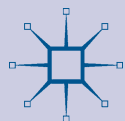




JOHN OWEN

Trajectories in Reformed Orthodox Theology

RYAN M. MCGRAW



John Owen

Ryan M. McGraw

John Owen

Trajectories in Reformed Orthodox Theology

palgrave
macmillan

Ryan M. McGraw
Department of Systematic Theology
Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary
Taylors, SC, USA

and

Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary
Grand Rapids, MI, USA

ISBN 978-3-319-60806-8 ISBN 978-3-319-60807-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1007/978-3-319-60807-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017944579

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2017

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: 19th era/Alamy Stock Photo

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Springer International Publishing AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due first to the publishers who gave permission to reprint in revised and updated form the essays included in this volume. Though each chapter includes the appropriate information related to original publications, I wish here to thank publicly *Westminster Theological Journal*, *Calvin Theological Journal*, *Journal of Reformed Theology*, Reformation Heritage Books, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal*, and *Mid-America Journal of Theology* for allowing me to expand and republish much of the material found in this volume.

I also thank my students at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and those at our extension campus in Gateshead, England for providing the proving ground for teaching what I have learned through researching these essays. It is a privilege to serve Christ by the Spirit among you to the glory of God the Father.

I am grateful to Phil Getz and to Amy Invernizzi at Palgrave Macmillan for their enthusiastic help in bringing this project to fruition.

Lastly, I thank my wife, Krista, and my children, Owen, Calvin, Jonathan, and Meghan, who have always taken an interest in my work and offered fervent prayer on my behalf. Anything worthwhile in these essays (and in everything that I write) is no doubt largely due to the Lord answering your prayers for me. Your encouragements and companionship double the joy of my work. I thank the Triune God for you all.

CONTENTS

1	Introduction	1
Part I Trinity, Exegesis, and Law and Gospel		
2	Trinitarian Doxology: Reassessing John Owen's Contribution to Reformed Orthodox Trinitarian Theology	9
3	"The Foundation of the Old Testament": John Owen on Genesis 3:15 as a Window into Reformed Orthodox Old Testament Exegesis	43
4	The Threats of the Gospel: John Owen on What the Law/Gospel Distinction Is not	71
Part II Practical Issues and Systematic Reflection		
5	Faith Versus Sight: Owen on Images of Christ, the Second Commandment, and the Role of Faith in Reformed Theology	113

6	John Owen on the Holy Spirit: In Relation to the Trinity, Christ's Humanity, and Believers	135
7	Quid Est?: Theologoumena Pantodapa and John Owen's Trinitarian Prolegomena	157
8	The Rising Prominence of John Owen: An Analysis of the Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology as a Window into the State of Owen Studies	189
	Works Cited	207
	Index	227

Introduction

John Owen is quickly gaining attention in recent historical and theological scholarship. As the essays below demonstrate, he is increasingly recognized as one of the greatest Reformed theologians Great Britain has ever produced, as well as one of the most significant theologians of the Reformed orthodox period. His theological interests were eclectic and exegetically based, and he sought to meet the needs of his times. As Owen rises in prominence in historical and theological scholarship, it is possible to make too much or too little out of his influence and theology simultaneously. The chapters in this volume treat key areas in Owen's thought, including the Trinity, Old Testament exegesis, covenant theology, the law and the gospel, the nature of faith in relation to images of Christ, the Holy Spirit, and prolegomena. The common theme tying them together is that John Owen helps us better understand the development and interrelationship of theology, exegesis, and piety in Reformed orthodox theology. By setting him in his international theological and cross-confessional context, the author seeks to use Owen as a window into the trajectory of Reformed thought in several key areas.

The essays in this volume spun out of the author's Ph.D. studies on Owen's Trinitarianism in relation to his views of public worship.¹

¹Ryan M. McGraw, *A Heavenly Directory: Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship, and a Reassessment of John Owen's Theology*, Reformed Historical Theology (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014).

