

'MINISTRY WITHOUT THE SPIRIT' OR 'A SPIRIT WITHOUT A MINISTRY'? JOHN OWEN AND JOHN 14–16¹

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The role of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Christian is a controversial and often misunderstood topic in Christian theology, but one which could not be more important in pastoral ministry. Our pneumatology has huge implications in the areas of assurance, sanctification, our experience of God and our attitude to the Bible. This article aims to shed light on this subject and its implications by considering the pneumatology of John Owen—one of the most profound theologians of the Spirit—in the light of John 14–16—one of the richest Bible passages concerning the Spirit.

Introduction

John Owen (1616–1683) occupies a paradoxical position in contemporary evangelical thought. On the one hand, he has ‘cast a long shadow,’ his works influencing theologians to the present day;² on the other, his name ‘is little known today even in theological circles.’³ This is a shame, as Owen is a ‘first-rate spiritual theologian’;⁴ but the loss is all the more keenly felt when one considers that Owen ‘self-consciously viewed himself as a theologian of the Spirit.’⁵ This is particularly important given the resurgence of attention paid to the Spirit and the ever-greater enthusiasm for ‘spirituality’ within Christian circles,⁶ coupled with a general lack of understanding about his work.⁷

¹ This material first appeared in an undergraduate essay at Oak Hill Theological College.

² Kelly M. Kavic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), pp. 17–21.

³ Carl R. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 1. This is perhaps largely due to his difficult writing style (Kelly M. Kavic, ‘Worshiping the Triune God: The Shape of John Owen’s Trinitarian Spirituality,’ in John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God* (ed. Kelly M. Kavic and Justin Taylor; Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2007), pp. 17–46).

⁴ Kavic, *Communion with God*, p. 17.

⁵ Kavic, ‘Worshiping the Triune God,’ p. 39.

⁶ Marian Raikes, *A Step Too Far: An Evangelical Critique of Christian Mysticism* (London: Latimer Trust, 2006), p. 1.

⁷ Packer calls this a ‘purblindness’: often Christians ‘fall short of a biblical focus on the Spirit, whose work we celebrate so often’ (J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the*

With the backdrop of this confusion, Owen's pneumatology deserves a wider hearing. However, it would not do to accept Owen's conclusions uncritically. As shall be seen, Owen saw Scripture as the touchstone by which all claims to truth must be measured; thus this article will attempt to evaluate Owen's pneumatology on the basis of Jesus' teaching on the Spirit in the 'Farewell Discourse' of John 14–16. This pericope is 'the most concentrated teaching in the Gospels on the ministry of the Spirit,'⁸ and is crucial to a right understanding of his person and work.⁹ Of course, John 14–16 do not represent the totality of the Bible's teaching on the Holy Spirit, and Owen's systematic works cover a much broader range of Biblical material. But focusing on these chapters scopes the discussion to the question: does Owen's pneumatology faithfully represent the teaching of the Farewell Discourse? Owen will say much more about the Spirit than is touched upon in John 14–16; but it is crucial that he does not say any *less*; in other words, if his thought is to be appropriated, it must be seen where and how it is challenged by the Farewell Discourse such that it requires modification.

This article will proceed in three stages. Section 1 presents an exegesis of John 14–16 with a particular focus on its pneumatological themes. Section 2 outlines Owen's thought as it pertains to these themes. Section 3 analyses Owen on the basis of the exegesis, seeking to find both areas where he agrees with and enriches our understanding of the Farewell Discourse and where his thought is challenged. The article concludes with some applications to the contemporary evangelical church, attempting to show how Owen's thought—when filtered and modified where necessary—may work to bring clarity where there is currently confusion.

1 Exegesis of John 14–16

With a troubled¹⁰ spirit, Jesus has sent Judas out to betray him,¹¹ warned the disciples of his imminent departure,¹² and prophesied Peter's denial.¹³

Spirit (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2005), p. 20).

⁸ Sinclair Ferguson, *Holy Spirit* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), p. 35.

⁹ Indeed, in John Jesus is laying 'the theological groundwork for the faith-reception of the Spirit' (Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, p. 68).

¹⁰ ἐταράχθη, 13:21.

¹¹ 13:27, prompting John's pregnant recollection that 'it was night' (13:30); more than just an eye-witness detail, the encroaching darkness signifies the rejection of the 'light' by the disbelieving world (c.f. 1:5, 3:19, 8:12, 12:35, 12:46).

¹² 13:31–36.

¹³ 13:38.

It is therefore no surprise to hear Jesus begin the Farewell Discourse by appealing to the disciples to calm *their* troubled¹⁴ hearts. However, this is not glib sentiment from Jesus, but an appeal to realise what his departure means—nothing less than the dawning of a new eschatological age.¹⁵ As we shall see, this new age will be marked by fruitfulness, joy, and life, and a new experience of God's presence; thus Jesus' comfort to his disciples is that his departure heralds an era when the benefits of his earthly presence will be communicated—in richer compass than the disciples have yet experienced—via 'another' (14:16); namely the Holy Spirit. Jesus' explanation of the new era and the Spirit's work within it will be examined under four descriptive themes: The Spirit of Christ (which examines the Christocentric nature of the coming age), The Spirit of Truth (which examines the truth-bringing role of the Spirit), The Spirit of Comfort (which examines the Spirit's role on the disciples' affections), and The Indwelling Spirit.

1.1 The Spirit of Christ

The new age is profoundly Christocentric; Jesus' departure is required to inaugurate the age of the Spirit, because *he* is the one who will send the Spirit (16:7). In the Discourse there is a consistent analogy between the relationship of Father to Son as there is Son to Spirit: the Son is sent by the Father, thus the Spirit is sent by the Son (14:24, 15:26); the Son glorifies the Father, thus the Spirit glorifies the Son (12:12, 16:14); the Son speaks the Father's words, thus the Spirit speaks the Son's words (15:15, 16:14).¹⁶ This suggests that the Spirit's work is not only Christocentric, but *filio-centric*; throughout John, Jesus has been revealing that he is the Son of God, and that God is truly and eternally known as his Father—the 'name' which Jesus was given in order to reveal him (17:6).¹⁷ Jesus' work—and analogously that of his Spirit—is thus also *patrotelic* (that is,

¹⁴ Μὴ παρασέσθω, 14:1.

