

The Holy Spirit's Role in John Owen's "Covenant of the Mediator" Formulation: A Case Study in Reformed Orthodox Formulations of the *Pactum Salutis*

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John Owen (1616–1683) is widely recognized as a preeminent trinitarian and covenantal theologian of Reformed orthodoxy. Scholarship on Owen has tended to focus either upon his trinitarian theology¹ or

1. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *The Triunity of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 113–14; Brian K. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality: John Owen and the Doctrine of God in Western Devotion*, Studies in Christian History and Thought (Eugene, Ore.: Wipf & Stock, 2008); Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen's Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998); Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man*, Great Theologians Series (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007); Trueman, "John Owen as a Theologian," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 2002), 41–68; Sinclair B. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), 74–98; Ferguson, "John Owen and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit," in *John Owen: The Man and His Theology*, ed. Robert W. Oliver (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R, 2002); Kelly M. Kopic, *Communion with God: The Divine and the Human in the Theology of John Owen* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), esp. ch. 5; Robert Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity in Its Catholic Context and Its Significance for Today," 2006, <http://j.mp/LethamOnOwen>; J. I. Packer, "A Puritan Perspective: Trinitarian Godliness according to John Owen," in *God the Holy Trinity: Reflections on Christian Faith and Practice*, ed. Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 91–108; Alan Spence, "John Owen and Trinitarian Agency," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 43, no. 2 (1990): 157–73; Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration: John Owen and the Coherence of Christology* (London: T & T Clark, 2007); Dale A. Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen: A Study of the Role of the Holy Spirit in Relation to the Shape of a Theology" (PhD diss., McGill University, 1967). Also, although he does not specifically identify trinitarianism as a highpoint of Owen's academic training, Sebastian Rehnman does note Owen's thorough imbibing of Western trinitarian sources, especially Augustine, patristic authors, and Aquinas; Rehnman, "John Owen: A Reformed Scholastic at Oxford," in *Reformation and Scholasticism: An Ecumenical Enterprise*, ed. Willem J. van Asselt and Eef Dekker, Texts & Studies in Reformation & Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 186, 188–89, 192–94.

upon his covenant theology² accordingly. Few studies have focused upon the nexus³ of the two, namely, Owen's formulation of the "covenant of the Mediator,"⁴ a doctrine known in Reformed orthodoxy as the *pactum salutis*.⁵ Furthermore, no studies have examined the Holy

2. David Wai-Sing Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen" (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998), 129–30; Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen, Pastor, Educator, Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971), 169–71; Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 20–36; Sebastian Rehnman, *Divine Discourse: The Theological Methodology of John Owen*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2002), 162ff; Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith G. Kline's Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, Inc., 2004), 46–56; Carol A. Williams, "The Decree of Redemption is in Effect a Covenant: David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption" (PhD diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2005), 61.

3. Cf. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 87; Paul Smalley, "A Sweet Mystery: John Owen on the Trinity," *Puritan Reformed Journal* 3, no. 1 (2011): 98–99.

4. Owen refers to his formulation of the *pactum salutis* by various terms such as "covenant of the Mediator" (John Owen, *The Works of John Owen*, ed. W. H. Goold [Johnstone & Hunter, 1850], II:65, 179; III:192; V:191–94; XI:297; XIII:1; XIX:78; XX:56; XXII:505), "covenant of the Redeemer" (*Works*, XI:123; XIX:1, 428; XX:1; XXI:148, 193), and "covenant of redemption" (*Works*, XXIV:240, 475); cf. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 25; Richard A. Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 13–14n23. Elsewhere Owen describes the *pactum* as "that compact, covenant, convention, or agreement, that was between the Father and the Son, for the accomplishment of the work of our redemption by the mediation of Christ, to the praise of the glorious grace of God" (*Works*, XII:497; cf. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 25n6). Furthermore, explicit and implicit references to the *pactum* in terms of eternal transactions and federal relations "between the Father and Son" are found in many places throughout Owen's theological writings (*Works*, I:55–56; II:178; V:179–80, 191–92, 258; VI:434, 488; IX:586–88; X:185; XI:299; XII:605; XVI:341) and throughout his Hebrews commentary (*Works*, XIX:131, 153, 196; XX:45, 225, 410; XXI:413–14, 495; XXII:489, 577; XXIII:57, 448; XXIV:240, 349, 475). Owen also alludes to the *pactum* in his *Greater Catechism*, Ch. 12, Q/A 1 (*Works*, I:481; cf. Williams, "David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption," 113) and in his explication of Christ's love for the church in terms of the Canticles' conjugal imagery (*Works*, II:118–19; cf. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 168). For simplicity's sake, I use *pactum salutis* hereafter as a summary of Owen's various terms. Also, when citing Owen's *Works*, I follow Goold's original 24-volume numbering rather than the 23-volume reprints which omit Owen's Latin works in the original vol. 17 and renumber vols. 18–24 as 17–23 accordingly.

5. Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms: Drawn Principally from Protestant Scholastic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), s.v., *pactum salutis*. For a detailed survey of the historical development of the *pactum salutis* in early Reformed Orthodoxy, see Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*."

Spirit's role in Owen's formulation of the *pactum*.⁶ In this essay, then, I attempt to weave together the two threads of this relatively unexplored trinitarian-covenantal nexus by arguing a twofold thesis: (1) Owen formulates the *pactum salutis* as the "mode" of the trinitarian *consilium Dei*⁷ with respect to salvation, and (2) Owen explicitly and implicitly assigns the Holy Spirit a role in both the *consilium Dei* and the *pactum*.

Before attempting to make headway down an unmarked trail, however, we need to get our bearings in the related scholarship.

Common Criticisms of the *Pactum Salutis*

The *pactum salutis* is a divisive doctrine in Reformed trinitarian theology. One eminent twentieth-century Reformed dogmatician, Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), hails the *pactum* as "the divine work par excellence,"⁸ while another, Karl Barth (1886–1968), derides it as a heterodox "mythology, for which there is no place in a right understanding of the doctrine of the Trinity."⁹ Contemporary Reformed

6. Several studies have briefly mentioned the Holy Spirit's role in Owen's formulation of the *pactum* (Toon, *God's Statesman*, 170; Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 86–93; Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 10), but no single study focuses specifically on this topic.

7. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, s.v., *consilium Dei*.

8. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 3, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 215. On Bavinck's formulation of the *pactum*, see Mark Jones, "Covenant Christology: Herman Bavinck and the Pactum Salutis," in *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology*, ed. John Bolt (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2011), 129–52; Laurence R. O'Donnell III, "Not Subtle Enough: An Assessment of Modern Scholarship on Herman Bavinck's Reformulation of the *Pactum Salutis* Contra 'Scholastic Subtlety,'" *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 22 (2011): 89–106.

9. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2004), IV/1:65. Regarding Barth's criticisms of the *pactum*, see Carl R. Trueman, "From Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant: Mythological Excess or an Exercise in Doctrinal Development?," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 11, no. 4 (2009): 378–97; Trueman, "The Harvest of Reformation Mythology?: Patrick Gillespie and the Covenant of Redemption," in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of Willem J. van Asselt*, ed. Maarten Wisse, Marcel Sarot, and Willemien Otten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 196–214; A. T. B. McGowan, "Karl Barth and Covenant Theology," in *Engaging with Barth: Contemporary Evangelical Critiques*, ed. David Gibson and Daniel Strange (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 113–35. Pace these studies, Amy Plantinga Pauw notes that Barth does not merely repudiate the doctrine; rather, he "made an appeal to a 'primal history' underlying all of God's relationships ad extra that functioned in a way similar to the covenant

theologians are equally divided. Cornelius Plantinga, for example, terms the *pactum* a “grotesque” and “seemingly barbaric idea” in which the Son is a sort of whipping boy who provides catharsis for the vengeful Father,¹⁰ whereas others advocate for the *pactum*.¹¹

In addition to attracting general trinitarian critiques, the *pactum* is specifically criticized as being sub-trinitarian for allegedly omitting a role for the Holy Spirit.¹² For example, Robert Letham describes the *pactum* as an “extreme development” of covenant theology in which the “Holy Spirit tended to be left out” and “strong elements of subordinationism” were put in.¹³ Also, Herman Hoeksema critiques Louis Berkhof’s formulation of the *pactum* for omitting the Spirit’s role and thus implicitly denying the Trinity.¹⁴ Moreover, Willem J. van Asselt attempts to mitigate the pneumatological critique by explicating Johannes Cocceius’s (1603–1669) formulation of the Spirit’s role in the *pactum*.¹⁵ Looking

of redemption in Puritan thought.” *“The Supreme Harmony of All”: The Trinitarian Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 116.

10. “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 23, no. 1 (1988): 37–38.

11. See David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2007), 167–96; cf. Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 77–110; Andreas J. Köstenberger and Scott R. Swain, *Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2008), 169–73.

12. “Much of the more recent criticism of the *pactum salutis* revolves around the contention that the Holy Spirit is never mentioned in this agreement. It does not really have a Trinitarian character, it is contended, because only the Father and the Son are named as participating subjects.” Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)*, trans. Raymond Andrew Blacketer, Studies in the History of Christian Thought (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2001), 233. However, van Asselt provides only one example: Barth’s “mythology” criticism (*ibid.*, 233n11).

13. Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ*, Contours of Christian Theology (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 52–53. Letham also critiques Owen’s formulation of the *pactum* as binitarian for allegedly omitting the Spirit’s role; see Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in Its Catholic Context and Its Significance for Today,” 10. We will treat his latter critique below.

14. *Reformed Dogmatics*, 2nd ed. (Grandville, Mich.: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 1:416–17; cf. Ralph Allan Smith, *The Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology* (Moscow, Ida.: Canon Press & Book Service, 2003), 15. Smith concludes incorrectly that Hoeksema’s critique of Berkhof is Hoeksema’s full view of the *pactum salutis*, which is certainly not the case.

15. Willem J. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669)*, 233–36.

at Owen's formulation will thus provide an important historical case study against which such criticisms can be evaluated.¹⁶

Owen's Formulation in Pactum Salutis Scholarship

Several historians and theologians take note of Owen's role in the historical development of the *pactum salutis*, but few elaborate on his particular formulation. For example, Herman Witsius (1636–1708), in tracing the *pactum's* development up to his day, remarks, "Dr. Owen handles this very subject at large on Heb. T. 1. Exercit. iv. p. 49."¹⁷ However, he offers no explication of Owen's view. Likewise, J. Mark Beach includes Owen on the list of Reformed predecessors who influenced Witsius's covenant theology, but he does not elaborate on the extent of Owen's influence or the nature of Owen's formulations.¹⁸ Heinrich Heppé simply lists Owen's commentary on Hebrews as supporting the existence of a federal relation between the Father and Son without giving any interpretative comments.¹⁹ Geerhardus Vos, in discussing

16. David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark aver that G. C. Berkouwer belongs on the list of modern theological detractors of the *pactum* for allegedly rejecting it as "a speculative doctrine" and as "tending to tritheism" (VanDrunen and Clark, "The Covenant Before the Covenants," 194–95). However, these charges mistake Berkouwer's discussions of the doctrine's dogmatic difficulties for his conclusion. VanDrunen and Clark reference G. C. Berkouwer's *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 162–63, whereas his actual conclusion—which undermines their allegations—is found on p. 171: "From the foregoing" Berkouwer concludes, "it is evident that our reflection on the election in Christ and in connection with that on the *pactum salutis* does not yield an abstract doctrine of election. But such abstraction is a continuous danger to the doctrine—as is evidenced by its history—and must be guarded against continually."

17. Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: The den Dulk Christian Foundation; Distributed by P & R Publishing, 1990), 1:177; cf. Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*," 13. I interpret Witsius to be referring to Part IV of Owen's *Exercitationes* on Hebrews, which, in Goold's edition, includes Owen's fullest presentation of the *pactum*, namely, *Exercitation XXVIII*.

18. J. Mark Beach, "The Doctrine of the *Pactum Salutis* in the Covenant Theology of Herman Witsius," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 13 (2002): 102. Similarly, Carol Williams argues that "Owen, Baxter, Cocceius and Witsius" are commonly seen as progenitors of the *pactum* and that Owen is an important contributor to British covenant theology; see Williams, "David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption," 27, 61.

19. Heinrich Heppé, *Reformed Dogmatics Set Out and Illustrated from the Sources*, ed. Ernst Bizer, trans. G. T. Thomson (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1950), 378.

the need to distinguish between predestination and the *pactum salutis*, refers to Exercitation XXVIII in Owen's Hebrews commentary, but he does not elaborate on Owen's formulation.²⁰ Similarly, Herman Bavinck cites Owen's commentary on Hebrews 7:22 while reflecting upon "scholastic subtlety" in the *pactum's* development.²¹ However, it is unclear whether Bavinck critiques Owen's full formulation or merely his exegesis of this one passage.

Jeong Koo Jeon surveys Owen as an important formulator of Reformed covenant theology, but he interprets Owen exclusively in terms of the contrast between the *foedus operum* and *foedus gratiae*. Thus, Jeon does not even mention Owen's *pactum* formulation.²² David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark also refer to Owen's use of the *pactum* to argue, contra the Socinians and Remonstrants, "that the subordination [of the Son to the Father] was not ontological but economic."²³ However, they provide no analysis of Owen's formulation. Additionally, Ralph Smith briefly summarizes Owen's formulation of the *pactum* in his *Exercitations on Hebrews* and claims that Owen's "discussion of the covenant itself is not explicitly trinitarian."²⁴ He offers no substantiation for this claim, however.