However, only the first essay in this present work is related directly to this previous project. Owen's voluminous writings are ripe for scholarly research, and the articles presented here represent attempts at exploring various areas of his exegesis and theology in their historical context. The aim in all of these essays is to use Owen as a means of evaluating broader trajectories in the development of Reformed thought in critical areas. This fits into the growing interest in the historical-theological study of Reformed orthodoxy in general. While the essays in this volume fit the genre of historical theology, their author hopes that they will be of use to historians, theologians, and ministers. All of these essays have appeared in print previously in seed form, and publication information is noted in each appropriate place. However, most of them have undergone dramatic and substantial revision, with much rewriting and many added sections to reflect recent scholarship and to further establish the thesis of each chapter. This further research, at times, challenges recent trends in Owen scholarship by setting his work in his broad international theological context.²

The material is divided roughly by theme and genre. The first section treats Owen's trinitarianism and various issues drawn from the relationship between theology and exegesis in his writings. The first essay, which treats Owen's trinitarianism in relation to his theology in general, explores some of the questions raised in the conclusion of my PhD work. It does so by expanding Owen's trinitarianism, not only as it functioned in his theology, but also as it contributed to trinitarian piety in its broader relation to Reformed orthodoxy. It serves primarily as a challenge to the assumption that Reformed writers contributed nothing of significance to trinitarian theology by pressing scholars to reassess the practical development and relevance of the Trinity in Reformed orthodox theology.

The second essay analyzes Owen's treatment of Genesis 3:15. By comparing him primarily to the Reformed Bible commentary tradition as well as to samples of didactic (systematic) theology, this essay serves as a window into the vital relationship between theology and exegesis in Reformed orthodoxy. It illustrates partly that, in addition to numerous historical factors, a historical figure's interpretation of the Bible could

²This is true preeminently of Chaps. 4 and 7.

contribute to shaping his or her context in its own right. This is an oft-underappreciated aspect of Reformed thought in historical studies.

The third and final essay in this section addresses Owen's assertion that "evangelical" threats were an indispensable component of the gospel as a covenant. This material demonstrates how the development of Reformed covenant theology altered the way in which Reformed authors formulated the law/gospel distinction in partial contrast to Lutheran constructions. It contends that post-Reformation theology was marked by continuities and discontinuities with earlier presentations of the law/gospel distinction. While this chapter will likely be regarded as controversial to some in light of contemporary theological debates over this subject, the primary purpose of the article is to provide clarity on the subject in light of an international and cross-confessional seventeenth-century context. Though the essay is historical in character, the author hopes that it will bring greater light and clarity to contemporary conversations over this topic as well.

The second major section of this book draws attention to practical issues in Owen's theology. Two out of the three essays present here include systematic and practical reflection on Owen's work. This emphasis arose partly from the context in which these essays originated. Owen on the Holy Spirit was developed from a conference address at Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and Owen on True Theology arose from a lecture delivered to faculty and students at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. While these articles aim primarily at answering historical questions, the author had a partial eye on drawing conclusions and applications from Owen for use in the church today. This is particularly true with relation to the essay on Owen's views of the Holy Spirit. I have tried to make these distinctions clear while maintaining the contextual character of the historical investigations. All three essays in this section have been expanded and altered substantially in order to strengthen the historical-theological character of each of them.

Chapter 5 expands and redirects the context and thesis of a subject that began as an appendix on images of Christ in my *Heavenly Directory*. The primary expansions of the material consist in altering the thesis of the original appendix in light of further primary and secondary material. This chapter contends that Owen, and the Reformed tradition at large, rejected the use of images of Christ in any form primarily on the grounds that they negated the biblical emphasis on walking by faith in this world rather than by sight. This meant that the rejection of images of Christ

was central rather than peripheral to Reformed theology and that it tied together several strands of the Reformed system of thought into a practical expression. Owen thus represents clearly what became a standard and pivotal feature of Reformed theology, distinguishing it from Lutheranism and others.

