

John Owen on the Study of Theology

By Ryan M. McGraw

Few things are as important for the vitality and strength of the Church of Jesus Christ as the manner in which men are trained for the ministry of the gospel. In 1977, the late D. M. Lloyd-Jones made the observation that “the Protestant Reformation, while it clearly saw the error of the teaching of Rome and introduced true gospel teaching and preaching, and while it corrected the doctrine, in my opinion did not deal in a fundamental manner with this further matter of training men for the ministry. It tended to take over the general idea of training, and though it gave men a different teaching, the method seems to me to have been much the same.”¹ In 1561, John Owen expressed a similar concern, although in a more conservative manner. He began with a qualification: “I am not out to stir up what is best left unstirred, nor yet to force a new method of study on you. That is not *my* nature.”² However, the errors that often came by way of the philosophical definitions of medieval scholastic theology concerned him enough to write, “through the darkness of these errors, there has arisen an elaborate, ingenious, and artificial science, not far removed from that taught by secular philosophy in the place of gospel theology” (Owen, *Biblical Theology*, xlv).

Owen did not suggest radical revisions to the subject matter of the curriculum, but instead he urged for revisions in defining the nature and task of theology itself. His primary concern lay in his definition of what “true theology” is and who “true theologians” are and,

consequently, the personal qualifications and conduct that are necessary for the “true theologian.” Exactly how far Owen parted ways with his contemporaries remains to be evaluated; but reading him on his own terms, he believed that he was making a significant advancement in the nature of theological studies. The feature of his teaching that is the most striking and instructive is that he argued that “true theology” involves both revelation from and personal communion with all three Persons of the Godhead, involving the rebirth of the human personality. He wrote a lengthy volume entitled *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, which was designed for the purposes of addressing contemporary debates over theological education. Partly due to its English title, *Biblical Theology: A History of Theology from Adam to Christ*, the purpose of this work has been largely neglected by a popular readership. The significance of his contribution to theological education is demonstrated clearly by re-evaluating his so-called *Biblical Theology*, by the distinction he made between “true theology” and “Christian philosophy,” and by the personal qualifications he set forth for theological students. According to Owen, the best way of transforming the study of theology in ministerial training was to redefine the nature and task of theological study.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF OWEN’S “BIBLICAL THEOLOGY”? : CONTEXT AND ANALYSIS

Owen lived in a twofold context. On the one hand, he was an English “Puritan.” On the other hand, he was a “Protestant Scholastic” theologian, in the sense that he was part of a broader international movement of Reformed theology especially in connection to the “schools” and the training of ministers. It is the latter context that is particularly relevant as the background for *Theologoumena Pantodapa*.

THE AUTHOR: Ryan M. McGraw is pastor of Grace Presbyterian Church in Conway, SC, and holds a M.Div. and a Th.M. from Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

1. D. M. Lloyd-Jones, “A Protestant Evangelical College,” in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions 1942–1977* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989), 359.

2. John Owen, *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ*, trans. Stephen P. Westcott (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1994), xlvi. Emphasis original to the translation.

Context: "Protestant Scholasticism"

A recent writer has argued that referring to Owen as a "Protestant Scholastic" attributes to him a position "that he himself firmly repudiates."³ This verbal repudiation of "scholasticism" was common among virtually all of the Reformed theologians as well as Luther. However, it fails to recognize that scholasticism had a twofold significance in the writings of the Reformed. On the one hand, scholasticism referred to theological content, which in most cases the Reformed thoroughly rejected; on the other hand, scholasticism referred to a theological method and system of organization.⁴ In this sense, the scholastic method referred to the manner in which theological inquiry was conducted in the context of the schools, as well as the manner in which theology began to be organized in conjunction with a codified confessional form of Reformed theology. While Owen did not write a systematic treatment of theology in a single volume, yet his methodology bears general characteristics of continuity with contemporary Reformed theology, both in England and throughout Europe. This is particularly evident in *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, where his purpose is partly to correct and modify the "scholastic" definitions and approach to the theological task. In this sense, he may be called a "Protestant Scholastic." Even with his modifications and criticisms of the method of his contemporaries at points, he lies within the realm of "Protestant scholasticism," which though sharing common features, was not a monolithic movement without variation (Muller, *PRRD*, I, 41).

Scholasticism was a theology "of the schools." It provided Reformed theologians and pastors with a clear system of theological organization as well as with tools to establish truth and to dismantle error. One clear instance of this was the *disputatio* method, which was common to the Middle Ages and to the Reformation and Post-Reformation periods alike. On their very surface, Owen's works abound with this method, both in his more "academic" as well as his "popular" works. Along with other "Protestant scholastics," he made heavy use of Aristotelian categories. This does not mean that he and others accepted the content of Aristotle's metaphysics or ethics, but that his categorical distinctions were adapted as a tool with Reformed content imported into them.⁵ Luther, whose writing contain numerous vitriolic attacks against both Medieval Scholasticism as well as Aristotle, did not hesitate to make use of Aristotle's fourfold causation.⁶ This illustrates precisely the point that attributing a scholastic method to men such as Owen, or identifying a heavily modified use of Aristotle, by no

means implies that these men adopted wholesale scholastic (or Aristotelian) theological content.

On the same note, there is a similar distinction between two uses of the term "philosophy" among Reformation and Post-Reformation theologians. On the one hand, "philosophy" could simply refer to the humanities, such as logic and rhetoric. On the other hand, "philosophy" often referred to metaphysics and ethics as derived from human reason apart from Scripture (Ibid., 277). Medieval theology, particularly following the lead of Thomas Aquinas, sought to harmonize truth as derived from nature and truth as derived from grace via God's revelation in Scripture. While not opposing revealed truths to one another in either nature or in grace, the Reformed frequently refused to view philosophy as a proper source for theological knowledge due to the depravity of the mind of man as fallen. Thus, the doctrine of sin became an important aspect of Protestant theological Prolegomena (Muller, *PRRD*, I, 108). This meant that in "Protestant scholasticism," philosophy was spoken of positively when it referred to developing proficiency in the humanities, but it was at times spoken of very negatively in relation to truth, metaphysics, and ethics. This reinforces the assertion that "Protestant scholasticism" represents a Reformed adaptation of the current methods of the

3. Stephen P. Westcott, *By the Bible Alone! John Owen's Puritan Theology for Today's Church* (Fellsmere, FL: Reformation Media and Press, 2010), 593. This work is designed to be a popular work on Owen's theology and it usefully illustrates the popular misconception of "Protestant scholasticism." The author confuses scholastic method with scholastic content. Westcott contends that scholasticism inherently involves the elevation of reason above faith via the Medieval synthesis between nature and grace (602). Popular historical theology often suffers from a lack of accurate historical research, coupled with scholarly rigor. Ironically, it was these very features that characterized Owen's own theological method.

4. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, Volume One: Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 34–37. Also see David C. Steinmetz, "The Scholastic Calvin," in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed., Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Bletchney, UK: Paternoster, 2005), 19–21.

5. See especially Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1998), esp. 29–44, who addresses Owen's use of Aristotle at length. In a later article, Trueman accuses those who import Aristotelian content into Protestant appropriations of him of being guilty of the "root fallacy." Trueman, "A Small Step Toward Rationalism: The Impact of the Metaphysics of Thommaso Campanella on the Theology of Richard Baxter," in *Protestant Scholasticism*, 188, 193. See also R. Scott Clark, "The Authority of Reason in the Latter Reformation: Scholasticism in Caspar Olevian and Antoine de le Faye," in *Protestant Scholasticism*, 126. Muller consistently refers to this as a "Christian Aristotelianism."

6. Lowell C. Green, "Melancthon's Relation to Scholasticism," in *Protestant Scholasticism*, 279.

day without implying any necessary appropriation of theological content.⁷

Owen's practice of theological reflection as well as his assertions concerning theological method must be understood within the international context of "Protestant scholasticism," with which he was conversant. As we shall see below, in the first pages of his *Theologoumena Pantodapa*, he argued vigorously that many perversions in theology resulted from an overuse of Scholastic and extra-biblical terminology as well as an over-dependence upon Aristotle. This does not mean

7. In this regard, James T. Dennison, Jr. incorrectly asserts that Turretin's attempted synthesis of reason and revelation was "classical" due to the fact that it bore resemblance to Aquinas' synthesis of nature and grace. James T. Dennison, Jr., "The Twilight of Scholasticism: Francis Turretin and the Dawn of the Enlightenment," in *Protestant Scholasticism*, 252. Martin I. Klauber more correctly observes the radical shift in the Reformed attitude towards reason and the use of natural theology with the rise of the Enlightenment, which implicitly brought a radical shift in the manner in which Protestants sought to establish the truth claims of Christianity apologetically. Martin I. Klauber, "Theological Transition in Geneva from Jean-Alphonse Turretin to Jacob Vernet," in *Protestant Scholasticism*, 266. See also Muller, *PRRD*, I, 122, 141, 146, and 160ff.

8. For a discussion of the distinction and relationship between the theology of the schools and popular theology in "Protestant scholasticism," see Donald Sinnema, "The Distinction Between Scholastic and Popular: Andreas Hyperius and Reformed Scholasticism," in *Protestant Scholasticism*, 127–144.

9. For a useful treatment of Owen's circumstance and work at Oxford, see Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), ch. 3. It is surprising that Toon only made passing reference to *Theologoumena Pantodapa* on p. 56. Though he provides a useful discussion of the raging debates over theological education in the 1650's, it is strange that he makes no reference to *Theologoumena Pantodapa* in relation to these debates, since this volume contains Owen's contribution to the debates. As shall be seen below, this book cautiously addressed the topic of revising the theological curriculum in an atmosphere where addressing this question could have been met by a severely hostile response.

