

# Covenant Theology and The Westminster Confession

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## 1. *The Covenant Idea*

It is commonplace to speak of the central importance of the covenant idea in the Bible. We divide Scripture into Old and New Testaments, but the Greek word translated ‘testament’ would be better rendered *covenant*. The old covenant is that made with Moses and Israel at Sinai, and the new covenant is that in Christ’s blood (Luke 22:20). So if we are going to understand Christ’s saving work we need to understand God’s covenant of which Christ is Mediator (Heb 8:6) and Guarantor (Heb 7:22). In that sense all Christian theology is covenant theology.

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for covenant (*berith*) is found some 285 times, mostly in regard to agreements made by God with humans. The same is true in the New Testament for the equivalent Greek word *diatheke*, found 33 times. Many of these references are quotations of Old Testament passages referring to God’s covenant with humans. As well as specific references, you can have a covenant without the word being used, as for the covenant with David in 2 Samuel 7, which is only elsewhere (eg. 2 Sam 23:5; Psa 89:3) described as such. You can also have language closely associated with covenants without the word itself. The most common of these is the Hebrew word *chesed*, which was usually translated ‘mercy’ in the KJV but which has the idea of steadfast love, the blessing of those who are faithful in a covenant relationship.

Despite much greater knowledge today of covenants and contracts in the Ancient Near East, we are no more certain as to the origin of the word *berith* than our fathers were 400 years ago. We need to be careful about forcing every usage of the term into one pre-conceived mould. For example, the standard Old Testament expression is ‘to cut a covenant’ because a covenant was often associated with a sacrificial ritual. The term ‘cut’ is usually translated in our English versions by ‘made’. However, sacrifice was not always literally necessary. The covenant with David is not associated with a sacrificial ritual, yet it is said to have been ‘cut’ with David in the Hebrew text of Psalm 89:3.

So what is the meaning of this word ‘covenant’ Biblically speaking? It clearly involves an agreement, and older Reformed writers often thought of it chiefly in that way, as a promise suspended on a condition, a contract, but then they qualified that by explanations. They stressed that divine-human covenants were always at God’s initiative, flowing from his goodness and were not mutually negotiated agreements. They stressed, too, that the fulfilment of the conditions was not supplied by man to obtain God’s blessing as a kind of business deal, but was itself a blessing of the covenant given to God’s elect. And they also stressed God’s goodness in entering into covenant with humans. We shall return to the definition of covenant later.

## 2. The God of covenant

However, the proper vantage point from which to view such an important subject as covenant has to be considered. I remember many years ago the wise words of the Scottish writer Dr Hugh Martin (1821-85). In his valuable 1870 book on *The Atonement* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, reprint 1976) he insisted that the atonement was properly discussed only in the context of it being a covenant transaction, and thus the principle of Jesus’ representative headship for his people was basic. This meant that the use of some abstract philosophical ideas to buttress the doctrine of a definite and substitutionary atonement could be avoided, and other objections to the orthodox teaching could be more adequately refuted. Developing Martin’s thought a little, I would like to suggest that covenant theology can be adequately discussed only when we consider it in the light of Biblical teaching of the One God who is Triune.

To speak of God in a fully Biblical way is not to speak of God as First Cause or Unmoved Mover or Great Architect of the Universe. The short creed of Israel, the *Shema* [Hebrew for “Hear”], is worth noting. It reads: “Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deut 6:4). This emphasis on the oneness of God means Israel is to worship him alone. The name LORD speaks of God as living and ever-present to help his people, and its meaning was demonstrated in the events of the Exodus (cf. Ex 6:3). Another translation is: “Hear O Israel, the LORD our God is the only LORD.” On this view the emphasis is that the LORD is the one whose character corresponds with the revelation he has given in mighty deeds for the salvation of his people. He alone is the God who saves. That is the supreme reason why they are to love him in return (v.5).

The New Testament citation of this passage by Jesus confirms its importance (Mark 12:29). Paul also refers to it: “We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live “ (1 Cor 8:4-6). In line with this we can recognise that, while the meaning of the name LORD was disclosed in part in the events of the Exodus from Egypt (cf. Ex 6:3), full disclosure comes in the saving deeds of God in Christ. Consequently, when Jesus parts from his disciples with the command to baptise “in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19), we have an unpacking of the covenant name LORD. God can only be properly thought of in this light. God is one in being or essence but within the singleness of his being there are three personal distinctions. Put plainly, we may say that God’s life is not a solitary, lonely one, but has a richness and fullness reflecting the fact that God is a fellowship.

Now to say God is a fellowship is not to say God is a committee, for a committee implies various individuals each with their distinctive origin, and might easily lead us to tritheism, belief in three Gods. To say God is a fellowship is to say that there is an intimacy of loving relationship, and reciprocity in the nature of God. It is to insist that the most basic reality is this Triune God who exists in an amazing fellowship of pure self-giving love and mutual joy. And it is also to insist that this God created humans not because he was lonely or bored, but because he desired to share his riches, to share himself, with a creature made in his image. God is not self-centred but self-giving. That is what he is like. God is love.

The biblical covenants are God’s covenants not ours, and need to be considered in the light of God’s character. This intimacy and fellowship between the persons of the trinity already noted is expressed in commitments and obligations. John records Jesus’ assertion that the Father had given him a work to complete and sent him into the world accordingly (John 6:36; 17:4). We also have the Father’s promise and bestowal of a reward for Christ’s completion of the work given him by the Father (Isa 53:12; Matt 28:19; Phil 2:9). He will have the nations as his inheritance (Psa 2:8).

Likewise the Spirit is referred to in terms of this intimacy and fellowship and commitment. Jesus says: “If you love me you will obey what I

command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth.... When the Counsellor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me... He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears... He will bring glory to me by taking what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you” (John 14:15-17; 15:26; 16:13-15). So singular and essential is the Spirit’s work in making Christ known that we have a virtual identity affirmed in the striking expression “the Lord is the Spirit” in 2 Corinthians 4:17.