Chapter 6 is the most directly theological contribution to this volume. It examines Owen's teaching on the Holy Spirit in relation to the Trinity, to Christ, and to believers. The aim is to show how the Spirit's ontological relationships with the Father and the Son determined the nature of his work in the incarnate Christ, which, in turn, served as a pattern for his work in believers. As the chapter demonstrates, while some authors have traced these themes in Owen, few have adequately examined how his work on the Spirit related to general trends in Medieval and Reformed theology. The result is that Owen often appears as an exceptional thinker who dropped out of the theological sky. I have expanded the historical research of this chapter significantly in light of recent research related to the Spirit and Christology in historic Reformed thought. I have also added substantial primary source material, especially from Thomas Goodwin's work on the Spirit in salvation. The most significant change to the original essay consists in the new material connecting the Spirit's work in the incarnate Christ to the *theologia unionis* and the beatific vision. This illustrates how and why a Christological vision of God was integral to Reformed prolegomena and why the Spirit's work was the link between these ideas. This provides one of the clearest examples of a general theme of this book that it is easy to make too much and too little out of Owen's contribution to Reformed orthodoxy at the same time. The essay closes with practical conclusions and applications, which incorporate systematic and practical theology into historical reflection.

Chapter 7 illustrates ways in which Owen's prolegomena was both standard and distinctive among other Reformed precedents. The original version of Chap. 7 was designed to assist theological students to pursue their studies in the right way by drawing lessons from Owen. However, this chapter as revised and presented here provides what is likely the most substantial, if potentially controversial, contribution to historical research in this volume. It contends that, in contrast to the assumptions of most scholars, both past and present, Owen's *Theologoumena Pantodapa* was a large-scale work of theological prolegomena rather than "a history of theology from Adam to Christ" or a large-scale covenant

theology. In the revisions, I have made substantial additions from Latin works of prolegomena and I have included much material from the Latin original of Owen's text in order to clarify the claims of the essay. In addition to seeking to determine the nature of this book, this essay argues that Owen's primary contribution to Reformed prolegomena lay in his trinitarian conceptions of true theology and the knowledge of God. This means that *Theologoumena Pantodapa* is less subversive to Reformed thought than some authors have assumed and more valuable in its contributions than others have realized. Such conclusions help expand our understanding of the nature and development of Reformed prolegomena.

The last chapter of this volume is an article assessment of the *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*. The *Ashgate Companion* is the first full-scale edited volume on Owen's thought. The title of this article supplies the title for this collection of essays. This essay uses this multi-author volume as an occasion to evaluate and to provide a glimpse into the current state of Owen research. This has the added advantage of covering a wide range of theological and practical topics that reflect Owen's wide range of interests and influence. In a way, this final piece helps justify the need for the preceding articles included in this present volume. The *Ashgate Companion* illustrates the growing scholarly attention Owen is receiving currently. The general strengths of this volume relate to its recognition of Owen's significance as a Reformed theologian. Its general weaknesses lie in the failure of many of its contributors to connect Owen to the trajectories of Reformed orthodoxy, which is the primary theme of this present volume. The evaluations presented in this book of each chapter in the *Ashgate Companion* serve as a fitting conclusion to the preceding chapters, since it solidifies this author's contention that as Owen rises in prominence in historical research, it is possible to make too much and too little of his significance at the same time.

The author has not added a general introduction treating Owen's political and social context. However, these aspects of his life and thought appear at key moments in various chapters. The author has prioritized Owen's theological context in relation to British, continental, Medieval, and, where appropriate, early church theology. While it is vital to understand Owen in the context of British Puritanism, the primary aim of these essays is to highlight international continuities and discontinuities within the development of Reformed theology and both to

evaluate Owen's place in this context and to understand the Reformed tradition better in light of Owen.

As Owen gains prominence in historical and theological research, it is important to keep him tied to his international theological moorings. While the essays in this volume are organized thematically, they do not progress systematically. This is appropriate for a subject like Owen, who never produced a full-scale system of theology, but who preferred to present his theology in the context of his teaching and exegetical labors. This feature also reflects the author's conviction that Reformed orthodoxy did not revolve around a central dogma, but that its proponents sought to discern the mind of God in Scripture in their historical contexts. It is this author's hope that this collection of essays will provide a realistic and sober view of the importance of Owen's contribution to Reformed theology, appreciating most where he is most distinctive and seeing him blend into the crowd of Reformed authors where he best fits in.

