reality to this soul-experience, and his Aristotelian faculty psychology lends to it an appearance of objectivity, but its reality is finally a thoroughly subjective reality. Its force depends not upon a historical, interpersonal relation, but upon a metaphysical conception which ascribes substance to the soul and conceives of it as a suitable habitation for the supernatural.

Pietism, understood as human moral effort, is given an exalted role in Owen's sanctification-oriented theology. Because it is our own individual humanity which ascends toward divinity, there is room for tremendous stress on human striving. We see this emphasis by Owen both in the work preparatory to regeneration and in the resulting process of sanctification. Here is a genuine place for practical, human participation in the mystery of election; yet Owen avoids the extremes of Pelagianism and Arminianism by putting regeneration at the heart of this human piety. Regeneration depends not upon a genuine humanity and upon the affirmation of that humanity in its humanness, but upon a metaphysical conception of grace as a supernatural substance.

Mysticism flows naturally from Owen's location of the transfiguring force of divinity within the soul. Here is a cosmology where God and man can meet within man. Only pneumatology prevents grace from being a thoroughly pantheistic force and keeps Christ and the absolute Deity at a transcendent distance. This framework allows Owen to express

a powerfully emotional and deeply devotional relation to the Almighty and to Christ. Even the humanity of Christ is subsumed under this cosmology, so that it is but a channel for the pervasive substance of grace. In this combination of substance philosophy and Platonism, actual humanity is phased out--if it were ever really there--since our individual humanity, which has replaced the humanity of Christ in the God-man relation, is in the process of deification. The anthropocentric focus of Owen's doctrine of sanctification serves only to spiritualize man out of his humanity. The spiritualization is not a personal encounter, but a subpersonal assimilation of the supernatural. While Owen intends the Spirit to be the real, personal purveyor of grace, the Spirit in fact has no externally objective, concrete point of reference; he is only an aspect of Owen's metaphysically-grounded cosmology.

2 Owen's metaphysical theology meshes nicely with the whole shape of his theology outlined in the preceding chapters. The Christ as a cosmological means and the Scripture as a psychological means serve the Spirit's work of grace in the crucial program of regeneration-sanctification. The rational powers of the mind are also used in the psychological process of regeneration and sanctification, so that Owen does not stress its corruption. The mind serves more as a means of regeneration than as the object of its effects. What is regenerated is primarily the will and, consequently,

the affections. In the next chapter we will see how, for Owen, the church has its only real being as a means for regeneration-sanctification.

CHAPTER VI

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH: INDIVIDUALISTIC THEOLOGY

Ecclesiastical differences in seventeenth century English Christianity are a study in themselves, and indeed many studies have already been made with respect to the various disputes and divergences. Owen himself engaged extensively in these many-sided controversies. In his Pneumatologia, however, he fails to deal directly with the doctrine of the church. Taking our cue from that, and thus keeping strictly to Owen's pneumatology, we propose to take up briefly the main features of his ecclesiology in order to weigh their significance- from our pneumatological point of view--for the whole shape of his theology. While we want in this way to avoid burdening our study with the labyrinthine side track of the contemporary ecclesiastical morphology,¹ we do expect our study of Owen at this point to offer some suggestive angles of approach toward understanding Puritan ecclesiology.

¹Our procedure implies that Owen's theology determines his ecclesiology, and not vice versa. While this may not be absolutely so, in his case a theology seems to have preceded his position on polity. At the very least, it is clear that ecclesiology was a deeply theological matter for these English Puritans; cf. Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650 (Beacon Press: Boston, 1959), p. 23.

A. The Holy Spirit's Work in the Church

The three concluding treatises in Owen's Pneumatologia correspond in a rough way to the topic of the church, and we propose to find in them both a point of departure to the larger subject of the church and also a general outline for our pneumatological consideration of the church. While Owen has taken up these three subjects mainly because he finds them to be themes of pneumatology in the Scripture and not because they are fundamentally important to his ecclesiology, nevertheless, their systematic significance relates to the doctrine of the church.

1. The Holy Spirit and prayer.

The first treatise takes up the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer. Prayer "is the way whereby we exercise towards him [God] all that grace which we do receive from him, and render him an acceptable acknowledgment of that homage and revenue of glory which we are never able to exhibit in their due kind and measure."² To speak of exercising grace reflects Owen's typical concern to combine divine sovereignty and human moral effort. Even his reference to homage is more a conscious act of obeisance before the Almighty than spontaneous eucharistic praise in Christ. Prayer is being considered in the covenant mode of thought--that is, according to the contract theory. The Holy Spirit is the one who gives the ability to pray,³ so that God has the initial importance

²Owen, Works, IV, 252.

³Ibid., p. 260.

in this matter. What the Holy Spirit gives is enough of the gift of prayer "unto every one so far as is necessary unto his own spiritual concernments, or the discharge of his duty towards God and all others."⁴ Man thus can play his full part.

However, man plays his part as an individual and not determinatively in Christ. Prayer is for Owen not basically a church matter--that is, a corporate act which is corporate precisely because it is grounded in the single covenant in which the human Christ played man's part. Calvin, for example, emphasized that the only valid prayer was and is the intercession of Christ, and that the prayers of individual Christians were and are of value only in relation to his intercession, being made in his name and as members of one body.⁵ Owen, however, makes prayer to belong to the individual as a "spiritual faculty."⁶ He deliberately distinguishes between Christ's intercession and our prayers, because what is crucial is the "work of the Spirit itself in believers."⁷ His work in believers is a work in individual hearts.⁸

The individual nature of the relation between men and God in Owen's concept of prayer is reflected in his distaste for set forms of prayer.⁹ Every man really must be on his own in this matter, for "it is a silly apprehension, and tending to atheism, that God doth not require of all men to

⁴Ibid. ⁵Calvin, Institutes, III, xx, 19.