¹⁵ There is a prevalence of eschatological language in the passage, including references to the 'day' (14:20, 16:23, 16:26); the 'hour' (16:2, 16:4, 16:21, 16:25, 16:32); resurrection and new life (14:6, 14:29, 16:16); Jesus' 'coming' and 'taking' the disciples to himself (14:3, 14:18, 15:19); and the notion of a time (a 'little while,' 14:19) of suffering followed by lasting joy (15:11, 15:18–25, 16:6, 16:20–22).

¹⁶ Athanasius, *The Letters of St. Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit* (ed. and trans. C.R.B. Shapland; London: Epworth, 1951), pp. 116–118.

¹⁷ Michael John Ovey, 'The Theological and Christological Contributions of the 'Truth' Word-Group to the Gospel of John' (Masters diss., Australian College of Theology, 1999), pp. 163–164.

it has the Father as its goal)¹⁸—although Jesus is central, his mission is to reveal how the Father might be known (1:18).¹⁹ Therefore Jesus' promise of the same Spirit to his disciples means that they will have 'a share in his filial relationship with the Father,²⁰ and indeed will be empowered to live new lives which imitate Christ, the true Son, in glorifying his Father (c.f. 14:21, 15:8).

Perhaps the most startling example of this is that the disciples will not only continue Jesus' works, but do 'greater works than these' (14:12). This is not a promise of the continuation of the miraculous 'signs' which Jesus has been performing,²¹ but rather the works of mission; the Spirit will enable the words and lives of the disciples to reveal the Son—and thus the Father—'more immediately and truly' once Jesus' salvific work has been completed and its full significance revealed to the apostles.²² Just as Jesus' words and works were allied for the purpose of engendering belief (14:10–11) and provoking guilt (15:22, 24), so the disciples' Spirit-empowered words and works will perform the same function (15:20, 16:8–11).

1.2 The Spirit of Truth

The Holy Spirit is the 'Spirit of truth' (14:17, 15:26, 16:13)—the one who communicates truth to those whom he indwells.²³ This is unfolded by Jesus in three statements. First, the Spirit will remind the disciples of

¹⁸ I am grateful to Mike Ovey for the vocabulary of filioentrism and patrotelism.

¹⁹ In Athanasius' analogy, the Father is the fountain, the Son the river, and thus when we drink of the Spirit we drink of Christ and thus know the Father (Athanasius, *Letters of St. Athanasius Concerning the Holy Spirit*, pp. 111–112).

²⁰ Andreas J. Kostenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John's Gospel* (Leicester: Apollos, 2008), p. 147. There is a 'vital penultimacy' (C.K. Barrett, *Essays on John* (London: SPCK, 1982), p. 4) to Jesus' mission temporally—for it will not be complete until after he returns to his Father and sends his Spirit to inaugurate the new eschatological age (Barrett notes that the forward-looking nature of Jesus is brought out in the Synoptic Gospels by the use of eschatology, whereas 'more characteristic of John is his use of the Holy Spirit to make the same point,' Barrett, *Essays on John*, 5)—but also even personally; the Son is sent by the Father (5:23, 36, 37; 6:44, 57; 8:16, 18, 42; 10:36; 12:49; 17:21, 25; 20:21), and manifests dependence on him for his ministry (5:30; 7:17, 28; 8:28, 42; 12:49; 14:10), the purpose of which is to reveal him (1:1, 14, 18; 12:36–50; 14:9; 17:1, 6, 26); Barrett, *Essays on John*, pp. 6–8.

²¹ Note the use of *ἔργα* rather than *σημεῖα*.

²² D.A. Carson, *Gospel According to John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), p. 496.

²³ Ovey, "Truth' Word-Group,' pp. 163–164.

all that Jesus taught them when on earth (14:26). This means more than that the disciples will have perfect recall—rather, the disciples will be able to ‘re-read’ Jesus’ statements in the light of the cross, resurrection and ascension as to understand their significance.²⁴ Second, the Spirit will ‘bear witness’ about Jesus (15:26), enabling the disciples to withstand the hatred and scorn of the world which Jesus himself faced (15:25, 16:1).²⁵

Third, the Spirit will guide the disciples in all truth. This is explained in two ways—first, the Spirit will speak what he hears from Jesus (16:13–14);²⁶ the words are still Jesus’ words, whether from his earthly ministry or from heaven. Second, the Spirit will ‘disclose to you the coming things’ (16:13); i.e. he will ‘unpack’ the significance of what is to come—namely, the climax of Jesus’ work and the beginning of the eschatological age itself.²⁷ The truth that the Spirit will lead them in, therefore, is ‘already principally disclosed,’²⁸ albeit in enigmatic fashion (16:25), and awaits the Spirit to grant understanding. Therefore, the primary referent of these promises is not all who would become disciples of Jesus, but the apostles whose words would communicate those of Jesus himself (16:13–24; c.f. 1 John 4:6).²⁹

²⁴ Indeed, this phenomenon is recorded in John’s Gospel itself (2:22, 12:16; George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987), p. 261).

²⁵ Paradoxically, the promise of hatred and persecution from the world (15:18) because of the disciples’ close affiliation with Christ (14:18) works as a comfort to the disciples. Jesus’ intention is to prepare them for the persecution such that they will see that the world which rejects the word ironically fulfils the word (15:25), and thus Jesus’ words are trustworthy and worth clinging to. Moreover, hatred from the world is a sign that they are chosen by Jesus to live in the new eschatological age, ‘out of the world,’ and are no longer living by its values (15:19).

²⁶ Note again the analogical relationship—these are the same words which Jesus has heard from his Father (12:49).

²⁷ Carson, *Gospel According to John*, p. 540. While this verse could be a reference to the Spirit’s prophetic ministry, Morris notes that this is not the Spirit’s ‘characteristic work’ (Morris, *Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p. 700). This explains Jesus’ statement that the disciples ‘cannot bear’ this revelation yet (16:12); before Jesus’ resurrection, they simply have ‘no category’ for a Messiah who would suffer, depart from them and leave them with his presence in the form of the Spirit (Carson, *Gospel According to John*, p. 543).

²⁸ Carson, *Gospel According to John*, p. 539.