While it is proper to see anticipations of the doctrine of the trinity in the Old Testament, it is really only as we see the redemptive action of God disclosed in the New Testament that the distinctions in the very depths of deity itself are appreciated. By the same token, the truth of the Trinity would never have gained hold if it had not been intimately connected with the Christian understanding of salvation. Thus, the strictly monotheistic disciples have no embarrassment in affirming the deity of the Son and the Spirit in such a manner that we might well call the New Testament a distinctively trinitarian volume.

In the Reformed understanding of the Christian faith trinitarianism really comes into its own, or should do. On the basis of such Scriptures as those already quoted we speak about the Father planning salvation, the Son purchasing it and the Spirit applying it. In speaking this way we are speaking of inter-personal relationships among the members of the Trinity, of loving undertakings with responsibilities and promised blessings. We have in this, I submit, all the essential marks of a covenant. In fact, the passages cited are evidence of what theologians commonly call the covenant of redemption, that is the arrangement by which salvation is provided for God’s elect. This plan is worked out in history in the twin covenants of works and of grace.

### **3. The origins of covenant theology**

Here we need to pause. For while all Christian theology must reckon with the idea of covenant, the Reformed confessions do not speak with one voice on the subject. Such outstanding Reformed creeds as the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Second Helvetic Confession (1566) do not have any reference to a covenant of works with Adam. It appears first in a creed

in the Irish Articles of 1615. These are a major source for the Westminster Confession of 1646 where the twin-covenant scheme, of works and of grace, is worked out in some detail. Further, as I will show below, the Westminster Confession itself represents a consensus formulation which does not settle all issues that were discussed in the 1640s. Despite its absence from the creeds of the Dutch church, the twin-covenant scheme is nevertheless the norm in Dutch theology from the 1620s on. For example, in the introduction to the *Staten-Vertaling*, the Dutch Bible translation commissioned by the Synod of Dort and published in 1637, one of the introductory items includes such statements as:

The word ‘Testament’ is a Latin word [Testamentum]. It translates the Greek word *Diatheke*, which the Greek Translators used to express the Hebrew word *Berith*, meaning ‘Covenant.’ Thereby is to be understood the Covenant itself which God made with man[kind] in order, under certain conditions, to give him everlasting life. That Covenant is twofold – the Old and the New. The Old is that which God made with the first man before the fall, in which everlasting life was promised on condition of an altogether perfect obedience and keeping of the Law. Therefore it is called the Covenant of the Law, which God [later] once again held forth to the Israelites.... Because this condition has been transgressed with all men, and cannot now be fulfilled by any man [save Jesus], they must seek their salvation in another Covenant. That is called New. It consists of God foreordaining His Son as a Mediator. He promises everlasting life, on condition that we trust in Him. It is called the Covenant of Grace. Because of its various administrations to mankind, it is also called Old and New. The Old is the administration of that Covenant before the coming of the Mediator who was promised to Abraham and his descendants from his seed – and portrayed by many kind of ceremonies described by Moses. The New is the administration of that same Covenant – after the Son of God and Mediator of that Covenant came in the flesh and effected the reconciliation of man with God. These two Covenants are indeed one and the same as regards their essence - for both promise forgiveness of sins and salvation and everlasting life, on the condition that one trust the Mediator. But they are distinguished in respect of the administration of both. The New is much clearer, is without illustrations, and extends itself to all nations.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Text translated from page 5 of the facsimile of the 1637 edition (Kampen: Kok, 1915) by Emeritus-Professor F. Nigel Lee, Brisbane, Australia, July 2002., cited from Rowland S. Ward, *God and Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant* (Wantirna: New Melbourne Press 2003) 64-65. The notes in the *Staten-*

Perhaps the finest exposition of covenant theology pre-1800 is the work of Herman Witsius (1636-1708), successively Professor of Theology at Franeker, Utrecht and Leiden. The first edition *Œconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* was issued in 1677. It went through several printings in Latin, was translated into Dutch in 1716, and into English in 1763. There were at least nine printings in English in the next 75 years. Another of the very best expositions of the covenant of works is by the greatest of Dutch theologians, Herman Bavinck (1854-1921).

But if the notion that the covenant of works is not a genuinely Reformed position must be dismissed, where did the idea of a covenant of works with Adam come from, and why did it so readily take hold? The precise answer to the first part of the question is not entirely clear. For example, in his *Commentary on Galatians*, written in 1546, Calvin insists that no reward is due to works of obedience apart from a covenant by God in which he graciously agrees to accept them. However, before the law of Moses was given there was no such covenant, he says.<sup>2</sup> In 1562 Zachary Ursinus, one of the authors of the Heidelberg Catechism, speaks of a “covenant of nature” (*foedus naturale*) in reference to the law of nature including the moral law given at creation and repeated at Sinai, but he does not develop thus further. Still, he does define law in a way requiring a reward for obedience:

‘A Law *in general* is a sentence commanding that which is honest, and binding the reasonable creature to obedience, with a promise of reward if that obedience be performed, and threatening of punishment, if it be violated.’<sup>3</sup>

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*Vertaling* were authored by Johannes Bogerman (Professor of Theology at Franeker), Willem Baudartius (the Dordt Synod’s Old Testament translator), Gerson Bucerus (Hebrew and History Scholar of Leiden), Antonius Thisius (Professor of Theology at Harderwijk), Jacob Roland (First Assessor at the Synod of Dordt), Herman Faukelius of Middelburg, Petrus Cornelius of Enkhuizen, Festus Hommius (Professor of Homiletics and Dogmatics at Leiden), Antonius Walaeus (Professor of Greek & Philosophy at Middelburg) and Jodocus Hoingius (Rector of Harderwijk).

<sup>2</sup> *The Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* [1548] translated by T.H.L. Parker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1965) 59 (on Gal 3:17).

<sup>3</sup> Zachary Ursinus, *A Collection of Certain Learned Discourses* translated from the Latin text of David Pareus by I.H. (London: J. Broome, 1600) 256 (italics in original).

A number of writers speak of a covenant of works in regard to the Mosaic covenant, but it is in Amandus Polanus (1561-1610) of Basel that we find the first outline statement of a post-creation, pre-fall covenant of works with Adam. Robert Rollock, Principal of the University of Edinburgh expounds the essentials at greater length in 1597 in his *A Treatise of God's Effectual Calling*. His comment is often quoted: "all the word of God pertains to some covenant for God speaks nothing to man without the covenant."