PART I

Trinity, Exegesis, and Law and Gospel

Trinitarian Doxology: Reassessing John Owen’s Contribution to Reformed Orthodox Trinitarian Theology

Reformed orthodox theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589–1676) referred to the doctrine of the Trinity as “the foundation of fundamentals.”¹ While Richard Muller dissuades scholars from searching for a “central dogma” in historic Reformed theology,² he notes that if any dogma

¹“Fundamentum fundamenti.” Gisperti Voetii, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum, Pars Prima* (Utrecht, 1648), 1:472. See Richard A. Muller, *Post Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, 1 for “fundamental articles.”

²Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008); Michael A.G. Haykin and Mark Jones, eds., *Drawn into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, vol. 17, *Reformed Historical Theology* (Göttingen; Oakville, CT: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), Chap. 1.

This article has been updated and modified from Ryan M. McGraw, “Trinitarian Doxology: Reassessing John Owen’s Contribution to Reformed Orthodox Trinitarian Theology,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 77, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 293–316. It expands upon the conclusions of my book, *A Heavenly Directory: Trinitarian Piety, Public Worship, and a Reassessment of John Owen’s Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2014). The article is not an abridgement of this work, but it is a summary and an expansion with fresh analysis and further conclusions.

comes close to achieving such status, it is the doctrine of the Trinity.³ In light of this fact, it is somewhat surprising that most modern treatments of trinitarian theology assume that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy had virtually nothing to contribute to this vital doctrine.⁴

The recent *Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* and the *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* both reflect this assumption.⁵ The Cambridge volume leaps four centuries from John Calvin (1509–1564) to Karl Barth, implying that little of consequence appeared in between. The *Oxford Handbook* devotes one out of forty-three chapters to the Reformed construction of the Trinity. However, this chapter addresses how Reformed authors tried to harmonize the historical doctrine of the Trinity with their principle of *sola scriptura*.⁶ It does not treat positive developments or applications of the doctrine. Calvin has received significant scholarly attention, but predominantly in relation to his construction of the doctrine rather than to his use of it or its influence on his system of theology.⁷ The void left in the secondary literature has not adequately probed the bold claims of Voetius or the scholarly reflections of Muller.⁸

John Owen (1616–1683) is a growing exception to this trend. Both historians and theologians are starting to recognize his significance as a theologian in general and a trinitarian theologian in particular. Even

³Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, 4 vols., 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 4.

⁴Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 1–3. MacLean observes the same trend in his recent work on James Durham: Donald John MacLean, *James Durham (1622–1658): And the Gospel Offer in Its Seventeenth-Century Context*, vol. 31, *Reformed Historical Theology* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), 97–98.

⁵Peter C. Phan, *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Gilles Emery and Matthew Levering, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁶Scott R. Swain, “The Trinity in the Reformers,” *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 227–239.

⁷For a notable example, see Brannon Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁸Muller notes that Reformed trinitarian theology is a neglected field. He suggests that the primary contribution of Reformed authors to this subject was exegetical. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:24–25.

the *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, despite largely bypassing Reformed orthodoxy, includes scattered references to Owen.⁹ Moreover, both the *Oxford Handbooks of Christology* and *Early Modern Theology* include references to Owen in relation to historical and systematic theology.¹⁰ While such broader treatments of Owen's theology have contributed much to understanding the trinitarian structure of Owen's theology and piety, they often stop short of observing how he intertwined his trinitarian theology and piety throughout his writings. The lens through which he did this was the theme of public worship.