²⁹ This can be seen in the pages of John’s Gospel itself; Jesus has made God known as his Father because he is ‘in the Father’s bosom’ (1:18; Christopher Ash, *Hearing the Spirit* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2011), pp. 22–23); tellingly, the ‘beloved disciple,’ the Evangelist, is said to recline ‘in Jesus’ bosom’ three times (13:23, 25; 21:20). Just as the Father is the source of Jesus’ words, so John tells his

As well as the Spirit bearing witness to the apostles, the Spirit also empowers them to bear witness to the world (15:27). This witness will not be in vain; even as the world hates the disciples, some will join them 'out of the world' (15:19) by being 'convicted' (ἐλέγξει) concerning sin, righteousness and judgement (16:8–11).³⁰

1.3 The Spirit of Comfort

In the context of the Farewell Discourse it would be cold comfort for those who love Jesus (14:15) and who are called his friends (15:15) to have Jesus replaced with someone who was merely quite like him, or did similar things. The intensely personal nature of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples means that the only hope to quieten their troubled hearts is the promise that their relationship will *continue* via the Spirit, not be severed by his arrival.³¹ Indeed, the disciples are not just promised an ongoing presence, but a delightful one; they will have joy (15:11, 16:20–24) and peace (14:27, 16:33), experience the Father's love (14:21, 23, 16:27) and have confidence in prayerful access to him (esp. 16:23–27). Again note the patrotelic nature of this comfort; just as Satan has no claim on Jesus (14:30), so he has no accusation to make about the disciples' relationship with God—the Spirit of truth will teach them that they are loved by the Father, rather than enslaved to their father the devil as are those who do not believe in Jesus (8:44).

1.4 The Indwelling Spirit

The 'engine' of all three of the above characteristics of the dawning eschatological age is that the Holy Spirit indwells believers. This is stated

readers that Jesus is the source of the words they have in front of them, and thus they can be trusted.

³⁰ These compact and difficult verses have provoked much differing interpretation. A useful summary and analysis of the prevailing readings can be found in John Aloisi, 'The Paraclete's Ministry of Conviction: Another Look at John 16:8–11,' *JETS* 47, no. 1 (March 2004): pp. 55–69, though his suggestion that believers as well as unbelievers are in view here is unconvincing given the focus on the world in the context.

³¹ Indeed, there would be little sense in calling the Spirit 'another Paraclete' if he could not provide the same comfort as Jesus, the first Paraclete. The meaning of ὁ παράκλητος is hotly debated. The general idea is one who draws alongside to provide aid, perhaps especially in a legal setting (BDAG 766b), and while 'comforter' is probably too weak, the pastoral context means that the Spirit's role in consolation is not to be ruled out, and without adopting compound words like 'advocate-companion,' it is probably the best English word we have (c.f. Carson, *Gospel According to John*, p. 499).

simply in 14:17—the Spirit has previously been ‘with’ them;³² but once Jesus is glorified (7:39), the Spirit will be ‘in’ them.³³ Several commentators have noted a strong allusion to temple imagery in the Farewell Discourse. The tabernacle as God’s dwelling place in the OT is picked up in the Prologue, where Jesus is said to have ‘tabernacled’ among us (1:14), and Jesus has described himself as the temple in 2:19–22.³⁴ In other words, Jesus is ‘the reality to which the temple points’³⁵—the one in whom God’s presence dwells fully by the Spirit and the one who is able to offer the final sacrifice for sin which makes the old temple obsolete (19:30).³⁶ With his sacrifice on the horizon, Jesus promises the indwelling Spirit, thereby ‘transferring the mediation of the temple’s blessings from Himself to His disciples.’³⁷

This indwelling of the disciples is clearly of a different order to the temporary filling experienced by those ‘mediators of God’s covenant’³⁸ in the OT; an empowering for service which could be removed in the case of covenant unfaithfulness.³⁹ The ‘total response and constant fidelity’ required for permanent indwelling is only ‘glimpsed’ in the OT,⁴⁰ and it is therefore significant that when Jesus is baptised the Spirit ‘descends and

³² Possibly by virtue of being ‘with’ Jesus, the one who has the Spirit without measure (3:34; James Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence* (Nashville: B&H, 2006), pp. 112–113, 156).

³³ C.f. Edward Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978), p. 26.

³⁴ Moreover, Hoskins has noted that language used to describe Jesus’ ‘lifting up’ (ὑψόω, δοξάζω) is also used both of God and the temple in the eschatological context of Isa 2 and 33 LXX (Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), pp. 154–5).

³⁵ Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, p. 144.

³⁶ For a comprehensive treatment of Jesus’ role as the fulfilment of the temple, see Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John*; c.f. Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, pp. 147–154.

³⁷ Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, p. 155. See 20:23 for the disciples’ ‘temple authority’ to forgive sins.

³⁸ Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, p. 27.

³⁹ Notably, when the Spirit comes upon King Asa, his presence is conditional on Asa’s ongoing abiding with the LORD (2 Chron 15:2). See also Saul’s experience in 1 Sam 16:14, and David’s plea in Psalm 51:11. This latter text is unlikely to be referring to the Holy Spirit; the phrase אֲנִי קָדְשׁ is not the usual term for the Holy Spirit in the OT, and it seems likely that David is referring to the Spirit’s anointing he received for kingship, thus pleading that he not be like Saul (see John Goldingay, *Psalms. Vol 2: Psalms 42–89* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), p. 125). C.f. Hamilton, *God’s Indwelling Presence*, pp. 32–33.

⁴⁰ Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant*, p. 49.

remains' (1:32) on Jesus, implying a permanent indwelling concomitant with Jesus' role as the Spirit-anointed Messiah and Spirit-filled new temple.⁴¹ The language of 15:1–7 therefore represents the fulfilment of a new covenant hope throughout the OT,⁴² marked by an internal dwelling of the divine presence (Ez 36:27), which would cause truth to be part of the interior makeup of believers (Jer 31:33); an indwelling enabled by the total forgiveness of sins (Jer 31:34) and once-for-all cleansing (Ex 36:25).⁴³ In other words, the indwelling of the Spirit is *covenantal*—it speaks of the new relationship brokered between man and God entirely on the merits and sacrifice of Christ, and thus fulfilling the OT hope of a Spirit-filled community of covenant-keepers, marked out by Spirit-empowered love and obedience to Jesus' commandments.⁴⁴

This indwelling is *also mutual*; not only does the Spirit indwell believers to communicate Jesus' presence and benefits to them, but they indwell *him* by the same Spirit (14:20). The most striking comfort which Jesus offers his disciples is thus that they will be drawn into the fellowship

⁴¹ The Spirit's work in the OT was 'enigmatic, sporadic, theocratic, selective and in some respects external,' whereas in the new covenant he dwells 'personally and permanently' (Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, p. 30); although Ferguson does allow that OT saints were indwelt, but he sees in the NT gift of the Spirit that the 'promised dawn has arrived, the final year of Jubilee...which will usher in the kingdom and triumph of God, and during which the Old Testament promises of the coming age will be fulfilled' (Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, pp. 47–48).