The teaching is soon found everywhere. With some variations of terminology that remind one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century theologian John Murray, it is found in William Bucan of Lausanne (d.1603). It's in John Ball's catechism with notes first issued in 1615, George Walker's *The Manifold Wisdom of God* (written 1616, published 1640), in William Ames *Marrow of Theology* (1623), in *A Body of Divinity* compiled by James Ussher in the early 1620s from various authors but not published until 1645, in Johannes Wollebius of Basel's *Compendium* (1626), in John Preston's *The New Covenant* (1629), and in any number of subsequent writings.

In some earlier studies Johannes Cocceius (1603-69) is credited as the originator of Covenant theology. This is obviously erroneous. A student of Ames, Cocceius' first published work bearing on the subject belongs to 1648 and his covenant theology was only adequately developed in the enlarged edition of 1654. The Westminster Confession was complete by 1646.

Reasons offered for the ready acceptance of a covenant of works with Adam vary. They include trade, social and political influences, as well as the impact of Ramist logic in its use of dichotomy to bring out the nature of things. Some early covenant theologians, such as Polanus, Rollock and Ames, were strongly influenced by Ramus. But it was also natural for theological refinement to occur as Protestantism moved from existence as a Protest movement "to its destiny as a self-sufficient ecclesiastical establishment with its own distinct academic, confessional and dogmatic needs."<sup>4</sup> However, the move is really from implicit to explicit, as God's relationship to humanity was further reflected upon.

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<sup>4</sup> R.A. Muller, *God, Creation and Providence in the Thought of Jacob Arminius* Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 4-5.

The covenant of works with Adam is not as such a revolutionary departure from the views of early Reformers such as Calvin.<sup>5</sup> They recognised Christ's work as the Last Adam as a covenantal work. Jesus himself refers to "the new covenant in my blood," and passages such as Romans 5:12ff, and 1 Corinthians 15:22 draw parallels between Adam and Christ.<sup>6</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century covenant theologian Hugh Martin states:

‘...it is more from what is partly the analogy and partly the antithesis of the two covenants, when set forth in the mutual light which they reflect on each other, that the covenant of works becomes manifest, than in any very express or abundant evidence of its own alone.’<sup>7</sup>

So I see a natural development of this doctrine taking place as Reformers continued to study the scripture. Paul's use of the story of Sarah and Hagar to represent two covenants (Gal 4:21ff) is significant, since they lived before Moses.<sup>8</sup> To see the covenants they symbolise as quite opposite, as Paul does, suggests a covenant of law and bondage existed in Abraham's time as well as a covenant of grace and freedom. Given that the covenant at Sinai did not annul the promise to Abraham (Gal 3:17), and was not in itself a covenant of works, even if some were in effect using it that way, there must have been a legal covenant before Moses, namely a covenant with Adam who had the law written on his heart but broke it. Some such was one of a number of likely chains of reasoning.<sup>9</sup> It was certainly an easy and logical step to recognise the First Adam as standing in a covenantal relationship with God. The covenant requiring obedience, which was broken by Adam, was seen as fulfilled by Jesus Christ in accordance with the covenant made with Abraham. Jesus, Abraham's offspring, obtained salvation for his people by his perfect obedience to the Father.

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<sup>5</sup> P.A. Lillback, *The Binding of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 276-304 discusses the question 'Is there a Covenant of Works in Calvin's Theology?' and illustrates the point made.

<sup>6</sup> As far as I can see, 1 Corinthians 15:42-49 was rarely cited in the literature, apparently not being seen as having relevance to the eschatology of the pre-fall state of humanity. Exceptions include William Bucan and Samuel Rutherford.

<sup>7</sup> *The Atonement in its relations to the Covenant, the Priesthood, the Intercession of our Lord* (Edinburgh: Knox Press, 1976), p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> Rollock uses the analogy of Sarah and Hagar in his *Treatise on Effectual Calling* (1597) when dealing with the covenant of works (in Chapter 2).

<sup>9</sup> In 1661, Patrick Gillespie, apparently not aware of the developments in the late 1580s, offers a proof of the covenant of works by reasoning back from Galatians 4:24 in the terms summarised in this paragraph (*Ark of the Covenant*, 181-183).

#### 4. The advantages of the twin-covenant idea

It is sometimes said that the idea of a covenant with Adam was valued because it enabled a “softening of the rigid doctrine of predestination”<sup>10</sup> – a hardly credible claim in its usual form given the firm teaching on predestination in the Westminster Confession. Others suggest that it facilitated universalising of the Decalogue as an obligation on all humanity so as to ground Puritan sabbatarianism. Still, the real advantages are not so marginal.

Prior to the covenant of works becoming explicit Reformed confessions had spoken of the transmission of sin in terms of hereditary evil (French, 1559), hereditary disease (Belgic, 1561), a corruption that is naturally engendered of the offspring of Adam (Thirty-nine Articles, 1563), or innate corruption derived or propagated in us from our first parents (Second Helvetic, 1566). The covenant idea enables the concept of imputation to come to the fore. Thus the Irish Articles (1615) cite Romans 5:19 [art. 22], and the draft revision of the Thirty-nine Articles by the Westminster Assembly (1643) specifically states that such corruption propagated from Adam is “together with his first sin imputed” [art. 9]. Thus a more Scriptural representation of the relationship of Adam and Christ (Romans 5) is possible in terms of the principle of representation or federal headship – and this of course counters the Arminian view of the extent of the atonement, and also assures the final salvation of those for whom Christ died.<sup>11</sup>

The Adamic covenant also gives the ability to emphasise God’s goodness to humanity, since “God in covenanting with his Creatures doth not expect any benefit or advantage by them, but does it to show how willing and ready he is to communicate his blessings to them.”<sup>12</sup> The high point of this is revealed in the promise of a blessing humanity could not otherwise attain. There is also the assurance of God’s consistency in his relationship with his creatures because of his covenant commitment. A further benefit is the focus on the progressive unfolding of God’s covenantal purpose, which is a helpful corrective to any tendency to impose dogmatic conclusions on the text of Scripture. It is this point that concerned Cocceius. While his

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<sup>10</sup> Jan Rohls, *Reformed Confessions; Theology from Zurich to Barmen* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1998) 24

<sup>11</sup> Cf. B. Berends, ‘The Obedience of Jesus Christ’ in *Vox Reformata*, #66 (2001) 38.

