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## The Affective Spirituality of John Owen

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*Dr King, who teaches at William Tyndale College, Farmington Hills, MI, offers us a sample from his thesis on 'Grace and Duty: The Interaction of the Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen (1616–83)', and demonstrates that Puritan religion was far from being merely intellectual but had its own strong spirituality.*

'Spirituality' has become in recent years something of a *cause célèbre* within evangelicalism.<sup>1</sup> J. I. Packer has recently noted the need to develop a 'systematic spirituality',<sup>2</sup> D. A. Carson has sought guidelines for defining truly 'spiritual' spirituality,<sup>3</sup> and most recently Alister McGrath has suggested that the future of evangelicalism rests in part on its ability to develop 'a credible, coherent and distinctive spirituality'.<sup>4</sup> Many of these writers have further suggested that such a developing evangelical spirituality would do well to mine the rich heritage of the Reformation traditions, and Puritanism is frequently offered as an especially promising source.<sup>5</sup>

It is to this trend that the present article is directed, in that some contemporary discussions of 'Puritan spirituality' leave the reader with the impression that Puritanism was a rationalistic faith in contrast to more subjective movements.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, the Puritans

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<sup>1</sup> See David Parker, 'Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed', *EQ* Vol. 63 No. 2 (April 1991): 123–148, for a useful overview.

<sup>2</sup> J. I. Packer, 'An Introduction to Systematic Spirituality', *Cruix* 26 (March 1990): 2–8.

<sup>3</sup> D. A. Carson, 'When is Spirituality Spiritual? Reflections on Some Problems of Definition', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 37 No. 3 (Sept. 1994): 381–394.

<sup>4</sup> A. E. McGrath, *Evangelicalism and the Future of Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 122.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., J. I. Packer, *Among God's Giants: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1990); Alister McGrath, *Roots that Refresh: A Celebration of Reformation Spirituality* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> A good example of this sort of categorizing is John Tiller, *Puritan, Pietist, and Pentecostalist: Three Types of Evangelical Spirituality* (Bramcote: Grove Books, 1982).

embraced 'religious affections' (to use Edwards' term) as an integral aspect of the Christian life, describing their immediate perception of God in very subjective (indeed, as it shall be argued, almost mystical) terms. This article will attempt to illustrate this affective trend in Puritan thought as exemplified in the writings of John Owen (1616–1683).

The broad aspects of Owen's spirituality have been described elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this article several points may be noted. First, Owen's spirituality is grounded in a Reformed theological framework which accepted (indeed, which saw as essential) the 'Calvinist' conclusions of Dort.<sup>8</sup> Owen also stood in the English covenant tradition of Perkins,<sup>9</sup> and it was his understanding of the covenants which provided him the vehicle for both God's grace as well as human duty. The Father and the Son covenanted in eternity that Christ would fulfill the covenant of works, and that salvation would be made available to the elect through a covenant of grace.<sup>10</sup> Yet the covenant of works fulfilled by Christ still remained behind the covenant of grace, and if it did not provide saving righteousness it nonetheless obliged the believer to habitual righteousness.<sup>11</sup> Thus in his covenant theology Owen is able to combine a recognition of both the sovereignty of God and the necessity of human activity.<sup>12</sup>

J. I. Packer has written, 'God's purpose for the Christian during his life on earth is sanctification. So said Calvin; so says Owen; and so says Holy Scripture.'<sup>13</sup> In sanctification Owen once again combines divine initiative and human responsibility, for sanctification is 'both God's promised gift and man's prescribed duty.'<sup>14</sup> Human duty in

<sup>7</sup> 'The Spirituality of John Owen' in Packer, *Among God's Giants*, 191–218.

<sup>8</sup> It will be noted that Owen's first published work was the polemic *A Display of Arminianism* (1643).

<sup>9</sup> For a useful introduction to this tradition see Michael McGiffert's 'Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism,' *Harvard Theological Review* 75:4 (1982), 463–502.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: Johnson and Hunter, 1854–55; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), II:77–78.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:287; cf. John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, William Goad, ed. (Edinburgh: Johnson and Hunter, 1850–53; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965–68), V:382.