Richard Muller includes Owen in a handful of studies related to the *pactum salutis*. First, he interprets Owen's view of God's love—that the Son is the "principle object" of the Father's eternal love—as an antecedent to the Reformed development of the *pactum*.²⁵ Second, he alleges that John Gill (1697–1771) criticized Owen's formulation of the *pactum* for lacking a pneumatological aspect.²⁶ Gill, however, does not critique Owen's entire doctrine of the *pactum* but only his exegesis

20. Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," trans. S. Voorwinde and W. Van Gemenen, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr., 234–67 (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publishing, 2001), 246; a translation of *De verbondsleer in de gereformeerde theologie: rede bij het overdragen van het rectoraat aan de Theol. School te Grand Rapids, Mich.* (Grand Rapids: Democrat, 1891).

21. Bavinck, *Sin and Salvation in Christ*, 213, 213n43.

22. Jeon, *Covenant Theology*, 1n1, 46–56.

23. VanDrunen and Clark, "The Covenant Before the Covenants," 196.

24. Smith, *The Eternal Covenant: How the Trinity Reshapes Covenant Theology*, 20.

25. Muller, *The Triunity of God*, 266.

26. Richard A. Muller, "The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill's Critique of the *Pactum Salutis*," *Foundations* 24, no. 1 (March 1981): 8n19.

of Zechariah 6:13 as applied to the *consilium Dei*.²⁷ Furthermore, Gill mitigates his critique by admitting that Owen's view can be harmonized with his own. Thus he writes:

My objections to this sense [of Zech. 6:13 as interpreted by Owen, et al.] have been that this council in eternity was between the three Persons, and not two only; and that that is what is past; whereas this is spoken of as future: but when I consider that Jehovah and the Branch are the only Persons mentioned in the text, and so could only, with propriety, be spoken of, though the council was between the three; and that, in the Hebrew language, tenses are frequently put for one another, the past for the future, and so the future for the past; and things are said to be, when they appear to be, though they are before; the sense may be, that when the Man, the Branch, should grow out of his place, and build the temple, and bear the glory and sit a priest on his throne, then it should clearly appear, that there had been a council of peace between them both, which was the ground and foundation of all: and in this light, this sense of the passage may be admitted, and so be a proof of the point under consideration.²⁸

Third, Muller lists Owen as one of the "British writers" who wrote on the *pactum* "slightly in advance of Cocceius."²⁹ Neither of these three studies, however, intend to examine Owen's formulation of the *pactum* in particular.

The Pactum Salutis in Owen Scholarship

In Owen scholarship there exists a similar situation to the one found in *pactum salutis* scholarship: his formulation is noted by many writers but not thoroughly examined, especially in terms of its trinitarian and pneumatological aspects. Nevertheless, several Owen-specific studies make important contributions for our investigation.

For example, Robert Letham and Carl Trueman make opposing claims concerning the Holy Spirit's role in Owen's doctrine of the *pactum*. Whereas the former charges Owen's formulation with

27. John Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity; or, A System of Practical Truths Deduced from The Sacred Scriptures* (London: Wittingham and Rowland, 1815), 1:150 (i.e., *Doctrinal Divinity*, Book II, ch. vi). For Owen's exegesis of Zechariah 6:13 in relation to the *pactum*, see Owen, *Works*, XII:500–01; XIX:85.

28. Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 150.

29. Muller, "Toward the *Pactum Salutis*," 13.

binitarianism for allegedly omitting the Spirit,³⁰ the latter avers that Owen's formulation is to be commended for its outstanding development of the Spirit's role in the *pactum*.³¹ These contradicting claims will be evaluated below. Additionally, Peter Toon, in his very brief summary of Owen's covenant theology, explicitly includes the Holy Spirit as a covenanting party in Owen's formulation of the *pactum*.³² Similarly, David Wong includes the Spirit in diagrams depicting the relationship between Owen's eternal *pactum salutis* and Owen's temporal covenants of works and grace.³³ His corresponding explication, however, does not mention the Spirit's role.

Other Owen studies indirectly contribute to our thesis. For example, Sinclair Ferguson provides a thorough examination of Owen's *pactum* formulation in relation to Owen's overall covenantal scheme. He argues that, for Owen, the *pactum* is "the foundation of the covenant of grace."³⁴ He asserts further that Owen views the covenant of grace as conditional, just like the covenant of works, but with one major difference: in the covenant of grace the conditions "devolve on the Mediator, rather than on those for whom the covenant is made."³⁵ This observation is highly significant since Owen's view of conditionality in the covenant of grace "makes the covenant of redemption a logical and theological necessity" in his covenant theology.³⁶ Furthermore, Ferguson summarizes the conditions and promises included in the *pactum salutis*, the key Scripture texts which Owen uses to prove the doctrine, and the importance Owen places on the *pactum* in relation to Christ's atonement.³⁷ Nevertheless, Ferguson's treatment is not entirely comprehensive. For example, he limits his study primarily to volumes XII and XIX of Owen's writings, whereas Owen utilizes the

30. Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 8, 10–11.

31. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 86–87, 92–93; Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 145–48.

32. Toon, *God's Statesman*, 170.

33. Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen," 177, fig. 3.3; 271, fig. 3.10.

34. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 25.

35. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 24–25. "And he was the surety of it in that he undertook unto God whatever by the terms of the covenant was to be done for man, to accomplish it in his own person, and whatever was to be done in and by man, to effect it by his own Spirit and grace...." Owen, *Works*, XIX:78.

36. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 25n1.

37. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 25–27.

pactum throughout his entire corpus. Also, Ferguson does not mention the Spirit's role in Owen's formulation of the *pactum*.

Brian Kay draws important connections between Owen's *pactum* formulation and his trinitarian theology.³⁸ In light of modern criticisms which paint the *pactum* as a cold contractual arrangement, Kay explains that, for Owen, the Father's eternal love is prior to and hence the ground of the Son's mediation in the *pactum* rather than vice versa.³⁹ Furthermore, following Spence, Kay defends Owen's development of the Western doctrine of appropriations, which is a key counterpart to the *pactum*.⁴⁰ However, he does not examine Owen's *pactum* formulation comprehensively, and, aside from a general mention of Owen's trinitarian covenant theology,⁴¹ Kay does not treat the Holy Spirit's role in Owen's formulation.

Summary

These three scholarly landmarks provide both warrant for our thesis and bearings by which we can direct our investigation. Reformed theologians differ widely over the propriety of the *pactum salutis*, and trinitarian and pneumatological critiques are commonly levied against it. In *pactum salutis* scholarship Owen's formulation is well known but remains relatively unexplored. Similarly, in Owen scholarship the doctrine of the *pactum salutis*—including the Spirit's role in the *pactum*—has received some scholarly attention, but no one has attempted a thorough study of these topics. Therefore, our task is to examine Owen's formulation of the *pactum salutis* while paying particular attention to the Spirit's role. We will ask whether Owen explicitly references the Spirit in the context of the *pactum*. If he does, then these references need to be correlated and analyzed. Furthermore, we will briefly compare Owen's formulation to other Reformed Orthodox formulations.