<sup>12</sup> John Barret, *Good will toward men* (London, 1675) 44.

elaboration had its faults, and caused great conflict with the followers of Voetius, in many ways he can be seen as pioneering biblical theology.

## 5. Definition of covenant

Before considering the formulation of covenant theology in the Westminster Confession a further look at how “covenant” in reference to God and Adam was defined will be in order. Polanus called a covenant “a bargain which God has made with men,” Rollock, “a promise under some one certain condition,” Ames, “the law of God or his covenant with man in the creation was *do this and you will live; if you do it not you will die*,” Ussher’s compilation, “an agreement which it pleaseth Almighty God to enter into with man, concerning his everlasting condition.” Edward Leigh (1633) suggests “a solemn Contract” but as distinct from a mutual promise it involves some solemnity, thus “a Covenant is a bundle of promises bound and knit together in one tie and mutual solemnity,” while John Ball (d.1640) says it is “neither a law or a promise but a promise with stipulations.” The covenant with Adam is thus a “mutual contract or agreement” – God promises eternal happiness on condition of Adam’s obedience. Anthony Burgess, a member of the Westminster Assembly, claims that it is “A mutual consent of parties with stipulations both sides,” while Francis Roberts (1657) is more full: “God’s gracious agreement with Adam, and with his Posterity, in him, to give them eternal life and happiness upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.”<sup>13</sup>

The language of mutuality and contract in the above should not be misunderstood. If one is to distinguish covenant from contract, one might say that a contract is generally between equals, who may not be friends or committed to an ongoing relationship. The business contract is generally mutually exploitative – you’ve got something I want, I’ll give you such and such for it. It is a relationship one can think of in purely legal terms. However, the covenant theologians did not think of the covenant of works in this way. First, they stressed the initiative of God in establishing the relationship on terms as he decided, of the mutual love that existed between God and the one he had made in his image, and of God’s purpose to secure a blessing to obedience that could not otherwise be achieved, and certainly could not have been earned by man. Man was to relate to God in love, trust and faithfulness but this does not exclude the fact that obedience was the

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<sup>13</sup> These definitions are set out with source details in Rowland S. Ward, *God and Adam*, op. cit., 89-91.

path to the promised blessing, anymore than a child is without obligation to obey his parents.

Some recent thinkers have polarised the issue by contrasting a contract and a covenant understanding of man's relationship to God. They see the contract view as upholding a mere legal relationship, a being bound to law, while the covenant view is seen as a relationship of love apart from law. The Westminster Confession is regarded as enshrining a mere contract view where blessing is earned by obedience. But this is a caricature of what the covenant theologians taught.<sup>14</sup> Some of them, such as Ball, Twisse, Rutherford and P. Gillespie, specifically use the term 'grace' in emphasising the covenant of works as a covenant flowing from the goodness of God, and involving God's power to Adam to enable him to fulfil its obligations.<sup>15</sup>

## 6. The Westminster confession

In now turning to look at the formulation of covenant theology in the Westminster Confession Chapter 7, the first point to note is the chapter heading – *Of God's Covenant with Man*. This language does not touch the existence of a covenant of redemption within the trinity (see further below).

i. The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto him as their creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God's part, which he hath been pleased to express by way of covenant. (Is.40:13-17; Job 9:32,33; 1 Sam.2:25; Ps.113:5,6; 100:2,3; Job 22:2,3; 35:7,8; Lk.17:10; Acts 17:24,25.)

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<sup>14</sup> J.B. Torrance has repeatedly written on the theme with covenant or contract as the polarised choices as if the 17th century writers taught a contract, eg. 'The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology' in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 26 (1973) 295-311. We find something similar in Holmes Rolston, *John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1972). These writers also employ a Barthian framework in speaking about the priority of grace over law. For a fine critique of J.B. Torrance's position see Donald Macleod's article in *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1993) 217-218.

<sup>15</sup> For illustrative quotations see Rowland S. Ward, *op. cit.*, 116ff.

This section teaches that the necessity for covenant relationship between man and God predates sin and belongs to man as man. In other words, man cannot fulfil the purpose of his existence - to glorify God and enjoy him forever - apart from a gracious condescension on God's part. Many writers seem to have regarded the covenant relationship as established after man's creation. Therefore one could contrast an initial creation state of relative servitude in which God owed man nothing (cf. Luke 17:10) with a subsequent covenant relationship in which God made generous promises on the condition of continued obedience, and so obliged himself to give to obedience what it could not otherwise have obtained. This is what WCF 7:1 sounds like at first glance. However, there were not lacking voices which emphasised that the covenant with Adam was made between friends already in covenant in some sense from the moment of creation, and that God's goodness and favour was richly evidenced from the beginning. The Larger Catechism 93 seems to suggest a promise of life is attached to the keeping of the moral law written on the heart, which would make it an implicit covenant, while WCF 19:1 appears to conflate the law written on the heart and the arrangement of Genesis 2 under the term covenant.

The notable Dutch covenant theologian, Herman Witsius (†1708), writes:

“I lay this down as an acknowledged truth, that God owes nothing to his creature. By no claim, no law is he bound to reward it. For all that the creature is, it owes entirely to God; both because he created it, and also, because he is infinitely exalted above it... Whatever then is promised to the creature by God, ought all to be ascribed to the immense goodness of the Deity... Nor can God on account of this his goodness refuse to communicate himself to, or give the enjoyment of himself to, an innocent, an holy creature... He does not love in reality, who desires not to communicate himself to the object of his affection... The sum of the divine commands is ... love me above all things... But how is it conceivable that God should thus speak to the soul, and the soul should religiously attend to, and diligently perform this, and yet never enjoy God ... [or for God to say] “long after me, but on condition, never of obtaining thy desire...”<sup>16</sup>

God's voluntary condescension is thus better placed at the point of his free decision to create a creature in his image than at a point subsequent to man's creation. The arrangement of Genesis 2 should be seen as “a particularisation of the Covenant, which was designed to bring man to self-

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<sup>16</sup> H. Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants*, Vol. 1, 1822ed., 76-79.

conscious choice and realisation of his covenant relation with God.”<sup>17</sup> Adam was never in a merely legal relationship with his Creator, a position where God owed him something, for on the basis of his deeds man never can earn God’s favour. The relationship was covenantal - personal as well as legal in order that man might be blessed (compare this aspect with marriage as a covenant). For a creature made in God’s image is not in an arbitrary or optional relation, but in a covenantal one as God’s son (so Luke 3:37).