10. Sebastian Rehnman describes this translation as being "of such inferior quality that it cannot be used for serious study." Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books House, 2002), 17, fn 3. His assessment is generally correct and it should be noted that the translator himself referred to his work as "an English interpretation of the Latin text." Though it is regrettable that the first English edition of this work does not adhere to the Latin text more closely, I have chosen to use it in this article for at least two reasons. First, Rehnman's disappointment over the translation is slightly exaggerated. Owen's essential thought stands forth clearly in the translation, particularly for those who have some familiarity with his other writings. Second, for all of its faults, this translation is the *only* one currently available to English readers. This author believed that this article would be more useful if his readers could find the places cited in the translation and read them in light of the arguments presented here.

11. The full statement is: "When I first set myself to writing this

that he should not be referred to as a "Protestant Scholastic." Instead, this reflects the common concern of "Protestant scholastics" to adopt a method of formulating theology that honored Scripture and that was consistent with their theology. Owen desired a more thorough revision of the use of terms than most of his contemporaries (Muller, *PRRD*, I, 153). While frequently justifying the use of extra-biblical terminology where appropriate or necessary, he desired to limit these terms to the barest possible minimum. The fact that he criticized aspects of the method that he had been trained in and had observed at Oxford does not mean that he desired to sever himself from the theology of the schools. If anything, he sought to modify the theology of the schools by closing the gap between academic and practical theology.⁸

Analysis of Theologoumena Pantodapa

From 1651 to 1660, by the appointment of Oliver Cromwell, John Owen served as Dean of Christ Church, and later as Vice-Chancellor (1652–1657) of Oxford University. He filled the position that was vacated by the removal of Presbyterian conformist and member of the Westminster Assembly, Edward Reynolds. He also labored alongside of renowned fellow Congregationalist minister, John Goodwin, who was appointed Dean of Magdalen College. Of the works that resulted from his tenure at Oxford, the one that most clearly reveals his views on the method of theological education is a large Latin work bearing the abbreviated Greek title, *Theologoumena Pantodapa*.⁹ The only available English translation has been entitled, *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ*.¹⁰ J. I. Packer provides the following translation of the full original title: "Theological affirmations of all sorts, or, of the nature, rise, progress, and study, of true theology with digressions on universal grace, the rise of the sciences, marks of the Roman Church, the origin of writing, ancient Hebrew script, Hebrew punctuation, Jewish versions and forms of worship, and other things" (*Biblical Theology*, xii).

It is striking that though Owen's stated purpose in writing this large volume consisted in expounding "some themes concerning the nature of gospel theology" (*Ibid*, xlix), the section in which he addressed this topic directly occupies merely one hundred out of seven hundred pages! Everything contained in the other six hundred pages was "necessary to preface their exposition" only (*Ibid*).¹¹ When Owen at length arrived at the subject of "evangelical theology" proper, he wrote, "It has been my professed intent and stated purpose—almost

my one and only purpose in this work—to set forward the theology of Christ” (Ibid, 591). However, in light of the title provided in the English translation, readers may be surprised to realize that this section does not expound what is called New Testament Biblical Theology. Instead, his true purpose was to expound the definition, nature, and methodology of theological studies. Everything set forth in the first six hundred pages of this work, in his view, established the theological *pre-suppositions* necessary for understanding and accepting his conclusions concerning the nature and method of “evangelical theology,” which was a term interchangeable with “true theology.” The primary reason for this fact is that the doctrines of Original Sin, the effects of total depravity on the mind of man, and the Trinitarian work of redemption provide the fundamental backdrop for understanding the nature and method of theological studies. “Evangelical theology,” “true theology,” and “gospel theology” as they are used in this work are *not* synonyms for *the gospel of Jesus Christ*, but rather represent Owen’s position with respect to the *task of theological study*.

In this respect, the English title, *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ*, is somewhat misleading. Owen’s purpose was *not* to set forth “the history of theology from Adam to Christ,” but to set forth the doctrine of the fall and of redemption in a manner that set the stage for his explanation of what true theology is, the principles upon which it is built, who is able to study it, and what is required of theological students.¹² The preface, purpose statement, general contents, emphases, and conclusions point to the fact that he designed this large work to serve as a “Prolegomena” to theological studies. If we remember that the two fundamental principles of Protestant Prolegomena are the being of God (*principium essendi*) and the Holy Scriptures (*principium cognoscendi*), then it immediately becomes clear that the topics selected by Owen revolve around these two great *principia*. Even his “digressions” served this overarching purpose. The digression dealing with the “notes” of the Church according to Roman Catholicism, for example, demonstrated the effects of sin upon true religion, resulting in apostasy and preventing the true knowledge of God. His heavy emphasis upon the Hebrew language and the various ancient “versions” of the Scriptures reflected both his concern for the integrity of Scripture, as well as his assertion that the primary task of theological students should be to study the text of the Scriptures in the original languages.¹³ He included these discussions because he believed that they were inseparably

connected to the authority of Holy Scripture. The fact that this work follows the historical progression of redemptive history creates *prima facie* plausibility for referring to the work as a “biblical theology,” yet even a cursory perusal of volume one of Muller’s magisterial work on Reformed Dogmatics illustrates that Owen carefully limited his material to the questions that were central to Protestant Prolegomena. If the modern epithet of “biblical theology” is attached to his work, then modern readers will be tempted to read the work with contemporary expectations regard the nature of biblical theology. The result will be that Owen’s selection of topics shall appear strange at best, with inexplicable gaps in his material. On the other hand, if one of his contemporaries read this book, they would have understood immediately that he was attempting to set forth a Prolegomena in the context of the historical character of biblical revelation.

work, I had no other plan than to expound, for your Christian consideration, some themes concerning the nature of gospel theology. What I had prepared for that purpose you will find consigned to that last part of this volume. But what I found necessary to preface to their exposition, which in the beginning I had expected to be done with briefly, has grown into the size you see. In fact, this is not at all out of keeping with our great subject, although it was never planned for.” This “preface” swelled to 590 pages!

12. Even William Goold, who republished Owen’s works in the nineteenth century, seems to have slightly missed the point of *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. In his preface to what was originally volume XVII of Owen’s Works, Goold wrote, “The treatise is simply a historical dissertation on the origin and progress of theology, in a spirit thoroughly evangelical, and in a style somewhat remarkable for the power and compass of its Latinity.” John Owen, *The Works of John Owen D. D.*, ed., by William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1862), vol. XVII, 2. Goold wrote a chapter-by-chapter synopsis of the Latin text of what was then volume XVII, but as Westcott has noted, his synopsis is an elaborate summary of the work with little analysis. See *Biblical Theology*, 721. The original Latin text of volume XVII along with Goold’s synopsis may be obtained from archive.org. Note that there are several versions of the works of Owen and that it is volume XVII of the Goold edition that contains that Latin text of *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. Carl Trueman refers to this volume as “a major Latin work of covenant theology,” but even this description falls short of Owen’s emphasis on the definition and nature of “true theology.” Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 5. Muller correctly refers to the work as a Prolegomena to theology. *PRRD*, I, 118.

13. Owen argued that the first priority of theological students is to study Greek and Hebrew, but especially Hebrew. The reasons for his preference for Hebrew are reflected in the relevant “digressions” and also lie in the significance of the untranslatable parallels, allusions, and other literary devices that are so often used in that language. He believed that Hebrew was the original language of mankind and the only language not corrupted by the events at the Tower of Babel. The curse fell upon those who participated in the sin; therefore, the godly were not cursed in the confusion of their language and continued to speak Hebrew.

His final digression, entitled “Digression on Philosophic Corruptions of Theology,” particularly reflects the heart and soul of Owen’s work. In that section he argued that man’s ability to know the truth by means of unassisted reason has been abolished as a result of man’s fall into sin. As a result, every attempt to establish truth based upon philosophers such as Plato, and especially Aristotle, has resulted in the corruption of true theology and of the Bible itself.¹⁴ The most striking example of his hard stance against mingling elements of philosophy

14. Rehnman contends that Owen spoke disparagingly of Aristotle only in the context of *general* references to him, but that all *specific* citations of Aristotle in his writings have a positive connotation. This overlooks the manner in which Owen used Aristotle. When citing Aristotle, he never did so to *establish* a point of truth, as some Medieval scholastics would have done. Instead, he used Aristotle and philosophy for structural purposes (such as logic and rhetoric), but not as a source of truth (such as ethics and metaphysics). Rehnman expresses surprise at Owen’s negative view of philosophy and reason in this volume in light of his later extensive use of both. His proposed solution is that Owen was simply bitter that the Puritans ultimately lost the English Civil War! This ignores the force of his extensive argumentation for his position in *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. It is one thing to use reason as a tool; it is another matter to use reason as a source of theology. Owen himself advocated the study of logic in this very book (608). A better possible explanation of his position is that his duties as Dean and Vice-Chancellor afforded him an occasion for an intense re-evaluation of the scholastic model of theological education. He wrote, “Adopting and relying on [Aristotelian philosophy], the scholastics, in effect, replaced the norm and faith of evangelical theology with a barbarous and pseudo-scientific ‘learning.’ ... Whenever they hold up their perverse and improper speculations, it is always the name of Aristotle that they shelter behind” (676). Green’s comments about the twofold use of the term “philosophy” mentioned above are particularly relevant here. Green, 277. Trueman adds the useful observation: “[Owen’s] use of the language of Aristotelian commentary tradition is simply indicative of the fact that he was raised and educated in a system of education with roots in the Middle Ages and the pedagogical literature of the Renaissance – indeed, given the universal acceptance of this language in the realm of intellectual life at the time, and the fact that it was used by Protestants, Catholics, Remonstrants etc., one wonders what alternative vocabulary he might reasonably be expected to have used.” Trueman, *John Owen*, 8.