Owen's Formulation of the *Pactum Salutis*

Owen uses the *pactum salutis* in a wide variety of places throughout almost every volume of his collected writings, a breadth which is

38. For Kay's references to Owen's doctrine of the *pactum*, see *Trinitarian Spirituality*, xiii, 109, 127–29, 154–55, 158, 168, 195.

39. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 127–29.

40. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 106–113, 188–89; cf. Spence, “John Owen and Trinitarian Agency.”

41. Kay, *Trinitarian Spirituality*, 195.

insufficiently noted in Owen scholarship.⁴² The well-known *locus classicus* for his doctrine of the *pactum*—Exercitation XXVIII of Owen’s commentary on Hebrews—contains his fullest explication.⁴³ Thus, our investigation will focus here, and at the same time we will incorporate insights from Owen’s other formulations.⁴⁴

In part IV of his Exercitations, Owen presents the *pactum salutis* in a Christological context. Specifically, it explains the eternal origin and ground of Christ’s priestly office.⁴⁵ Before arguing for the *pactum* directly, however, Owen spends considerable effort in laying its trinitarian foundations in God’s eternal decrees. Accordingly, there is a twofold structure in Owen’s formulation of the *pactum* which corresponds with two of his Exercitations: (1) there exist trinitarian transactions in God’s eternal counsels (i.e., Exercitation XXVII), and (2) these trinitarian transactions take on the form or mode of a covenant (i.e., Exercitation XXVIII). Noting Owen’s correlation of these two aspects is vital for a proper understanding of his formulation.

Trinitarian Transactions in the Consilium Dei

Owen’s first step in formulating the *pactum salutis* is to argue “that there were from all eternity personal transactions in the holy Trinity concerning mankind in their temporal and eternal condition, which first manifested themselves in our creation.”⁴⁶ Before looking at the account of man’s creation in Genesis 1:26, however, he first deals briefly with how man can gain knowledge of God’s decrees.

In Exercitation XXVI, Owen grounds the origin of Christ’s priestly office in “the eternal counsels of God” (XIX:15), which assertion sets the stage for his discussion of trinitarian transactions in the *consilium Dei*. After dealing with perennially debated questions in the remainder of Exercitation XXVI (i.e., whether Christ would

42. See note 4 above.

43. Owen himself writes that he treats the *pactum salutis* most fully in his Hebrews Exercitations; see *Works*, V:191.

44. Owen treats the *pactum* at length in Book I of *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (Owen, *Works*, X:157–200) and in Chapter XXVII of *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (*Works*, XII:496–508).

45. Step one of Owen’s argument grounds Christ’s priestly office in the *consilium Dei* (*Works*, XIX:15), and step two narrows the ground to the *pactum salutis* specifically (*Works*, XIX:84).

46. Owen, *Works*, XIX:43; hereafter cited in text.

have become incarnate if man had not sinned, how the ordering of God's decrees relates to Christ's incarnation, etc.), Owen moves on in Exercitation XXVII to inquire "more expressly into the nature of the counsels of God in this matter, and their progress in execution" (XIX:42). For Owen, man's only possible access to God's trinitarian transactions is via revelation. He does not attempt to deduce Christ's priestly office from the *consilium Dei* in an *a priori* manner. Rather, to "avoid all curiosity, or vain attempts to be wise above what is written," he asserts an *a posteriori* principle: God's nature is known through creation (Isa. 40:12–17; Rom. 1:19–21; Ps. 19:1–2), and God's nature *as triune* is known only through the creation of man in particular (XIX:43). Therefore, according to Owen, God reveals His trinitarian nature to man in Genesis 1:26.

In this text Owen finds a strong adumbration of God's trinitarian nature specifically in God's plural self-identification: "Therefore," he argues, "the first express mention of a plurality of persons in the divine nature is in the creation of man; and therein also are personal transactions intimated concerning his present and future condition" (XIX:43). By looking to the Trinity's self-revelation in Genesis 1:26, Owen finds access to the *consilium Dei*, a specifically *trinitarian consilium* no less. After treating this verse at length (XIX:43–58), Owen devotes the rest of Exercitation XXVII to arguing that further evidence for trinitarian transactions in the *consilium Dei* can be found in Proverbs 8:22–31 (XIX:58–71), Psalm 2:7 (XIX:71–78), and Psalm 110:1–2 (XIX:78). He also refutes Jewish, Arian, Socinian, and Muslim non-trinitarian interpretations of these passages.

The Holy Spirit in the Consilium Dei

Owen's primary focus throughout Exercitation XXVII is upon the Father and the Son. This makes sense when we recall that he sets up his whole discussion of the *pactum salutis* in the context of grounding Christ's priestly office in the *consilium Dei*. Nevertheless, two times in Exercitation XXVII Owen explicitly, albeit briefly, assigns the Holy Spirit a role within these trinitarian counsels.

In the first place, he includes the Spirit as an actor in the trinitarian transactions intimated in Genesis 1:26. "And that which hence we intend to prove is," argues Owen, "that in the framing and producing the things which concern mankind, there were *peculiar, internal, personal transactions* between the Father, Son, and Spirit" (XIX:58).

He sees in this verse “mutual distinct actings and concurrence of the *several* persons in the Trinity,” not just the Father and Son (XIX:58; emphasis added). Furthermore, out of this same verse he draws a “basic principle” of trinitarian revelation:

Man was peculiarly created unto the glory of the Trinity, or of God as three in one. Hence in all things concerning him there is not only an intimation of those distinct subsistences, but also of their distinct actings with respect unto him (XIX:58).

Although Owen does not elaborate on the Spirit’s role, he does explicitly list the Holy Spirit as an active participant in the trinitarian counsels of Genesis 1:26, and he affirms a specifically trinitarian, as opposed to binitarian, *consilium Dei* with respect to man’s salvation.

In the second place, Owen assigns the Spirit a role in the *consilium Dei* based on Proverbs 8:22–31. With this passage in mind, he writes, “A personal transaction, before the creation of the world, between the Father and the Son, acting mutually by their one Spirit, concerning the state and condition of mankind, with respect unto divine love and favour, is that which we inquire after, and which is here fully expressed...” (XIX:67). Owen does not explain how the Father and Son act “mutually by their one Spirit”; he seems to simply presuppose the Spirit’s role in the Trinity’s eternal counsels.

At the conclusion to Exercitation XXVII, however, he omits the Spirit. He writes: “It appears, therefore, that there were eternal transactions between the Father and Son concerning the redemption of mankind by his interposition or mediation” (XIX:76). Again, recalling the overall Christological context within which Owen formulates the *pactum*, focusing on the Father and Son makes sense. Since he mentions the Spirit twice in Exercitation XXVII but omits the Spirit in his concluding statement, a bit of ambiguity regarding the Spirit’s role attends his formulation.