The consensus statement in the Confession, when some issues had not been fully worked through, has perhaps contributed to some presentations that do not do justice to the fact of Adam’s sonship. Orthodox theologians like Charles Hodge, J.H.Thornwell and Abraham Kuyper speak as if Adam was at first a servant and not a son, and that sonship was something he would gain through the path of obedience. Wayne Grudem seems little different.<sup>18</sup> Others in the tradition of Witsius moved in a better way, but it is men like the Southern Presbyterians J.L.Girardeau and R.A. Webb<sup>19</sup> who explicitly make the better case, and it is not surprising that these men also make an important contribution to the doctrine of adoption. Cornelius Van Til, Meredith Kline (since about 1980), O. Palmer Robertson, Morton H. Smith, William Dumbrell and Gordon Spykman, as well as the Dutch theologians J. Van Genderen and W.H.Velema in their recent important *Beknopte Gereformeerde Dogmatiek (Concise Reformed Dogmatics)*, all agree: whatever other differences they may have, that there was never a point in which God’s relationship to Adam was not covenantal.<sup>20</sup>

It should be emphasised that the covenant of works should not be construed as giving supernatural qualities to the man of nature in the manner of some Roman Catholic theology, which supernatural qualities were lost in the fall. The covenant of works does not add to what is already given in creation, but is the means by which God may crown his son with glory and honour such as could not be attained by him in any other way.

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<sup>17</sup> Morton H. Smith, *Systematic Theology*, Vol 1., 1994, 280.

<sup>18</sup> Although Grudem says the covenant of works expressed God’s “fatherly care” he goes so far as to state: “Nor did the nature of man as God created him demand that God have any fellowship with man or that God make any promises concerning his relationship with men, or give man any clear directions concerning what he should do” – *Systematic Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1994) 517.

<sup>19</sup> R.A. Webb, *Christian Salvation – Its Doctrine and Experience* ([1921] Harrisonburg: Sprinkle, 1985) 391.

<sup>20</sup> Citations are provided in Rowland S. Ward, *op. cit.*, 180-181.

ii. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works (Gal.3:12), wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity (Rom.10:5; 5:12-20), upon condition of perfect and personal obedience (Gen.2:17; Gal.3:10).

In writing of the first covenant *with man*, the position of those who held to a covenant of redemption within the trinity as the foundation of the covenant of grace is safeguarded. In accordance with the terms of this covenant of redemption, Christ fully met all the obligations of the covenant of works as the Last Adam, and secured the Holy Spirit for his people. Many in the 1640s in effect viewed the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace as one, and this was later popularised by Thomas Boston.

Although the language of covenant is not explicit, I have already illustrated the Scriptural foundation for a covenant of redemption. Perhaps surprisingly, given its scriptural warrant, a covenant of redemption distinct from the covenant of grace in history was not altogether common at the time of the Westminster Assembly. The elements of the pre-temporal covenant of redemption are found as early as Caspar Olevianus (1536-87).<sup>21</sup> David Dickson is a Scottish advocate in the 1630s. Samuel Rutherford, one of the Scottish Commissioners to the Assembly, was an advocate. I think that it enables the stating of the issues with greater clarity, although one is really making a distinction rather than a separation. One should not magnify the differences in the respective presentations. Its earliest credal expression is in the Savoy Declaration (1658) 8.1. It is also found in the Baptist Confession (1677/89) 7.3 & 8.1.

*The existence of the covenant:* We do not read the word covenant of the relationship between God and our first parents unless Hosea 6:7 is an exception, as I believe it is (see below). However, the elements of a covenant are present in Genesis 2 (parties, promise, condition, penalty); the probationary character of the Adamic administration implies it; and the analogy with the covenant of grace and the headship position of Adam and Christ, ‘the last Adam’ (1 Cor 15:45 cf. Rom 5:12ff), demands it. Further, while the word ‘covenant’ first appears in the history of Noah (Genesis 6:18), it is obvious that God’s covenant of blessing with Noah (Genesis 9) has in essence the same content as the blessing and commission to Adam (‘be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it’). In short, when the original blessing of our first parents is repeated to Noah it is called a

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. L.D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 107-112.

covenant. Therefore the original relationship to Adam was covenantal. Genesis 6:18 refers to continuing an existing relationship not commencing a new one. Those blessings in Genesis 1 are covenantal blessings. To the same effect is Jeremiah's reference to God's 'covenant for day and night' (33:20ff). This passage refers back beyond Genesis 9:8 to Genesis 1 and God's blessing of his good creation, as Jeremiah 31:35 makes clear. Thus we see God's covenant commitment at the very beginning of creation in the making of a creature in his image, dependent and responsive.

Hosea 6:6-7 declares of Israel that the LORD desired faithful love and the knowledge of God more than sacrifices and offerings, 'but they like Adam (*or, like man*) transgressed the covenant'. The rendering *at Adam* is favoured by the parallel in the following line [*There they dealt treacherously against me*], but *like Adam* or *like man/a man* is what the Hebrew says. Further, no disobedience at Adam (Josh 3:16) or Adamah (Josh 19:36) is known, and the assumption of the passage on this reading is that the disobedience there was notorious. The *There* is thus better taken as a reference to the disobedience in the land God gave them in his covenant (cf. Gen 12:7). This still leaves a choice between *like Adam* and *like man/a man* but either way a parallel between Adam/man and Israel is being drawn, thus a breaking of a covenant with God in both cases, rather than covenants with other men. The point will then be: Adam broke the covenant God made with him and was driven from Eden; Israel has broken the covenant God made with her and will be driven out of the land God gave her, cf. Hos 1:9. Despite Calvin's assessment of *like Adam* as 'vapid', this does appear the proper choice given that Scripture attests a covenant relationship with Adam. The earliest British reference is the translation 'like Adam' in the Bishop's Bible of 1568,<sup>22</sup> although nothing is made of it at the time. Covenant theologians did not rest their case on Hosea 6:7.