Owen regarded public worship as the highest expression of communion with God as triune. The connection that he drew between trinitarian piety and public worship illustrates how he integrated his trinitarian theology into his entire system of theology. This article will reassess Owen's contribution to Reformed trinitarian theology in two major segments. The first does so by critiquing two recent treatments of his work. The remaining material explores the theological foundations of Owen's trinitarian doxology, followed by the theological and practical conclusions that he drew from his theology in relation to Scripture, spiritual affections, covenant theology, and ecclesiology. Owen illustrates that one of the primary contributions of Reformed orthodoxy to trinitarian theology lies in its integration into Reformed soteriology and piety.¹¹ This article reassesses Owen's contribution to trinitarian theology and provides clues for scholars to trace the significance of the Reformed contribution to trinitarian theology in other authors within that tradition.¹²

⁹Emery and Levering, *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 246, 506–509. *Drawn into Controversie*, cited above, includes Owen in nine of twelve chapters.

¹⁰Francesca Aran Murphy, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Christology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 619; Ulrich L. Lehner, Richard A. Muller, and A.G. Roeber, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Modern Theology, 1600–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 181–95, 245.

¹¹For a less scholarly treatment of Owen's teaching on the Trinity in relation to soteriology, see Matthew Barrett and Michael A.G. Haykin, *Owen on the Christian Life: Living for the Glory of God in Christ*, *Theologians on the Christian Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 53–88.

¹²As such, it is not merely a restatement of the material from my *Heavenly Directory*.

IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM: TWO RECENT TREATMENTS OF OWEN'S TRINITARIANISM

The significance of Owen's contribution to Reformed orthodox trinitarian theology is illustrated through interacting critically with two recent treatments of his thought. The first is Robert Letham's essay on Owen's trinitarianism. The other is Paul Lim's chapter on Owen and Francis Cheynell's (1608–1665) practical trinitarianism in his recent work on Socinianism. While both studies are valuable, Letham appears to import modern trinitarian questions into his historical analysis, while Lim diminishes the distinctiveness of Owen's practical use of the doctrine. Both of these approaches illustrate different reasons why Owen's practical use of the Trinity has been partially underdeveloped and why contemporary authors assume that Reformed orthodoxy contributes little to trinitarian theology. This analysis sets the backdrop from the analysis below of how he intertwined the Trinity and public worship into his theological system.

*Asking the Wrong Question of the Wrong Century*¹³

One of the reasons why some contemporary authors likely have missed the contribution of Reformed orthodoxy to trinitarian theology is that they ask different questions from those that occupied Reformed authors. This is evident in Robert Letham's article in the recent *Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology*.¹⁴

Letham asks whether Owen's Trinitarian emphases have eastern or western tendencies. He argues that Owen's views on matters such as the *filioque* clause were western, but that his stress on distinct communion with the divine persons was eastern in tone.¹⁵ In Letham's other works on the Trinity, he often gives readers the impression that western

¹³This material is modified from Ryan M. McGraw, "The Rising Prominence of John Owen: A Review Article of The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen's Theology," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 24 (2013): 105–120.

¹⁴Robert Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context," *Ashgate Companion to Owen's Theology*, 185–198.

¹⁵Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context," 186, 191.

Trinitarians are the “bad guys.”¹⁶ This essay is no exception.¹⁷ Citing an earlier publication, he notes, “Owen is not so much an innovator as a brilliant synthesizer.”¹⁸ The synthesis that he has in mind is between western emphases on the unity of God and eastern emphases on the divine persons. He adds, “[Owen’s] focus on the three persons was and is missing from the West in general” (196).¹⁹

Letham does not sufficiently base his claims on seventeenth-century evidence by comparing or contrasting Owen to his contemporaries. By contrast, Richard Muller argues that it is impossible to classify Reformed trinitarianism either as eastern or western.²⁰ Showing similarities between Owen and eastern authors in emphasizing the divine persons means less if we find that other western authors expressed similar emphases for different reasons. Owen is distinctive among most English writers in terms of Trinitarian piety. However, he shows affinity with Dutch authors such as Voetius and Hoornbeek (1617–1666), both of whom he cited periodically.²¹ Such authors developed a devotional emphasis on the divine persons in response to Arminianism because Arminians denied that the Trinity was a fundamental article of the faith since it had no practical value.²²

¹⁶For example, throughout his work, *The Holy Trinity*, and in Robert Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity and its Significance for Today,” in *Where Reason Fails: Papers Read at the 2006 Westminster Conference* (Stoke on Trent, UK: Tentmaker Publications, 2006), 10–20.