⁴² C.f. Malatesta, *Interiority and Covenant*, pp. 60–63, Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, pp. 42–54.

⁴³ Note that Jesus is not calling for a 'new conditionality,' wherein his presence will abide with them if and only if they obey perfectly. Rather, the disciples are already clean (15:3); they will bear fruit as a result (15:8) and are chosen such that their fruit 'remains' (15:16). Obedience flowing from their love for Christ (14:15) is a mark of a true Christian who is indwelt by the Spirit: 'Jesus is describing a set of essential relations, not a set of titillating conditions' (Carson, *Gospel According to John*, p. 500). Unlike the conditional filling of the temple, which ceased when the old covenant was breached (Ezek 8–11), the Spirit will abide with the disciples (just as he did with Jesus, 1:32) because of Jesus' final sacrifice for sin which secured the permanent peace and forgiveness of the new covenant (14:27, 16:33; c.f. Jer 31:31–33; Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, p. 158).

⁴⁴ The imagery of certain branches being cast off, fruitless and withering, into the eternal fire (15:6) should not lead us to assume that some in the new covenant will ultimately turn out to be covenant-breakers. The analogy holds because it is those who are truly grafted into Jesus who bear fruit by the Spirit; those who do not, though they seem to profess Christ, ultimately show that 'the transforming life of Christ has never pulsed within them' (Carson, *Gospel According to John*, p. 515).

of the Trinity itself;⁴⁵ rather than using Jesus as an ‘intermediary,’ they have the same access to the Father that Jesus himself does (16:23, 26–27).

2 John Owen’s Pneumatology

Owen’s pneumatology can only be understood within his polemical context. With a pastor’s heart, Owen saw Satan leading people astray by shifting between encouraging ‘ministry without the Spirit’—i.e., a rationalistic understanding of Scripture which denies that reason is fallen and sees no need for the Spirit—and ‘a Spirit without a ministry’—i.e., a supra-rational access to the divine without any need for the word.⁴⁶ In Owen’s day, the former were represented by the Socinians, the latter by the Quakers, and both are equally dangerous.⁴⁷

2.1 Owen on the Spirit of Christ

Owen’s pneumatology is shaped by his Trinitarian conception that the *ad extra* operations of the persons of the Trinity in the economy of salvation were necessarily reflective of their ontology.⁴⁸ This points to a Christocentric pneumatology at the very foundation, for in Owen’s thought it is Christ’s entrance into history—and in particular his work of redemption—which most gloriously reveals the Trinity.⁴⁹ Surveying the works of God in salvation history, therefore, Owen returns repeatedly

⁴⁵ Note the analogous relationships throughout the passage: the Father loves the Son (15:9) and the Son loves the Father (14:31); the Son loves the disciples (15:9) and the disciples love the Son (14:15); and because of this, the Father loves the disciples (14:21) and the disciples love the Father (although this is not explicitly stated, they ‘know’ the Father (14:7) which implies love for him, as those who do not know him (16:3) hate him (15:23)).

⁴⁶ Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, p. 400.

⁴⁷ Indeed, the Quakers eventually ‘considered that the knowledge of Christ’s historical life was not essential for faith’ at all, in effect turning from the word completely (Alan Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), p. 47).

⁴⁸ C.f. Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 1998), pp. 131–132. For example, the Holy Spirit is called the ‘Spirit of Christ’ because he is sent by Christ in salvation history; but it would be impossible to call him that unless he also proceeds ontologically (John Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 61–64).

⁴⁹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 158; c.f. Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2007), pp. 102–103; ‘since God is known only by his works, the works of the triune God are deliberately designed for the revelation of his triune nature, particularly the work of redemption’ (Richard

to a formula which expresses the Persons' distinct work within the Trinity: The Father is the originator of redemptive activity, which is then accomplished by the Son, and made effectual for believers by the Spirit.⁵⁰ This Trinitarian formula gives Owen an inherent understanding of the filio-centric and patrotelic nature of the Spirit's work. The Spirit is the 'Spirit of adoption,' such that prayer is his voice 'addressing itself in the hearts of believers unto God as Father,'⁵¹ and the 'life and comfort of our communion with God' consists in the 'clear access to the Father through the Son by the Spirit' which the gospel reveals.⁵²

A foundational element of Owen's Christocentric view of the role of the Spirit towards believers is his conviction that he was also active 'in and on' Jesus in a paradigmatic way.⁵³ As well as restoring the image of God in Christ, Christ was subsequently anointed at his baptism and given the Spirit without measure, such that on the completion of his work⁵⁴ he could bestow the Spirit on others.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Spirit is the agent of the union of Christ with his mystical body, the church,⁵⁶ heralding a new eschatological age in God's salvation plan.⁵⁷ The Spirit's ongoing work in

Daniels, *The Christology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2004), p. 102).

⁵⁰ To the Spirit are assigned 'the concluding, completing, perfecting acts' (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 94); the 'operative love' of the Spirit makes effective the 'purchasing love' of the Son as accords with the 'electing love' of the Father, to the glorification of all three (Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, p. 305).

⁵¹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 200.

⁵² Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 190.

⁵³ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 160–183. While affirming the Chalcedonian definition of the hypostatic union of Christ's human and divine natures (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 162) Owen maintains that because the Spirit is the 'immediate, peculiar, efficient cause of all external divine operations,' even the work of God the Son towards his own human nature is accomplished by the Spirit (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 161–162).

⁵⁴ Owen sees four separate anointings of Christ with the Holy Spirit, each one greater than the last, to the final end of the redistribution of the Spirit to those united with him (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, p. 393).

⁵⁵ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 172–173.