⁶Owen, Works, IV, 271. ⁷Ibid., p. 289.

⁸Ibid., p. 290. ⁹Cf. ibid., pp. 300-301, 338-350.

regulate their actings towards him according to that sovereign light which he hath erected in their own minds."¹⁰ What Owen clearly has in view is an individual relationship to God on the part of each believer. The significance of this will be the first question we will ask of his doctrine of the church.

2. The Holy Spirit as comforter.

The second treatise by Owen is concerned with the role of the Holy Spirit as a comforter. Experiencing the Holy Spirit as a comforter is one of the chief promises to the church. Owen connects it with the whole work of the Spirit, seeing it as the real nature of the finishing work about which the Spirit has covenanted--"He is intrusted with this work, and of his own will hath taken it on himself."¹¹ Christ had to leave the world, but the Spirit took over. Christ's work was towards God, but the Spirit's work is towards us.¹² Here is the familiar and fundamental duality between christology and pneumatology in the work of redemption---a cleavage which we have been discovering throughout Owen's theology.

At the close of this treatise Owen makes three summary points. First, "all evangelical privileges whereof believers are made partakers in this world do centre in the person of the Holy Spirit. . . . In this one privilege,

¹⁰Ibid., p. 339. ¹¹Ibid., p. 355. ¹²Ibid., p. 356.

therefore, of receiving the Spirit, are all others in-wrapped."¹³ Second, the gift of the Spirit is the greatest possible "pledge . . . of the love and favour of God" and "assurance of a future blessed condition."¹⁴ Third, this gift of the Spirit is a sign of God's willingness that "the heirs of promise should receive strong consolation in all their distresses, when they flee for refuge unto the hope that is set before them."¹⁵ For Owen the being of the Christian life is here focused upon the receiving of the Spirit as the vital aid in our individual pilgrimage. The Spirit comforts us on our way by giving our hearts "spiritual refreshment."¹⁶

How does Christ relate to this work of the Spirit? He is the head of the church, which means that the Spirit first comforted him as he now comforts us.¹⁷ "As it did in the Lord Christ, so also will it do in believers according unto their measure."¹⁸ Christ is the first and foremost in a series of individual pilgrimages--not the one reality and ground of the whole church. What is central is not the being of Christ, but the Holy Spirit dwelling "in us."¹⁹

The Holy Spirit as comforter is given by God to believers "so to act his divine power in them as to enable them unto all the duties of their holy calling; evidencing

¹³Ibid., p. 412.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 374.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 403.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 406.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 408.

them to be accepted with him both unto themselves and others, and asserting their preservation unto eternal salvation."²⁰ This appears to cover the whole field of our sanctification-pilgrimage. The significance of this pilgrimage theme will be the second question we will ask of Owen's doctrine of the church.

3. The Holy Spirit and spiritual gifts.

Grace and gifts are not the same. Grace is divine in nature, but gifts are human abilities.²¹ The gifts are not human in provenance, however, but come from the Spirit.²² While not directly sanctifying, they are nevertheless "the great means whereby all grace is ingenerated and exercised; and although the spiritual life of the church doth not consist in them, yet the order and edification of the church depend wholly on them."²³ There were extraordinary gifts by which the foundation of the church was laid,²⁴ as well as ordinary gifts which make possible the continuance of a visible, organized church.²⁵

If gifts have to do with the foundation and continuance of the church, they must have some relation to Jesus Christ. Indeed, they are from his kingly dispensation and are the "powers of the new world."²⁶ As such they mark the difference between the Mosaic administration of the

²⁰Ibid., p. 404. ²¹Ibid., p. 420. ²²Ibid., p. 427.

²³Ibid., p. 421. ²⁴Ibid., p. 422. ²⁵Ibid., p. 428.

²⁶Ibid., p. 433.

church and Christ's new ordinances, or gospel institutions.²⁷

The distinction between extraordinary and ordinary gifts means that Owen can distinguish between the extraordinary apostolic office and the ordinary ministerial office, with only the former being applicable to the foundation of the church and the latter being alone applicable to the present state of the church. The foundation of the church is crucial because it is thus instituted by Christ, but the ongoing church is still continually dependent upon the Spirit's gift of ministry for its very existence.

Let men mould and cast themselves into what order and form they please, and let them pretend that their right and title unto their church power and station is derived unto them from their progenitors or predecessors, if they are not furnished with the gifts of the Spirit, to enable their guides unto gospel administrations, they are no orderly gospel church.²⁸

The significance of this double relation of the church to Christ--by original institution and by current charismatic ministry--will be the third question we will ask Owen concerning his doctrine of the church as we seek to discover precisely what basis in Christ the church has.

B. The Covenanted Society

Our first question about Owen's doctrine of the church concerned his emphasis on the individual relation between the believer and God at the expense of a corporate

²⁷Ibid., p. 421.

²⁸Ibid., p. 504.

being in Christ. At first sight, one might argue that the congregational Puritans placed an almost abnormal emphasis on the corporateness of the church since they insisted on the character of the church as a covenanted society. So powerful was the cohesive force of this fellowship that a whole society could be based upon it, as Perry Miller has shown us in his study of New England Puritanism.²⁹ It was in fact from this New England experience that John Owen first learned and embraced the congregational way.³⁰ We shall be concerned to discover, then, the true proportions of individualism and corporateness in Owen's doctrine of the church and the significance of these apparently contradictory emphases.