¹⁷Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context,” 188, for example.

¹⁸Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context,” 190. Cited from Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity and its Significance for Today,” 11.

¹⁹Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context,” 196. The recent *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, assumes that such assertions have not been taken seriously in scholarly circles for several decades. *Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, 123.

²⁰Muller, *PRRD*, 4:72.

²¹For example, John Owen, *Theologoumena Pantodapa, Sive, De Natura, Ortu Progressu, Et Studio Vere Theologiae, Libri Sex Quibus Etiam Origines & Processus Veri & Falsi Cultus Religiosi, Casus & Instaurationes Ecclesiae Illustiores Ab Iphis Rerum Primordiis, Enarrantur* ... (Oxoniae: Excudebat Hen. Hall ... impensis Tho. Robinson ..., 1661), 522 (Voetius) and 519 (Hoornbeek).

²²See Gisperti Voetii, *Selectarum Disputationum Theologicarum, Pars Prima* (Utrecht, 1648), 1:472, who called the Trinity the *fundamentum fundamenti*. He added that the doctrine of the Trinity was fundamental because it was the foundation of so many practical uses, personal holiness, and divine worship (473). For Hoornbeek, see Johannes

While Owen was less directly concerned with Arminian views of the Trinity than these men were, it is more plausible that his emphasis on the divine persons stems from continental influence than from eastern theology. One historian warns against relying too much on English books in studying English Reformed theology following the advent of Early English Books Online.²³ Continental authors produced trinitarian emphases that were less common in an English context due to differing theological concerns. This is not to say that eastern emphases were not present, but the evidence that Letham produces arises from contemporary questions rather than from seventeenth-century literature. Moreover, he overlooks Muller's defense of Reformed orthodoxy against the charge of abstracting the divine essence and attributes from the Trinity.²⁴ Muller argues that the tables of contents of dogmatic works are not reliable guides to discern the relative importance of the divine attributes and the divine persons in these works. This is precisely the mistake that Letham makes in this essay.²⁵

Exploring the broader context of seventeenth-century western trinitarianism more fully might reveal that the question of eastern versus western trinitarianism was not on the Reformed horizon²⁶—at least not with respect to every Reformed author.²⁷ Letham gives the impression that he is asking the wrong question of the wrong century. The context that he sets for Owen is too narrow in relation to primary sources and too broad in terms of historical setting.

Footnote 22 (continued)

Hoornbeeck, *Theologiae Practicae* (Utrecht, 1663), 1:136. For the Arminian denial that the Trinity is a “fundamental article” of the faith, see Muller, *PRRD*, 4:109.

²³Polly Ha, Patrick Collinson, eds., *The Reception of Continental Reformation in Britain* (Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 2010), 235–236.

²⁴Richard A. Muller, *PRRD*, 4:144–149.

²⁵Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context,” 189. Sebastian Rehnman strengthens Muller’s case in his contribution to *A Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*.

²⁶As Muller argues, *PRRD*, 4:109.

²⁷A.C. Neele has alerted directed me to Maastricht, who showed some concern for eastern trinitarianism. In any case, I have not found sufficient evidence of contemporary eastern influences in Owen.

Diminishing Owen's Distinctiveness

Paul Lim's analysis slightly diminishes Owen's distinctiveness within the Reformed tradition. He devotes significant attention to Owen's trinitarian theology in his recent book, *Mystery Unveiled*.²⁸ The primary thesis of this book is that the Socinian position on the Trinity represented a consistent application of the Reformed principle of *sola scriptura*.²⁹ He includes a chapter on Owen and Cheynell and argues that such men tried to revive the doctrine of the Trinity by weaving it into devotion. His assessment is significant; however, it fails to show the integral function of the Trinity in Owen's theology and especially the recurring connection between this doctrine and public worship.