⁵⁶ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 207. The union between the believer and Christ is dependent on the 'fructifying, fattening, virtue' (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, p. 340) of the Holy Spirit, the 'sap' which binds him to the vine of Christ (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, p. 341).

⁵⁷ Owen draws a double analogy between the Spirit 'hovering over the waters' (Gen 1:2) like a bird in the first creation and both Mary's 'overshadowing' by the Spirit (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 166) and the dove descending on Christ

the life of Christ—such as his growth in obedience and knowledge;⁵⁸ his miraculous signs;⁵⁹ comfort, guidance and support in his ministry;⁶⁰ and his resurrection⁶¹—is therefore to be examined as paradigmatic of how he works in us such that we are ‘made conformable in all things unto him, and that by the powerful and effectual operation of that Spirit which thus wrought all things in him.’⁶²

2.2 Owen on the Spirit of Truth

Owen saw Jesus’ earthly ministry as the dawning of a ‘great contest’ in which ‘heaven and hell were deeply engaged’; and Jesus’ forces in the battle were merely ‘twelve poor men’ against ‘the confronting suffrage of the world.’ That the apostles were able to both vindicate Christ ‘against all the machinations of Satan’ and bring about faith and obedience in the world must therefore be the work of the Holy Spirit, who enabled them to bear witness such that on their testimony ‘there is real faith in him yet maintained in the world.’⁶³ Accordingly, Owen has a very high view of Scripture as the ‘constant means of preserving divine revelations’⁶⁴ by the Spirit.

Just as the apostles’ revelation was grounded in the work of Jesus, a repeated concern for Owen is that believers should not continue to seek either new or immediate revelation. When the Spirit came to the disciples, he did not come with an ‘absolute new dispensation of truth and grace, distinct and different from that which is in and by the Lord Christ, and which they had heard from him’;⁶⁵ similarly, in post-apostolic believers, the work of the Spirit is ‘an internal revelation of that which is outward and antecedent unto it,’ providing ‘enlightenment’ as they consider the apostles’ normative ‘inspiration.’⁶⁶ Those who claim new revelation are not only in error, but in serious danger—of neglecting Scripture and in his baptism, thus signifying ‘the entrance of the new creation’ (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 75).

⁵⁸ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 169–170, 178–179.

⁵⁹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 174.

⁶⁰ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 174–175.

⁶¹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 181–182.

⁶² Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 183. C.f. Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration*, p. 112.

⁶³ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 184.

⁶⁴ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, pp. 10–11.

⁶⁵ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 195.

⁶⁶ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 197; vol. 4, p. 59. Even the authoritative revelation which the authors of Scripture received was not the means by which they learned ‘the mind of God,’ but instead stood in place of Scripture for them,

setting up a new authority; of mutual contradiction; and ultimately of a confusion which will inevitably lead to atheism.⁶⁷ On the other hand, the gospel without the effectual work of the Holy Spirit is a 'dead letter': 'he that would utterly separate the Spirit from the word had as good burn his Bible.'⁶⁸

2.3 Owen on the Spirit of Comfort

Owen sees the work of the Holy Spirit as providing comfort as believers consider the persons of the Trinity and God's work towards them. Owen's devotional writings are explicitly Trinitarian, and affectionate communion with God is enabled by the gracious self-revelation of God *as* Trinity in the climactic salvific work of the Son.⁶⁹ The comfort of this communion is applied to believers by the Spirit—indeed, even as the disciples enjoyed Christ's presence with them, they were yet to understand that even that comfort was mediated to them by the Spirit and not by Jesus directly.⁷⁰ Believers should consider that the legacy of Jesus Christ is the Spirit himself, and 'look to him for all our comforts and supplies,'⁷¹ he sheds the apprehension of God's love within our hearts and makes adoption known to us.⁷² These and other enjoyments of contemplating God⁷³ are *transformative*⁷⁴—they stir up our love,⁷⁵ motivate our obedience,⁷⁶ and protect us from apostasy.⁷⁷

requiring the use of their reason to apprehend it (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, pp. 125, 167).

⁶⁷ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, p. 167.

⁶⁸ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 192.

⁶⁹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 158; Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, pp. 102–103.

⁷⁰ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, p. 357. Although the Spirit can communicate joy to believers immediately (Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, p. 395), he usually uses means (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, p. 379), chiefly prayer, corporate worship, and biblical meditation on the properties and distinct work of each Person of the Trinity, which forms the basis of the believer's communion with God (Kapic, 'Worshiping the Triune God,' p. 21).

⁷¹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 156.

⁷² Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, pp. 378–379.

⁷³ See especially Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, pp. 392–394.

⁷⁴ Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, p. 71.

⁷⁵ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 188.

⁷⁶ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, p. 397.

⁷⁷ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, pp. 362–363. Just 'as the full soul loathes the honeycomb,' so the soul which is satisfied with God will not be drawn away by 'the baits and allurements' of other temptations (John Owen, *Overcoming Sin*

2.4 Owen on the Indwelling Spirit

Owen's thought on the indwelling of the Spirit is explicitly—and typically—Trinitarian. The Spirit who indwelt Christ is given to us in the 'same kind' because Christ is the head of his mystical body.⁷⁸ For Owen, this action of the Spirit is consistent in all believers throughout salvation history. Owen makes this case using (at least) three lines of argumentation. First, he points to key texts in which OT saints are said to have the Spirit.⁷⁹ Secondly, he contends that, because anything holy, acceptable and good must proceed from the Holy Spirit,⁸⁰ OT saints who seem to receive blessings such as forgiveness must have been indwelt—if we allow them some of the promises of Jer 31:31–14, we must allow them all of the promises.⁸¹

Third, and most crucially for Owen, his position is informed by his covenant theology, which sees a single covenant underpinning all God's saving activity. This covenant of grace is identical to the new covenant; it is 'the outward manifestation of God's decree to save,⁸² and although the new covenant brought in new revelation of God's saving works, new and explicit forms of worship, and a new dispensation of the Spirit,⁸³ Owen reads all the new covenant promises in the OT as being descriptive of the

and Temptation (ed. Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor; Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2006), p. 215).

⁷⁸ Note that this is not to divinise believers, because he remains the Spirit of Christ and not of us (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 61). Believers are only united to Christ, not immediately to the Spirit, because only in the Son are the divine and the human united (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, pp. 338–339; vol. 4, p. 385); moreover, Christ does not indwell us immediately because he is bodily in heaven (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 156)—rather he comes to us 'in and by' the Spirit (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 24). However, Jesus still comforts us by his Spirit because of the inseparable operation of the Persons (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, pp. 358–359).