There are two more explicit, though brief, references concerning the Spirit’s role in the trinitarian *consilium Dei* beyond Owen’s Exercitations on Hebrews. First, in the context of explaining how the Father and the Son are indirectly involved in Christ’s incarnation, he writes, “Now, this emptying of the Deity, this humbling of himself, this dwelling amongst us, was the sole act of the second person, or the divine nature in the second person, the Father and the Spirit having no concurrence in it but by liking, approbation, and eternal counsel”

(X:175). Owen provides no elaboration on this passing reference to the Spirit other than a general remark regarding concurrence with the entire economy of salvation: the Holy Spirit “is evidently concurring, in his own distinct operation, to all the several chief or grand parts of this work” (X:178). Nevertheless, for the third time we see that he assigns the Spirit a role in the *consilium Dei*.

Second, amidst his lengthy commentary on Heb. 1:1–2, Owen argues “that the whole mystery of his will, antecedently to the revelation of it, is said to be *hid in God*; that is, the Father, Eph. 3:9. It lay wrapped up from the eyes of men and angels, in his eternal wisdom and counsel, Col. 1:26, 27” (XX:34). Then he explicitly includes the Holy Spirit as a “partaker with him [i.e., the Father] in this counsel,” along with the Son (XX:34). Thus Owen mentions all three of the divine persons as actors in the *consilium Dei*.

The significance of these four explicit references to the Holy Spirit's role in the *consilium Dei* will become apparent as we look next at how Owen correlates the *consilium* with the *pactum*.

The *Pactum Salutis* as the *Modus* of the *Consilium Dei*

Owen's second step in formulating the *pactum salutis* is found in Exercitation XXVIII. He writes, “That there were eternal transactions in general between those distinct persons, with respect unto the salvation of mankind, hath been evinced in the foregoing Exercitation [i.e., XXVII]. That these were federal, or had in them the nature of a covenant, is now further to be manifested [in Exercitation XXVIII]” (XIX:84; cf. 77–78). He then argues in Exercitation XXVIII that the trinitarian transactions in the *consilium* regarding man's salvation are “carried on ‘per modum foederis,’ ‘by way of covenant,’ compact, and mutual agreement, between the Father and the Son” (XIX:77). Thus for Owen there is a sense in which the *consilium Dei* is the *pactum salutis*. In other words, he finds an inseparable connection between the *consilium* and the *pactum*, between Exercitations XXVII and XXVIII.

That Owen draws a connection between the trinitarian counsels of God and the *pactum salutis* is significant for our thesis in three respects.

An Underdeveloped Correlation

Owen scholarship has tended either to underplay or to miss altogether the connection between Owen's formulations of the *consilium Dei* and the *pactum salutis*. For example, David Wong presents a detailed

examination of the role of the *pactum salutis* in relation to Owen's covenant theology as a whole. However, in developing the link between Owen's view of God's trinitarian counsels and his covenant theology, Wong omits the passage where Owen most fully explicates this relationship—Exercitation XXVII.⁴⁷ Instead of connecting the *pactum* with the *consilium*, Wong argues that Owen employs a Platonic relation between the *pactum* and the covenant of grace,⁴⁸ and he ultimately rejects Owen's *pactum* formulation as a "Platonic philosophical interpolation."⁴⁹ Similarly, Carol Williams surveys Owen's Exercitations and briefly explains the *consilium-pactum* relationship, but omits Exercitation XXVII.⁵⁰ Robert Wright also notes that Owen grounds Christ's priesthood in "the eternal counsels of the Trinity," and he further comments that Owen "devotes a whole essay to these federal transactions between the Persons of the Trinity."⁵¹ However, he does not elaborate on either topic or their interrelation.

Sebastian Rehnman argues that Owen follows "Coccejus' notion of an eternal Trinitarian covenant" in arguing "that the covenant of grace has its basis in the eternal covenant, pact, or transaction between the Father and the Son."⁵² Coccejus, however, is only cited once when Owen explicates the *pactum*,⁵³ so Rehnman's observation is slightly overstated. Furthermore, Rehnman mentions Owen's *pactum* formulation only in passing, and he does not relate the *pactum* to the *consilium* in Owen's thought. Dale Stover directly relates Owen's pneumatology to his covenant theology, even discussing Owen's *pactum* formulation at points.⁵⁴ However, he grounds Owen's covenant theology not in the *consilium Dei* but in William Tyndale's contract

47. Owen presents his view of the trinitarian counsels of God in Exercitation XXVII of his commentary on Hebrews, which is entitled, "The Original of the priesthood of Christ in the Counsel of God"; see Owen, *Works*, XIX:42–76.

48. Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen," 163.

49. Wong, "The Covenant Theology of John Owen," 273.

50. Williams, "David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption," 232–34.

51. Robert Keith McGregor Wright, "John Owen's Great High Priest: The High-priesthood of Christ in the Theology of John Owen, (1616–1683)" (PhD diss., Iliff School of Theology and The University of Denver [Colorado Seminary], 1989), 183.

52. Rehnman, *Divine Discourse*, 168–69.

53. Owen, *Works*, XII:503. Only two other citations of Coccejus appear in Owen's corpus, both of which are found in *Theologoumena Pantodapa*; see Owen, *Works*, XVII:158, 382.

54. Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 144–213.

theory and in an allegedly abstract, deterministic notion of predestination inherited from William Perkins.⁵⁵

Alan Spence comments on both the trinitarian nature of God's eternal counsels and the *pactum* as a specific instance of the trinitarian counsels in Owen's thought. He also highlights the relationship between Owen's *consilium Dei* formulation and his use of trinitarian appropriations, especially in the context of Christ's incarnation. Yet, beyond grounding Owen's doctrine of the incarnation in the *pactum*, Spence does not elaborate on Owen's *consilium-pactum* correlation.⁵⁶

Sinclair Ferguson briefly mentions that Owen's *pactum* is grounded in a trinitarian transaction,⁵⁷ but he references only Owen's introductory comment on the first page of Exercitation XXVIII⁵⁸ and does not examine Owen's full explication of God's trinitarian counsel in Exercitation XXVII. He thus misses Owen's references to the Spirit in the *consilium*, and he limits the *consilium* to transactions between the Father and Son. Furthermore, Ferguson considers the *consilium-pactum* relationship in terms of possibility and actuality,⁵⁹ whereas Owen treats this relationship in terms of *modus*.

Robert Letham avers that "Owen integrates the eternal counsel of God, described as a covenant, with the atonement and justification, providing the context within which both have meaning."⁶⁰ He further comments that Owen "handles the covenant of redemption better than others."⁶¹ Nevertheless, he alleges that Owen's *pactum* formulation "is a binitarian construction. Amazingly the Holy Spirit receives no mention! This, despite Owen's focus elsewhere on the Spirit."⁶² Letham, however, only references Owen's formulation in

55. Stover, "The Pneumatology of John Owen," 211.

56. Spence, *Incarnation and Inspiration*, 28–30.

57. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 25.

58. Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 25n5.

