A Biographical Sketch of John Owen

Birth
A. Date, place: 1616 in Stadham, England
B. Father: Henry Owen—Vicar of local Church of England. John Owen was his second son.
C. Historical Context
   1. Thrones of England and Scotland united
   2. Calvinistic tutors of James VI
   3. No bishop, no king
   4. Hope for reform was dashed
   5. John Owen’s home environment combined Anglicanism with Reformed and Puritan elements

Education
A. Grammar school
B. Oxford University
   Entered Oxford (age 12)
   Received B.A. (age 16)
      a. Rigorous personal discipline
      b. Participated in sports and music
   Received M.A.
   Ordained a deacon and began studies in the Bachelor’s of Divinity (7 year course)
C. Theological conflict
   1. Discussion of the 39 articles forbidden by Charles I in 1628
   2. Owen’s decision to leave the university

Chaplaincy
A. Factors which led Owen into chaplaincy
B. Benefits of the chaplaincy

Salvation
A. Spirit of melancholy
B. Conversion/assurance
   1. Edmund Calamy
   2. The substitute preacher
   3. The sermon on Matthew 8:26 by an unknown preacher
First book
   A. *A Display of Arminianism* (1642)
   B. Living of Fordham: conferred on Owen by the Committee of Religion (1643)

Family
   A. Wife: Mary Rooke
   B. Children, only one survived to adulthood

Further Writings
   A. Two catechisms (1645)
   B. *The Duty of Pastors and People Distinguished*

Church Government
   A. Initially, Owen preferred presbyterianism over the episcopacy
   B. From Fordham to Coggeshall
   C. Congregationalism vs. Presbyterianism
      1. *A Vindication of the Treatise on Schism*
         a. Owen’s youth and lack of acquaintance with congregationalism
         b. Owen’s method of theological examination
         c. *The Keys of the Kingdom* (John Cotton)
         d. Leader of Congregationalism

National Prominence
   A. Historical context
   B. Preaching before Parliament
   C. Introduction to Oliver Cromwell
   D. Owen’s plea: Gospel preachers for Ireland
   E. Appointment as preacher
   F. Appointments as Dean of Christ Church College (1651)
   G. Appointment as Vice-Chancellor of Oxford (1652)
   H. Election to Parliament
   I. Conference to unite Puritans (1653)

Further Writings
   A. *Dissertation on Divine Justice*
   B. *The Doctrine of the Saints’ Perseverance*
   C. *Vindicae Evangelicae* (1655)
   D. *Communion with God* (1657)

Political Involvement
   A. Opposition to Cromwell’s ascendancy to the throne
   B. Cromwell as Lord Protector

The Savory Declaration (1658)
The Restoration of the Monarchy
A. Dismissal from Christ Church
B. Owen gathers a house church
C. Clarendon Code: The Clarendon Code was a series of political acts resulting in persecution of Puritan pastors.
   1. Act of Uniformity
   2. Great Ejection of 1662
   3. Five Mile Act
D. Reasons for Owen’s preservation
   1. Financial independence
   2. Theological usefulness

Writings on Toleration
A. Indulgence and Toleration
B. A Peace Offering

Spiritual writings
A. Indwelling Sin
B. Exposition on Psalm 130
C. Hebrews

Sermons vs. book
A. The Mortification of Sin
B. Cultural context of sermons

Pastoral ministry
A. Congregational and pastoral assistants
B. Interesting sidelights
   1. Ideal congregation size
   2. Self-criticisms

Final years
A. Major theological contribution—person and work of the Holy Spirit
B. Marriage
C. Declining health
D. Death (24 August 1683)

Owen’s Doctrine of Scripture

Inspiration
A. Revelation
   1. Additions of Roman Catholic tradition
   2. Excessive rationalism
   3. Authority of personal experience
B. Nature of Scripture
1. Revelation is broader than Scripture
2. Scripture is the gateway of Revelation

