

## OWEN, JOHN

John Owen was a 17th-century English pastor, theologian, and educator who served the cause of nonconformity during the tumultuous days of the English Civil Wars and Interregnum period.

### Early Life and Education

John Owen was born at Stadhampton in Oxfordshire in 1616. He received his bachelor's (1632) and master's (1635) degrees from Queen's College at Oxford. Like many students and faculty with Puritan convictions, Owen was forced to leave Oxford in 1637 due to the new regulations enforced by Archbishop William Laud. He made a respectable living serving as a chaplain in the home of Sir Robert Dormer, First Earl of Carnarvon.

### Significant Contributions

Owen occupied a number of important positions during the English Civil Wars and the Cromwellian Protectorate. He served as a pastor in the community of Coggeshall in Essex during the 1640s. He preached several times for the Parliamentary armies under Lord Thomas Fairfax and was ultimately asked to preach before Parliament the day after Charles I was executed. He never once referred to the previous day's execution in his sermon. Owen was elected to Parliament but was quickly reassigned to accompany Oliver Cromwell on his Irish campaign as Cromwell's personal chaplain. Owen provided leadership in reorganizing the affairs of Trinity College in Dublin during this campaign. He also accompanied Cromwell on his campaign in Scotland in 1650. Upon his return to England, Owen was appointed by Cromwell to be the dean of Christ Church Cathedral (1651) and vice-chancellor of Oxford University (1652). Despite his support of Cromwell, Owen opposed proposals that Cromwell take the title of king. It was possibly because of this opposition that Owen lost his vice-chancellorship under Cromwell's son, Richard. He also lost some support among Presbyterian leaders because of his role in the drafting of the Congregationalist Savoy Declaration in 1658. Owen's loss of Presbyterian support resulted in his losing the deanery of Christ Church.

Like other nonconformists in Restoration England, Owen spent his final years laboring under governmental restrictions and arguing for religious toleration. Owen moved to Stadhampton, where he preached until 1662. The Clarendon Codes ultimately impeded his ability to preach freely, so he decided to move to London. During this period, Owen had two opportunities to leave England for the American colonies. The first was an invitation to assume the pulpit of the Congregation Church in Boston in 1663. Owen declined this invitation, as well as

an invitation to serve as president of Harvard University in 1670. He energetically promoted religious toleration in England in the latter years of his career. He also attempted to enlist the assistance of Richard Baxter in uniting nonconformists in advocacy for toleration. Owen wrote a personal note of thanks to King Charles II when the monarch issued the Royal Declaration of Indulgence in 1672. He published and preached for another decade, until his death in 1683.

### Significant Writings

John Owen was a prolific author of influential theological treatises that continue to be read by theologians and students of 17th-century history. His *A Display of Arminianism* (1642) was a critical analysis of Arminian theology. *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647) presented an extensive analysis of the atonement from a Reformed perspective. Specifically, Owen defended the Reformed concept of particular atonement. He contributed a reflection on the nature of sanctification in *Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656). Owen attacked the religious repression of the Restoration monarchy in *On Apostasy* (1676). His seven-volume *Commentary on Hebrews* is still considered a classic of exegesis and exposition.

### References and Resources

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- Toon, Peter. 1971. *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen*. Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press.
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## OXFORD UNIVERSITY

### History

Oxford University's long history ensured that it played a part in the theological debates of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. In the post-Reformation era, its scholars contributed to the translation that became the Authorized Version of the Bible (or King James Version) in 1611, and later the Oxford University Press secured one of the valuable licenses to print the text. After the Enlightenment, the university's religious character diminished, but even in the 20th century, it contributed