*Naming the covenant:* One can look at the relationship from different angles. As the original relationship it may be called the covenant of *creation*. As it was to be fulfilled by man in the strength with which he is endowed it may be called the covenant of *nature*. Being made with Adam

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<sup>22</sup> M. McGiffert, 'From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works' in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XIX. 2 (Summer 1988) 135. The Geneva Bible (1560) has 'But they like men...' with a note: That is, like small and weak persons. The KJV (1611) puts 'Adam' in the margin and reads, 'But they like men...' The Dutch *Staten-Vertaling* Version (1637) reads: 'like Adam'. This illustrates the fact that covenant theologians had no uniform view of Hosea 6:7. The best survey remains that of B.B. Warfield, *Selected Shorter Writings*, Vol 1, 116-129 who prefers 'like Adam'.

before sin it may be called the covenant of *innocence*. As made between parties who were friends it may be called the covenant of *friendship* (but not a covenant of reconciliation since the parties were not estranged). The blessing in view may lead us to call it a covenant of *life*, as does the Shorter Catechism Q12. The requirement of obedience to God suggests the terms *legal* covenant, covenant of *obedience* or covenant of *works*. Consideration of the tender love and generosity God showed may suggest the term covenant of *favour*. A more neutral term could be *Adamic* covenant. All these terms appear in the classic literature of the 17th century.

*The condition of the covenant:* The terminology is not the real issue. The distinctive provision of the Adamic covenant is the issue, and this must be seen as requiring obedience to the covenant terms as the principle required in order to obtain the blessing. In Protestant theology the covenant of works, to use the most common expression, is contrasted with the covenant of grace instituted after the entry of sin. The covenant of grace is not a separate covenant so much as a development necessitated by the fact that God, confronted by sin, does not abandon his covenanted commitment to his creation. He now relates to it redemptively, Christ fulfilling the covenant of works as the basis for the covenant of grace. The term *covenant of works* does not imply the relationship is purely legal. Adam was God's son (Luke 3:31), created in his image, and the filial and the legal bonds are not contrary to each other. The blessing would be found in the way of obedience, but the notion of meriting reward is uniformly rejected by the 17th century writers, except in the sense that God, by his covenant with Adam, obligates himself to reward obedience.

*The blessing promised:* The Confession affirms life was promised to Adam. The nature of this life was a matter of some difference of opinion in the 1640s. As the New England preacher Peter Bulkeley put it:

‘[The covenant of works and the covenant of grace] agree in this, that in both there is a promise of life and blessedness; the Covenant of works saith, Do this and live; the covenant of grace saith, Believe and live. Life is promised in both. Now whether the same life is promised in both, or whether a terrene [earthly] felicity and life here on earth, be promised in the one, and a heavenly in the other, as some think, or whether a heavenly life and glory in both, as some others think, I will not determine, it not being much material. It's enough to know that life and blessedness was and is promised in both.’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> *The Gospel Covenant* (London 1651) 55

Scripture does not expressly state that life was promised to Adam, but, as God's son, he had an inheritance, and the threat of death is effectively the loss of the inheritance. The supposition that he should always have continued in life, but with the possibility of falling, was generally rejected. His sin brought eternal death and his obedience would have brought eternal life. At some point he would have been confirmed. Hence it was usual to speak of a probation climaxed by a gracious reward.

*The representative or federal principle:* Adam was the fountainhead of the race and in him God dealt with all who should descend from him in the ordinary course. We may not understand this procedure, although it is illustrated in our ordinary life in a variety of ways. For example, the acts of a President or Prime Minister may bind the nation. More to the point, the principle is illustrated in the method of redemption. Jesus is representative of his people to pay their debt and meet their obligations. The covenant headship of Adam does not mean we actually committed his sin, but that his disobedience in some just way is reckoned to us so that we are charged with its guilt and share its consequences.

The lack of explicit mention in the Three Forms of Unity, reaction to one sided emphases, and a limited grasp of the literature, seem to have contributed to a tradition in Dutch Reformed thought which rejects a covenant of works as if such is inherently legalistic.<sup>24</sup> That there is a covenant in Eden is usually admitted, but that life was promised for an obedient probation is rejected. The notion of a covenant that had in view man's advancement is put aside. There was no eschatology before sin but simply the assurance of God's love as long as man continued in the way of faith/faithfulness. The concern here is to avoid any suggestion of merit in the divine-human relationship, yet by downplaying the importance of works/obedience in the Adamic covenant one is at risk of downplaying them in regard to the work of Christ.

WCF 8 clearly teaches that Christ is a covenant head whose obedience is imputed to us representatively. Justification is not merely being treated as if we had never sinned but includes treating us as if we had fully obeyed, as

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<sup>24</sup> Klaas Schilder has some tendencies of this kind. More particularly note Clarence Stam, *The Covenant of Love* (Winnepeg: Premier, 1999) 49-50; Norman Shepherd, *The Call of Grace* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2000). A Barthian influence is evident in the later G.C. Berkouwer and very much so in the Scottish Torrance school. Herman Hoeksema also rejects a covenant of work and a probation, but from the angle of viewing everything through the eyes of election.

indeed in Christ we have.<sup>25</sup> If Adam is God's son, as his possessing the image of God indicates, then he is due an inheritance. The threat of death is effectually the forfeiture of the inheritance. The accomplishment of Christ means we receive the adoption as sons, and 'if a son then an heir.'