1. The particular church and the principle of consent.

Owen has a three-fold definition of the church. In the first place the church is "the mystical body of Christ, his elect, redeemed, justified, and sanctified ones throughout the world; commonly called the church catholic militant."³¹ The term militant is somewhat out of place here because this church has no visibility, and Owen more accurately describes it as "the catholic invisible church."³² This church consists in its union with Christ,³³ which might be expected to give it the quality of corporateness. Owen points out, however,

²⁹His descriptive accounts are in Orthodoxy in Massachusetts and The New England Mind: From Colony to Province.

³⁰By reading John Cotton, The Keyes of the Kingdom of Heaven and Power thereof, as he reports in Works, XIII, 223.

³¹Owen, Works, XIII, 124. ³²Ibid., XV, 233.

³³Ibid., XIII, 129.

that this union with Christ has no fleshly dimension, but is only a spiritual union.³⁴ The Spirit is the basis of this "union," because the same Spirit which dwelt in him dwells in us and teaches us faith. "They are so taught of God as that they shall certainly have that measure of knowledge and faith which is needful to bring them to Christ, and to God by him."³⁵ Here are the characteristic features of an epistemological relation, a pilgrimage pattern, and union with Christ by ascent to him. Our so-called "implantation into Christ" is simply a "participation of the Spirit" as a supernatural efficacy which works "divine and mighty effects" in the heart of the individual.³⁶ This "union" has no real corporateness to it.

Owen's second mode of considering the church is "the universality of men throughout the world called by the preaching of the word, visibly professing and yielding obedience to the gospel; called by some the church catholic visible."³⁷ He is careful to point out that this church is not visible as a church.³⁸ It is not an institution, but only a particular number of individuals.³⁹ Its only corporateness is "the unity of the faith."⁴⁰

Thirdly and finally, the really visible church is for Owen "a particular church of some place, wherein the

³⁴Ibid., p. 130. ³⁵Ibid. ³⁶Ibid., p. 133.

³⁷Ibid., p. 124. ³⁸Ibid., p. 137. ³⁹Ibid.

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 157.

instituted worship of God in Christ is celebrated according to his mind."⁴¹ In addition to this principle of a church being only that society which worships together in one place, there is implied a second principle which is discipline. "And whereas there are laws and external rules for joint communion given to them that are called, which is confessed, the necessity of churches in the last acceptation [as a particular church], wherein obedience can alone be yielded to those laws, is hereby established."⁴² Owen makes these two marks of the church quite explicit in a later, more mature expression of his ecclesiology. The church is "such a state as wherein the worship of God is to be celebrated in the way and manner by him appointed, and which is to be ruled by the power which he gives it, and according to the discipline which he hath ordained."⁴³

Owen is concerned to limit the being of the church to particular congregations which can worship together and govern themselves because he conceives of the church as a covenanted society. "That which is one church must join at least in some one church act, numerically one."⁴⁴ The idea of covenant in this context means a contract--an agreement entered into actively and voluntarily. What is determinative for the church is the human act of entering into this contract--"herein do they give themselves unto the Lord."⁴⁵

⁴¹Ibid., p. 125.

⁴²Ibid.

⁴³Ibid., XV, 233; cf. Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, p. 57.

⁴⁴Ibid., XIII, 139.

⁴⁵Ibid., XVI, 27.

This resignation of ourselves unto the will, power, and authority of Christ, with an express engagement made unto him of doing and observing all his commands, hath the nature of a covenant on our part; and it hath so on his, by virtue of the promise of his especial presence annexed unto this engagement on our part, Matt. xxviii. 18-20.⁴⁶

This church relation has all the ingredients of a covenant, says Owen, and though it is not itself the covenant of grace it is intimately related to it.⁴⁷ Because there is in this conception of the church a mutual engagement between believers and the Lord in which both perform their parts, therefore "their so doing hath the nature of a divine covenant included in it; which is the formal cause of their church-state and being."⁴⁸ The church in its proper sense must be only a particular congregation because it is based on a contract between those specific people and Christ. A church is only the church in an individual way.

Underlying the very possibility of such a covenanted society is the necessity of the voluntary consent of all those engaging themselves in such a contract. In order for a church to be authentically a church its initial congregating must have been "regular"--"no otherwise done but by their own actual, express, voluntary consent."⁴⁹ Of course, there must also necessarily be baptism, profession of faith, geographical proximity, and joint worship, but the decisive thing concerns "the wills of men, bringing themselves under an obligation unto

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Ibid.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁹Ibid., pp. 25-26.

them [the covenant obligations] by their voluntary consent."⁵⁰ At the bottom of it all we thus find the inviolable Puritan principle of the natural human ability to enter into covenants.⁵¹

Owen defends himself against the charge of schism on the basis of the foregoing definition of the church. All Independents are members of the Church of England to the extent that they are of the elect in England--the invisible catholic church.⁵² They are also members of the Church of England insofar as Christians in England are able to make a true profession of faith according to a standard established on firm doctrinal grounds, independent of Rome--in this way being the visible catholic church.⁵³ But they were not members of the Church of England as a church institution because it was hierarchical instead of particular, and because they (the Independents) were not personally included by consent in the founding or continuance of that organization.⁵⁴ The real meaning of the Church of England can only be a reference to individuals and not to churches.⁵⁵ Schism presupposes membership in a particular church by voluntary consent, and Independents are consequently quite free from such a charge with respect to Rome or Canterbury.⁵⁶ Because Owen has featured the individual human act of consent upon entering

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 26.

⁵¹Cr. Supra, p. 168; Geoffrey Nuttall, Visible Saints (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1957), p. 106.