<sup>12</sup> Mindful of this trend in Puritanism generally, Kendall has suggested replacing the historically vague term 'puritanism' with the more descriptive (if also more awkward) phrase 'experimental predestinarianism'; cf. R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 6–9.

<sup>13</sup> *Among God's Giants*, 196.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* Packer then cites Owen, who writes, 'neither can we perform our duty herein without the grace of God, nor doth God give us this grace unto any other end but that we may rightly perform our duty' (*Works*, III:384).

sanctification includes both the positive 'vivification' of the new nature and the negative 'mortification' of the old nature.<sup>15</sup> Yet holiness is not an end in itself, as if Owen and the Puritans were merely concerned with outward actions. Rather, sanctification was an aspect of the larger goal of communion with God, a 'joint participation' with God which 'consisteth in his communication of himself unto us, with our returnal unto him of that which he requireth and accepteth, flowing from that union which in Jesus Christ we have in him.'<sup>16</sup> As the believer responds in love to the love received in Christ, the communion thereby developed gives 'shape, substance, and strength' to his/her Christian walk.<sup>17</sup>

It would seem that such an emphasis on communion with God might include an emphasis on the subjective and experiential, and indeed Packer notes that the Puritans 'were not less concerned about experiential acquaintance with God than we are—rather, indeed the reverse.' But Packer qualifies their experiential emphasis by noting that, 'they did not isolate this concern in their minds from their broader theological concern about the doctrine of divine grace.' Packer concludes, 'Thus they were saved from the peril of false mysticism, which has polluted much would-be Christian devotion in recent times.'<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Sinclair Ferguson has written,

Owen steers a course which avoids mysticism on the one hand, and on the other, the pietism and quiescence of a later period in the Evangelical tradition, which was marred by an unhealthy subjectivism.<sup>19</sup>

Thus both Packer and Ferguson seek to distance Owen's spirituality from 'mysticism' and other too-subjective traditions.

Such a hard and fast distinction may, however, be somewhat misleading. Broadly considered, mysticism involves 'an immediate knowledge of God attained in this present life through personal religious experience.'<sup>20</sup> The Puritans generally and Owen specifically

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<sup>15</sup> 'And all these acts and duties of holiness or gospel obedience are of two sorts, or may be referred unto two heads:—First, Such as have the will of God in positive commands for their object, which they respect in duties internal and external, wherein we do what God requireth. Secondly, Such as respect divine prohibitions, which consist in the actings of grace or holiness in an opposition unto or the mortification of sin' (*Works*, III:528).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, II:7,8–9.

<sup>17</sup> *Among God's Giants*, 212.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>19</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1987), 224.

<sup>20</sup> 'Mysticism' in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Revised Second Edition, F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 952.

affirm the centrality of communion with God, and an integral aspect of that communion was a subjective experience of the divine (as shall be shown). As Gordon Wakefield writes, 'Is there a Puritan mysticism? We have discovered an intense desire for immediacy of communion with God, though this is always understood as possible only in Christ.'<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Stoeffler has given the following four characteristics as elements found in all pietism: an understanding of the essence of Christianity to be in individual relationships with God made possible by a union with God, a religious idealism which rejects nominal religion, a biblical emphasis, and a dissatisfaction with dominant religious patterns.<sup>22</sup> Each of these aspects appears within Puritanism, and thus it is no surprise to find that Stoeffler includes Puritanism as an early branch in the overall stream of Pietism.<sup>23</sup> Thus Ferguson and others may be misleading in suggesting so clear-cut a distinction between Puritanism, such as that of Owen, and mysticism or pietism. Owen did, by virtue of his biblicism, avoid the more extreme elements of these movements.<sup>24</sup> What he made no attempt to avoid, indeed what he readily embraced (but what some modern advocates of the Puritans seem to pass over) was the often overtly subjective aspects of Puritan religious life.<sup>25</sup>

Owen is clear regarding the type of religious knowledge which the believer is to seek out: 'There is nothing of more certainty to the souls of any, than what they have real, spiritual experience of. When the things about which they are conversant lie only in notion, and are rationally discoursed or debated, much deceit may lie under all; but when things between God and the soul come to be realized by practical experience, they give a never-failing certainty of themselves.'<sup>26</sup> Thus experiential truth is self-authenticating in a way that merely notional truth is not, and therefore Owen advises:

<sup>21</sup> Gordon S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion: Its Place in the Development of Christian Piety* (London: The Epworth Press, 1957), 108.