15. Muller notes that apologetic tactics and the use of philosophy radically shifted as Protestant scholastics began to interact with the Enlightenment. Prior to this time, “The Protestant Orthodox disavowed evidentialism.” *PRRD*, I, 141. This does not mean that they were “fideists,” but that they relied upon the “inner logic” of their system as its own apologetic. *Ibid*, 164.

16. For a good discussion of Owen’s education and the extent of his learning see Carl R. Trueman, “John Owen as a Theologian,” in *John Owen: The Man and his Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 2002), esp. 44–51.

17. This use of “natural theology” is immediately obvious throughout Books I and II.

18. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, trans. George Musgrave Giger (Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 1997), I:6.

with theology is demonstrated by the fact that he rooted the apostasy of the Middle Ages in “the first mingling of gentile philosophy with true theology” by the early church apologists (*Biblical Theology*, 675). By framing apologetic arguments for the Christian faith that were “hammered out on secular anvils,” and by “attempting to match philosophy with philosophy,” good men such as Origen, Clement (of Alexandria), and even Tertullian unintentionally set the stage for wholesale apostasy (*Ibid*, 673–674).¹⁵ The use of philosophy in true theology had been employed by “almost all denominations of Christians,” but this “unnatural partnership of philosophy with theology” was the reason why “our evangelical doctrine has been cast down from its spiritual supremacy and loses its heavenly grandeur” (*Ibid*, 671). Philosophy is a prominent topic in *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. The learning Owen displayed in his citations of a broad range of philosophers and theologians throughout this work is astonishing.¹⁶ His primary use of philosophy, however, was to illustrate the noetic effects of sin upon man’s ability to know God. The history of philosophy is thus the history of a gradually progressing *apostasy* from the true knowledge of God. To the extent that the “theologians” of the church had imbibed the teachings of the philosophers, they had taken the church a step closer towards apostasy. Even though Westcott’s English title does not adequately reflect this fact, he noted correctly: “The English language reader will be unlikely to have reached this point in the book without realizing that in this ‘Digression’ he has, in many ways, reached the real ‘core’ of the work, and is face to face with the real points which Owen wishes to make, and is anxious that his readers understand and ‘take on board.’” (*Biblical Theology*, 721, “general note”). This “core” consisted of a vigorous polemic against philosophy as a source for any true knowledge of God, man, or the world.

This point is reinforced further in light of Owen’s treatment of “natural theology.” He asserted that the history of philosophy is the history of the gradual perversion of “natural theology” (Book I, chapter 8). “Natural theology” is not that which the unregenerate man derives from natural revelation through the use of unassisted reason. Rather, “natural theology” refers to fallen man’s “memory” of the knowledge of God before the Fall, as well as information obtained through revelation in subsequent history and handed down by oral tradition.¹⁷ Francis Turretin, Owen’s younger contemporary, noted later that the Socinians denied the legitimacy of “natural theology” by insisting that “what may appear to be such has flowed partly from tradition handed down from Adam.”¹⁸ What he had in view was that while the

Socinians affirmed that revealed theology was transmitted from generation to generation, they denied that man had the testimony to his Creator within him. Turretin referred to this internal testimony as a “principle or potency” that included reason, the capacity to understand and know God, and “the natural first principles of knowledge from which conclusions both theoretical and practical are deduced” (*Elenctic Theology*, I:6).

Obviously, Owen did not conceive of “natural theology” in the Socinian sense. He maintained the biblical teaching concerning the witness within man by virtue of bearing the image of God. However, his position on “natural theology” was stated more strongly than some of his contemporaries. Contrasting Owen with Turretin on the use of philosophy in theology illustrates this point. Turretin stated, “They sin in defect who hold that philosophy is opposed to theology and should therefore be altogether separated from it, not only as useless, but also as positively harmful.... The orthodox ... do not confound theology with sound philosophy as the parts of a whole; nor do they set them against each other as contraries, but subordinate and compound them as subordinates which are not at variance with, but mutually assist one another” (Ibid, I, 44). In contrast, Owen asserted, “A philosophical method of teaching spiritual matters is alien to the gospel! Christians were quite strangers to philosophy in the days of the apostles.... The spiritual nature of the gospel is most wickedly eclipsed while multitudes of petty ‘scholars’ fret themselves how they might best teach the faith within a rigidly structured, accurate, methodological-philosophical form” (*Biblical Theology*, 679–680. Emphasis original to the translation).¹⁹ Though Owen’s writings consistently demonstrate his use of “Christian Aristotelianism,” his comments demonstrate that he was concerned with more than simply excluding philosophy from the foundation and content of the theology. He desired some revision of the form or method of theology as well. In this sense, there is at least a partial discontinuity between the assertions of *Theologoumena Pantodapa* and some other proponents of Protestant Scholasticism.

However, Owen’s rejection of philosophy as a source of theology is in line with the Prolegomena of Protestant Scholasticism (See Muller, *PRRD*, I, throughout). Philosophy did not represent the *discovery* of “natural theology.” Philosophy represented the *distortion and loss* of “natural theology.”²⁰ This was most clearly evidenced by the writings of the Greek poets, who took the oral record of true historical events and embellished them by way of intricate and fantastic stories. Thus Noah eventually became a Greek god and Nimrod the “mighty hunter”

was the origin of the Bacchus myth. Likewise, God gave the sun as a great light to “rule” the day; therefore, all subsequent idolatry had its ancient origin in sun worship. The significance of his discussion of these things, together with the further distortions introduced by the philosophers, is that he was establishing a basis upon which the use of philosophy in discovering the truths of God ought to be rejected *in toto*.²¹ Instead, true theology is taught by the Spirit through His revelation in the Scriptures and through His experiential application of the Scriptures to men’s hearts by regeneration (*Biblical Theology*, 668–684). If the effects of Original Sin upon man’s mind demand the extraction of philosophy from “gospel theology,” then the three prerequisites to the study of theology are the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit, the covenant of grace (including the Mediator of the covenant and the commands required by the covenant), and divinely instituted forms of worship.

Owen implicitly laid the groundwork for a biblical epistemology as well. He did this with reference to what Calvin referred to as the *sensus divinitatis*, or the witness within man that the Lord is God.²² Even though

19. Even a casual reading of Owen’s work reveals that statements such as these are abundant throughout. Though Turretin’s work was published roughly twenty years after Owen’s, it was as though Owen had Turretin in mind in his assertions. In stark contrast to Owen’s sentiments in this passage, Turretin wrote: “Although the apostles taught theology without the help of philosophy, it does not follow that we also can do it because the consequence from that extraordinary and immediate instruction of God (which was necessary in those first beginnings of the rising church) to the ordinary and mediate (which is given by the study and the help of inferior sciences) does not hold good.” Turretin, *Institutes*, I, 47. It is striking that while both Owen and Turretin cited Tertullian’s famous question (intended to accentuate the disjunction between philosophy and theology), “What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?” Owen cited him with approval and Turretin cited him with disapproval.

20. See chapters 7–9 of Book I. Book III traces the same gradual apostasy of mankind through the loss of the original knowledge of God by examining the origins of pagan idolatry. Book V traces the process of idolatry among God’s old covenant people. Book VI, chapter 8 demonstrates that this process occurred once again in the new covenant church, resulting in Medieval Roman Catholicism. The common thread in all of these discussions is that if man is not regenerated by the Holy Spirit in conjunction with receiving revelation from God, human wisdom (i.e., philosophy) has nothing to contribute to the true knowledge of God other than apostasy.

21. See the whole of Book I, chapter 8.

22. John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeil, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), book I, chapters 3–4. For an excellent treatment of Calvin’s teaching on this point, see K. Scott Oliphint, “A Primal and Simple Knowledge,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 16–43. Owen’s view of “natural theology” as I have presented it above is very similar to Oliphint’s exposition of Calvin’s *sensus divinitatis*.

he denied that the witness within man to his Creator could teach man any certain knowledge of God, this internal witness provided man with the *capacity* to know God. The image of God largely consists in this capacity. This internal witness to the Creator is the foundation for man's conscience and of his capacity for reason and knowledge. Human philosophy and reason can never provide a viable epistemology, or theory of why knowledge is possible. The capacity for knowledge rests upon the fact that man is made in the image of God and thus possesses the capacity for knowing God. However, without the regenerating work of the Spirit, man is nothing but darkness and blindness. As a result, an awareness of who man is in relation to God, coupled with fallen man's inability to know God without divine assistance, and the work of Christ and of the Holy Spirit in the accomplishment and the application of redemption have far reaching implications for the nature and methods of the study of theology. These were common observations in post-Reformation Protestant prolegomena.

If Owen's true purpose in this book was to examine the methods of genuine theological studies and the consequent demands upon theological students,²³ why did he begin with a lengthy biblical and historical introduction? In part, this question has already been answered. He needed to lay the theological and systematic underpinnings upon which his conclusions rested. It is important to remember that among older Reformed authors, the hard-and-fast distinction that often exists today between biblical theology and systematic theology was unknown. This does not mean that older authors did not engage in what is now called biblical theology, but that biblical theology and systematic theology were often the same endeavor. This is reflected by the fact that the *logical order* of topics in systematic theology often closely follows the *historical order* in which God has revealed himself in Scripture. As a result, either method reads as an unfolding story.²⁴ Owen believed that his teaching on the study of theology could not be considered independently from the theological presuppositions demanded by

the Scriptures as a whole. The theological presuppositions that we bring to the Bible, as well as the subsequent understanding obtained from the Bible, both contribute to a gradually self-correcting system.²⁵ The Prolegomena to theology precedes the theological system in order, but the theological system determines the nature of the Prolegomena, which is developed last (Muller, *PRRD*, I, 85). It is not entirely improper to entitle Owen's *Theologoumena Pantodapa, Biblical Theology*, as long as the reader remembers that the limited "biblical theology" serves only as the foundation of the true purpose of the work, which is to set forth the nature of theology and the method of theological studies (see above). This is a complete work on Prolegomena with all of its theological underpinnings expounded at length. More precisely, Owen has set forth the definition, genus, nature, object, subject, and foundations of theology as a discipline.