⁵²Owen, Works, XIII, 182-83. ⁵³Ibid., p. 183.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 189-90. ⁵⁵Ibid., p. 194. ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 196.

a covenant he has forfeited any sense of the visible corporate-ness of the church as the body of Christ. The being of a church resides not in Christ, but in my consent; so that the church is not one, but many.

2. The individual believer and the bond of unity.

The fragmentation involved in Owen's ecclesiology does not stop with the local congregation. Since the determinative issue is the voluntary consent of the individual believer, the relation of the believer to Christ is separated from the relation of the believer to the church--at least, to the church in its proper sense as a particular congregation. "Men must first join themselves unto the Lord, or give up themselves unto him, before they can give up themselves unto the church."⁵⁷ A believer may contract with Christ without contracting with a church.⁵⁸ To be in Christ, then, is an individual matter, not a corporate one. Of course, Owen would say that he is as such (in Christ) a member of the invisible and visible catholic churches, which are collections of individuals; but a man may be a member of these two "churches" without ever becoming a member of a particular church.⁵⁹ This is what Owen especially holds against the Presbyterians--that they require a man to belong to a particular church in order to be a member of the visible church.⁶⁰

⁵⁷Ibid., XV, 321.

⁵⁸Ibid., XIII, 147.

⁵⁹Ibid., pp. 175-76.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 193.

It must be admitted that Owen does teach it to be a man's duty to join a particular church; but it is not a necessity.⁶¹ Men appear to be quite free to begin churches at will⁶² and to separate from them upon grounds of conscience.⁶³ To break with churches is not schism; indeed it may be a duty.⁶⁴ To break with a church does not mean that one has broken with Christ. As a matter of fact, one may be compelled to break with a church precisely in order to maintain union with Christ. "He that will not separate from the world and false worship is a separate from Christ."⁶⁵ Separation from a church is a serious matter, "but separation from the sinful practices, and disorderly walkings, and false unwarranted ways of worship in any, is to fulfil the precept of not partaking in other men's sins."⁶⁶

Schism is, properly, only the breaking of the bond of union between a believer and Christ.⁶⁷ This does not refer to "any kind of relinquishment or desertion of any church or churches."⁶⁸ Church unity is therefore a matter which is distinct from unity with Christ. That the church is the body of Christ is for Owen only a pretty phrase. It has no connection with Christian reality. The union with Christ is fundamentally individual.

⁶¹Ibid., pp. 150, 176.

⁶²Ibid., p. 179.

⁶³Ibid., p. 171.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 68.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 69.

⁶⁷Ibid., p. 124.

⁶⁸Ibid.

C. The Pilgrim Society

Our second question about Owen's doctrine of the church concerned the pilgrimage character of the believer's sanctification. If the Holy Spirit is the one who comforts us on the way, what connection does our journey have with the role of the church? Does the nature of the church in Owen's view of it confirm or repudiate the pilgrimage interpretation of the Christian life as an ascent to God on the basis of our personal holiness?

1. Voluntary consent and the goal of edification.

Owen insists that the formation of the church on the basis of voluntary consent is absolutely necessary because of the nature of the church's life. "There are many mutual duties required of all which join in church-societies, and powers to be exercised and submitted unto, whereunto none can be obliged without their own consent."⁶⁹ The life of the church is a deliberate human enterprise and those within it must be willingly engaged in the program. The most characteristic expression used by Owen to describe this enterprise is the term edification. This is why it is the duty of every Christian to join some particular church--"for his own spiritual edification."⁷⁰ This is also the basic justification for separation from any particular church.

⁶⁹Ibid., XVI, 28.

⁷⁰Ibid., XV, 320.

It must be remembered that communion with particular churches is to be regulated absolutely by edification. No man is or can be obliged to abide in or confine himself unto the communion of any particular church any longer than it is for his edification.⁷¹

One does not need to join a church in order to be joined to Christ, but he does need to join a church in order to fulfil certain aspects of edification which can only be carried out in a social context.⁷²

The principle of exclusion gives us some clue as to the meaning of edification. "All wicked and profane persons, . . . are indisputably cut off."⁷³ The ignorant are also excluded, for "there is a measure of knowledge of absolute and indispensable necessity to salvation."⁷⁴ Excluded as well are several categories of papist--"hypocritical self-justiciaries," "idolaters," and "all that worship the beast set up by the dragon."⁷⁵ It would seem from this that to be edified means to become a moral, catechized Protestant. Such a conclusion would be confirmed by what is included in the church--"competent knowledge of the doctrines and mystery of the gospel," "constant performance of all known duties of religion," and "a careful abstinence from all known sins."⁷⁶

Edification is not only identified with the moral life--"exemplary walking in all holiness and godliness"⁷⁷--but also with the ascent to Christ according to the holiness

⁷¹Ibid., XVI, 21.

⁷²Ibid., XIII, 176.

⁷³Ibid., pp. 133-34; cf. ibid., XVI, 13, 17.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 134.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 135-36.

⁷⁶Ibid., XVI, pp. 15-17.

⁷⁷Ibid., XIII, 85.

in us. "Let this, then, be the great discriminating character of the church from the world, that they are a holy, humble, self-denying people. Our Master is holy; his doctrine and worship are holy: let us strive that our hearts may also be holy."⁷⁸ What is in view is union with Christ on the basis of our moral behavior. "We desire no more to constitute church-members, and we can desire no less, than what, in the judgment of charity, may comply with the union that is between Christ the head and the church."⁷⁹ Owen realizes that one cannot make an absolutely certain test of such actual holiness, but he proposes that the church should proceed "on evidence of moral probability."⁸⁰

2. Edification by worship and discipline.

Edification takes place in the ongoing life of the church. Exercise is a key word. In the congregation there can be "the joint exercise of the faith and love of true believers," which "is a principle means of the increase and augmentation of those graces [of the Spirit of Christ] in themselves, or their spiritual edification."⁸¹ By exercise, therefore, grace is increased, and this is edification. The "exercise of faith and love" refers to the two primary functions of the church--worship and discipline.