<sup>22</sup> F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1965), 13ff.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 24ff.

<sup>24</sup> E.g., Quakerism.

<sup>25</sup> Thus his *Pro Sacris Scripturis Exercitationes adversus Fanaticos* (1658) attacks Quakerism not so much because it claimed direct contact with the Spirit, but because it claimed that its contact with the Spirit rendered the written Word of no value for the believer. (This work has recently been made available for the first time in English translation in the volume *Biblical Theology*, Stephen P. Westcott, trans. (Pittsburgh: Soli Deo Gratia, 1994), 769–861.)

<sup>26</sup> *Works*, IX:151–152.

Get an experience of the power of the gospel, and all the ordinances of it, in and upon your own hearts, or all your profession is an expiring thing;—unless, I say, you find the power of God upon your own hearts in every ordinance, expect not any continuance in your profession. If the preaching of the word be not effectual unto the renewing of your souls, the illuminating of your minds, the endearing of your hearts to God,—if you do not find power in it, you will quickly reason with yourselves upon what account should you adventure trouble and reproach for it. If you have an experience of this power upon your hearts, it will recover all your recoiling, wandering thoughts, when you find you cannot live without it. It is so as to every ordinance whatever; unless we can have some experience of the benefit of it, and of the power and efficacy of the grace of God in it, we can never expect to abide in our profession of it.<sup>27</sup>

Owen asserts that it is the Spirit who provides these types of experiences: ‘He gives unto believers a spiritual sense of the power and reality of the things believed, whereby their faith is greatly established . . .’<sup>28</sup> It is such experience which sustains the believer through trials.<sup>29</sup> It is the experience of the internal workings of grace which motivate external obedience in the believer: ‘Without the internal actings of the life of faith, external administrations of ordinances of worship are but dead things, nor can any believer obtain real satisfaction in them or refreshment by them without an inward experience of faith and love in them and by them; and it is that which, if we are wise, we shall continually attend to the consideration of.’<sup>30</sup> Indeed, internal experience of the power of God is to be used by the believer when the devil asks whether or not God truly exists:

Therefore the way in this case, for him who is really a believer, is, to retreat immediately unto his own experience; which will pour shame and contempt on the suggestions of Satan. There is no believer, who hath knowledge and time to exercise the wisdom of faith in the consideration of himself and of God’s dealings with him, but hath a witness in himself of his eternal power and Godhead, as also of all those perfections of his nature which he is pleased to manifest and glory by Jesus Christ. Wherefore, on this suggestion of Satan that there is no God, he will be able to say, ‘He might better tell me that I do not live nor breathe, that I am not fed by my meat nor warmed by my clothes, that I know not myself nor any thing else; for I have spiritual sense and experience to the contrary. . . . How often,’ will he say, ‘have I had experience of the power and presence of God in prayer, as though I had not only heard of him by the hearing of the ear, but also seen him by the seeing of the eye! How

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, IX:237.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, IV:64.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, I:433.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:435.

often hath he put forth his power and grace in me by his Spirit and his word, with an uncontrollable evidence of his being, goodness, love, and grace! How often hath he refreshed my conscience with the sense of the pardon of sin, speaking that peace unto my soul which all the world could not communicate unto me! In how many afflictions, dangers, troubles, hath he been a present help and relief! What sensible emanations of life and power from him have I obtained in meditation on his grace and glory? . . . This shield of faith, managed in the hand of experience, will quench the fiery darts of Satan, and he will fall under a double defeat . . .<sup>31</sup>

Owen writes elsewhere:

When a soul hath a real experience of the grace of God, of the pardon of sins, of the virtue and efficacy of the death of Christ, of justification by his blood, and peace with God by believing; let men or devils, or angels from heaven, oppose these things, if it cannot answer their sophisms, yet he can rise up and walk,—he can, with all holy confidence and assurance, oppose his own satisfying experience unto all their arguings and suggestions. A man will not be disputed out of what he sees and feels; and a believer will abide as firmly by his spiritual sense as any man by his natural. . . . It is certain unto us; that is, we have an assured knowledge of it by the experience we have of it. . . . Let a real trial come, and this will appear. Few will be found to sacrifice their lives on bare speculations. Experience will give assurance and stability.<sup>32</sup>

Here is a strong emphasis upon a subjective and experiential religion. It is this sort of religion which provides assurance against doubt and, according to Owen, it is this sort of religion—that which aims ‘together with the knowledge of it, to have an experience of its power and efficacy’—which Owen recommends as the best deterrent to apostasy.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Owen goes so far as to question the validity of ‘conversions’ which lack profound experiences of the Spirit.<sup>34</sup> As Hambrick-Stowe has noted, then, ‘At its heart . . . Puritanism was a devotional movement, rooted in religious experience.’<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:371.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, VI:458–459.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:113. Bearing this in mind it seems that Packer has overstated his case in suggesting that in Owen’s estimation ‘it is the preacher’s first task to teach his flock the doctrines of the Bible, eschewing emotionalism (the attempt to play directly on the affections) and addressing himself constantly to the mind’ (*Among God’s Giants*, 195).

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, VI:512. On the subject of Puritan conversion experiences see Richard C. Lovelace, ‘Puritan Spirituality: The Search for a Rightly Reformed Church’ in *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, Dupré and Saliers, eds. (London: SCM, 1989), 294–323 (esp. 302–305).

<sup>35</sup> Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Practices in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), vi.

Owen frequently emphasizes in his writings the necessity of contemplation, or 'spiritual mindedness'.<sup>36</sup> Indeed, Dewey Wallace has identified the theme as 'one of the most prominent themes of Puritan spirituality in this era.'<sup>37</sup> According to Owen, spiritual mindedness is a key to the experiential aspect of the faith: 'Our want of experience in the power of this holy intercourse and communion with Christ ariseth principally from our defect in this duty.'<sup>38</sup>

Owen defines spiritual mindedness as, 'the actual exercise of the mind as renewed by the Holy Ghost, as furnished with a principle of spiritual life and light, in its conception of spiritual things and the setting of its affections on them, as finding that relish and savour in them wherewith it is pleased and satisfied.'<sup>39</sup> To be spiritually minded is 'to have the course and stream of those thoughts which we ordinarily retreat unto, which we approve of as suited to our affections, to be about spiritual things.'<sup>40</sup> To Owen it is a disciplining of the thoughts and affections, so that our thoughts then normally and regularly turn toward spiritual things. Such contemplative techniques are not, however, reserved for a privileged few in the church, but rather Owen insists that it is imperative for each believer to strive to become spiritually minded:

Whoever he be who doth not sincerely aim at the highest degree of being spiritually minded which the means he enjoyeth would lead him unto, and which the light he hath received doth call for,—whoever judgeth it necessary unto his present advantages, occasions, and circumstances, to rest in such measures or degrees of it as he cannot but know come short of what he ought to aim at, and so doth not endeavour after completeness in the will of God herein,—can have no satisfaction in his own mind, hath no unfailling grounds whereon to believe that he hath any thing at all of the reality of this grace in him. Such a person possibly may have life, which accompanies the essence of this grace, but he cannot have peace, which follows on its degree in a due improvement.<sup>41</sup>

An experience of the grace of God is necessary to achieve peace, and Owen directly links this experience to contemplation.

Hambrick-Stowe has noted, 'The common assumption that early seventeenth-century Puritans eschewed meditation as a means of achieving spiritual delight and union with Christ is incorrect . . .'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Cf. Owen I:274ff; VII:267ff.

<sup>37</sup> Dewey Wallace, ed., *The Spirituality of the Later English Puritans: An Anthology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), xvii.

<sup>38</sup> *Works*, VII:348.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:270.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:277.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:274.

<sup>42</sup> Hambrick-Stowe, 165.