Owen believed that his title would make the aim of his book immediately perspicuous: "The very title page of this book will demonstrate, without further explanation from me, the intention of the work I have undertaken. Clearly it attempts to map out the nature of true Theology, and maps out the course and method by which others may follow in a God-honoring method" (*Biblical Theology*, xiii–xiv). In Owen's thought, "true theology" did not refer to the body or system of Christian doctrine. Instead, "true theology" referred to the *nature* of theology itself, the *task* of theological studies, and the *character* of theological students.

DEFINITIONS OF "TRUE THEOLOGY" AND THE "TRUE THEOLOGIAN"

The primary contribution of *Theologoumena Pantodapa* to Reformed Prolegomena lies in its definitions. According to Owen, "true theology" is a communication from the Father, to the Son, to the soul of the believer by the Holy Spirit, who uses this knowledge in the renovation of the human personality. The doctrines of Original Sin, communion with the Triune God, and regeneration are essential to his definition of "true theology." The usefulness of his definition becomes clear in light of the contrast he made between "true" or "evangelical theology" and "Christian philosophy." Owen denied that theology could properly be termed a "science" and he sought to determine the nature of theological studies on the basis of Scripture alone. This is made clear through his definitions themselves, the nature of the true theologian, the contrast between "true theology" and "Christian philosophy," and by viewing these

23. The seventeenth-century German Reformed theologian, Johan Heinrich Alsted, included the method of theological studies and the proper posture of students of theology in his Prolegomena as well. Muller, *PRRD*, I, 116.

24. See J. V. Fesko, "The Antiquity of Biblical Theology," in *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.*, ed. Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey Wadlington (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2008), 470–471.

25. See the useful discussion in Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2002), 61–77.

matters in light of his overarching concerns regarding “scholastic” education.²⁶

“True Theology”

Owen defined “true theology” both by negation and by affirmation. Negatively, “true theology” is not a science.²⁷ “Science” is knowledge based upon deductions derived from principles agreed upon by reason, whereas “theology” is known only by “God revealing God” (*Biblical Theology*, 8). As we have seen, he taught that philosophy and reason have distorted (rather than discovered) “natural theology.” Therefore, since theology is concerned with the knowledge of God, it is not a science like other human sciences. He argued that scholastic debates as to whether or not theology is a science or an art, theoretical or practical, had uselessly clouded the discussion with Aristotelian categories. He wrote, “their subtle reasoning all the while mixing Aristotelian philosophy with Christian simplicity, have only served at last to stretch their rationality so far as to display no intelligence whatsoever” (Ibid, 7). This is certainly out of accord with his contemporaries, who accepted these debates as inherited from medieval discussions. By contrast, “Theology . . . relies upon a Divine influence over the mind, which must be submissive to the truth of the Revealer. It will be seen, then, that as the subject matter of theology is largely God himself, it is as infinitely far removed from the methodology of science as the sciences themselves are from nonexistence” (Ibid, 8). Even where the term “science” was applied in an exclusively theological sense, he made the strong assertion: “Certainly none of the ends of evangelical theology are served by theological science” (Ibid, 608).²⁸ The reason for such a bold statement was that “theological science” employed definitions and methods that were common to *all* sciences. His contention was that unless theology was placed in a category of its own, it was a distortion of “true” or “evangelical theology.”²⁹

Owen’s denial that theology is a science was closely coupled with his assertion that theology is impossible for the unregenerate: “Now I ask you, how is a man who simply cannot understand scriptural matters, who considers them foolishness, who cannot at all be capable of such things, be accounted as a gospel theologian? Anyone who considers otherwise is either mistaken in their thinking or they do not believe the gospel!” (Ibid, 614). Natural men can study Science; spiritual men only can study theology. The knowledge of God that Owen had in view in the study of theology was the *revelation* of the Spirit in the Scriptures, as well as the *illumination* of the Spirit in the believer. This line of argumentation

was rooted in his thorough and profound exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2. Beginning with verse four, he wrote,

See, then, that just as mathematicians and logicians have their own demonstrations and proofs, so also our teaching is based upon demonstrations and proofs, but demonstrations and proofs of the Spirit and of power – things as far above the range of human wisdom as heaven is above the earth. Paul then goes on to add the reason and purpose of this distinction, ‘that your faith might not stand in the power of men’ (verse 5), which, naturally, it would, if theology were based upon the same criteria as the arts and sciences of human philosophers, or had similar principles, nature or purpose, ‘but in the power of God’ (God’s power making *his* wisdom effective in Paul’s preaching), ‘Howbeit we speak wisdom . . . yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of the world, that come to naught (which proves that Paul’s wisdom comes not by human erudition), but we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world to our glory’ (verses 6–7).³⁰

26. As noted above, the two great *principia* of Protestant Scholasticism were Scripture (*pricipium cognoscendi*) and the being of God (*pricipium essendi*). See Muller, *PRRD*, I, chs. 1–2. As demonstrated below, Owen proposed a distinctively Trinitarian principle of knowledge and of being by including not only the revelation of the Father and the Son, but the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Spirit upon the theologian as part of his definition of theology. In other words, the Trinity was intertwined with the *principia* of theology rather than an important subject treated under the locus on God.

27. Compare and contrast to Rijssenius: “As a *disposition* (*habitu-aliter*), theology is a science (*scientia*). As a *system* (*systematice*), it is the doctrine of divine truth that leads to godliness and salvation of men (Tit. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:13).” Leonard Rijssen, *A Summary of Elenctic Theology*, trans. and introduction by J. Wesley White (unpublished ThM thesis, Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary), 1. Emphasis original.

28. However, Owen’s view is not entirely out of accord with the common practice of Reformed theologians to define theology as a science. See below.

29. Interestingly, Owen here resembles some of Aquinas’ statements on whether or not theology is a science. Aquinas denied, in one sense, that theology was a science, on precisely the same grounds stated by Owen: “Videtur quod sacra doctrina non sit scientia. Omnis enim scientia procedit ex principiis per se notis. Sed sacra doctrina procedit ex articulis fidei, qui non sunt per se noti, cum non ab omnibus concedantur, non enim omnium est fides, ut dicitur II Thessalon. III. Non igitur sacra doctrina est scientia.” Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* (n.p.: 1274), Q. 1, Article 2, cited from corpus Thomisticum.org. He immediately added that theology may be considered to be a superior science that is based upon revelation from God Himself. “Et hoc modo sacra doctrina est scientia, quia procedit ex principiis notis lumine superioris scientiae, quae scilicet est scientia Dei et beatorum.”

30. Owen, *Biblical Theology*, 8–9. Owen returned to a significant

Compare this to a statement from *Communion with God*, which he wrote while teaching at Oxford. After asserting that Christ reveals what is in His heart to His people, Owen added:

And all this is spoken in opposition to unbelievers, with whom he hath no communion. These know nothing of the mind of Christ as they ought: ‘The natural man receiveth not the things that are of God,’ 1 Cor. ii.14. There is a wide difference between understanding the doctrine of Scripture as in the letter, and a true knowing of the mind of Christ. This we have by especial unction from Christ, 1 John ii.27, ‘We have an unction from the Holy One, and we know all things,’ 1 John ii.20.³¹

Ultimately, theology is not properly ranked among *human sciences* because it is not of *human origin* and it is not possible for the unregenerate.

treatment of this and similar passages on pp. 614–618. His assertions are intimately tied to and rooted in his exegesis of Scripture. Whatever Owen scholars may think about his own application of these principles, the force of his arguments are often ignored for the sake of cramming him neatly into pre-conceived ideas concerning “Protestant Scholasticism.” For instance, Rehnman assumes Owen’s basic agreement with other Protestant scholastics to the extent that where he left out details on commonly discussed subjects, Rehnman consistently quotes from Turretin and many others as though Owen’s ideas were identical with their own. For the most part this is an accurate assumption, but it is also the likely cause for Rehnman’s confusion over Owen’s decidedly negative views of philosophy. It is enlightening to read *Theologoumena Pantodapa* and the first 54 pages of Turretin’s *Institutes* simultaneously. Both addressed the same terminology and the same relevant passages of Scripture, but at times Owen came to radically different conclusions. Both began their works with the definition of theology, but Owen taught that if the term “theology” were retained, Scripture and not philosophy must define it, while Turretin without hesitation defined theology by citing Aristotle.

31. John Owen, *Communion with God*, in *The Works of John Owen*, ed. William H. Goold (Orig. pub., NY: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1851, reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1994), II, 120.

32. Owen used “true theology” and “evangelical theology” as synonyms. This reiterates the fact that Book VI, which bears the title “Evangelical Theology,” is not his attempt at New Testament “biblical theology. It is his attempt to define theology as a discipline and to prescribe what is necessary to its study.

33. Emphasis original to the translated text. Owen’s definitions are numerous throughout this work. I have presented a few representative examples only.

34. Also consider Owen’s treatment of communion with God in terms of receiving the personal revelation of each Person in the Godhead. *Communion with God*, chapter 2.

35. Thus far, Owen’s emphases are on par with other Protestant Scholastics. However, his contemporaries and forerunners often slated the purpose or end of true theology, without including communion with the Trinity within the definition of theology. For important works on Prolegomena from this period, see Muller, *PRRD*, I, 109ff.