Worship and discipline can only be genuinely carried out in particular churches, because only these are "such

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 86.

⁷⁹Ibid., XVI, 20.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 21.

⁸¹Ibid., XV, 252.

societies as wherein the solemn duties of his worship are performed, and his rule or discipline are exercised."⁸²

Worship must be according to divine institution and discipline according to divine command⁸³--both of which are clear in the Scripture. These matters can be vitally carried out only in a local congregation because there men are able to know one another and act together authoritatively.⁸⁴

Worship is important, for it is "a way for the joint exercise of the graces and gifts of the Spirit."⁸⁵ Mutual edification by means of this human activity is "the especial end of all churches, their offices, officers, gifts, and order, Eph. iv. 12-16."⁸⁶ "Whatsoever doth not promote edification is excluded out of the worship of the church."⁸⁷ When worship is thus seen as edification, it has become a means for the pilgrim to come to God rather than being a eucharistic response to and participation in the victory of Christ. The emphasis is upon human performance. So crucial is this edification theme for the meaning of worship that when a church is of such a nature that it cannot perform this duty of worship together regularly, Owen claims that it ceases to be a real church.⁸⁸

Discipline is no less important for the life of the church in Owen's view.

⁸²Ibid., p. 253. ⁸³Ibid., p. 233. ⁸⁴Ibid., pp. 253-54.
⁸⁵Ibid., p. 264. ⁸⁶Ibid. ⁸⁷Ibid., XVI, 243.
⁸⁸Ibid., XV, 265.

And it cannot be questioned, by any who understand the nature, use, and end of evangelical churches, but that a relinquishment of the rule of the gospel in any of them, as unto the practice of holiness, is as just a cause of withdrawing communion from them as their forsaking the same rule in doctrine and worship.⁸⁹

Discipline is, perhaps, even more clearly aimed at the goal of edification as its single purpose.⁹⁰ Discipline means "vigilant watchfulness over each other's conversation, attended with mutual admonition in case of disorderly walking."⁹¹ It also means that "persons openly or flagitiously wicked be not admitted into the society of the church."⁹² If disorderly members are unrepentant "they are to be cast out of the church."⁹³ The ministers are the ones who fill the ruling office of the church and they must carry out its discipline. "The sole end of the ministerial exercise of this power and rule, by virtue thereof, unto the church, is the edification of itself."⁹⁴

Edification is clearly for Owen the primary purpose for the church's existence. It clearly consists in human effort, and it has in view the goal of holiness. Its features bear a marked resemblance to Owen's deification-concept of sanctification. The church is for Owen truly a pilgrim society.

D. The Instituted Society

Our third question about Owen's doctrine of the church concerned the nature of the church's foundation in

⁸⁹Ibid., XVI, 22. ⁹⁰Ibid., p. 31. ⁹¹Ibid., XIII, 83.

⁹²Ibid., XV, 339. ⁹³Ibid., XVI, 13. ⁹⁴Ibid., p. 31.

Christ. Owen referred to the extraordinary institution of the church by the appointment of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit, but he did not conceive of the church as being a historically authoritative organization. Instead, the church was continually dependent upon present ministerial gifts. We want to discover in our examination at this point in just what sense the church represents Christ and in what particular way it is presently related to him.

1. The church as the primitive original.

Owen conceives the church as having a definite, original form which was pure and ideal in its primitiveness. "I know no other reformation of any church, or any thing in a church, but the reducing of it to its primitive institution, and the order allotted to it by Jesus Christ."⁹⁵ These complementary notions of a divine institution and of reductionism to the primitive original mean that Owen places a heavy emphasis on form--strange for a Puritan.⁹⁶

Clebsch, in his study of Tyndale and other early English reformers, noted the importance of the issue of ceremonial laws. These men reviled the Roman church because of these ceremonial laws which they felt had been nullified by Christ.⁹⁷ Here is perhaps the root difficulty behind later controversies over vestments, prayer book, and ritual

⁹⁵Ibid., XIII, 202; cf. pp. 119, 182.

⁹⁶Form here refers not so much to a ritual concern as to a literal, abstract concern.

⁹⁷Clebsch, op. cit., pp. 168-69.

in general. We can guess Owen's stance on this matter from our previous study of his handling of the Mosaic covenant.⁹⁸ The Old Testament form of worship was "a yoke of bondage"--having its rightful place before Christ lived, but now utterly annulled.⁹⁹ The new covenant established by Christ has included with it its own explicit form of worship.¹⁰⁰

This emphasis on form applies to both the worship and the discipline as well as to the pattern of organization. The worship includes specific "ordinances," the discipline is "prescribed by himself," and the officers are those "whom he hath appointed."¹⁰¹ What is fundamental in this emphasis on form is a formal relation to Christ. He originates a church-form, but the church is not the corporate participation in his being. If a Christian wants to be connected with Christ, he must above all seek the correct form of the church.

And when any society or combination of men (whatever hitherto it hath been esteemed) is not capable of such a reduction and renovation, I suppose I shall not provoke any wise and sober person if I profess I cannot look on such a society as a church of Christ, and thereupon advise those therein who have a due right to the privileges purchased for them by Christ, as to gospel administrations, to take some other peaceable course to make themselves partakers of them.¹⁰²

Christ has been pushed back into the isolation of a historical moment--the originating of a form. He is not the present reality in which we participate corporately and out of which some particular forms may grow in a vital way.

