

## CORRESPONDENCE

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Following the Journal issue featuring the appearance in English of Francis Turretine's *Institutes* [Issue 3, July-Sept 1993 - Ed.], readers may be interested to know that another classic work of Reformed theology from that period, also hitherto locked away in Latin, is planned to be issued in a 'first ever' English translation, about Easter 1994. What is more, this Latin author is not only British but arguably the greatest ever English theologian - John Owen. Owen's *Theologoumena Pantadapa* was issued in 1661 at Oxford being, in effect, a written summary of the system of the theology he was endeavouring to promote at that University; committed to paper after his dismissal as Vice-Chancellor by Oliver Cromwell in 1658. What is especially interesting is that Owen's approach is that of a 'Biblical theology' - some three centuries before that concept was popularised in Reformed circles by Geerhardus Vos (1948).

The six books of the *Theologoumena* progress as follows: 1. Natural Theology, 2. Theology from Adam to Noah, 3. Theology from Noah to Abraham, 4. Theology from Abraham to Moses, 5. Theology from Moses to Christ, and 6. Evangelical Theology. There are also extended digressions on such diverse subjects as the Romanist *Notes of the Church*, *The Origin of Writing*, *The Antiquity of Hebrew*, and *Jewish Rites and Christianity*. To complete the work a translation is added of Owen's 1858 *Pro Scaris Scripturis Adversus Hujus Temporis Fanaticos*, making it a definitive English version of all of Owen's Latin

theological writings, under the overall title of *Biblical Theology with a Defence of the Scriptures*. The book will be issued with a recommendatory preface by J I Packer. As the translation editor I am (naturally) somewhat biased, but I might add that the very final Chapter of the *Biblical Theology* (on the Spiritual qualifications for true students of theology) has been reviewed by a U.S. pastor and educator who comments that he wishes that it could be made required reading for all students of theology!

The re-issue of this material might also serve to clear up some misunderstandings about Owenian theology, as it is very common to read and assimilate material from his voluminous English writings without ever grasping some of his great underlying convictions - a classic case of failing to see the wood from the trees! Note how even Owen's nineteenth century editor, William Goold, parts company with Owen over the latter's absolute and uncompromising advocacy of the 'Received Text' and its 'Divine preservation,' especially as highlighted in Owen's controversy with Brian Walton (see *Works*, Vol 16, pps 345-7, Goold, Banner of Truth edition). Similarly Owen, on the basis of these writings (and the waning later of Latin scholarship), is so often referred to as a 'Reformed Scholastic,' as indeed he is in your 'Turretine' issue. In fact there is little that Owen himself would have more soundly refuted than that charge! What emerges from the *Biblical Theology* is that Owen is deeply concerned by what he sees as a western blending of 'philosophy' with 'theology,' to genuine theology's great detriment. Owen

would point us to such texts as 1 Cor.1:22; "The Jews require a sign and the Greeks seek after wisdom" in the light of subsequent Church history, as meaning that the great temptation and danger for the Church in her earliest days came from Judaism, which would believe nothing unless accompanied by clearly miraculous signs. This danger was circumvented by Paul's victory over the Judaisers, and the overthrow of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation in 70 AD.

But who has ever taken due note of the danger 'on the other wing'? Why are we still concerned with Judaism, and all too unaware of the dangers and errors of 'Gentilism'? And Gentilism's prevailing stumbling block is philosophy - the search for 'wisdom' - in stark contrast to faith, which accepts that which is unseen. Owen suggests that perhaps such Gentilism has swept the board, whilst the evangelical Church has been so predominantly Western and European. It is thus a love of philosophy which leads men to restructure theology as a 'science' with recognised divisions, heads, and 'loci,' in imitation of the purely human 'ologies.' The result (even in the best Reformed circles, Owen would suggest) is that essentially

philosophic theology which is properly 'Reformed Scholasticism.' Hence the irony of labelling Owen as a 'Reformed Scholastic,' because he wrote some weighty theological tomes in Latin in the seventeenth century! (Note how the same error is made even in the Preface to Theodore Letis' *The Majority Text*, 1987, p ix; "reappraising John Owen as a 'Scholastic Calvinist,' whose orthodoxy prevailed until the advent of B B Warfield").

It will now be apparent why Owen sets his one-volume theology text in the shape of a 'Biblical' and not a 'Systematic' theology! In short, John Owen pleads that to be genuine, theology must be pursued 'within the regulative principle of Scripture,' and that a Biblical methodology for arranging divine truth *must* of necessity be 'more Scriptural' than any re-arrangement of the same material into a 'logical' or 'scientific' system. I, for one, found this viewpoint both challenging and exciting - readers may judge for themselves when the book is available.

I have taken up too much of your valuable space and time. The Owen volume will run to approx 900 pps, and be out (DV) around April '94. It will be published by Soli Deo Gloria Publications.'

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