For Owen, the objects of such meditation were the things of the spiritual realm, and in particular the person and work of Christ: 'Wherefore, if we are spiritually minded, we should fix our thoughts on Christ above, as the centre of all heavenly glory.'<sup>43</sup> Owen is careful, however, to express the caution that all such contemplation must be of Christ as revealed in Scripture: 'In your thoughts of Christ, be very careful that they are conceived and directed according to the rule of the word, lest you deceive your own souls, and give up the conduct of your affections unto vain imaginations.'<sup>44</sup> Yet a true contemplation of Christ will stir up grace within the believer:

Let us live in the constant contemplation of the glory of Christ, and virtue will proceed from him to repair all our decays, to renew a right spirit within us, and to cause us to abound in all duties of obedience. . . . It will fix the soul unto that object which is suited to give it delight, complacency, and satisfaction. . . . when the mind is filled with thoughts of Christ and his glory, when the soul thereon cleaves unto him with intense affections, they will cast out, or not give admittance unto, those causes of spiritual weakness and indisposition. . . . Where we are engaged in this duty, it will stir up every grace unto its due exercise; which is that wherein the spiritual revival inquired after doth consist. . . . And nothing will so much excite and encourage our souls hereunto as a constant view of Christ and his glory; everything in him hath a constraining power hereunto, as is known to all who have any acquaintance with these things.<sup>45</sup>

It is, in fact, such contemplation which is the foundation for the creation of a Christ-like character within the believer, 'for there is no more certain gospel truth than this, that believers ought continually to contemplate on Christ by the actings of faith in their thoughts and affections, and that thereby they are changed and transformed into his image, 2 Cor. iii.18.'<sup>46</sup>

It will have been noted that for Owen such contemplation is not merely cognitive, but it is also affective. This is because the affections are, for Owen, the foundation of spiritual contemplation: 'Spiritual affections, whereby the soul adheres unto spiritual things, taking in such a savour and relish of them as wherein it finds rest and satisfaction, is the peculiar spring and substance of our being spiritually minded.'<sup>47</sup> Indeed, meditation specifically aims at 'the affecting of our own hearts and minds with love, delight, and

<sup>43</sup> *Works*, VII:344.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:345.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, I:460-461.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:346.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:395.



humiliation.<sup>48</sup> Contemplation maintains within the soul a sense of the divine love: 'Now, the great means of retaining a sense of the love of God, which is the spring of life and peace unto our souls, is this grace and duty of being spiritually minded.'<sup>49</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that the love of God in Christ is to be a frequent object of contemplation, with the goal of exciting a reciprocal love for God from the believer. It will be noted that this was Owen's explicit goal in expounding the Canticles.<sup>50</sup> Such affections for Christ as the divine Spouse are to be cultivated and relied upon in times of trouble:

You may remember with what affections you engaged unto God. It is a marriage covenant, Jer. iii. 14, 'I am married unto you,' saith God; and Isa. liv. 5, 'Thy Maker is thy husband; the Lord of hosts is his name.' And there is nothing more eminent in the marriage covenant than a mighty prevalency of affection. I should much doubt whether I had really entered into covenant with God, if I had never found any thing of entire marriage affections towards God in Christ for himself. That soul that can, under his distresses, repair to some sense and experience of the prevalency of his affections in it formerly,—it will relieve him against all his troubles, and only make him cry out for such affections unto God again, that will fully satisfy, when they are drawn out unto him. The remembrance and calling over of these things will greatly relieve and support a soul, whatever its distress or perplexity may be.<sup>51</sup>

The believer is thus to contemplate Christ with a view to cultivating strong affections for him. Charles Hambrick-Stowe was undoubtedly correct in suggesting that, 'Puritanism was as affective as it was rational . . .'<sup>52</sup> Of course one might inquire whether such an emphasis on subjective affections would not lead into error. To this Owen responds, 'Yet I must say that I had rather be among them who, in the actings of their love and affection unto Christ, do fall into some irregularities and excesses in the manner of expressing it (provided their worship of him be neither superstitious nor idolatrous), than among those who, professing themselves to be Christians, do almost disavow their having any thoughts of or affection unto the person of Christ.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:384.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, VII:492.