Positively, Owen made the following affirmations concerning “true” or “evangelical theology:”³²

With these perceptions, we can come to a definition of theology as: ‘The doctrine of God with regard to himself, his works, his will, his worship, as well as our required obedience, our future rewards and punishments, all as revealed by God himself to the glory of his name.’ This is the Word of God—this is theology! (*Biblical Theology*, 16–17).

This revelation of God’s will, gifted to Christ by the Father, communicated by Christ through the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and others for the benefit of the entire Church, taken at its greatest extent, is the divine teaching or *theology of the gospel*, which I shall try to expound (*Ibid*, 602).³³

At least two features of these definitions are worthy of notice. First, God is both the originator and the end of “true theology.” The scope and purpose of theology contained in Owen’s definition harmonize with the common Protestant emphasis that theology is both theoretical and practical (Muller, *PRRD*, I, 95ff). Second, his definition is based upon a distinctly Trinitarian view of revelation that consists of communion between the human soul and all three Persons of the Godhead. This shall be clarified by what follows. It is noteworthy that he wrote his work on *Communion with God* a few years prior to *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. This work mirrors his definitions of theology, and he even made reference to it in one instance (*Ibid*, 643).³⁴ Comparing his definitions of “true theology” with his definition of communion with God immediately illustrates the connection between these concepts:

Now, communion is the mutual communication of such good things as wherein the persons holding communion are delighted, bottomed in some union between them ... Our communion, then, with God consisteth in his *communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him* of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that *union* which in Jesus Christ we have with him (*Communion with God*, 8–9, emphasis original).

Later in *Theologoumena*, Owen made the connection between “true theology” and communion with God explicit: “Evangelical theology has been instituted by God in order that sinners may once again enjoy communion with God himself, the All-Holy One” (*Biblical Theology*, 618).³⁵

Under Owen’s construction of “true theology,” the

revelation of God to the *mind* through Scripture and the revelation of God to the *heart* by the Holy Spirit become inextricably intertwined. For this reason, he wrote, “By my definition, the basis of Evangelical theology is the rebirth of the human personality by the operation of the Holy Spirit” (Ibid, 636). Theology under the traditional designation of “a discourse concerning God” does not go far enough.³⁶ Theology is not merely that which God reveals to man, but what God expects to receive from man, by means of what God has done in man. He provided the following summation:

True theology may be called that knowledge of the divine will and mind which God himself expects from his people (Psalm 119:27; Jeremiah 22:15–16; John 17:3–4; John 2:3–4, 7), and such awareness of him and his will is well pleasing to God (1 Chronicles 28:9; Hosea 6:6). It follows that men who are steeped in true theology are pleasing and acceptable to God (Jeremiah 24:7) (*Biblical Theology*, 609).

This is why “the rebirth of the human personality by the operation of the Holy Spirit” is necessary to make true theologians. In light of this fact, “The ultimate end of true theology is the celebration of the praise of God, and his glory and grace in the eternal salvation of sinners” (Ibid, 619). In short, “true theology” consists in a personal knowledge of God through union with Christ: “To know *him* that is true – that is *theology*; and, if it is not, then I here declare my total ignorance of what is!” (Ibid, 638, emphasis original to the translation).

Notice that there is both an objective and a subjective aspect to Owen’s definition of “true theology.” Objectively, “true theology” is a revelation from the Triune God. Subjectively, “true theology” is a personal communication from God to the human soul by the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, “true theology” is a spiritual gift or charisma, or rather, “a combination of spiritual graces” (Ibid, 636). The ascension of Jesus Christ is the foundation for the bestowal of spiritual gifts and graces, and the Holy Spirit is himself *the* great gift of Christ to his Church. On the basis of Ephesians 1:17–18, he observed, “The gift [of true theology] comes from the Father through Christ” (Ibid, 642). This “wisdom” is never produced by “man’s systems of thought.” The “mystery” into which the Spirit initiates believers is communion with all three Persons of the Trinity and “... this most deep mysterious doctrine is the very essence of Evangelical theology” (Ibid, 642–643). He concluded: “Evangelical theology is thus a *charisma*, a spiritual gift

(1 Corinthians 2:7–9), and as the all powerful Spirit works all things in all men in order to make this gift distinct from his general operations, I maintain that it comes from and is granted by Christ as Mediator” (Ibid, 637–638, emphasis original). Human sciences fall under the realm of the “general operations” of the Holy Spirit. Theology is a spiritual gift that may be granted to man only through Christ as the Mediator between God and man.

The “True Theologian”

Owen’s definitions of the “true theologian” are correlative to his definitions of “true theology.” Theology cannot be ranked among the sciences because it cannot be derived from the common principles or abilities of fallen man. The “true theologian” (as we have seen) must have new principles and restored faculties in order to know God. He wrote,

We conclude, therefore, that one who is an initiate is instructed by the Holy Spirit into scriptural mysteries and is made familiar with things beyond the comprehension of the natural man, by God’s making known to him ‘the mystery of His will’ (Ephesians 1:9), through a God-given ‘spirit of wisdom and revelation’ (Ephesians 1:17), and such a man, and only such a man, is, in the estimation of Paul, a theologian (Ibid, 11).

The “true theologian” is one who does not merely know *about* God, but he personally *knows* God. In this sense, the term “theologian” refers to *every* true believer in the school of Christ, in addition to those who are engaged in formal theological training (Ibid, 685–703). A man cannot be trained for the ministry in order to preach for the salvation of souls unless he has first become a “true theologian” by the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. Becoming a “true theologian,” in its broadest sense, is identical with becoming a true Christian. A Christian minister, then, must be taught by God (John 6:45; Jer. 31:34) and he must teach as one who is taught by God. He included the subjective work of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the pastor-theologian in what is now called “Prolegomena.” With regard to the sources of theology, the knowledge of God, the nature of the Scriptures, and other similar subjects, he believed that the study of theology (if it is worthy of the name “theology”)

36. For a highly insightful analysis of how Protestants used and defined the term “theology,” see Muller, *PRRD*, I, 152–164. The fact that Owen shared the same concerns with his contemporaries is immediately apparent from Muller’s numerous citations.

could be understood and pursued successfully only by regenerate believers in Christ (Ibid, 618).

Comparing him to his contemporary, Herman Witsius, highlights the profundity of Owen's definition of the "true theologian". Witsius wrote, "By a theologian, I mean one who, imbued with a substantial knowledge of divine things derived from the teaching of God himself, declares and extols, not in words only, but by the whole course of his life, the wonderful excellencies of God and thus lives entirely for his glory."³⁷ The similarities to Owen are immediately apparent. However, Witsius' primary assertion was, "He alone is a true theologian who adds the practical to the theoretical part of religion." Owen would possibly have taken issue with the word "adds." In his view, "true theology" involves communion with God and all that this entails. The "true theologian" is one who enjoys communion with God through Jesus Christ, and who walks with God. The task of theological study is not to *add* practical to theoretical religion, but to actually commune with God, which is *by definition* both theoretical and practical. This avoids the potential division between theoretical and practical theology (which Witsius certainly was not guilty of!). For Owen, while theory and practice remained distinct conceptually, his definitions removed all possibility of understanding Christianity in terms of merely believing a body of truth and living a consistent life. Christianity *is* communion with the Triune God; Christianity *is* "true theology;" and the Christian alone *is* the "true theologian." The practical import of this refinement is that it is impossible for the "true theologian" to study, teach, preach, or write about true theology without a doxological purpose that is readily apparent from beginning to end.³⁸

37. Herman Witsius, *On the Character of a True Theologian*, trans. John Donaldson, ed. J. Ligon Duncan, III (Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994), 27. The manner in which we are exhorted to study the Scriptures in *Westminster Larger Catechism* question 157 approaches Owen's description of the "true theologian" as well: "The Holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer."

38. Peter Van Mastricht would later emphasize the same point in nearly the same way in his *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*. For an analysis of Mastricht's work, see Adriaan C. Neele, *Petrus van Mastricht (1630-1706): Reformed Orthodoxy: Method and Piety* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

39. William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 77. For the profound influence of Ames' definition on subsequent theologians see Muller, *PRRD*, I, 155. This definition was largely borrowed from Ramus and Perkins. *Ibid.*, 113.

The significance of his treatment of the study of theology is illustrated further by comparing him with his earlier contemporary, William Ames. The first line of Ames' *Marrow of Theology* begins with the words, "Theology is the doctrine or teaching of living to God."³⁹ Owen's definition of communion with God, however, indicates that there are certain aspects of theology that remain "practical" while not *directly* involving "living," at least in the sense of personal conduct. The typical discussion of the "theoretical" and "practical" aspects of theology breaks down to some extent under his definitions. The reason for this is that his idea of communion with God makes these two ideas less pronounced and distinct. In terms of communion with the Triune God, what is typically referred to as "theoretical" knowledge is intensely practical because it involves personal knowledge of and delight in fellowship with God. If "theoretical" knowledge is not characterized by delight in fellowship with God, then he would excluded such knowledge from theology altogether. On the other hand, knowledge or belief can be "practical," in the sense of leading to practice, without involving communion with God at all. What Owen held in common with his contemporaries was the concern for regeneration and personal holiness through the study of theology. What set Owen apart from some of his contemporaries was his refinement of the definition of "true theology" in his own peculiar manner. In other words, the contrast between Owen and some of his contemporaries was not fundamental, though it was significant.

Owen's ideas of "true theology" and of the "true theologian" have potentially revolutionary implications for the manner in which men ought to be trained for the ministry, both in his time and in our own. Theological training should not aim at the mind only, but at the heart as well. More specifically, the theological studies of future ministers should be largely identical with their personal communion with the Triune God. If "theology" and "theologian" are understood purely in intellectual terms, ministerial training shall militate against personal holiness and drive students away from God. However, if the study of theology includes the "rebirth of the human personality by the operation of the Holy Spirit" (*Biblical Theology*, 636), then the more students grow in their studies, the more they will grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. This emphasis must be explicit, both in the study, in the classroom, and in the pulpit. Moreover the *principia*, or fundamental presuppositions of theology, should not only include Scripture and the doctrine of God, but the doctrine of God as distinctively Triune and as revealed in the plan of redemption.