C. Mode of inspiration
   1. The absolute divinity of Scripture
   2. The role of the human author
   3. The point restated: verbal inspiration balanced with human instrumentality
   4. The dictation view of Scripture

D. Three elements of inspiration
   1. The author’s understanding of the revelation
   2. The intellectual ability to express the revelation
   3. Divine superintendence of the recording of Scripture

E. Owen and Calvin
   1. They had similarities on the nature of Scripture. Reverence for Scripture is reverence for God.
   2. Principle of accommodation

Authority
   A. The syllogism
   B. Exposition of the Syllogism

Infallibility
   A. Inspiration plus authority
   B. Infallibility explained
   C. Reasons for infallibility
      1. The character of God
      2. The prophetic role of Christ in the church

Additional attributes of Scripture
   A. Sufficiency
   B. Perspicuity
      1. Deduced from inspiration and authority
      2. Narrow and broad
      3. The two-tier element: objective and existential
      4. Incomprehensible God: perspicuous revelation

The Holy Spirit and Scripture
   A. The Scripture’s self-attestation
   B. The inner testimony of the Spirit
   C. The two sides of the believer’s conviction concerning the authority of Scripture

The influence of Calvin
   A. Institutes
   B. Augustine
   C. Puritan historiography: Were the Puritans faithful to Calvin? That it an irrelevant question for the Puritans.
      1. The Puritans were more concerned to be faithful to Scripture.
2. Puritan tradition predates Calvin

**Understanding Scripture**
A. General statement of perspicuity
B. Role of the Holy Spirit—illumination
C. Three mans of understanding Scripture
   1. Spiritual means
      a. Knowing the truth and knowing the power of the truth
      b. Importance of prayer
   2. Disciplinarian means: original languages, chronology, Biblical theology, genre
   3. Other ministers and heritage of the church
D. Tradition vs. private interpretation
   1. Roman Catholicism
   2. The Reformed tradition
   3. Public vs. private worship

**The Influence of Scripture on the Christian Life**
A. 2 Timothy 3:16 and Hebrews 12:5-6
B. The usefulness of Scripture for the individual
   1. The necessity of regeneration: a powerful persuasive efficacy
   2. The Word of God indwells those who receive it: analogy of a seed
   3. Spiritual nourishment
   4. Preservation against temptation
   5. Summary

**Owen on the Covenant**

**Historical development of covenant (federal) theology**
A. Stage 1: Rediscovery of the doctrine of the covenant
   1. Prior to the Reformation
   2. During the Reformation
      a. Grammatical-historical exegesis
      b. Covenant became central to a study of redemptive history and the relationship of Old and New Testaments
B. Stage 2: Employment of the doctrine of the covenant in biblical theology:
   1. First generation reformers
      a. Zwingli
      b. Bullinger (1534): *Compendium of the Christian Religion*
      c. Oecolampadius: Commentaries on Isaiah and the Minor Prophets
      d. Bucer: *The Kingdom of Christ*
      e. Tyndale (1534): Prologue to his *Notes on the Pentateuch*
   2. Second generation reformers
      • Calvin: Book 2 of *The Institutes*
   3. Third generation reformers
C. Stage 3: Two developments in understanding the doctrine of the covenant:
   1. It became an organizing principle for systematic theology
   2. A dual concept of the covenant develops
D. Continental reformers
   1. Ursinus: *Sum of the Christian Religion* (1584)
   2. Gomarus: *Oration of the Covenant of God* (1594)
   3. Polanus
   4. Cocceius
   5. By the end of the 17th century, a dual concept of the covenant (Covenant of Works / Covenant of Grace) is characteristic of Reformed theology.
E. English and Scottish Reformers
   1. John Ponet: *Short Catechism* (1553)
   2. Dudley Fenner: *Sacred Theology* (1585)
   3. William Ames: *Marrow of Sacred Theology*
   4. Paul Baynes
   5. Richard Sibbes
   6. Robert Rollock
F. Review
   1. Calvin’s two teachings on the covenant
      a. It is a unifying principle in Scripture
      b. It contains unity and diversity
   2. Review of the three stages of historical development of the covenant
      a. Rediscovery of the covenant
      b. Application of the covenant in biblical theology
      c. Use of the covenant as an organizing principle of systematic theology
   3. The dual covenant structure