59. Ferguson reasons that Owen's doctrine of the covenant of grace relates to his formulation of the *pactum* in two senses: first, the *pactum* can only be possible if distinctions among the activities of persons within the unity of the Godhead is possible; second, the *pactum* can only become actual in the context of Christ's incarnation. See Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 25.

60. Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 10; cf. *ibid.*, 7–8.

61. Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 10. Compare his earlier statement: "Owen is one of the first exponents of the theologoumenon, the covenant of redemption, and by far the best." "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 7–8.

62. Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 10. However, he had

Exercitation XXVIII⁶³ and ignores his full treatment in XXVII. This same omission undermines the charge of binitarianism: without seeing the *consilium-pactum* correlation, Letham misses Owen's explicit references to the Spirit.

Carl Trueman provides a robust evaluation of Owen's formulation of the *pactum salutis*. In addition to recognizing the *pactum's* role as the eternal ground for the trinitarian economy of salvation,⁶⁴ he argues for a "basic axiom of his theology that acts *ad extra* mirror the internal intratrinitarian relationships."⁶⁵ Thus, Trueman appears to pick up on the logic Owen uses to interpret Genesis 1:26. However, despite his robust treatment, he omits any connection between the *consilium* and the *pactum*.⁶⁶ It is no surprise, then, that he references Exercitation XXVIII but not XXVII.⁶⁷

A Common Reformed Orthodox Pattern

In addition to its being underdeveloped or ignored, the *consilium-pactum* correlation is significant in that several Reformed orthodox theologians follow this two-step pattern in their formulations.⁶⁸ For example, David Dickson (1583–1662) grounds the *pactum salutis* in Christ's investiture with the office of mediator that began within the *consilium Dei*. In *Therapeutica Sacra*, he writes:

A divine covenant we call, a Contract or Paction, wherein God is at least the one party Contracter. Of this sort of Covenants about

remarked earlier that Owen "relates all aspects of classic trinitarian doctrine to [the *pactum salutis*] and guards against misunderstandings in a way that is seldom repeated and never bettered." "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 8.

63. Letham, "John Owen's Doctrine of the Trinity," 8.

64. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 80–83.

65. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 132.

66. Owen's fullest formulation of the eternal trinitarian counsels which correspond with the *pactum salutis* is Exercitation XXVII in his Hebrews commentary (*Works*, XIX:42–76), which work Trueman omits in his analysis of Owen's *pactum* formulation. See Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 129–50; Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 80–99.

67. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 85nn70–71.

68. Similarly, though referring to a broader context, Muller argues that the trinitarian formulation of God's decrees is an antecedent to Reformed orthodox formulations of the *pactum salutis*. See Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1986), 167.

the eternal Salvation of Men (which sort chiefly belong to our purpose) there are Three. The First is, the Covenant of Redemption, past between God, and Christ [whom] God appointed Mediator, before the World was, in the Council of the Trinity.⁶⁹

Dickson further avers that the *pactum* “is in effect one with the eternal Decree of Redemption,” thus making the *pactum* coextensive with the *consilium Dei* regarding redemption.⁷⁰

Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680), Owen’s friend and colleague, formulated his doctrine of the *pactum salutis* along similar *consilium-pactum* lines. The argument in Book I of Goodwin’s *Of Christ the Mediator* begins, “God the Father’s eternal counsel and transactions with Christ, to undertake the work of redemption for man, considered as fallen” and proceeds to the covenant of redemption as “the conclusion of this agreement.”⁷¹

Furthermore, Patrick Gillespie (1617–1675) uses a similar two-step formulation. In his extensive treatise on the *pactum salutis*, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened*, to which Owen wrote the foreword,⁷² Gillespie argues that a variety of purposes in the *consilium* are presupposed by the *pactum*. For example:

The Covenant of Redemption wherein God entered with Christ, did proceed upon supposition of these things mainly... 1. This

69. David Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra: Shewing briefly the method of healing the diseases of the conscience, concerning regeneration* (Craig’s-Clofs: Printed by James Watson, 1697), 35. Compare Dickson’s summary in Head II of his shorter work: *The Sum of Saving Knowledge: or, a brief sum of Christian doctrine contained in the Holy Scriptures, and holden forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms; together with the practical use thereof* (Edinburgh: Johnstone, Hunter, & Co., 1871), 9–11; cf. Williams, “David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption,” 185–86.

70. Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra*, 38; cf. Williams, “David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption,” 193–98. Owen, however, views the *pactum* as more than a decree: “Thus, though this covenant be eternal, and the object of it be that which might not have been, and so it hath the nature of the residue of God’s decrees in these regards, yet because of this distinct acting of the will of the Father and the will of the Son with regard to each other, it is more than a decree, and hath the proper nature of a *covenant* or compact” (*Works*, XII:497).

71. Thomas Goodwin, *The works of Thomas Goodwin, D.D., Sometime President of Magdalene college, Oxford* (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1863), V:3–33.

72. John Owen, “To the Reader,” in *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ, as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1677), n.p.

Covenant supposeth that God had purposed in himself, and decreed eminently to glorify himself in the way of justice and mercy.... 2. This Covenant supposeth that God had purposed and decreed, that there should be objects qualified, and fit for the glorifying of both these Attributes; and this was absolutely necessary to that purpose.... 3. The Covenant of Redemption supposeth God's purpose and free decree, so far to follow his Covenant truth and justice upon man, as not to acquit him without a satisfaction to Justice in his own person, or by a surety of the same kind that sinned....⁷³

Thus, for Gillespie the *pactum* presupposes trinitarian transactions in the *consilium Dei*. Moreover, John Gill (1697–1771) clearly follows this *consilium-pactum* pattern in his *Body of Doctrinal Divinity*. Speaking of the relationship between the *consilium* and the *pactum*, Gill writes:

These are generally blended together by divines; and indeed it is difficult to consider them distinctly with exactness and precision; but I think they are to be distinguished, and the one to be considered as leading on, and as preparatory and introductory to the other, though both of an eternal date.⁷⁴

Therefore, upon comparing these fellow Reformed orthodox formulators of the *pactum salutis*, it is apparent that Owen's two-step argument for the *pactum* can be located within a stream of similarly structured formulations both before and after his day.

An Implicit Connection to the Holy Spirit's Role

Additionally, this *consilium-pactum* correlation is significant for our thesis in that it provides an implicit argument for the Holy Spirit's role in Owen's *pactum* formulation. This inference can be stated as a syllogism: (a) the Holy Spirit has a role in the *consilium Dei* concerning salvation; (b) the *pactum salutis* is the *modus* of the *consilium Dei* concerning salvation; (c) therefore, the Spirit's role in the *pactum* is the execution of the role that the Spirit received in the *consilium*.

Even though Owen's two-step formulation allows for the possibility of inference to the Spirit's role, we must be cautious here since

73. Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ, as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (London: Printed for Tho. Parkhurst, 1677), 32–33.

74. Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, 148.

he does not draw this inference himself. Throughout Exercitation XXVIII, he focuses exclusively upon the Father and Son. Having described the three components of a general covenant and the three supplemental components of special covenants, Owen avers that the *pactum salutis* is a special covenant.⁷⁵ He then devotes the rest of Exercitation XXVIII to marshaling support for the claim that the eternal transactions between the Father and Son display the six components of a special covenant. Significantly, he nowhere discusses the Holy Spirit throughout his explication of these six components; even in his discussion of the distinct covenanting parties in the *pactum*—the place where we would most expect to find a mention of the Spirit—he only points to biblical passages wherein the Father declares that He will be God to His Son (Ps. 16:2, 9–11; 22:1; 40:8; 45:7; Mic. 5:4; John 20:17; Rev. 3:12) (XIX:84). “The Father,” he writes, “was the *prescriber*, the promiser, and lawgiver; and the Son was the *undertaker* upon his prescription, law, and promises” (XIX:85).

In sum, Owen does not assign a role to the Holy Spirit in Exercitation XXVIII. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the inference to the Spirit's role implicit in Owen's two-step formulation; for, as we will see in the following section, in writings outside of his Exercitations, Owen does explicitly assign the Spirit a role in the *pactum* after all.

The Holy Spirit's Role in the *Pactum Salutis*

There are two references in Owen's writings where he references the Holy Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis*. In both cases, he merely mentions the Spirit without elaborating on His particular role.

The first reference is found in Book II, Chapter V of *Pneumatologia*, Owen's 1674 treatise on the Holy Spirit. In the context of explaining how the resurrected and exalted Christ sends His Spirit to build the church, Owen turns to Acts 2:33 (III:191). In the course of his exposition Owen comments that Christ, before He ascended into heaven, comforted His disciples with the promise of the Holy Spirit and commanded them not to begin building the church until the Spirit had come. The promise of the Spirit, however, did not originate merely at Christ's ascension. Rather, Owen terms this promise an “everlasting promise”:

75. Owen, *Works*, XIX:82–84; hereafter cited in text.

And herein lay, and herein doth lie, the foundation of the ministry of the church, as also its continuance and efficacy. The kingdom of Christ is spiritual, and, in the animating principles of it, invisible. If we fix our minds only on outward order, we lose the rise and power of the whole. It is not an outward visible ordination by men,—though that be necessary, by rule and precept,—but Christ’s communication of that Spirit, the everlasting promise whereof he received of the Father, that gives being, life, usefulness, and success, to the ministry (III:191).

While explaining this “everlasting promise,” Owen mentions the Holy Spirit in the context of the *pactum salutis*. With Acts 2:33 in mind, he distinguishes the inception of “the promise” to Christ in the *pactum salutis* from the reception of “the thing promised” to Christ in and for the church within the *historia revelationis* (III:191–92).

The promise, therefore, itself was given unto the Lord Christ, and actually received by him in the covenant of the mediator, when he undertook the great work of the restoration of all things, to the glory of God; for herein had he the engagement of the Father that the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the sons of men, to make effectual unto their souls the whole work of his mediation: wherefore, he is said now to “receive this promise,” because on his account, and by him as exalted, it was now solemnly accomplished in and towards the church (III:192).

Owen sees two senses in which Christ received the promised Spirit. First, in terms of the *opera Dei ad intra*, the Father promises the Spirit to the Son in the *pactum salutis*. Second, in terms of the *opera Dei ad extra*, Christ, at His exaltation, receives the promised Spirit “in and towards the church.”⁷⁶ The former promise grounds the latter.

Christ’s promise to send His Spirit to the church can be termed an “everlasting promise” because Christ Himself “actually received” this promise for Himself in eternity via the *pactum salutis*. Christ’s giving of the Holy Spirit to the church, then, is a sort of re-giving—a historical (*opera Dei ad extra*) consequent to a heavenly (*opera Dei ad intra*) antecedent. Furthermore, Owen turns to Psalm 68:18 and Ephesians 4:8 to confirm his interpretation of this “everlasting promise.”⁷⁷

76. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, s.v., *opera Dei ad intra*, *opera Dei ad extra*.

77. Owen, *Works*, III:192.

He thus concludes in deep wonder that God “hath knit these things together toward his elect, in the bond of an everlasting covenant!”⁷⁸

Now, we must admit that Owen refers to the Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis* only in a passive sense: the Holy Spirit is promised to the Son by the Father as the efficient cause, so to speak, of Christ's mediation. Nonetheless, herein he explicitly assigns the Spirit a role in the *pactum*: the Spirit is, from all eternity, the promised dispenser of Christ's benefits and builder of Christ's church.

The second explicit reference to the Holy Spirit in the *pactum* is even more subtle than the first. In Chapter XXVI of *Vindiciae Evangelicae*, Owen is clearly focused not on the Spirit but on the “compact, covenant, convention, or agreement, that was between the Father and the Son.”⁷⁹ Yet, he explicitly includes the Spirit when explaining the general principle of trinitarian appropriations of God's will in the *opera Dei ad intra*:

It is true, the will of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is but one. It is a natural property, and where there is but one nature there is but one will: but in respect of their distinct personal actings, this will is appropriated to them respectively, so that the will of the Father and the will of the Son may be considered [distinctly] in this business; which though essentially one and the same, yet in their distinct personality it is distinctly considered, as the will of the Father and the will of the Son.⁸⁰

Even though Owen is clearly focused here upon the Father and Son, he recognizes that the Spirit's will is coessential with the unified will of the Godhead. Thus, for the second time, he briefly mentions the Spirit in a formulation of the *pactum salutis*.

The *Pactum Salutis* and the *Historia Revelationis*

With Owen's two enigmatic references to the Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis* in mind, we are prepared to evaluate Carl Trueman's assessment of Owen's pneumatological contribution to Reformed orthodox formulations of the doctrine. He claims that Owen makes “a significant contribution...in his attention to the role of the Holy Spirit with reference to covenant” by specifically “describing the

78. Owen, *Works*, III:193. He refers to Isaiah 59:21 in support of this conclusion.

79. Owen, *Works*, XII:496.

80. Owen, *Works*, XII:497.

various roles played in the covenant of redemption by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; and in so doing,” Trueman continues, “he is being consistent with his basic premise that every external act of God is in its deepest sense an act of the whole Trinity.”⁸¹ After delineating the roles of the Father and Son, Trueman describes the Spirit’s role in Owen’s formulation as follows: “Finally,” he writes, “the Holy Spirit is engaged in the work of incarnation and of Christ’s earthly ministry, his oblation, and in his resurrection.”⁸² Furthermore, a few pages later Trueman interprets the Spirit’s works in the *historia revelationis* as an “expression” of the *pactum salutis*:

Owen’s elaboration of the Trinitarian structure of the covenant of redemption continued throughout his career, and receives perhaps its most sophisticated expression in his *Pneumatologia*, where he employs some of the most sophisticated concepts in patristic Christology particularly to expand upon the role of the Holy Spirit relative to the Incarnation.⁸³