“True Theology” vs. “Christian Philosophy”

Owen recognized a potential objection at this point. If it is the case that the natural man cannot know the things of God, and that the Holy Spirit must teach the “true theologian,” does this not deny the perspicuity of the Scriptures? In other words, if the study of theology not only requires revelation from, but communion with the Triune God, then how can the message of the Scriptures be inherently clear?⁴⁰ He answered that although theology *could* properly be referred to as a science in a “broad sense” (and often is), such studies *ought* to be called “Christian philosophy” rather than “true theology,” since they do not measure up to the purposes for which God has revealed theology in his Word.

Theology is in a “broad sense” a science due the fact that the natural man *can*, to some degree, grasp the *contents* of the Bible. He observed:

Thus, to sum up the matter, the entirety of divine truth has been revealed in Scripture by our Lord Jesus Christ, and such is theology, if we take the term in its very widest signification. It contains propositions which are capable of systematic arrangement, and its content is open to human intellects. These revealed propositions, along with such conclusions as may legitimately be drawn from them, may be reduced to a written system and made the source material for a discipline of study. But all of this is Christian philosophy, and still lacks the hallmarks of theology in its narrower and inner signification” (Ibid, 607).

Theology involves the sanctification of the Spirit and the true knowledge of God on the part of the sinner. “Christian philosophy” refers merely to the intellectual understanding of the system of biblical doctrine. In this manner, he defended his definition of “true theology” while upholding the vital doctrine of the perspicuity, or clarity, of the Scriptures. Thus theology, as the term is commonly used, may legitimately be called a science, but this use of the term is, strictly speaking, improper.⁴¹

“Christian philosophy” represents a correct theological system without the regeneration of the Holy Spirit. As such, “Christian philosophy” is not the “understanding” that is taught by the Spirit (1 Cor. 2) and that constitutes “true theology.” “Christian philosophy” surpasses all man-made philosophies because it is derived from the infallible truth of the Word of God. However, without union with Jesus Christ through regeneration and faith, the natural man can never raise himself above mere philosophy, even with the aid of divine revelation. This

distinction is of great value, since it removes the discipline of theology from a purely academic setting. How would such a distinction transform the method of teaching in theological seminaries today? How would it alter theological writing? How would it improve theological reading by making the all-seeing eye of God upon our studies inescapable from our notice? The massive implication is that any presentation of theology in which the “theologian” himself is not personally involved, and in which he does not seek to bring his hearers/readers into personal communion with God is not theology at all. This stresses the fact that there should not be a sharp contrast between “academic” and “popular” theology, since theology is not worthy of the name unless its purpose is the glory of God through the conversion of the ungodly, and the edification of the Church. If the “academy” has any role to play (and Owen certainly believed that it did!), its task must be governed by Scripture and the concerns of the Church rather than by contemporary “academic” standards. The role of theological education is to prepare “true theologians” to serve the Church, not to prepare academics who have merely been trained to write and to teach “Christian philosophy.”

Owen’s Overarching Concern

Owen’s overarching concern in his *Theologoumena* was

40. The Westminster Confession of Faith contains a classic expression of the Reformed statement of the perspicuity of Scripture: “All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation, are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain to a sufficient understanding of them.” 1.7.

41. In this manner, Owen’s work does not represent a radical break with contemporary and subsequent Reformed works on theology, which have consistently defined theology as a science. See for examples: Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (orig. pub., n.p., n.d., reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), I, 1; Alexander Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (orig. pub., NY: Robert Carter & Brothers, 1863, 1878, reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 15; R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (orig. pub., n.p., 1871, reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2002), 5; William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes (orig. pub., NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1891, reprint, Philipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2003), 43; James Henley Thornwell, *The Collected Writings of James Henley Thornwell*, ed., John B. Adger (orig. pub., Richmond: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1871, reprint, Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2004), I, 25; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2003), 38–46; John Dick, *Lectures on Theology* (orig. pub., Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1838, reprint, Stoke on Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2004), I, 3; etc. Also see the statements of Aquinas cited above.

to rescue Reformed theological education from the abuses of some forms of scholasticism. He can rightly be classified as a “Protestant Scholastic” theologian in several respects, and he was largely conservative in his approach. However, his critical adaptation of the scholastic method should not be overlooked.⁴² Perhaps his tenure as Vice-Chancellor at Oxford (where he had the primary responsibility for maintaining discipline and morality on campus) caused him to reassess the effects of some aspects of the scholastic model upon his students.⁴³

There were several aspects of the Medieval scholastic model that Owen rejected. As demonstrated above, he argued vigorously that the mingling of philosophy with theology distorts, if not destroys, the entire discipline. This applies to content *in toto* and to method in part. Instead, theological education must be defined

42. See Trueman, *John Owen*, chapter 1, for the manner in which Owen learned from, as well as critically evaluated, Medieval and contemporary literature. Muller adds that Reformed Scholasticism was both a rejection of and an outgrowth of Medieval Scholasticism. *PRRD*, I, 97.

43. See the comments above.

44. At the same time, Owen’s desire to minimize the distinction between the theology of the “schools” and the theology of the Church (in contrast to the distinctions made by men such as Hyperius) are likely part of what has made some of his treatises difficult to read. His work on *Apostasy* was intended to benefit the average churchgoer, yet the work begins with a weighty and detailed exposition of the Greek text of Hebrews six, coupled with numerous citations from other languages. The work is filled with scholastic distinctions as well that are cumbersome to modern readers. His work on the Holy Spirit had a popular audience in view as well, but his frequent use of the scholastic *disputatio* method as well as Christian Aristotelian categories makes for difficult reading for many. All of Owen’s works bear a devotional character that is consistent with his definitions, but his style raises the question as to whether or not a blending of the theology of the “schools” and of the Church is always profitable for common readers.

45. The Trinitarian piety of this work pervades the whole of the *Biblical Theology* volume. For a treatment of the significance of Owen’s Trinitarianism, see Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008), esp. pp. 124–199. The title of this work is somewhat misleading, since Owen is treated in particular in the second half of the book only. Most of Kay’s treatment of Owen consists of an analysis of *Communion with God*, rather than tracing Owen’s Trinitarianism throughout his writings. Nevertheless, his analysis is insightful, and it places Owen in the context of the historic formulations of the doctrine of the Trinity.

46. See Toon, 50–79 for a brief history of these debates over the role of the universities in England.

47. While not explicitly mentioning historical theology, his own example demonstrates the importance that he attached to this discipline. His statement reflects what he believed should be the primary emphases of the curriculum, rather than the exclusive *content* of the curriculum.

and governed on the basis of Scripture. This narrowing of the gap between scholastic and popular theology is illustrated powerfully in Owen’s voluminous writings. In every book, he always addressed the mind and the heart, for the purpose of worship and holiness, and all at the same time.⁴⁴ In this light, the treatises that he preached and published during his time at Oxford are highly insightful. For instance, during this period he preached the well-known sermons on *The Mortification of Sin* (1656) and *The Nature and Power of Temptation* (1658). Both of these series were preached to his Oxford students and provided the materials that he believed were necessary to make them “true theologians” (Toon, *God’s Statesman*, 55–56). It is also notable that he published his tremendous work, *On Communion with God*, in 1657.⁴⁵

It is vital to recall the controversies over the place and methods of education at Oxford during this time.⁴⁶ Owen gently implied that the most effective way to reform (and to justify) theological education was to purge the curriculum of philosophy as a foundation for truth, as well as (in part) a method for expounding the truth, in order to redefine the task of the theological curriculum in a manner that made communion with God and ministerial preparation inseparable. The only explicit comments that he made upon the curriculum in a roughly seven hundred-page book on the study of theology were that the primary emphases ought to be the study of the Bible in the original languages, the proper use of logic as a tool to understand the Bible, and the rhetorical form of the Bible (*Biblical Theology*, 608).⁴⁷ Notice that each of these emphases is tailored to produce men who would be able to preach the Scriptures.

Owen’s labors and emphases while at Oxford appear to have borne some fruit. Matthew Henry, the son and biographer of Philip Henry, gave this testimony concerning his father’s studies at Oxford during Owen’s tenure: “[He] would often mention with thankfulness to God, what great helps and advantages he had then in the University, not only for learning, but for religion and piety. Serious godliness was in reputation, and besides the public opportunities they had, there were many of the scholars that used to meet together for prayer, and Christian conference to the great confirmation of one another’s hearts in the fear and love of God and the preparing them for the service of the Church in their generation” (cited in *God’s Statesman*, 79). In other words, Philip Henry and his colleagues had become “true theologians,” and they demonstrated this fact by serving the Lord in his Church.

QUALIFICATIONS AND CONDUCT OF TRUE
THEOLOGIANS

In John Owen's thought, the "true theologian" should not be defined primarily in terms of what he does, but in terms of who he is. The personal qualifications necessary to study theology with profit represent the capstone of Owen's Prolegomena. He expressed this at the outset of his section on "Evangelical Theology": "It has been my professed intent and stated purpose – almost my one and only purpose in this work – to set forward the theology of Christ. This is not just the teaching of the gospel but *the disposition of mind which alone can embrace it*, and that goal has been ever present before my eyes from the start of this volume" (*Biblical Theology*, 591, emphasis original to the translation). Unless theology is defined properly, it cannot be studied or taught properly. However, once theology has been defined properly, the best means for the student to become proficient in theology is to pursue his own personal holiness. This will be demonstrated by setting forth some of Owen's general remarks on this subject, several obstacles to the study of theology, and his instructions on how to study theology for the purposes of ministry.