Lim provides valuable insights into how Cheynell and Owen formulated trinitarian spirituality in a polemical context.³⁰ Cheynell has received little attention in the secondary literature. Lim shows that most authors treat Puritan spirituality and polemics in isolation from one another instead of as informing one another. Cheynell and Owen remedy this misconception by stressing the devotional aspects of their trinitarian theology in the context of controversy. However, contra the impression given by Lim, Cheynell and Owen are not fully comparable in this regard. Cheynell stressed the Trinity as the object of worship while Owen emphasized the importance of the Trinity in relation to the manner of worship and the personal experience of the worshipers.³¹ Also, many of Cheynell's "practical" exhortations refer to rejecting Socinian fellowship and to the magistrate's duty to remove them from society.³²

²⁸Paul Chang-Ha Lim, *Mystery Unveiled: The Crisis of the Trinity in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁹Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 1, 13–14.

³⁰Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 215.

³¹For Owen, see below. Francis Cheynell, *The Divine Trinitunity of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Or, the Blessed Doctrine of the Three Coessentiall Subsistents in the Eternall Godhead Without Any Confusion or Division of the Distinct Subsistences or Multiplication of the Most Single and Entire Godhead Acknowledged, Beleved, Adored by Christians, in Opposition to Pagans, Jewes, Mahumetans, Blasphemous and Antichristian Hereticks, Who Say They Are Christians, but Are Not* (London: Printed by T.R. and E.M. for Samuel Gellibrand ..., 1650), 6–7, 182, and especially 272–305. These themes continue through the remainder of the book. These observations also apply to William Perkins, *Idolatrie of the Last Times*, throughout.

³²Cheynell, *Divine Triunity*, 417–480.

The material below will show how widely this differs from Owen's practical use of the doctrine.

Lim's treatment of Owen contributes several things to Owen studies. He demonstrates that "Owen's Trinitarian theology hinged on his Christological formulations."³³ He provides a detailed analysis of how Owen and other Reformed authors largely adopted the medieval interpretation of the Song of Solomon as well.³⁴ The most important contribution of his treatment is that he shows how, at various stages in Owen's career, he sharpened his trinitarian spirituality through polemical encounters. This is similar to this writer's observation above regarding the way in which the Arminian context influenced trinitarian piety on the continent. The primary difference here is that Owen aimed at the Socinians rather than the Arminians, while Dutch authors aimed at both.³⁵

Despite its value, Lim's section on Owen contains some deficiencies. He overstates his case in comparing Owen's to the eastern view of *theosis/deification*, his dependence upon Calvin's construction of the ontological Trinity, and "the inherent antinomian potential" that he attributes to Owen's view of Christ's imputed righteousness in justification.³⁶

First, endnote seventy-two³⁷ inappropriately compares Owen's views to Vladimir Lossky's doctrine of *theosis*. Lossky is a (controversial) twentieth-century Eastern Orthodox theologian. Lim later refers to Owen's "*theosis*-sounding divinity."³⁸ Apart from the anachronistic risk involved in comparing a seventeenth-century Reformed theologian with a twentieth-century Eastern Orthodox theologian, the evidence points to the fact that in his mature years Owen believed that being "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet. 1:4) entailed renewal in God's image rather than *deification*.³⁹ Ironically, Lim reflects this fact by citing the relevant passage from Owen's *Glory of Christ*, where he interprets being "partakers of the divine nature" as being endued with "the gracious

³³Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 187.

³⁴Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 193–200.

³⁵See references above.

³⁶Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 207.

³⁷Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 382.

³⁸Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 209.

³⁹For example, Owen, *The Doctrine of the Saint's Perseverance Explained and Confirmed*, Works, 11:402.

qualifications” with which Christ is endued “in his human nature.”⁴⁰ Bruce McCormack’s research and arguments against importing theosis into Calvin’s theology apply with equal force to Owen.⁴¹ Moreover, later Reformed authors, such as Mastricht, regarded the language of deification as dangerous at best and openly blasphemous at worst.⁴² Lim’s comparisons approach the same error of East/West categorization that Letham makes and that Muller rejects.