⁹⁸Supra, p. 177. ⁹⁹Owen, Works, XXIII, 64-65.

¹⁰⁰Ibid. ¹⁰¹Ibid., XV, 262; cf. pp. 233-34.

¹⁰²Ibid., XIII, 202.

2. The church as the means of grace.

The church is yet related to Christ in more than a formal way for Owen. Christ is, of course, the repository of grace. "And on the ministry and the church do all ordinary communications of grace from God depend."¹⁰³ Grace regularly comes by external means, and therefore even the crucial work of regeneration is dependent upon the church.

We grant that in the work of regeneration, the Holy Spirit, towards those that are adult, doth make use of the word, both the law and the gospel, and the ministry of the church in the dispensation of it, as the ordinary means thereof; yea, this is ordinarily the whole external means that is made use of in this work, and an efficacy proper unto it it is accompanied withal.¹⁰⁴

While external means of grace are necessary according to Owen's psychology, we noticed in the preceding chapter that for him the more fundamental concept of this grace-relation was metaphysical. This concept also finds expression in terms of the relation of the church to Christ. He sees Christ (though essentially not in his human nature) as being "such an immense fountain of grace as from whence there should be an emanation of it into all the members of the mystical body."¹⁰⁵ He offers an analogy of the vine and the branches (John xv, 1-6) in which he stresses the union between Christ and his church. However, what is determinative in his analogy is the juice, which represents his metaphysical concept of grace. "And the Lord Christ doth

¹⁰³Ibid., III, 193. ¹⁰⁴Ibid., p. 316. ¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 519.

spiritually and voluntarily communicate of this grace unto all believers, as the vine communicates its juice unto the branches naturally."¹⁰⁶

3. The church and its ordinances.

The implications and relative significance of the formal and mystical relations of the church to Christ might further be weighed by a consideration of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The very fact that they are called ordinances rather than sacraments may reflect their nature for Owen as something which Christ has instituted rather than some way of Christ's being unto us--rules rather than reality, our performance rather than our participation. On the other hand, these two acts of worship, especially, might be expected to be means of grace.

a. Baptism.--Baptism is properly a baptism of infants, claims Owen; unless of course an individual has never been baptized and is now an adult, in which case he is rightly baptized as an adult. What underlies Owen's position on this matter is his covenant theology. The covenant with Abraham was the covenant of grace in the form of a promise, and according to this covenant all his "seed" were included in the promise.¹⁰⁷ Owen does not mean to say that all children of church members are automatically elect, but if regeneration is entirely God's act then infants may theoretically be elect and may theoretically die before they

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 521.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., XVI, 259.

are old enough to personally "own" the covenant.¹⁰⁸ While baptism is not essential to their election, they should not be deprived of the sign of regenerating grace since God would not so order things as to intentionally separate the sign of regeneration from the fact of it.¹⁰⁹ Therefore, baptism must be administered to infant children of believing parents.

One might suppose that this line of argument could be logically extended to include the baptism of all children, since any of them may be potentially elect. It is significant that Owen does not make this extension. The basic reason for his restriction of baptism to the children of believers inheres in his conception of the covenant relation. A covenant is not really a covenant without man's active participation. How then can infants be included in a covenant when they are yet unable to enter into such a contract personally? They are included under the Abrahamic notion of their parents' covenant as long as they do not actively repudiate it.¹¹⁰ A covenant is still a contract--in this case a contract made by the parents because children are unable to make their own contract. Children do not belong to the covenant because of any genuine corporateness of men in Christ, since the children of uncovenanted parents are excluded.¹¹¹ What is central and foundational is the human act of consent which in this case

¹⁰⁸Ibid., pp. 259-60.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 22.

¹¹¹Ibid., p. 258.

has to be the parents' act. "Thus it is with the children of believers with respect unto the covenant of their parents, whence alone they are said to be holy."¹¹² Of course, these children must subsequently affirm this covenant by their personal ratification when they are old enough to do it.¹¹³

Baptism, besides being proper for infants, does not basically refer to the form of immersion. Owen exerts himself to prove that baptism means washing. "Wherefore, in this sense, as the word is applied unto the ordinance, the sense of dipping is utterly excluded."¹¹⁴ He does not prohibit the use of immersion "as a mere external mode," but he devilishly insists that then the ordinance must be administered to people while they are "stark naked."¹¹⁵ The significance of his concern about this form of baptism is fundamental. He is against baptism by immersion because that appears to signify a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ.¹¹⁶ He holds that we do not participate in that death and resurrection, but only in the grace that results from it.¹¹⁷ The idea of washing suggests in a more appropriate fashion this participation in grace. In this way Owen has clearly disclosed to us that our union with Christ has, not the personal dimension of being in him, but the metaphysical dimension of sharing in his grace. Thus, the

¹¹²Ibid., p. 261.

¹¹³Ibid., p. 262.

¹¹⁴Ibid., pp. 266-67.

¹¹⁵Ibid., p. 267.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 268.