**Owen’s Exposition of Covenant Theology**
In accord with the Westminster divines and the Savoy Declaration, Owen fundamentally operates with the dual covenant structure (covenant of works and covenant of grace). However, he finds it necessary to expand the structure to accommodate four covenants.

A. Covenant of works: (covenant of nature, covenant of life, covenant of creation)
   1. Founded on the same attributes of God as the covenant of grace. “Works” should not be viewed as the opposite of grace.
   2. Character of God
   3. Nature of man
   4. Promise of reward
B. Covenant of grace
   1. All covenants are representative
   2. Owen posits a third covenant—the covenant of redemption
C. Covenant of redemption
   1. The basic concept
   2. Scriptural basis (Psalm 2; Isaiah 53)
   3. Owen’s exposition
      a. The three conditions of the covenant laid upon the Son by the Father
i. Son should assume human nature
ii. Son’s obedience to the Father
iii. Consummation of Son’s disobedience is his paying the penalty of
     Adam’s breach of the covenant—death on the cross

b. The three promises of the covenant (made by the Father to the Son)
   i. Assistance to accomplish this work
   ii. Exaltation as a result of the work
   iii. Salvation in the Son to those for who he dies

4. Meaning of Christ’s death
   The covenant of redemption is supra-historical. It is the working out of the
   covenant of grace in Christ

D. Covenant of Sinai (Owen’s fourth covenant)
   1. Calvin’s exposition—a new dispensation of the covenant of grace
   2. Owen’s exposition
      i. Romans 10:5
      ii. 2 Corinthians 3:4-7
      iii. Hebrews 8:8ff (Note that Owen believed that the Epistle to the Hebrews
           was written by Paul)
   3. Puritan exposition: Most of the Puritans did not follow exposition for the
      following reasons:
      i. “Do this and live”—a command for sanctification, not justification
      ii. Most saw the Mosaic covenant as a development of the covenant of grace

E. Summary and transition
   1. In the covenant of redemption Owen identified requirements made of the Son and
      promises given to the Son
   2. The principles aid (as promised by the Father) is given to the Son in his humanity
      is the Holy Spirit
   3. The goal in view is the restoration of men and women to the full image of God.
      The Spirit heads a “new humanity.”

Owen on the Holy Spirit, Assurance, and Perseverance

Introduction
- Owen is unique in that he deals with the Holy Spirit in a comprehensive fashion
- Owen’s approach to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is Christocentric

The Christological ministry of the Holy Spirit
A. The incarnation (stage 1)
   1. General background: coactivity of the Trinity
   2. Hebrews 10:5; 2:14: Father’s involvement in the incarnation
   3. The Spirit’s activity in the incarnation
   4. From incarnation to Pentecost
B. The life of Jesus: How was the Spirit of God present and active throughout the life of
   Jesus?
   1. The Spirit enabled Jesus to experience personal progress in holiness.
2. The Spirit enabled Jesus to make progress in the work he came to perform.
   a. Baptism
   b. Temptations
C. The Atonement (Heb 9:13-14)
D. The Exaltation of Christ
   1. Romans 1:3, 4
   2. 1 Timothy 3:16
   3. The promised Spirit
E. The four categories restated
   1. The incarnation narrowly understood
   2. The ministry viewed as a whole
   3. The passion in terms of the crucifixion
   4. The exaltation of Christ

The Soteriological Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Introduction: The work of the Holy Spirit is seen in justification and in renovation

