

Review of John Owen, *Communion with the Triune God*, edited by Kelly M. Kopic and Justin Taylor, Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2007.

The great English Puritan author John Owen would not make it onto many people's lists of devotional writers. Alongside the common fare today Owen stands like an imposing yet stately variegated oak rudely protruding a functional white plastic fence. He is not easy reading. He is not easy reading even in his most readable moments, as in his books on *The Person of Christ* or his *Exposition of Psalm 130*. And his *Communion with God*, here presented in a carefully edited format by Kelly Kopic and Justin Taylor, is not as comfortable to navigate as those works.

Why, then, this new edition? There are many sound reasons that could be given. One might say that Owen's profundity and theological balance make this work required reading for anyone who is serious about researching the glories of trinitarianism in our day. Certainly, Owen made important contributions to our understanding of the Trinity which ought to be heard again. Or it could be explained that he was a theologian of the heart, a master at bringing God into the quandaries of facing life in a fallen world, and so making it less formal and impersonal. For John Owen, as for the Puritans generally, theology was the most human expression of Truth. Not primarily for the academy but for the Church – for the congregation. *Communion with the Triune God* is an exposition of the doctrine of the Trinity for the children of the Triune God.

This edition is enhanced by an admirable essay by Kopic on Owen's conception of the saint's worship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Kopic really sets the stage for the feast to come. A very thorough analytical outline, (an improved version of the one found in Owen's Works, vol. II), with page numbers relating to the treatise, encourages the wary to sample parts of the book before taking the plunge.

What about the book itself? Well, first it is full of Scripture. Owen pulls passages from every corner of the Bible to demonstrate the comprehensive teaching he is concerned to drive home. This is amply evidenced in the first chapter (89-94) where on pages 90 and 91 the author writes glowingly in proving that believers indeed 'have communion with God.'

Owen is concerned to show that the Christian is privileged to commune with each Person in the Godhead in such a way as to draw strength and encouragement from the association, but he is diligent never to forget that the Three Persons coinhere, and are to be known in their works *through* each other. For example, he includes separate sections on communion with the Father, then the Son, then the Spirit, and explains how the Persons communicate *to* the believer and how each one is to be regarded and addressed. But he doesn't lose sight of the fact that the Three are One and communion between the Divine Persons is an essential "property" of the Godhead.

Perhaps the best way to communicate all this is to reproduce three snippets from the book which illustrate the author's objective. Regarding communion with the Father: "To

believe on the Son of God in this place [Owen is citing 1 Jn. 5:10] is to receive the Lord Christ as the Son, *the Son given for us*, for all the ends of the Father's love, upon the credit of the Father's testimony; and, therefore, therein is faith immediately acted on the Father." (98. Italics mine). Faith is directed to the Father by reflecting on the His gift of the Son (see 2 Cor. 9:15).

Speaking of the Son: "Jesus Christ is a plant and root out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2), ... born of a sinner, after there had been no innocent flesh in the world for four thousand years... To have a flower of wonderful rarity to grow in *paradise*, a garden of God's own planting... is not so strange; but... to have a spotless bud brought forth in a *wilderness* of corrupted nature, is a thing which angels may desire to look into." (164-165. Italics in original). Owen is taken up with Christ for many pages.

Finally, with regard to the procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son in the work of salvation: "There is in it, in a most special manner, the condescension of the Holy Ghost, in his love to us, to the authoritative delegation of Father and Son in this business; ... This subjection (if I may so call it), or "inequality in respect of office," does [in] no way prejudice the equality of nature which he has with the Father and Son; no more than the mission of the Son by the Father does his. And on this authoritative mission of the Spirit does the right apprehension of many mysteries in the gospel, and ordering of our hearts in communion with him, depend." (362-363).

Communion with the Triune God is a marvelous combination of deep Puritan theology and relentless spiritual application. If you are not used to it, surely it is about time to discover what you have been missing!

A little side note might be helpful here. As any fan of the great man knows, Owen is fond of stating his intentions quite early on his books and then telling his reader that a fuller treatment of these matters lies in wait for him later on. This can be rather off-putting for someone who has wrestled not to miss the point of what Owen is saying, only to be told that the real explication has yet to begin. But perseverance will have its reward.

The editors have left Owen's prose virtually untouched, which is a good thing. But they have supplied help with the terminology wherever needed. The editorial notes are helpful, but it would have been of great assistance to have included the odd explanatory footnote unpacking Owen's teaching for the uninitiated. For example, on pages 92-93 Owen speaks of 'Communion in General' in rather abstruse terms. Although this is unpacked further on, it does place a bit of an impediment in the way of the "casual reader" who may be forgiven for skipping a few pages. But this is nit-picking. The editors are to be thanked for this new edition of a great classic by a truly great Christian man.