**iii. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second (Gal.3:21; Rom.8:3; 3:20,21; Gen.3:15; Is.42:6), commonly called the covenant of grace; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved (Mk.16:15,16; Jn.3:16; Rom.10:6,9; Gal.3:11), and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe (Ezek.36:26,27; Jn.6:44,45).**

The covenant of (redemptive) grace has historic manifestations in the promise of redemption (Gen 3:15), and in the various biblical covenants which God made with his people, and which culminated in the new covenant ratified by Christ's death. The parties to this second covenant with man are not stated in the Confession, nor are they in Shorter Catechism 20. In the *Larger Catechism* chapter 31 the parties are said to be God, and Christ as representing the elect. This viewpoint, which does not distinguish the covenant of redemption from the covenant of grace, is followed by Thomas Boston in his justly influential book, *Human Nature in its Fourfold State* (1720). However, the alternative and, in my view, clearer and more helpful position, is to regard the parties to the covenant of grace as God and the believer. Abraham is called the father of the faithful, and is a pivotal example for those justified by faith in every age (eg. Rom 4:1). The requirement of faith on our side is not a work or condition in order to meet the requirements of salvation, but it is the means by which we enter into relationship with Christ in history. Like the totality of salvation, faith is itself a blessing of the covenant given to the elect on the basis of the work of Christ (Eph 2:8).

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<sup>25</sup> Note J.L. Girardeau's words: "Not only was it incumbent upon Christ to deliver his people from the death incurred by the fall of Adam, but as the second Adam to do what the first was required to do – to pay obedience to the precepts of the law. That, strictly speaking, is righteousness, and that the glorious representative of the elect wrought out for them. He produced a perfect obedience to the whole law, and therefore won for himself an adorable name by which he is known in the assemblies of the saints – 'the Lord our righteousness.'" – *The Federal Theology: Its Import and Regulative Influence* ([1881] Greenville, Reformed Academic Press, 1994), p. 19.

The obedience and sacrifice of Christ, rendered as the covenant head of his people in terms of the covenant of redemption, is the ground of the covenant of grace. All who are 'in Christ' by faith share in the salvation he has merited. Note that the parallel between Adam and Christ is not precisely equivalent (cf. Romans 5:12ff). Adam could not have merited life but it was necessary for the Redeemer to do so, since the fall had introduced demerit.

**iv. This covenant of grace is frequently set forth in scripture by the name of a testament, in reference to the death of Jesus Christ the testator, and to the everlasting inheritance, with all things belonging to it, therein bequeathed (Heb.9:15-17; 7:22; Lk.22:20; 1 Cor.11:25).**

An exegetical problem faces us here. Only in Hebrews 9:16,17 is the Greek word *diatheke* (covenant) likely to have the meaning 'testament' and even here there is doubt. It would be better to reword the statement to read something like, *This covenant of grace is frequently described in Scripture as inaugurated by the death of Jesus Christ, and as securing an everlasting inheritance for all believers.* The original texts of Scripture cited support this. Either way, the doctrinal point remains valid: Christ's work is testamentary since our salvation is through his death, and what we receive from him is the inheritance of the children of God that was not secured by Adam.

**v. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel (2 Cor.3:6-9): under the law it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all fore-signifying Christ to come (Heb. chs.8-10; Rom.4:11; Col.2:11,12; 1 Cor.5:7); which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised messiah (Cor.10:1-4; Heb.11:13; Jn.8:56), by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament (Gal.3:7-9,14).**

**vi. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance (Col.2:17), was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's**

**Supper (Mt.28:19,20; 1 Cor.11:23-25):** which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence, and spiritual efficacy (Heb.12:22-28; Jer.31:33,34), to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles (Mt.28:19; Eph.2:15-19); and is called the New Testament (Lk.22:20). There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations (Gal.3:14,16; Acts 15:11; Rom.3:21-23,30; Ps.32:1 with Rom.4:3,6,16,17,23,24; Heb.13:8).

The gracious character of the God's covenant with Abraham must not be denied by appeal to the Mosaic administration which came later (cf. Galatians 3). Indeed, the character of the Mosaic economy was one in which grateful and obedient response to the covenant Lord was the ethic, and not legalism or self-righteousness. The Exodus deliverance came before the law at Sinai (cf. Ex 19:4; 20:2).

When the apostle John reminds us that 'the law was given through Moses; grace and truth were realised through Jesus Christ' (John 1:17), the contrast is not between two ways of salvation. Rather, the contrast is between the provisional prefiguring of the Old Testament through the Mosaic administration, and the reality that has come in Jesus Christ. The clear and full revelation now given means the ceremonies and sacrifices in which the Messiah was veiled and prefigured are no longer to be observed.

Covenant theology sees the choice of Israel as part of God's preparation for the coming of Christ when salvation would be proclaimed among the nations. The kingdom of Israel was intended to provide an illustration of the kingdom of God inaugurated by Christ, just as surely as the sacrificial system provided types of Christ's saving work. Old Testament promises about the future employed the images of the institutions of Israel without at all meaning to limit the fulfilment to a mere earthly reproduction of them. Proper interpretation here seeks the intended meaning, which is not necessarily the surface meaning. The Old Testament promises are fulfilled in and through the church as the expanded Israel of God. The unity of the church in every age is basic (Romans 11).

A more recent rival view among evangelicals is dispensationalism, which arose in the 19th century. It is associated with the *Scofield Reference Bible* (1909), writers such as J.N. Darby, C.I. Scofield and L.S. Chafer, and institutions such as Dallas Theological Seminary. It seeks to reckon with

the historic unfolding of God's purposes, but tends to create periods which are not properly linked by the unifying factor of God's grace. The dispensational scheme employs a radical literalism which leads to the view that God has separate and distinct purposes for Israel and the Church, the one earthly and the other heavenly. It is claimed that Israel in Scripture always means earthly Israel. This Israel rejected the earthly Davidic kingdom offered her, and crucified her king. Consequently, the Lord, through the Apostles, introduced the Church age with a heavenly message for the Gentiles. This parenthesis will continue until God again restores the kingdom to ethnic Israel during an earthly millennium. Before that happens the Gospel must be preached to all the nations as a testimony, but pessimism about both its reception and the faithfulness of the organised church is characteristic. A great tribulation will precede the millennium, but the church will be raptured away to heaven before it occurs. This is not an approach endorsed by the Confession.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century Reformers, followed by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Puritan/Reformed writers, did not consider the covenant with Moses and Israel to be a covenant of works which either temporarily or permanently established salvation for the Jews on the obedience-inheritance principle. Such was an impossibility since the fall of our first parents. The law could not give life. Further, the Law of Moses could not change the covenant of grace made with Abraham 430 years before: 'For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on a promise; but God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise' (Gal 3:18). The majority therefore viewed the Mosaic covenant as, in substance, an administration of the covenant of grace made with Moses and fulfilled in Christ. The Judaizers of the New Testament period misused the Law of Moses. They sought to earn righteousness by it, something it could never yield because of the fall.