<sup>50</sup> 'To strengthen our hearts in the resignation mentioned of ourselves unto the Lord Christ as our husband, as also to make way for the stirring of us up to those consequential conjugal affections of which mention shall afterward be made, I shall turn aside to a more full description of some of the personal excellencies of the Lord Christ, whereby the hearts of his saints are indeed endeared unto him' (*ibid.*, II:59).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, IX:427.

<sup>52</sup> Hambrick-Stowe, viii.

<sup>53</sup> *Works*, VII:346.

Dewey Wallace has identified spiritual mindedness and the concept of union with Christ to be two loci for Puritan affective mysticism.<sup>54</sup> Owen certainly combines these themes in an affective religion which at times moves toward religious ecstasy:

The spiritual intense fixation of the mind, by contemplation on God in Christ, until the soul be as it were swallowed up in admiration and delight, and being brought unto an utter loss, through the infiniteness of those excellencies which it doth admire and adore, it returns again to its own abasements, out of a sense of its infinite distance from what it would absolutely and eternally embrace, and withal, the inexpressible rest and satisfaction which the will and affections receive in their approaches unto the eternal Fountain of goodness, are things to be aimed at in prayer, and which, through the riches of divine condescension, are frequently enjoyed. The soul is hereby raised and ravished, not into ecstasies or unaccountable raptures, not acted into motions above the power of its own understanding and will; but in all the faculties and affections of it, through the effectual workings of the Spirit of grace and the lively impressions of divine love, with intimations of the relations and kindness of God, is filled with rest, in 'joy unspeakable and full of glory.'<sup>55</sup>

And again:

Should we go to speak now of the love of Christ, on the one side, it is an ocean,—we cannot fathom it. The best act of our souls towards Christ's love is admiration, astonishing admiration, till the heart is quite overwhelmed with it,—till our thoughts and understandings are, as it were, lost; the soul is taken out of itself, and laid in the dust, as nothing, to be swallowed up in a holy contemplation of the unspeakable, inconceivable love of Jesus Christ.<sup>56</sup>

If the example of Owen is in any way typical, then Brauer was correct in his observation that, 'There actually was a very strong mystical element in English Puritanism.'<sup>57</sup>

It may be suggested, in light of this overview, that the subjective or experiential aspect of Puritanism (at least as represented by John Owen) was in fact an integral and significant part of its 'spirituality'. Indeed, as Brauer has noted, it was precisely the experiential nature of Puritanism which caused it to emphasize the work of the Spirit to

<sup>54</sup> Wallace, xvii.

<sup>55</sup> *Works*, IV:329-330.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, IX:468.

<sup>57</sup> Jerald C. Brauer, 'Puritan Mysticism and the Development of Liberalism', *CH* XIX:3 (Sept., 1950), 151.

a degree unparalleled in church history.<sup>58</sup> Some have caricatured Puritanism, and indeed much of the Reformed tradition, as a cold and lifeless intellectualism.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, the religion of the Puritans was an affective and experiential religion, as those who would look to this tradition for insight into 'evangelical spirituality' will discover.

### **Abstract**

This article notes that in recent discussions regarding 'evangelical spirituality' reference is often made to Puritanism as a worthy source tradition, but that such references occasionally portray Puritan spirituality as primarily rationalistic as opposed to affective. This article demonstrates that Puritanism, as exemplified by John Owen, was highly affective. Owen stresses the place of experience in the Christian life to provide assurance and stability, and commends contemplation to stir up the needed affections. Examples are finally given of Owen's own descriptions of proper affections toward Christ, which at times move toward the religious ecstasy of the mystic.

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<sup>58</sup> Jerald C. Brauer, 'Reflections on the Nature of Puritanism', CH XXIII:2 (June 1954), 102; cf. Geoffrey Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946; reprint, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 7.

<sup>59</sup> Colin W. Williamson has written, 'So much in Protestantism has been purely intellectual. We are prepared to have a grim faith in God, to reason, to believe. But any talk of love for God, of a warm affection for God, seems to smack of pietism.' *The Church, New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. IV (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 95.