¹¹⁷Ibid.

participation can be individual and not corporate; and the formal relation with Christ as the historical figure of long ago is congenial with the mystical relation with Christ as the source of grace--the human Christ corresponding to the former and the divine Christ to the latter.

b. The Lord's Supper.--The Lord's Supper also reflects Owen's concept of a formal relation to Christ. In its celebration we are "to keep severely unto the institution of Christ, as unto the way and manner of their administration."¹¹⁸ Nothing is to be included in it "but in express obedience unto his authority."¹¹⁹ It is "an ordinance of thanksgiving" for Owen chiefly, it would seem, because at the original institution Christ gave thanks.¹²⁰

The Supper is, as was baptism, largely a human act, which is performed in accordance with the primitive original. Thus Owen exhorts, "Let us prepare our hearts for it in the authority of its institution."¹²¹ Because the human involvement is crucial, only "those who are meet and worthy" should participate.¹²² Consequently, Owen advises his congregation, "Prepare your souls for special communion with him, then, by subjugating them thoroughly to the authority of Christ in this ordinance."¹²³ This Lord's Supper gives them an opportunity to exercise their faith.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 79. ¹¹⁹Ibid. ¹²⁰Ibid., IX, 578.

¹²¹Ibid., p. 528. ¹²²Ibid., XVI, 79.

¹²³Ibid., IX, 528. ¹²⁴Ibid., p. 529.

The Lord's Supper also conforms to the covenant pattern. Christ is present in this ordinance by representation, exhibition, and obsignation (sealing).¹²⁵ Having said this, Owen proceeds to emphasize our presence, which is so crucial in any covenant affair. "There are three acts of faith whereby we may be present with Christ,"¹²⁶ which correspond with the three modes of his presence. First, we recognize him, which is done by remembrance¹²⁷--Christ is here the distant, historical figure. Second, we receive him as a way of entering into the agreement in which he has offered himself--"Let Christ be received into your hearts by faith and love, upon this particular tender that he assuredly makes in this ordinance of himself unto you."¹²⁸ Finally, we "seal the covenant," which means "solemnly to take upon yourselves again the performance of your part of the covenant."¹²⁹

Christ is present in this covenant mode of being, but Owen makes clear that this is not to be understood as any sort of corporeal presence. "The corporeal presence of Christ, and the evangelical presence of the Holy Ghost as the Comforter, in the New Testament, are inconsistent."¹³⁰ Calvin said the very opposite--that Christ is corporeally present precisely by means of the Spirit's power.¹³¹ There is in the Supper,

¹²⁵Ibid., pp. 573-74. ¹²⁶Ibid., p. 574. ¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 575. ¹²⁹Ibid. ¹³⁰Ibid., p. 572.

¹³¹Calvin, Institutes, IV, xvii, 10, 18, 33. Stephen Mayor, in "The Teaching of John Owen Concerning the Lord's Supper" (Scottish Journal of Theology, XVIII [June, 1965]), is right in pointing to the difference between Owen and Calvin on this matter (pp. 176-77). Owen, he notes, objects to the

says Owen, only a "spiritual exhibition" of Christ.¹³² "It is a great spiritual mystery, not at all to be apprehended but by the supernatural light of faith."¹³³ Our relation to Christ is basically epistemological in this ordinance. We supernaturally see him, but we do not partake of him. "O let us labour for this in particular, if possible, that through the power of the Spirit of God, we may have some impressions of the love of Christ on our hearts."¹³⁴

In this ordinance of the Lord's Supper the combination of a formal and mystical relation of the church to Christ is evident. Formally, Christ is the historical originator whom we remember. Mystically, he is related to us by the grace of the covenant. There is no corporate dimension involved in this relation, but individual human effort is at the center.

If God help us afresh to receive the atonement at this time, we have discharged our duty in this ordinance; for here is the atonement proposed, from the love of God, and from the love of Christ, by virtue of the

Roman doctrine of transubstantiation as putting "more" into the Lord's Supper than was there (Works, XXIII, 39), whereas, Calvin's argument with the Romans was their putting less--a quasi-physical presence, says Mayor--into this sacrament than the real presence of Christ (cf. Institutes, IV, xvii, 17, 29, 32). This difference between Owen and Calvin is related to Mayor's further remark about the Lord's Supper that "for Owen it is wholly related to the order of redemption, not that of creation" (p. 180). This reflects somewhat the distinction we have been discovering between the humanity of Christ and his divinity--our connection being only with his divinity (grace) and not with his humanity.

¹³²Owen, Works, XXIII, 39. ¹³³Ibid.

¹³⁴Ibid., IX, 584.

compact between the Father and the Son, through the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ, in his whole person, soul and body. Here is an atonement with God proposed unto us: the working of our faith is to receive it, or to believe it so as to approve of it as an excellent way, full of wisdom, goodness, holiness; to embrace it, and trust in it.¹³⁵

E. Individualistic Theology

Our study of the work of the Holy Spirit in relation to the church correlates with, and thoroughly confirms, the conclusions of our earlier chapters. We have discovered the contract-concept of the covenant running throughout and being especially evident as the very basis of the particular church. We have found the pilgrimage-concept of sanctification to be the one great purpose of the church's existence--edification. Finally, we have corroborated our former analysis of the believer's union with Christ in seeing the church related to Christ's humanity in only a formal, historical way and related to him spiritually by means of grace.

In all of this, individualism defines the church. It has no corporate being in Christ. It is as an individual that one joins this organization. It is as an individual that one makes his pilgrimage by edification. It is as an individual that one is at all related to the head of the church. Instead of being the body of Christ with its corporateness consisting in the humanity of Christ corporately fulfilling our human part in the covenant, the church is only the chance number of individuals who enter into covenant on their own.