The closing sentence in this section of the Confession came at the conclusion of considerable debate. In explaining this matter there was often difference of terminology, but not of real substance, arising from differences in distinguishing law and covenant, and confusion over whether the covenant with Moses in some way functioned as a covenant of works. Also many did not distinguish the covenant of redemption in eternity from the manifestation of it in the covenant of grace in history. Edmund Calamy (1600-66), the popular and leading Presbyterian minister in London, and a member of the Westminster Assembly, provides evidence of the variety of

ways in which men spoke of the covenants. In a little known work,<sup>26</sup> a 30 page pamphlet published early in 1646, in the middle of the debate on Chapter 7, Calamy comments:

‘There be several opinions about the Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of grace, to the great disturbance of many Christians; [1.] some hold that there be four Covenants, two of Works and two of Grace; the two first, one with *Adam* before the fall, and the other with *Israel* at their return out of *Egypt*, and the Covenants of Grace the first to *Abraham*, and the other at the incarnation of Jesus Christ; this Mr *Simpson*<sup>27</sup> affirmed before a Committee of the Assembly of Divines in my hearing.

2. Others hold that there are but three Covenants, the first with *Adam*, the second with *Israel* at their going out of *Egypt*, and a third with Jesus Christ, the two first of Works and the last of Grace, and this Mr *Burroughs*<sup>28</sup> delivered in his Exposition Sermon in *Cornhill* in my hearing.

3. Others hold that there is [sic] but two Covenants, the one of Works and the other of Grace; yet the first they hold was made with *Israel* at Mount *Sinai*, and no Covenant of Works before that, and now is vanished away, and the other a Covenant of grace yet not made until the death of Christ the testator, and this is affirmed by James Pope, in a [recently published] book entitled *The unveiling of Antichrist*.

4. Others hold that the Law at *Mount Sinai* was a covenant of grace, implying that there is more than one covenant of grace, and this is affirmed by Mr Anthony Burgess<sup>29</sup> in his *Vindication of the Morall Law*, the 24<sup>th</sup> Lecture, text [Chapter] 4 of *Deuteronomy*.

5. Others with myself hold that there are but two Covenants, the one a Covenant of works, and the tree of life was a sacrament or sign and

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<sup>26</sup> Edmund Calamy, *Two solemne Covenants made betweene God and Man: viz. The Covenants of Workes, And the Covenant of Grace* (London: Thomas Banks, 1647) 1. The actual publication date was 1 February 1646 (new style).

<sup>27</sup> Sidrach Simpson (c.1600-1655) was a curate in London (1629-38) became an Independent in Rotterdam and returned to London as such in 1641.

<sup>28</sup> Jeremiah Burroughs (c.1599-1646) was assistant to Calamy 1627-31, then rector in Norfolk, then served in Rotterdam as an Independent from 1637, returning to London in 1641.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony Burgess (1608-64) was a minister in Warwickshire and member of the Westminster Assembly, as also were Simpson and Burroughs.

token of it; this was made with Adam before his fall and to all his posterity... But then there was a Covenant of grace which God the Father made with Jesus Christ from all eternity to save some of the posterity of Adam...<sup>30</sup>

In its final formulation the WCF recognised only two covenants, one of works, the other of grace (7.2-3). It affirmed God's condescension in making the covenant of works (7.1), and of course rejected the intrinsic merit of our best works (16.5). By stating that the *first* covenant with man was one of works with Adam (WCF 7.2), it rejected the position of those who denied a covenant of works with Adam (#3 above), but it left open the question of a distinct covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son as advocated by some, such as Samuel Rutherford. It also passed over that presentation of the covenant of grace combined with the so-called covenant of redemption as held by Calamy (#5 above), but it did allow for it.

Thus the *second* covenant noted in the Confession (7.3) – which is identified as a covenant with man (note the Chapter title, Of God's Covenant with Man) – provides for life and salvation by Jesus Christ. In this covenant of grace the person or persons with whom it is made is either unspecified (WCF 7.3, WSC 20) or not well distinguished (WLC 31, 'Christ and the elect'), so giving room for views like Rutherford's and Calamy's. The intention is to allow liberty for those agreed on the substantial issue.

The Confession concludes: 'There are not therefore two covenants of grace differing in substance, but one and the same under different dispensations' (WCF 7.6). This rejected the view Calamy drew from Burgess (#4 above), and closed the door to the notion of the covenant with Moses being a covenant of works in its essential nature (#2, 3). Perhaps it also rejected Calamy's personal view, that the Law at Mt Sinai was a rule of obedience to those in covenant, but not itself a covenant. However, it does not exclude views of the Mosaic covenant that saw an aspect illustrative of the works-inheritance principle in it, subservient to its position as an administration of the covenant of grace. This was a quite common viewpoint.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> E. Calamy, *Two solemn Covenants*, 1-2 (paraphrasing supplied).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. S. Bolton, *True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994) 99.

## 7. Conclusion

The twin-covenant theology is part of the warp and woof of the theology of the Confession. B.B. Warfield spoke of the 'architectonic principle' of the Westminster Confession being supplied by the schematisation of the federal theology.<sup>32</sup> Today there are signs of some recovery of interest in covenant theology, particularly in the United States of America. Unhappily a measure of controversy has occurred, contributed to both by an ignorance of the formulations in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, and by reactive polarisation between parties as, for example, between the presentation of Meredith Kline since 1980 and that of his former colleague, Norman Shepherd. However, the vitality and potential of a well-balanced form of covenant theology should not be underestimated, both as regards its explanatory power and practical relevance. The generic form of covenant theology in the Westminster Confession provides a fine framework for careful reflection and thoughtful development.

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<sup>32</sup> *The Westminster Assembly and its Work*, 56.