Second, Lim states that Owen followed Calvin in asserting that the Father was the fountain of the deity.⁴³ However, Calvin departed from patristic expressions on this point and the evidence is that most of the Reformed orthodox tradition did not follow his construction.⁴⁴ Calvin taught that the Father was the fountain of the trinity, but he denied that he was the fountain of the deity. The difference was that while other Reformed authors believed that eternal generation had reference to the Son’s deity and to his personal subsistence, Calvin denied the former while affirming the latter. Perhaps Lim’s confusion stems from the fact that Cheynell devoted a section in his massive work on the Trinity to arguing that Calvin did not detach Christ’s deity from his personal subsistence in reference to eternal generation.⁴⁵

Third, Lim criticizes Owen for going “slightly” in the direction of Antinomianism by saying that we are freed from obedience.⁴⁶ However, he does not properly acknowledge the Reformed distinction between freedom from obedience in justification as contrasted to sanctification. Owen’s position is antinomian only from the standpoint of Richard Baxter’s (1615–1691) neonomian position, since Baxter regarded the imputation of Christ’s righteousness as inherently antinomian.⁴⁷ If Owen “tilted” in an antinomian direction, then his teaching on freedom from

⁴⁰Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 215.

⁴¹Bruce L. McCormack, “Union with Christ in Calvin’s Theology: Grounds for a Divinization Theory?,” in *Tributes to John Calvin: A Celebration of His Quincentenary*, ed. David W. Hall (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2010), 504–529.

⁴²Mastricht, *Theoretico-Practica Theologia*, 792.

⁴³Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 190.

⁴⁴Ellis, *Calvin, Classical Trinitarianism, and the Aseity of the Son*, Chap. 1.

⁴⁵Cheynell, *Divine Trinity*, 232–235.

⁴⁶Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 201.

⁴⁷Tim Cooper, *John Owen, Richard Baxter, and the Formation of Nonconformity* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 78–83.

the law with respect to justification is not proper evidence of the fact. Later Lim adds that Owen was decidedly not antinomian.⁴⁸ However, later still he wrote of the “inherent antinomian potential” of Owen’s views of imputed righteousness.⁴⁹ This is a theological rather than a historical judgment that assumes the validity of Baxterian and Catholic criticisms against the Reformed doctrine of justification. If the Reformed view of imputed righteousness preceded or was divorced from union with Christ, then it would not simply have “inherent antinomian potential,” but it would be theological antinomianism outright.⁵⁰ However, by rooting justification in existential union with Christ, Reformed orthodoxy had inherent anti-antinomian tendencies, since union with Christ included renewal in Christ’s image. Lim’s citation of Richard Hooker concerning participating in Christ by way of imputation and infusion is evidence in this direction.⁵¹

Lim’s treatment reveals that Owen (and Cheynell) stressed the practical use of the Trinity, but he falls short of revealing how this was so or what this looked like in practice. Upon examination, Cheynell’s model was very different than Owen’s in that he relegated application to treating the divine persons as the object of worship. The material below shows that Lim’s analysis leaves Owen’s trinitarian piety vague and underdeveloped.

FOUNDATIONS OF OWEN’S TRINITARIAN THEOLOGY

This preliminary analysis enables us to begin to ask: what was distinctive about Owen’s trinitarian theology, and how does his teaching relate to seventeenth-century Reformed orthodoxy? Owen’s trinitarian theology was the foundation of his trinitarian piety, and his trinitarian piety permeated every area of his theology. This cycle began with his teaching on the knowledge of God and true theology, and it found its highest expression in public worship. This section sets the stage for the theological connections drawn in subsequent sections.

⁴⁸Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 207.

⁴⁹Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 208.

⁵⁰See Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology’s Unwelcome Guest?* 2013.

⁵¹Lim, *Mystery Unveiled*, 210.