⁷⁹ Such as David asking for the Holy Spirit not to depart from him (Ps 51:11; Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, p. 332; vol. 4, p. 386) God 'putting' the Spirit on men (Isa 42:1, Ezek 37:14, Isa 63:11; Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 112) and the 'clothing' and 'anointing' of kings, elders and prophets, which all imply permanency (1 Chron 12:18, Num 11:25–26, 2 Kings 2:15; Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 119).

⁸⁰ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 27.

⁸¹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, pp. 313–314.

⁸² Trueman, *John Owen*, p. 78. Trueman notes that this makes Owen's commitment to infant baptism along covenantal lines (as outlined in Lee Gatiss, *From Life's First Cry: John Owen on Infant Baptism and Infant Salvation* (London: Latimer Trust, 2008)) rather inconsistent (Trueman, *John Owen*, p. 79).

⁸³ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 22, pp. 64–65.

work of the Spirit in all believers—the indwelling and abiding Spirit is ‘the main and principal promise’ of ‘the covenant of grace’ *in toto*, not just the new covenant.⁸⁴ This does not mean that the Spirit acts in all believers throughout history in precisely the same way; OT saints awaited the confirmation and establishment of the covenant of grace in the new covenant for a ‘larger measure’⁸⁵ and ‘more signal effusion’ of the Spirit.⁸⁶ OT saints were regenerate,⁸⁷ but the Spirit acted ‘secretly and virtually,’ with ‘no clear access’ to the Father.⁸⁸ By contrast, the new covenant brings the untold blessing of the understanding that we are adopted,⁸⁹ because the Spirit in the new covenant has ‘graciously condescended to bear the office of comforter.’⁹⁰ The disciples must understand that the Spirit who was in the disciples for sanctification (as with all OT saints) is now in them for consolation.⁹¹

Because the covenant of grace is unbreakable, therefore, in contrast to the Sinaitic covenant,⁹² believers can never lose the Spirit, which is in them as a monergistic work of God’s sovereign grace.⁹³ However, believers should humbly pray for the Spirit’s continuance as David did,⁹⁴ and indeed the Spirit may depart ‘partially for a season’ with respect to ‘degrees and sensible effects’;⁹⁵ but he will never utterly leave them, and the believer may be assured that he or she ‘radically...has a foundation of consolation, which in due time will be drawn forth.’⁹⁶

⁸⁴ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, p. 315. Men were ‘converted of old by a rich participation of the Holy Ghost’ (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 115).

⁸⁵ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 114.

⁸⁶ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 22, pp. 65, 95.

⁸⁷ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 212.

⁸⁸ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 190.

⁸⁹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 22, p. 93.

⁹⁰ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 22, p. 95.

⁹¹ Owen’s interpretation of John 14:17; Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, p. 365.

⁹² Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, pp. 206–209.

⁹³ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, pp. 310, 365. Moreover, there is an inherent absurdity in any arguments that a lack of holiness or faith could cause a believer to lose the Spirit—because it is precisely holiness and faith that the Spirit is in us to engender (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 11, pp. 311, 321).

⁹⁴ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, pp. 386–387.

⁹⁵ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 120.

⁹⁶ Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, 367.

3 Analysis of Owen in the Light of the Farewell Discourse

3.1 Owen's Positive Contributions

Owen's pneumatology not only aligns with the Farewell Discourse at many points, but sheds new light on its understanding and thoughtfully expounds its application.⁹⁷ In particular, the recognition that the Spirit's work on Christ is paradigmatic for his work on those who are united to him by the same Spirit is extremely helpful for understanding their call to Christ-imitation.⁹⁸ Moreover, Owen's vital understanding of the role of the affections in the Christian life means he strongly links the Spirit's role in engendering delight in God's truth with the believers' joyful compliance in obedience,⁹⁹ as Jesus does throughout the Discourse (e.g. 14:15, 15:11–12).

Owen grasps that the epithets 'Spirit of truth' and 'Spirit of Christ' are fundamentally linked—the truth in which the Spirit leads believers is the same truth about Jesus as revealed in his word. His separation of the Spirit's particular and unrepeatable work of *inspiration* from his ongoing and expected work of *enlightenment* is extremely helpful, sending believers back to Scripture for an infallible means of testing the spirits, while also causing them to expect God to continue to speak through his word such that it never can be treated as a 'dead letter.'¹⁰⁰ The Farewell Discourse also lends support to Owen's commitment to understanding the true essence of God as revealed in his works. In particular, Jesus' climactic cross-work brings the revelation of Trinitarian relationships (14:7, 14:17, 14:20, 14:31); which in turn implies that true conviction and knowledge of God as he really is can only come by the Spirit's work

⁹⁷ There are far too many points of alignment between Owen and the Farewell Discourse to detail in this short dissertation; here we will focus on particularly noteworthy contributions.

⁹⁸ For example, Owen's understanding that Christ's obedience is empowered by the same Spirit (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 178–189) which he promises his disciples (14:16–17), explains their new ability to obey him (14:15) as he paradigmatically obeyed his Father (14:31). Similarly, Christ's miraculous signs (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 174) which engender trust in him (10:37–38) become—by the indwelling in believers of the same Spirit which empowered them—paradigmatic of the disciples' 'greater works' (14:12) by which the Spirit convicts the world concerning Christ (15:20, 16:8–11).

⁹⁹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, p. 397.

¹⁰⁰ Even though Owen is probably mistaken to read the primary referent of Jesus' words as representative disciples rather than apostles per se, and he reads the promise that the Spirit would 'remind' the apostles of Jesus' words (14:26) rather too literally.

through the gospel which is disclosed in Scripture. Owen's grounding of the affectionate devotional life of the believer in the eternally unchanging nature of God himself certainly matches Jesus' comforting words as he departs from his disciples—it is precisely this ongoing communion which he points to as the reason for them not to have troubled hearts (14:18, 14:23, 15:1–7, 16:23, 16:26–27).