A. Regeneration
   1. Different uses of the term
   2. Fallen condition of humanity: image of God in fallen man marred
      a. Darkened understanding
      b. Depravity in the will
      c. Spiritual death in the soul
   3. Misunderstandings of regeneration
      a. Not a sacramental phenomenon
      b. Not merely reformational
      c. Not ecstatic experience
   4. Regeneration as transformational
   5. Two main principles in Puritan and Reformed theology about regeneration
      a. It is a work of divine sovereignty
      b. It is a work of divine mystery
   6. Owen’s assessment of the above two principles
      a. God regenerates in a way appropriate to the individual qualities of man
      b. “Regeneration carries no more repugnancy unto our faculties than a prevalent persuasion doth.”
      c. Example of Lazarus’ resurrection

B. Sanctification: the renovation of the mind
   1. The importance of spiritual-mindedness
   2. The marks of spiritual mindedness
      a. Negatively: to posses a mind not dominated by this world in its fallen condition
      b. Positively: Mourning over negligence in the exercise of a spiritual mind
   3. Developing spiritual mindedness
      a. Word and Spirit—the exposition of Scripture
      b. Life experiences such as periods of chastisement
   4. Focus of spiritual-mindedness is the future life.
“The mark of worldly mindedness is to see the world to come in light of this world. The mark of spiritual mindedness is that we see this world in light of the world to come.”

“Heavenly mindedness creates earthly usefulness.”

5. Heavenly mindedness sees God as the object of the believer’s rejoicing.
6. Spiritual affections result from spiritual mindedness

“We can love nothing sincerely with divine love but what we believe savingly with divine faith.”

(Vol. 7, p. 445)

7. Fruit of spiritual mindedness: life and peace
   • The emotions are stabilized and sanctified through spiritual mindedness
8. The role of the Lord’s Supper
   a. Audible and visible word are parallel
   b. Sacraments are visible seals of God’s promises
   c. Supper is a microcosm of spiritual mindedness
   d. The supper leads to meditation on the wonder of salvation
   e. The supper is the seal of God’s covenant in Christ
   f. The supper as preaching the gospel by Christ

Owen’s View of Assurance
A. Polemic against Roman Catholicism
B. Concern for false assurance
C. Many lack assurance
D. The blessing of assurance
E. Owen’s practical rules of assurance
   1. Final judge of my assurance is the word of Christ
   2. Assurance coexists with a sense of guilt
   3. Necessity of patience (Ps 130)
   4. Importance of self-examination
   5. Distinguish between spiritual jealousy and unbelief
   6. Distinguish between faith and sense/feelings
   7. Do not confused the foundations of assurance with the building of it
   8. Do not substitute spiritual complains for actings of grace (a probing of false assurance)
   9. Guard the mind against natural harsh thoughts of God
   10. Improving manifestations of God’s grace
   11. Deal radically with sin which wounds assurance
F. Four great hindrances to assurance
   1. Christians must endure affliction
a. Don’t despise its usefulness  
b. Don’t sink under its pressure  
2. Perplexity over personal regeneration  
3. Are the evidences of grace authentic?  
4. Although sin’s dominion is broken, its presence remains.  

“The state of grace is not to be measured by the opposition that sin makes to you, but by the opposition you make to sin.”

**Owens’ View of Perseverance**

A. The work of God’s grace is always under threat  
   e.g., The life of Christ was lived out under attack of the dominion of darkness  
B. Perseverance based on five theological premises  
   1. The immutability of God’s nature (Mal. 3:6)  
   2. The immutability of the divine purposes (Eph 1:11)  
   3. The nature of God’s covenant as an expression of God’s faithfulness  
   4. God’s unconditional promises to save the elect  
   5. The saving work of Christ  
C. Three appendices to the doctrine of perseverance  
   1. The atonement actually atones; the redemption actually redeems. The atonement disarms Satan.  
   2. The atonement is accomplished by Christ to procure the Holy Spirit.  
   3. The atonement secures Christ’s priestly work of intercession.

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