General Remarks

There are two primary places in *Theologoumena Pantodapa* where Owen addressed the qualifications for theological students. The first place was in his lengthy introduction, and the second place was the last chapter of the entire work. This means that the first thing his readers are confronted with and the last impression that they are left with is the need for the personal holiness of ministerial students. He began his address to theological students by setting forth two general cautions.

The first caution is that students must be aware of the darkness that remains in their own minds, even though the Holy Spirit has regenerated them:

Indeed the greatest obstacle to all students of theology is an inborn and destructive darkness of mind. Seek to break through that by the power of him who once commanded light to shine forth out of darkness. Without this aid, anyone who invests time and effort on the study of theology will find that he is hunting for the wind with a net! (Ibid, xxvi).

Knowledge of the weaknesses and limitations resulting from sin must drive students to *prayer*. Students

shall not make progress in "true theology" unless they continually develop a realistic view of themselves and a correspondent dependence upon the Lord. Later he added, "Make no mistake, if you do not know how to trust in the promises of the Spirit, if you cannot implore his help and strength by regular prayer, if you are not enlisted under the Headship of him who can make all mysteries clear, then you are wasting time in *this study*" (Ibid, 698, emphasis original to the translation).

The second caution is that the student must be aware that there is a connection between the mortification of sin and his ability to progress in theological studies. Lack of mortification shall make study wearisome: "It is for no other reason than a failure to subdue sinful nature and carnal habits before the Spirit and grace of Christ that we see so many men who profess to have committed themselves to the study of the liberal arts and, especially, theology, finally grow weary and fall into the ways of negligence and sloth" (Ibid, xxviii). In other words, if men are well exercised in "sinful habits," they shall easily grow weary in theological studies. Once again, there is a parallel to this statement in his later treatment of the holiness of students:

When minds which are still in bondage to inner vanity and sin are brought into contact with the Word, they naturally shy away from its study and experience an antipathy towards it. Such indwelling natures are not simply a barrier to the study of theology, but rather they are incapable of anything but unbelievable frustration if they are held to the study of the Scriptures" (Ibid, 699).

Before students begin the study of theology in earnest, they must continually place before themselves the darkness that remains in their minds and the necessity of prayer, as well as the connection between the mortification of sin and the strength for theological pursuits.

Obstacles to the Study of Theology

Just as Owen set forth his definition of theology in both negative and positive terms, so he presented the manner in which students must pursue the study of theology in both negative and positive terms. In particular, there are two classes of difficulties that must be overcome in order to pursue "true theology." The first class of difficulties respects the student himself, and the second class respects the subject matter that he is concerned with.

With regard to the student himself, three things must be considered. The first obstacle is *sloth*. He warned,

Sadly, you will see about you many men who should be dedicated to the study and expounding of God's Word, but who hold their positions by any number of pretexts, names, and titles, who are just like worn-out horses. No goad will force them onward in the course they have begun. Their fallen condition by nature has been compounded with new sins" (Ibid, xxvii).

What he described here was a form of intellectual and spiritual laziness that became evident through lack of growth. Theology involves continual growth in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. In particular, upholding received doctrines without diligent study was the kind of sloth immediately in view. If the student is slothful, then he will fail to progress; if the student fails to progress, then he is guilty of sin.

The second personal obstacle in the study of theology is the temptation to serve the cause of some *sect* or *faction*. Owen wrote,

There can be few worse impediments to the study of divine truth than for a student, either from birth and upbringing, by the false teaching of others or for worldly advantage, to be ensnared into a vigorous sect before he has had the chance to develop independent, candid, and mature judgment of his own.... Great emperors are quicker to make peace after bloodshed and disasters given and received than are theologians fired by sectarian zeal. (Ibid, xxxi).

This reflects the ongoing concern in his life for peace in the Church and his careful exposition and treatment of the question of schism.⁴⁸ This obstacle is closely related to sloth in study in that it is often the primary cause of sloth. Students must always beware of maintaining a position because it is the position of the faction that they are attached to, whether by birth or by choice. All true theology must rest its conclusions upon the Word of God alone, and the true theologian must be willing to leave his particular faction if he finds its teachings opposed to the Word of God.⁴⁹

The third obstacle may not seem immediately relevant to present-day students of theology. He referred

48. Consider in particular the treatises in volumes XII and XIV of Owen's *Works*, as well as the "appendix" to the first sermon in volume VIII.

49. Although this author disagrees with Owen's conclusions at this point, Owen exemplified his own teaching by his willingness to be convinced of a Congregational form of church government as opposed to his former Presbyterian convictions.

to the danger of being dependent upon and influenced by *pagan poetry/entertainment* and *philosophy* (Ibid, xxxiii–xliv). He did not explicitly single this out as a third point, but it was clearly designed to be such. This section stands on its own as a polemic against immersion in "classical" literature. He vigorously denounced the practice of infecting young minds with pagan poetry and philosophy. Students of theology must beware of inundating their minds, whether through study or through entertainment, with material that is contrary to Scripture and to the purposes of "true theology."

Owen's second set of obstacles had regard to the study of theology itself. He drew attention to elements that are indispensable to the study of theology. At least four factors must be taken into account. First, theology can never be understood properly if it is detached from the end of becoming "proficient in the holy mysteries of the Gospel, and hence to attain sanctified wisdom" (Ibid, xlv). Second, the proper means of studying Theology are determined by having the proper end or purpose in the study of theology. Third, prayer is "the most necessary means of all" to the proper study of theology (Ibid, xlv). Fourth, love for the truth is necessary for the proper understanding of the truth. This point reiterates and highlights the idea that "true theology" is personal communion with God:

Let us proclaim it boldly – the man who is not inflamed with divine love is an outsider to all theology! Let him toil long and hard in airing of thorny questions; let him be the most avid devourer of theological books in existence; if he has this and nothing else, it is but the stronger proof that the natural beauty of God's truth has never penetrated through even the smallest chink into his mind. He is not on fire with love of divine truth, nor carried away with admiration of her beauty (Ibid, xlvi).

These qualifications bring his definitions of "true theology" and the "true theologian" into concrete and practical expression. The object of theology cannot be studied properly unless the subject is prepared properly for his studies.

In light of Owen's role at Oxford as Vice-Chancellor, it is interesting to note that, in his estimation, there were far too few "true theologians" at the University. He wrote:

Yet every day there press into the vineyard (more's the pity) our new preachers: foolish youngsters with a smattering of higher education who fondly believe that they

will be able to fool the simple country folks with a din of long words, and so keep them content – such is their own estimate of their powers – while in the event they just demonstrate in public their own lack of saving light and spiritual attainments, and so their ministries prove fatal failures.... It is to prevent such scandals that our sacred calling requires us to be hard gospel students, practitioners of holiness, true ministers of the Word, and to be ever ready to overcome by the force of truth and not by the force of arms (Ibid, 689–690).

His redefinition of theology and the task of theological studies was his attempt to reverse the trend that he believed that he saw in young graduates.⁵⁰

How to Study Theology for the Purposes of Ministry

The last chapter of *Theologoumena Pantodapa* draws Owen's work to something of a conclusion as well as an expansion of the points listed in the previous section. It is instructive in itself that he did not instruct the "true theologian" in his duty until this point. This reinforces the fact that Owen treated theological presuppositions and definitions as the most important and primary means to direct men properly in the study of "true theology." It is in this light alone that these concluding instructions may be duly appreciated.

First, remember that God is "in a special manner" near to the student as he works in this field of study. He urged, "Wherever fear and caution have not infused the student's heart, God is despised. His pleasure is only to dwell in hearts which tremble at his Word. Light or frivolous perusal of the Scriptures is a sickness of the soul which leads on to the death of atheism.... If this fear is not experienced in the study of the Word, it will not display itself in any other facet of life" (Ibid, 699–700). *Second*, students must gauge their progress by the proportion to which their growth in the knowledge of the Scriptures corresponds to their increased worship of God and communion with him: "The Word is for the nourishment of the soul. Both the light of our salvation and the spiritual gifts which follow salvation are nourished by it. The first is for our own unutterable comfort, the latter for our ministry to others" (Ibid, 700). This requirement necessitates careful thought and meditation. Communion with God by means of his Word nourishes spiritual gifts. Therefore, without this vital communion with God, ministers shall never be able to provide the instruction that is necessary to nourish the flock. *Third*, he exhorted that we must *demonstrate* the authority of the Scriptures by submitting our lives to them (Ibid, 700–701).

Fourth, theological students must diligently study the Scriptures in the original languages, "especially the Hebrew."⁵¹ The *fifth* is now recognizable as an oft-repeated theme in *Theologoumena Pantodapa*. Owen pressed his readers to precede, accompany, and follow their studies by heartfelt prayer in dependence upon the Holy Spirit (Ibid, 701). He exclaimed: "Is it amazing to see so many first-class intellects stumped and surrendering the study of heavenly truth? Why is it? They don't know how to pray! They have never received the Spirit of supplication. Worse than that, they have quite deliberately turned their backs upon him!" (Ibid, 702). He did not explicitly label a *sixth* exhortation, yet a distinct and final exhortation is present within the fifth heading. The true theologian must keep company with those who are serious in the practice of holiness. Owen asserted, "Living interaction with saints and believers is essential to the student. It will sharpen, by exercise and practice, those spiritual gifts on which true gospel wisdom is founded, and that wisdom itself will be strengthened and increased by holy practice" (Ibid, 703). This principle emphasizes the important point that theological students, whether in the seminary or in the pastorate, should profit as much outside of the study as they do in the study. In particular, this highlights the importance of establishing and maintaining ministerial friendships.