¹³⁵Ibid., p. 588.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION: JOHN OWEN AND PNEUMATOLOGY

A. The Shape of a Theology

Owen's theology is consistently pneumatological. The pneumatological principle of the Holy Spirit as the proximate person of God pervades the whole of his thought. This does not mean, however, that his theology is thoroughly theocentric. Indeed, it is precisely because his theology is so anthropocentric that it is so pneumatological. The Holy Spirit may be divine, but since he is spirit our knowledge of him--and of God by him--always has a radical tendency to be speculative. We saw how Owen's pneumatological principle led to a rational theology. We noticed his emphasis on the Scripture as an authoritative check on this speculative rationalism, although we also saw that the Scripture, being propositionally understood, was only masking some other authority--a rationally subjective one.

Owen by no means neglected the place of Christ, and one might suppose that his emphasis on Christ would supply an objective, theocentric focus for his theology. The Christ and the Spirit were intimately related in his thought, but the Christ was allotted a systematic role located in the past and the Spirit was given the independent, vital role of

uniting with the believer. Christ in his humanness was only an intermediate factor in the covenant plan. Christ in his divinity was the cosmological source of grace. The Spirit represented to us only the divine Christ and his grace, so that again subjective speculativeness loomed over Owen's thought--there being no firm relation between God and man which is objective to us.

While his stress on Scripture and Christ were attempts to keep the speculative tendencies under control, Owen's treatment of regeneration and sanctification revealed his central theological concern--the pious life. When the divine enters into the humanity of the individual according to the metaphysical principle of grace--there is the creative center of his thought which shapes the whole. At that point it is clear that Owen has cast his vote for an anthropological theology. What is important is the individual man on his own salvation-trek.

The church has little significance for Owen, since individualism is the sovereign mode of thought. The church is only an external means of grace or an aid to edification for the individual on his holiness-way.

Nevertheless, we must recognize the importance of Owen's stress on any church at all. His theology is not utterly subjective. He has worked out a very sophisticated synthesis. Scripture, Christ, church, and even the doctrine of grace--at least, over against a doctrine of salvation by works--represent an objective balance to his subjective

theology. It is the role of the Holy Spirit which enables him to make the synthesis operable, and it is our study of his pneumatology which has enabled us to discover the ultimately subjective foundation of his theology. Does John Owen do justice to both the objective and subjective factors in revelational theology? We would say that he presents the appearance of a synthesis, but at heart his theology is thoroughly subjective.

B. The Role of the Holy Spirit

We claim our study to be a confirmation of our critical viewpoint, because our pneumatological approach has indeed guided us to the very nerve centers of this man's theology. It has enabled us to probe under the semantic surface--so heavily overlaid in his case--to test the real significance of his line of thought. It has led us to a somewhat revolutionary conclusion¹--that this most rigorous of English Calvinists held an anthropological theology. It represents a judgment upon any radical disjunction of Calvinist and Arminian, or Puritan and Anglican.²

On the basis of our study we propose some considerations concerning pneumatology and the nature of Christian theology. Pneumatology is the dynamic principle of theology,

¹Perry Miller and Leonard Trinterud would not be surprised at this, but Vose, Wallace, Nuttall (who have all studied Owen extensively), and a host of others would be.

²As, for example, John F. H. New contrasts them in Anglican and Puritan: The Basis of Their Opposition, (1558-1640) (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1964).

but if it is going to play its proper role it must have a firm anchorage. It is vital since it is the connecting link between Christ and the individual Christian. If it is not to be radically subjective it must have an indissoluble relation with him who is outside of us--the Christ.

Our study found an increasing value in its reference to Calvin because we saw in him a fundamentally different handling of the relation between Christ and the Spirit. Whereas Owen saw Christ and the Spirit as independent persons, Calvin appeared to see the Spirit only as Christ's Spirit. Again, Calvin's emphasis on the body of Christ as the ground of the Spirit's relation to believers appeared as a crucial difference between him and Owen. When Owen linked the Spirit with only a divine Christ, he cut the Spirit off from the incarnation which was the primary, objective, historical connection between God and man.

Once Owen had introduced a relation between the Spirit and Christ which had basically omitted the humanity of Christ, then the doctrine of the trinity no longer had a christological basis, but only a speculative one. Indicative of this philosophical conception of the trinity is Owen's extreme view of the personality of Father, Son, and Spirit--arguing that believers had communion with each of them separately.³ When God is known in this philosophical way, then epistemology is inevitably detached from soteriology.

³Owen, Of Communion with God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Each Person Distinctly, etc. in Works, II.

Furthermore, when pneumatology is divorced from an incarnational christology, it has serious consequences for genuine anthropology. If the Spirit is related to us only as a divine principle, it readily leads to an emphasis on the spiritual side of man's being--a stress on the soul at the expense of the body. Indeed, by centering on the individual man and a spiritual principle infused into him Owen's theology encouraged the deification of man--which, conversely, is man's dehumanization.

Covenant theology might be an antidote to spiritualizing tendencies since it emphasizes man's role in the relations between God and man. A theology which respects the importance of both objective and subjective factors in the relation of God with men must be as genuinely anthropocentric as it is theocentric. However, when the anthropos is the individual, he remains in the grasp of subjectivism and subject to the spiritualization noted above. When, however, the anthropos is the Christ who genuinely fills the human side of the covenant relation and fulfils it in a determinative way, then the relation of God to man is objective to us and the human role is genuinely included in a way that is free from subjectivity or spirituality. Then, the Spirit as Christ's Spirit does not negate our humanity by uniting us with Christ, but affirms it since he unites us with the fulfilled humanity of Christ.

What we conclude, then, is that pneumatology is indeed the vital, dynamic feature of Christian theology, so

that God in Christ is thus intimately and subjectively related to us in our human condition. However, the genuineness of this relation always depends on this pneumatology being strictly related to christology--and to a christology that includes the full and abiding humanity of Christ.

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