Trueman’s claims involve a conflation, however; whereas the *pactum salutis* belongs to the *opera Dei ad intra*, the *historia revelationis* belongs to the *opera Dei ad extra*. Christ’s incarnation and earthly ministry belong to the *historia revelationis* (an *ad extra* work). Thus, they are not a part of the *pactum salutis* (an *ad intra* work). Yet, Trueman describes the *pactum* as an *ad extra* work, and he explains the Spirit’s role in the *pactum salutis* in terms of the *historia revelationis* (i.e., “Holy Spirit is engaged in the work of incarnation,” etc.). These assertions, then, which view the Spirit’s work in the *historia revelationis* as belonging to the *pactum*, conflate the *opera Dei ad intra* and the *opera Dei ad extra*.⁸⁴

These conflations appear to be anomalies in Trueman’s overall excellent interpretation of Owen’s *pactum* formulation. In the very next paragraph, for example, Trueman properly distinguishes the Holy Spirit’s role in the *pactum* (*ad intra*) from His role in *historia revelationis* (*ad extra*).⁸⁵ Furthermore, it may be possible to interpret the

81. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 86.

82. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 86–87.

83. Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 92–93.

84. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, s.v., *historia revelationis*, *opera Dei ad extra*, *opera Dei ad intra*, *ordo salutis*, *pactum salutis*.

85. “First, the Christological focus of the covenant [i.e., the *pactum salutis*] indicates that it is rather the foundation of salvation history, its necessary Trinitarian

passage which Trueman incorrectly cites to support the Spirit's role in the *pactum*⁸⁶ as indeed referring to the *pactum*, albeit indirectly rather than directly. Applying Trueman's "basic axiom" rule mentioned earlier wherein trinitarian "acts *ad extra* mirror the internal intratrinitarian relationships,"⁸⁷ we could argue by inference that the Spirit's role in the *historia revelationis* mirrors His prior role in the *opera Dei ad intra* (i.e., specifically in the *pactum salutis*). In this light it may be possible to interpret Owen's remarks about the Spirit's role in the overall economy of salvation as indirectly relating to the Spirit's role in the *pactum*. Speaking of this overall economy, Owen writes:

And thus have we discovered the blessed agents and undertakers in this work, their several actions and orderly concurrence unto the whole; which, though they may be thus distinguished, yet they are not so divided but that every one must be ascribed to the whole nature, whereof each person is "in solidum" partaker. And as they begin it, so they will jointly carry along the application of it unto its ultimate issue and accomplishment....⁸⁸

Applying Trueman's "axiom" rule, an inference from the *opera Dei ad extra* to the *opera Dei ad intra* could be stated like this: if "the blessed agents" work in their several actions of salvation via an "orderly concurrence unto the whole," and if "each person is 'in solidum' partaker" of the other persons' works both *ad intra* and *ad extra*, then the Holy Spirit must have a role in the *pactum salutis* (*opera Dei ad intra*) insofar as the Spirit works "in solidum" and by "concurrence unto the whole" in all of the *opera Dei ad extra*.

Nevertheless, in light of our investigation of Owen's mere two explicit references to the Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis*, Trueman's claim that Owen is a singular developer of the Spirit's role in the *pactum* seems too strong. Unlike other formulators such as John Gill⁸⁹

presupposition, if you like, which then makes the historical ministry of Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit in applying the same, and thus the salvation of the elect, an historical reality. It is the nexus between eternity and time with respect to salvation." Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 87.

86. Trueman cites a brief chapter entitled, "The peculiar actions of the Holy Spirit in this business," in Owen, *Works*, X:178–79; Trueman, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic*, 87n75.

87. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*, 132.

88. Owen, *Works*, X:179.

89. See "Of the Concern the Spirit of God Has in the Covenant of Grace"

and Johannes Cocceius,⁹⁰ Owen does not provide any elaboration on the Holy Spirit's role specifically in the *pactum*.

Conclusions

Our inquiry into the Holy Spirit's role in John Owen's doctrine of the *pactum salutis* has demonstrated (1) that Owen's formulation of the *pactum* is interrelated with his formulation of trinitarian counsels concerning man's salvation, and (2) that Owen assigns the Spirit a role in the *pactum*, but without elaboration.

The Trinitarian Consilium Dei and the Pactum Salutis

Owen presents his formulation of the *pactum* in two steps. First, he develops the idea of trinitarian transactions in the *consilium Dei*. Second, he argues that the *pactum* is the *modus* of these trinitarian transactions. In this light his formulation of the *pactum* in Exercitation XXVIII cannot be properly understood apart from his prior argument for a trinitarian *consilium Dei* in Exercitation XXVII. This correlation has been consistently underdeveloped. Not a single scholar who has written on Owen's *pactum* formulation has referenced Exercitation XXVII, and many studies abstract Exercitation XXVIII as if it were Owen's entire formulation of the *pactum*. Therefore, to obtain a full picture of Owen's formulation, Part IV of his Exercitations on Hebrews must be read as an integrated whole.

Owen's two-step approach is not idiosyncratic. Other Reformed orthodox formulators of the *pactum* begin with the *consilium* and then move to the *pactum*. One specific implication for Owen scholarship, then, is that a comprehensive treatment of Owen's *pactum* formulation needs to include a robust study of Owen's *consilium* formulation. Furthermore, there is warrant for raising the question of whether this ignored aspect of Owen's formulation has been similarly ignored in other studies of Reformed orthodox formulations of the *pactum salutis*.

The Holy Spirit's Role in the Pactum Salutis

In quantitative terms, our investigation yields four explicit references to the Holy Spirit in Owen's formulation of the *consilium Dei* regarding

in Gill, *A Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, ch. 14 (pp. 173–75). In contrast to Owen, note that Gill devotes an entire chapter to the Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis*.

90. van Asselt, *The Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius*, 233–36.

man's salvation. Furthermore, we found two explicit references to the Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis*. If we follow the reasoning of Owen's two-step formulation in his Exercitations, then by inference we can conclude that Owen refers to the Holy Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis* at least six times throughout his writings. Thus it is incorrect, on the one hand, to charge Owen's formulation of the *pactum salutis* with binitarianism or sub-trinitarianism for an alleged lack of references to the Spirit's role therein. On the other hand, the claim that Owen is a singular developer of the Spirit's role in the *pactum* is overstated. The most that can be said is that he neither ignores completely nor develops satisfyingly the Spirit's role in the *pactum*.

In qualitative terms, Owen provides no explication of the Spirit's role in the *pactum salutis*. Many of his six explicit references to the Spirit occur as mere passing comments in contexts where his focus is directed either toward the roles of the Father and Son exclusively or toward the general trinitarian principles regarding personal appropriations of the Godhead's undivided will. Furthermore, in contrast to other Reformed formulators of the *pactum*, he does not provide separate discussions or elaborations on the Spirit's role. What he does provide, however, is a significant, fully trinitarian Reformed orthodox formulation of the *pactum salutis*.