Moreover, this explicitly Trinitarian understanding of the believer's communion with God demonstrates the filiocentric and patrotelic nature of the Farewell Discourse. This is brought out in Owen's work on distinct communion with each Person of the Trinity distinctly.¹⁰¹ Owen affirms that the Father is the 'fountain,' the 'spring of all gracious communications' that come to us; and though believers gain 'refreshment' from communing with the other two Persons, they are inevitably 'led up unto the fountain' of the Father himself.¹⁰² Believers experience the Father's accepting love through gaining an interest in the blood of the Son, participating in him by the Spirit;¹⁰³ compare this to Jesus promising that the believers will be loved by the Father, and thus loved by the Son such that he will manifest himself to them by his Spirit (14:15, 23). The fruit of obedience to God is originated from the Father by election, enabled by the Son by purification, and applied by the Spirit by transformation;¹⁰⁴ compare Jesus' assurance that the disciples are chosen, cleansed and will certainly bear fruit as they are attached to the vine (15:3, 8, 16).

3.2 Areas of Owen's Thought which are Challenged by the Farewell Discourse

Owen's grasp of the Biblical material, profound systematic understanding and pastor's heart mean that there are few obvious shortcomings of his pneumatological work vis-a-vis the Farewell Discourse. However, perhaps the major area of difference between our exegesis and Owen's pneumatology is Owen's reduction of the peculiar

¹⁰¹ Although Owen's exegetical basis for this work is founded on a textual gloss in 1 John 5:7 which is widely rejected by modern textual critics (Kapic, *Communion with God*, p. 161, n59), there is no doubt it reflects a vibrant and thoughtful Trinitarian theology (Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity: In Scripture, History, Theology and Worship* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2004), pp. 419–420).

¹⁰² Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, p. 112; c.f. Kapic, *Communion with God*, p. 170.

¹⁰³ Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, p. 302; c.f. Kapic, *Communion with God*, p. 188.

¹⁰⁴ Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, pp. 304–306; Kapic, *Communion with God*, p. 189.

blessings of the new covenant to the realm of new revelation, rather than new ontology. To be sure, in Owen the new covenant does not bring with it *mere* revelation—from the believer’s perspective, something radically new has occurred: a level of assurance and access to God unprecedented before the giving of the Spirit.

However, Owen’s *a priori* commitment to his covenant theology means that he is loath to say that the role of the Spirit in the life of the post-Pentecost believer is ontologically any different from that of the OT saint.¹⁰⁵ Although Owen notes the clear analogy between Father to Son and Son to Spirit, he does not give it its full salvation-historical force; just as the Son is sent at a particular point in space-time, his subsequent sending of the Spirit is also an irruption in space-time of an eschatological reality which properly belongs to the new covenant, not to all believers throughout history.

This leads to difficulties in interpretation when it comes to the Farewell Discourse. John’s preparatory comment in 7:39¹⁰⁶ is softened to read ‘in comparison, the Spirit had not yet been given.’¹⁰⁷ Owen’s exegesis of 14:17 is again strained as he interprets the contrast between the Spirit being ‘with’ and being ‘in’ the disciples as two differently-experienced forms of indwelling.¹⁰⁸ Similarly, Owen’s understanding that it was really the Spirit who was acting as the disciples’ immediate Paraclete while Jesus was with them, if only they were to realise it,¹⁰⁹ seems to make Jesus’ words in 14:16 rather disingenuous: in saying ‘the Father will give you another Comforter,’ Owen would have us understand Jesus meaning ‘the Father will reveal to you that the Comforter was with you all along.’

Owen’s covenant theology thus has the effect of rather flattening the narrative of the divine presence in salvation history. The movement from the loss of God’s presence in Eden (Gen 3:23), through the fearful encounter with God’s glory at Sinai (Exod 19), through God dwelling with his people in a way which reminded them of their separation from him (Heb 9:8), to God’s presence incarnated in Jesus’ ‘tabernacling’ with us (John 1:14), to the climactic promise of God dwelling with newly-cleansed individual believers by his Spirit (John 14:23),¹¹⁰ is rather

¹⁰⁵ Indeed, as we have seen, Owen has no problem applying the great new covenant promise of Jer 31:34 to OT believers (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 313).

¹⁰⁶ οὐπω γὰρ ἦν πνεῦμα, literally ‘the Spirit was not yet.’

¹⁰⁷ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 22, p. 95.

¹⁰⁸ Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, p. 365.

¹⁰⁹ Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 4, pp. 357–358.

¹¹⁰ What VanGemeran and Abernethy call ‘the democratization’ of the Spirit (William VanGemeran and Andrew Abernethy, ‘The Spirit and the future: a

obscured in Owen's pneumatology, and thus his readers may lack a vital motivation to praise God for what he has done uniquely through Christ.¹¹¹

Moreover, Owen's concern for dynamic, relational piety is welcome; but the way his thought is developed in the area of assurance leaves room for ambiguity. As we have seen, Owen affirms that true assurance does not rest on the believer's experience, but on the immutable promises of God. However, he also points to the subjective apprehension of Christ's benefits as necessary evidence for the believer's salvation.¹¹² This role of the affections in assurance is certainly consonant with the Farewell Discourse—the disciples' love for Jesus is a key mark of their discipleship and they are called to 'remain' in Jesus' love (15:9) and expected to experience his joy (16:22) and peace (14:27). However, Owen's prior commitment to his covenant theology confuses this by seeing the Spirit's work in the OT as functionally equivalent to that in the NT. Specifically, because the Spirit seems to depart from believers in the OT,¹¹³ and yet those in the covenant of grace are promised that the Spirit will never depart from them,¹¹⁴ Owen understands that the Spirit can depart from NT believers 'for a season.' These two themes—the role of the affections in assurance, and the potential for the affections to be attenuated by the seasonal departure of the Spirit—when held together, could prove pastorally confusing for the believer.¹¹⁵

canonical approach,' in *Presence, Power and Promise* (ed. David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner; Nottingham: Apollos, 2011), pp. 321–345).

¹¹¹ 'Until the time of Christ, God's special revelatory presence extended only to the borders of the Holy of Holies...When he ascended into the heavenly temple, he then sent his Spirit to create God's people as a part of that extending heavenly temple' (G.K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Apollos, 2004), p. 387).

¹¹² Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 45.

¹¹³ Owen's repeated test case here is Ps 51, which as we have seen is not at all straightforward.

¹¹⁴ See Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 120—Owen again using 'new covenant' promises (Isa 59:21, Jer 31:33, Ezek 11:19–20) to understand the role of the Spirit throughout salvation history.