These instructions not only serve as directions as to how to study theology for the purposes of ministry. They reflect the fact that in Owen's view all theology that is worthy of the name must be designed for the purposes of ministry. There is no such thing as theology that is not intimately interwoven with the personal piety of the student *and* that does not aim at the edification of others. True students of theology must be worshippers of God and servants of Christ's Church. His exhortations should remind future (and current) ministers why and how they must conduct themselves in the study; his definitions of "true theology" and the "true theologian" serve as the driving force and weight behind these exhortations.

Continued on Page 298.

50. It is difficult to evaluate Owen's observations at this point. Though his estimation of "our new preachers" may seem harsh, it often continues to be the case that ministerial students confuse their beginnings in theological learning with personal piety and Christian maturity.

51. Ibid., 701. For the vital importance of Hebrew, see Owen's various "Digressions" on the Hebrew language throughout this book. Remember that Owen believed that Hebrew was the *original* human language and the only language that was not *corrupted* at the Tower of Babel.

The Theological Climate of the Early Nineteenth Century and the Founding of a Polemical Seminary at Princeton. Continued from Page 30.

institution faces is not whether or not their institution is built on polemic, this seems an unavoidable conclusion, but whether or not their polemic will survive. Put another way: ‘How long will a seminary maintain the theological distinctives it was founded to preserve?’ The answer to this question hinges on the success or failure of its polemic.

The theological seminary falls under continuous pressure during its tenure from two opposing mindsets (though recognizably over-simplified): *preservation* or *progress*. The seminary at Princeton, as in most other theological institutions, found its origin in the concern to *preserve* that which it had inherited. No one did this better or longer than did Old Princeton. Yet inevitably, within the first few years of its existence, Alexander and Miller faced charges of opposing *progress* (Alexander, 426–428). This charge not only reoccurred throughout Old Princeton’s existence but remains today the constant charge of virtually all theological innovators. Like Old Princeton, our confessional seminaries should strive to preserve their standards. This certainly should not hinder the search for progress in theological understanding within these boundaries of orthodoxy, but like the Princetonians, theological “progress” of confessional standards should be received with great hesitance, caution, and collective wisdom.

Ultimately, not even Old Princeton could resist “progress” and in 1929, fell to a reorganized Princeton that had moved toward a “broad and warm evangelicalism” and away from the bondage of “a highly rational orthodoxy and extreme literalism” of Westminster Calvinism (Loetscher, *Broadening Church*, 147). The emphasis of a seminary, or lack thereof, on polemic theology seems to suggest which of these mindsets it embraces. Perhaps this helpfully serves as an evaluative criterion of our theological institutions.

Though in the end Old Princeton succumbed to the pressures of denominational “progress,” its polemic survived and thrived against these pressures for over a century and, as a result, Old School Calvinism likewise thrived. How was Princeton able to succeed against such pressures? They succeeded not simply by founding the seminary on polemic but by establishing it in the same. In its early years, Miller and Alexander laid this foundation and Charles Hodge, with his creation of the *Biblical Repertory* in 1825, solidified it for the next hundred years. But the development of Princeton’s polemic in these early stages must be reserved for another occasion. ■

American Presbyterianism and the Cold War. Continued from Page 96.

of an earlier generation has today morphed into a pro-interventionist perspective—a neo-conservatism that champions nation-building rather than simply the stopping of aggression. Ironically, that approach entails its own version of internationalism—sometimes even backed up by UN resolutions. But that discussion is beyond the scope of this article, and awaits a fuller consideration on another day.

What is obvious is that, during the Cold War, within American Presbyterianism another war was raging, a war that was fought over the nature of the Kingdom of God and of His righteousness. The battle lines were drawn between those who believed in historic Christianity in terms of its content, and those who rejected that content; between those who regarded personal conversion as the foundation of a just society, and those who emphasized institutional changes to the virtual exclusion of heart regeneration; between those who used terms in their traditional meaning, and those who felt free to use old terms but give them new meanings; between those who believed in a limited government, and those whose belief in limited government had to do with obedience to a “militaristic” State and not to the extent of State authority. And, although the Cold War itself may be a fading memory of the past, this Presbyterian war, both within and across denominational lines, goes on. ■

John Owen on the Study of Theology. Continued from Page 195.

CONCLUSIONS

John Owen’s so-called *Biblical Theology* was not intended to serve so much as a biblical theology as a manual for the definition, methods, and study of theology. This work bears the character of a Protestant Scholastic Prolegomena to theology, with the necessary presuppositions of theology set forth in detail from the biblical data in historical sequence. While this historical sequence makes it plausible to refer to this work as a biblical theology, yet the subject matter is closely limited to the topics treated in Protestant Prolegomena in Owen’s time. If the purpose of this book were understood more widely, it might attract a different audience. His primary contributions lie in the fact that he sought to shape theological studies by redefining the nature and task of theology, but especially in the fact that by rooting Prolegomena in a distinctly Trinitarian foundation, he more closely bridged the gap between theory and piety than some of his contemporaries did. If he is read in light of Scripture and modified by subsequent developments in Church history, then Owen’s teaching

on this subject might have massive implications for the training of theological students at the present time. If true theology in our seminaries today were defined in terms of communion with all three Persons in the Godhead, together with the rebirth of the human personality, how would this change the atmosphere in which ministers are trained? How would it change the theological curriculum? How would it alter theological writing? How would it transform the ministry in Reformed Churches? We need a learned ministry that has been thoroughly educated in the schools, but that has been taught by the Triune God as well. We need more ministers who are capable theologians, and we need more theology produced by ministers and for the profit of the Church. Perhaps the most vital lesson to glean from Owen is that we need seminaries whose existence and task is defined by Scripture in service to the Church. ■

In Translatiōne. Continued from Page 262.

Bishop: What? What are you saying? Does St. Cyprian say all that you are saying here?

Guy: Not all, sir. But I have said how Bertramus treats these words of St. Cyprian, and expositis them thus word for word, just as I have recited them. But St. Cyprian says, in some pointed words against the Aquarii, that if wine is not in the chalice, then the blood of Christ is not able to be drunk there and cannot be understood to be there.⁷⁹ If the wine is transubstantiated, it ceases to be wine. And thus according to St. Cyprian, the blood of Christ is not to be understood. The same doctor in the sermon *De Coena Domini* says that the sanctified bread enters into the polluted mouth.⁸⁰ Likewise in his sermon *De Lapsis* he says, speaking of the young girl who vomited the sacrament, “The drink sanctified in the blood of the Lord exited the polluted innards.”⁸¹ He does not say “the bread and the drink that was transubstantiated,” but “the bread and the wine sanctified in the body and blood of the Lord.” And likewise Theodoret who lived during the time of Cyril, and who was with him at the Council of Ephesus and Chalcedon, a very learned man, in his book which was printed at Rome in Greek, says it in the first dialogue, setting it up between two persons, the faithful and the heretic.⁸² The faithful says, “Our Saviour himself changed the names of the bread and the wine, and to his body assigned the name of the symbol, and the symbol that of his body. So, after calling himself a vine, he spoke of the symbol as blood.” Then the heretic responds: “But I wish to know well and good the reason the names are changed.” The faithful responds: “To them that are initiated in divine things the intention is plain. For he wished the partakers in the divine mysteries not to give heed to the nature of the visible objects, but, by means of the variation of the names, to believe the change wrought of grace. For He, we know, who spoke of his natural body as

wheat and bread, and, again, called Himself a vine, dignified the visible symbols by the appellation of the body and blood, not because He had changed their nature, but because to their nature He had added grace.” Then in the same place he says again, “The mystical symbols do not change their nature after sanctification. For they remain in their original substance, figure and form, and can be seen and touched as before.”⁸³ He does not say in the first sentence that the bread and the wine are transubstantiated, but that the bread and the wine are transformed and changed when it comes to their names. They are called the body and blood of Christ, which they were not called before. And he says that the nature of the bread has not changed, only that grace is added to the nature. That shows as clear as day that the bread remains in the Sacrament, and likewise the wine. ■

Editorial. Continued from Page 2.

we had initially anticipated. Even if most of the articles fail to match the length of some of the material in past issues, we are pleased to have more than a dozen contributions this year, as well as another fine Reviews section. I will simply note that we continue our regular departments in addition to the main sections. Bridging from last year’s *Psallo* entry on Psalm 42, the Rev. Todd L. Ruddell offers up a rendering of Psalm 43. For *In Translatiōne*, Wes Bredenhof provides a translation of the Reformation martyr Guy de Brès’ debate with François Richardot regarding the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper.

Antiquary this year contains the results of my investigation into one aspect of what S. W. Carruthers styled the “everyday work” of the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Many of the divines were far away from their homes and their libraries, and they made it clear to the Parliament that they felt disadvantaged by this. The fact that many of the assemblymen still managed to write significant treatises during this time raises the question of where did they find their books for research? I attempt to shed light on various answers to this question in “Westminster Abbey Library and Other Theological Resources of the Assembly of Divines (1643–1652).” In the balance of this

79. ANF, Vol. 5, 361. The Aquarii were an early sect who used water in the place of wine in the Lord’s Supper.

80. This writing was often attributed to Cyprian. However, in a 1520 edition of Cyprian’s works, Erasmus categorized it as a work falsely attributed to him. In 1611, the first librarian of the Bodleian Library at Oxford University, Thomas James, proved that *De Coena Domini* was written by Arnold, abbot of Bonneval, in the mid-twelfth century. It appears that de Brès was either unaware of Erasmus’ scholarship or dissented from his opinion. See *The History of the University of Oxford, Vol. 3: The Collegiate University*, ed. James McConica (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1986), 323.

81. ANF, Vol. 5, 444.

82. What follows here can be found in NPNE, Series 2, Vol. 3, 167–168.

83. Cf. in second dialogue, NPNE, Series 2, Vol. 3, 200–201.