of conscience”. This cultural practice during the first half of the seventeenth century of writing and reading a “book of conscience” that chronicled sin and salvation by way of journaling can be seen as the cause of the radical growth of Puritan journaling that burgeoned in the 1650s and beyond. Puritans regarded the writing of their experiences as a record of God’s work within their lives, and of their lives as a record of work towards God. They used their journaling to better understand sin and salvation and their personal involvement in this. In a postscript, Alexandra Walsham concludes that this volume “delineates some of the complex and delicate ways in which clergy and laity negotiated the theological ruptures wrought by the reformation, but inevitably it cannot address many others.” This collection of essays is a very welcome contribution to a growing corpus of studies that researches core religious preoccupations of men and women in early modern England.

Dr. Reinier W. de Koeijer
Minister Protestant Church Bilthoven
rwdkoeyer@filternet.nl


The theologian John Owen looms large in the history of Puritanism, Dissent, and Reformed Orthodoxy. Between the 1640s and 1680s, he published eighty books containing eight and a half million words. His commentary on the book of Hebrews alone was a mammoth undertaking comprising over two million words in 2000 folio pages. And he did much more than just write. During the two decades of the English Revolution, he was an Essex pastor, chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, Dean of Christ Church, Vice Chancellor of Oxford University, and the ‘Atlas of Independency’. After the Restoration, he was (with Richard Baxter) the nation’s leading nonconformist divine. At his funeral in 1683, one participant observed the presence of the carriages of sixty-seven nobles and gentlemen.

Crawford Gribben admits to approaching his subject with ‘trepidation’ and modestly confesses that ‘Owen has defeated me’ (ix, xiii). Yet this book is a landmark in the study of Owen and seventeenth-century Puritanism, not least because its author displays an impressive command of theology, history, and literary studies (the back cover carries commendations from an eminent theologian, an eminent literary scholar, and an eminent historian). The book’s success also owes much to the wealth of research and writing since W.H. Goold’s 24-volume Victorian edition of The Works of John Owen was republished by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1965. The Goold edition was
arranged in thematic rather than chronological order, giving the impression of a majestic architectonic intellectual structure. It has contributed to the rather ahistorical nature of Owen studies, a field dominated by theologians most of whom have relatively little interest in the specific contexts in which Owen operated in Essex, Oxford or London. Although the theologians have done much to illuminate Owen’s thought, Gribben is rightly critical of their “freeze-frame” approach and ‘static view’ (10). By contrast, this biography reveals Owen to be a theologian on the move, reacting in sometimes startling ways to a series of dramatic shifts in political and ecclesiastical affairs. In this respect, Gribben is indebted to the pioneering historical research by Peter Toon and Sarah Cook, and cites the inspiration of Tim Cooper’s 2011 study of Owen, Baxter and Nonconformity, a work which did much to historicise and humanise Owen.

Gribben’s book is arranged in nine chapters whose titles trace the arc of Owen’s ecclesiastical career: Apprentice Puritan, Emerging Theologian, Frustrated Pastor, Army Preacher, Oxford Reformer, Cromwellian Courtier, Defeated Revolutionary, Restoration Politique, Nonconformist Divine. There are unifying themes. One is how Owen changed his mind. The first set of changes occurred in the 1640s, when he embraced a high Calvinist doctrine of limited or definite atonement and a Congregationalist ecclesiology. This is well known, but more surprising is another shift in intellectual positions that Gribben detects in the early 1660s, when Owen rejected the scholastic method that had hitherto dominated Reformed orthodoxy, eulogised ‘our late king of glorious memory’, and dismissed confessions of faith as ‘a Procrustes’ bed’ (10). Indeed, one of the book’s startling assertions is that by ‘abandon[ing] his early sacramentalism’ and prioritising ‘the subjective over the objective’, Owen ‘was subverting, not epitomizing, the Reformed theological tradition that he is often believed to personify’ (271).

A second theme is announced in the subtitle: Experiences of Defeat (with its nod to the late Christopher Hill). Even in the 1650s, Owen was outmanoeuvred in Oxford and marginalised at the Cromwellian court. In 1660, he was devastated by the collapse of the revolution, and the restoration of monarchy and episcopal hierarchy. He lived to see Puritanism scorned, Nonconformity persecuted, and Calvinism repudiated. By his death, he felt that his life’s work had failed. However, a final theme is Owen’s enduring legacy. The book begins by noting that Owen is ‘attracting a wider readership than ever before’ (4) and ends by arguing that Owen ‘did more than most historians have realized to lay the theoretical foundation’ for the evangelicalism that emerged in the 1730s (273). This arguably overplays Owen’s role and his readership, though if Owen is seen as a significant influence on Isaac Watts, the case looks stronger. In any case, it is clear that what survived of Owen, at least until the revival of interest among theologians over the past generation, was his
practical divinity, with its stress on the work of the Holy Spirit in the soul of the believer. He was, in other words, a significant shaper of Reformed Pietism.

If the book has a weakness, it lies in the relative lack of space given to the two decades after the Restoration, when Owen wrote and published more than in the first half of his career. Part of the problem, of course, is that Owen was often working in the shadows after 1660, in contrast to his very public career in the 1650s. Even here, though, Gribben’s account has much to add to what was previously known. This review has only been able to sketch the broad outlines of John Owen and English Puritanism, but readers will find every chapter contains powerful insights.

Prof. Dr. John Coffey
University of Leicester
jrdc1@le.ac.uk


George Whitefield was one of the best-known and most widely travelled evangelical revivalists of the eighteenth-century. However, whereas the life and legacy of John Wesley, Whitefield’s fellow evangelist and antagonist, has been analyzed regularly, the significance of Whitefield has received considerably less attention. Therefore, this collection of articles is a welcome contribution to a steady stream of publications regarding this remarkable evangelist.

The first article, Boyd Schlenther’s original research of Whitefield’s life and character, shows that his personal relationships were often tumultuous and that his character was complex. Important is Mark Olsen’s study regarding Whitefield’s conversion and his early theological development. It shows that the evangelist began as an Oxford Methodist and only later came to a Calvinistic understanding of the evangelical gospel, especially with regard to justification by faith alone. His theological journey towards Calvinism began in the months following his new birth experience, when he read literature that reflected a moderate Calvinism. Whitefield embraced his Calvinism incrementally during the next several years, although it was not until a season of deep spiritual crisis in the autumn of 1739 that he was fully convinced of Calvinistic principles. William Gibson writes about Whitefield and the Church of