¹¹⁵ Moreover, this highlights a potential weakness in Owen's pneumatology—that he does not provide a fine enough distinction between the different roles of the Spirit in salvation history. Linking the 'coming' of John 15:26, 16:7 with the 'clothing' of Amasai (1 Chron 12:18) for service and the anointing for prophecy in Acts 19:6 is problematic (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, p. 118); Saul's anointing seems to be of a similar kind to that of Amasai (1 Sam 11:6), and yet the Spirit's subsequent total departure from 'profligate sinners' such as Saul and the apostates in Heb 6 (Owen, *Works of John Owen*, vol. 3, pp. 119–120) would suggest that it is

Conclusion

In general, Owen's pneumatology not only conforms to the teaching of the Farewell Discourse, but in many cases enriches understanding of Jesus' teaching. Moreover, Owen's insight into Satan's twin tactics of deluding the church into accepting either a 'ministry without the Spirit' or the 'Spirit without a ministry' can be mapped onto contemporary evangelical thought, and his challenges to both can prove instructive today.

Kuyper's concern that 'the Church has never sufficiently confessed the influence the Holy Spirit exerted upon the work of Christ'¹¹⁶ is more than adequately met by Owen's understanding of the Spirit's work 'in and on' Jesus, which not only fits him for his ministry but enables him to be our head and elder brother. Just as Christ's resurrection was *his* redemption such that in him it might be *ours*,¹¹⁷ so—for example—the Spirit's sanctifying work on Christ for his obedience to the Father becomes an analogue for how the Spirit works in us for our obedience to him.¹¹⁸ This provides a challenge to a more contemplative¹¹⁹ or mystical¹²⁰ view, which urges the believer to 'surrender, abandon ourselves, submit, yield,'¹²¹ 'as if his own will were in abeyance';¹²² in the popular phrase, to 'let go and let God.'¹²³ Owen's thought challenges this: it makes the Spirit out to be coercive and us his passive instruments, rather than the

qualitatively different from the abiding, indwelling presence of the Spirit promised by Jesus.

¹¹⁶ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), p. 97.

¹¹⁷ Richard B. Gaffin Jr., *Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Paul's Soteriology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), pp. 114ff.

¹¹⁸ Sanctification thus proceeds—as the vine imagery makes clear—in union with Christ, whence we may bear fruit as the Spirit challenges us through his living word to love the Father (C.f. Sinclair B. Ferguson, 'The Reformed View,' in *Christian Spirituality* (ed. Donald L. Alexander; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), pp. 47–66).

¹¹⁹ E. Glenn Hinson, 'The Contemplative View,' in *Christian Spirituality*, pp. 171–189.

¹²⁰ Raikes, *Step Too Far*.

¹²¹ Hinson, 'Contemplative View,' p. 177.

¹²² Raikes, *Step Too Far*, p. 13.

¹²³ The mystic's goal is union with God; as we have seen, union with Christ is the ground and engine of all our fruitfulness and affectionate communion with God, rather than the final step. C.f. Raikes, *Step Too Far*, p. 42: 'the "mystical way" ends where it should begin.'

Spirit using the means of Scripture which he inspired and speaks through today.¹²⁴ Second, the idea of 'God' here is contentless; unless we mean 'God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,' we drive a wedge between the Spirit and the Son, which may well lead to a lack of interest in the historical Jesus and ultimately to a lack of interest in Jesus' Father, who is the goal of our salvation.

As well as denying charismatic 'illumination'¹²⁵ which claims new direct revelation, Owen challenges modern existential thought which emphasises 'the gap between an intellectual knowledge and the reality of spiritual experience,'¹²⁶ separating the Spirit from his Word and making his ministry a matter of 'the awareness of the other' and other common human experiences.¹²⁷ The danger here is that there is no way to test whether a particular experience is truly of the Spirit, as Owen would have us do against the touchstone of Scripture. We are left with an experience which can only ever be self-validating and a God who is 'distant and mysterious,'¹²⁸ which leads to an irrationalism which is self-refuting as it has no basis on which to test itself.¹²⁹

However, it is not only those who (however unwittingly) promote the 'Spirit without a ministry' but those who promote 'ministry without the Spirit' who need to heed Owen's thought. Liberal theologians who treat the Scriptures as an object of scientific study ought to hear this challenge; but so too ought conservative evangelicals such as the present author: all theological study, no matter how rigorous, which does not overflow in renewed joy and love for the Father as he is approached through his Son is not truly spiritual.¹³⁰

¹²⁴ It is instructive to note that one of the normative keys to mystical experience is that it is 'noetic': it 'conveys some insight into supra-rational truth' (Raikes, *Step Too Far*, p. 12). As we have seen, this supra-rationality is denied in Owen because it corresponds to Satan's tactic of promoting 'Spirit without a ministry'—a separation of the Spirit from his word.

¹²⁵ Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 156.

¹²⁶ Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration*, p. 48.

¹²⁷ Such as in the thought of John Taylor, cited in Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration*, p. 49. Packer calls this the over-emphasis on the Spirit's work of 'presentation' (Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 35).

¹²⁸ John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 1987), p. 60.

¹²⁹ Frame, *Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, p. 61.

¹³⁰ 'Now it is almost a devilish thing that even in the case of the theologian the joy of possession [of knowledge] can kill love' (Helmut Thielicke, *A Little Exercise for Young Theologians* (ed. and trans. Charles L. Taylor; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), p. 17).

Finally, the Farewell Discourse forms the basis for perhaps Owen's most important contribution to pneumatology—that the Spirit enables active, ongoing communion with the Triune God. Although we would wish to modify Owen's flattening of salvation-history to view mutual indwelling as the singular distinctive of the new eschaton, we affirm with him that the permanent presence of God with us is 'the central, focal element in [the Spirit's] many-sided ministry';¹³¹ and our assurance and apprehension of the benefits of the gospel is entirely dependent on this gracious gift of our Lord Jesus. To possess the Spirit 'is to possess Christ himself'¹³² and to experience the love of the Father—therefore let not our hearts be troubled.

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¹³¹ Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit*, p. 42. Again this proves a robust challenge to the 'transiency' of mystical experience (Raikes, *Step Too Far*, 13); how much more glorious the permanency of true Biblical spirituality.

¹³² Ferguson, *Holy Spirit*, p. 37.

