John Owen and the Civil War apocalypse. Preaching, prophecy and politics. By Martyn Calvin Cowan. (Religious Cultures in the Early Modern World). Pp. xvi + 219. London–New York: Routledge, 2018. £105. 978 1 138 08776 7

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Though John Owen (1616–83) was perhaps the most significant English theologian of the seventeenth century, he has not always attracted commensurate attention from historians. Contemporaries like John Bunyan (1628–88) and Richard Baxter (1615–91) have generated vigorous interest among a wide range of scholars, yet Owen's following has often been drawn from a narrower stream. He has proved intensely fascinating to historical theologians, but far less so to those engaged in social, cultural and political history. But with the publication of Martyn Cowan's *John Owen and the Civil War apocalypse*, those sceptical of Owen's wider relevance have been given good reason to reconsider. Following a methodological approach similar to that of Tim Cooper's *John Owen, Richard Baxter and the formation of Nonconformity* (London 2011) and Crawford Gribben's *John Owen and English Puritanism* (Oxford 2016), Cowan has produced a work that takes Owen's theological ideas very seriously indeed, and yet does not interpret them apart from an equally serious inquiry into the broader historical context out of which they arose and in which they were intended to be received. The book accomplishes this by listening carefully to Owen's 'prophetic preaching' during the years 1646 to 1659 and documenting how both his apocalyptic worldview and his own self-understanding as a prophetic figure decisively shaped his role in the emerging British republic. To this end, the book's first two chapters systematically expound the eschatologically-charged vision of history through which Owen made sense of his rapidly changing world. Chapter iii then examines how Owen pressed his audiences to active engagement and further reformation, urging them to 'improve' the 'providential mercies' unfolding around them. In chapters iv, v and vi Cowan considers Owen's recommendations for how civil magistrates might most helpfully and appropriately facilitate the progress of godly reformation and thus stave off the divine judgements that would follow any failure to do so. The book's second half will thus be of particular interest to historians of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, as it brings a fresh perspective to the vexing question of precisely how Congregationalists during the 1650s understood the ideal relationship between Church and State. Along the way, Cowan is able to make several significant adjustments to our understanding of Owen's theo-political trajectory, arguing persuasively, for example, that Owen's eschatological views did not shift during the early 1650s as some have contended. But the book's most significant historiographical intervention is in its insistence, echoing Gribben, that Owen scholars resist 'an abstract approach to the study of Owen's theology', one which would inevitably 'portray him as an isolated and scholastic theologian' (p. 6). Cowan's portrayal, by contrast, is of an Owen who 'self-identifies as a prophet speaking in momentous times' and who consistently implored his audiences to respond appropriately 'to what he believed to be a unique moment in the eschatological drama' (p. 183). This volume makes an excellent contribution to the ongoing renaissance in Owen studies and helpfully illuminates the degree to which apocalyptic fervour shaped the development of Cromwellian England.

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