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## ABBREVIATIONS

AB	Anchor Bible
ABRL	Anchor Bible Reference Library
<i>ACF</i>	<i>Annuaire du Collège de France</i>
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AnBib	Analecta Biblica
ANE	ancient Near East(ern)
<i>ANES</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
ASBT	Acadia Studies in Bible and Theology
AUMSR	Andrews University Monographs, Studies in Religion
<i>AUSS</i>	<i>Andrews University Seminary Studies</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BB	Babel und Bibel
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>BETS</i>	<i>Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
BibInt	Biblical Interpretation Series
<i>BJRL</i>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester</i>
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BSS	Barth Studies Series
BTCP	Biblical Theology for Christian Proclamation
BTNT	Biblical Theology of the New Testament
BZNW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
CCT	Contours of Christian Theology

<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
CJA	Christianity and Judaism in Antiquity
CNTC	<i>Calvin's New Testament Commentaries</i> . Edited by David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance. 12 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959–1972.
<i>Comm.</i>	<i>Calvin's Commentaries</i> . Edited by John King et al. Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1844–1856.
<i>ConcJ</i>	<i>Concordia Journal</i>
<i>ConTJ</i>	<i>Conservative Theological Journal</i>
<i>CovQ</i>	<i>The Covenant Quarterly</i>
CPSHT	Changing Paradigms in Systematic and Historical Theology
CRT	Classic Reformed Theology
CSCD	Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine
CSEMBH	Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History
CSRT	Columbia Series in Reformed Theology
CTC	Christian Theology in Context
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
<i>CurBR</i>	<i>Currents in Biblical Research</i>
CUSAS	Cornell University Studies in Assyriology and Sumerology
<i>Di</i>	<i>Dialog</i>
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
<i>DS</i>	<i>Diplomacy and Statecraft</i>
<i>DSD</i>	<i>Dead Sea Discoveries</i>
EBib	Etudes bibliques
EBT	Explorations in Biblical Theology
EPSC	EP Study Commentary
<i>ERT</i>	<i>Evangelical Review of Theology</i>
EUSLR	Emory University Studies in Law and Religion
<i>EvQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
<i>EvT</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>Exp</i>	<i>Expositor</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FKD	Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte
GSC	Geneva Series of Commentaries



<i>GTJ</i>	<i>Grace Theological Journal</i>
<i>HALOT</i>	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i> . Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of Mervyn E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden: Brill, 1994–1999.
HBS <sub>t</sub>	Herders Biblische Studien
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
ICC	International Critical Commentary
<i>IJST</i>	<i>International Journal of Systematic Theology</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JDT</i>	<i>Jahrbücher für Deutsche Theologie</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JSJ</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods</i>
JSJS <sub>Sup</sub>	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSNT <sub>Sup</sub>	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSOT <sub>Sup</sub>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
JTIS <sub>Sup</sub>	Journal of Theological Interpretation, Supplements
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KTC</i>	Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum. <i>Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants</i> . 2nd ed. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018.
LCC	Library of Christian Classics
LJI	Library of Jewish Ideas
LNTS	Library of New Testament Studies
LRS	Leipziger Rechtswissenschaftliche Studien
LSTS	Library of Second Temple Studies
LTPM	Louvain Theological and Pastoral Monographs

<i>LW</i>	Martin Luther. <i>Luther's Works</i> . Edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut T. Lehman. American ed. 55 vols. Philadelphia: Fortress; Saint Louis, MO: Concordia, 1955–1986.
MC	Mentor Commentary
MEC	Mentor Expository Commentary
<i>MJT</i>	<i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>
MRS	Mission de Ras Shamra
<i>MSJ</i>	<i>The Master's Seminary Journal</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NACSBT	NAC Studies in Bible and Theology
<i>NAK</i>	<i>Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis</i>
NCB	New Century Bible Commentary
NCT	new covenant theology
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i> . Edited by Willem A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997.
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC	NIV Application Commentary
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NSD	New Studies in Dogmatics
NTC	New Testament Commentary
NTL	New Testament Library
<i>NTS</i>	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
NTT	New Testament Theology
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
OSHT	Oxford Studies in Historical Theology
OTL	Old Testament Library
OTRM	Oxford Theology and Religion Monographs
OTS	Old Testament Studies
PC	progressive covenantalism

PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>Presb</i>	<i>Presbyterian</i>
<i>PRJ</i>	<i>Puritan Reformed Journal</i>
ProEcclSer	Pro Ecclesia Series
PrTMS	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
<i>PRU</i>	Claude F.-A. Schaeffer, ed., <i>Le palais royal d'Ugarit</i> , MRS (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1955–1970).
<i>RA</i>	<i>Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale</i>
RBDS	Reformed Baptist Dissertation Series
REDS	Reformed, Exegetical, and Doctrinal Studies
<i>RefR</i>	<i>Reformed Review</i>
<i>RevQ</i>	<i>Revue de Qumran</i>
<i>RFP</i>	<i>Reformed Faith and Practice</i>
RHT	Reformed Historical Theology
RHTS	Reformed Historical Theological Studies
RIME	Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods
<i>RJ</i>	<i>Reformed Journal</i>
<i>RRR</i>	<i>Reformation and Renaissance Review</i>
<i>RTR</i>	<i>Reformed Theological Review</i>
SAA	State Archives of Assyria
<i>SAAB</i>	<i>State Archives of Assyria Bulletin</i>
SBET	Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology
<i>SBJT</i>	<i>Southern Baptist Journal of Theology</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBLMS	Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series
SBLSS	SBL Symposium Series
SCHT	Studies in Christian History and Thought
<i>SCJ</i>	<i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>
SDST	Studien zur Dogmengeschichte und systematischen Theologie
SHCT	Studies in the History of Christian Thought
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SMAL	Studies in Mediterranean Archaeology and Literature
SMRT	Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions

SNTSMS	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SNTW	Studies of the New Testament and Its World
SSBT	Short Studies in Biblical Theology
StBibLit	Studies in Biblical Literature
<i>StPatr</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>
<i>SwJT</i>	<i>Southwestern Journal of Theology</i>
TAPS	Transactions of the American Philosophical Society
TBS	Twin Brooks Series
TCL	Theologians on the Christian Life
<i>TDNT</i>	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> . Edited by Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. 10 vols. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–1976.
THR	Travaux d’humanisme et Renaissance
TiC	Theology in Community
<i>TJ</i>	<i>Trinity Journal</i>
<i>TJT</i>	<i>Toronto Journal of Theology</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TSRPRT	Text and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VR	<i>Vox Reformata</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WAW	Writings from the Ancient World
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WCF	Westminster Confession of Faith, in <i>The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms: As Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America</i> . Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education and Publications of the PCA, 2007.
WEC	Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary
WLC	Westminster Larger Catechism, in <i>The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms: As Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America</i> . Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education and Publications of the PCA, 2007.

WSC	Westminster Shorter Catechism, in <i>The Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms: As Adopted by the Presbyterian Church in America</i> . Lawrenceville, GA: Christian Education and Publications of the PCA, 2007.
WSJ	<i>Westminster Society Journal</i>
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>



# FOREWORD

J. Ligon Duncan III

Reformed theology is covenant theology. Allow me to explain.

Reformed theology, representing the public, ecclesial, doctrinal convictions of a major branch of Protestantism, is a school of historic, orthodox, confessional Christianity that maintains and emphasizes the sovereignty of the triune God, the authority of Scripture, God's grace in salvation, the necessity and significance of the church, and covenant theology. Reformed theology believes that the Bible needs to be studied and understood by employing both biblical theology and systematic theology.

Biblical theology approaches the Bible from a redemptive-historical perspective. That is, biblical theology studies the Bible chronologically, historically, or diachronically. It is the study of special revelation from the standpoint of the history of redemption.<sup>1</sup> As Michael Lawrence puts it, "Biblical theology is the attempt to tell the whole story of the whole Bible as Christian Scripture."<sup>2</sup> Biblical theology is concerned to show that the Bible has one story and to relate all its parts to that one story.

Systematic theology, in comparison, is concerned to show that the Bible has one theology and to relate all its doctrines to one another as part of that one coherent theology. Hence, systematic theology studies the Bible topically, synchronically, and interrelatedly. It works on the collection, summary, interrelation, articulation, and application of what the whole Bible teaches on the major topics that it addresses. Systematic theology is not an enemy of, competitor with, or alternative to biblical theology but is its partner, benefactor, and beneficiary. Biblical theology cannot provide the final assessment offered by systematic theology, but it helps systematic theology make that assessment. Biblical theology and systematic theology, done rightly, are friends. They need each other. They complement one another.

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1. See Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948).

2. Michael Lawrence, *Biblical Theology in the Life of the Church: A Guide for Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 89.

Covenant theology is a blending of both biblical and systematic theology. If biblical theology is the thematic survey of redemptive history, with an emphasis on the theological development—era to era—of whatever loci is being studied, then covenant theology could rightly be called “biblical biblical theology.” That is, covenant theology recognizes that the Bible itself structures the progress of redemptive history through the succession of covenants.

Covenant theology is systematic theology in that it identifies the covenants as a fundamental organizing principle for the Bible’s theology. Thus it proceeds to integrate the biblical teaching about the federal headships of Adam and Christ, the covenantal nature of the incarnation and atonement, the continuities and discontinuities in the progress of redemptive history, the relation of the Old and New Testament Scriptures, and law and gospel into a coherent theological system.

So covenant theology is Reformed theology’s way of gleaning from and putting together both systematic and biblical theology. Hence, Reformed theology is covenant theology.

No wonder B. B. Warfield called covenant theology the “architectonic principle” of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647),<sup>3</sup> or James Walker asserted that covenant theology was “the old theology of Scotland.”<sup>4</sup> J. I. Packer claims that we cannot understand the gospel, the Bible, or the reality of God without a covenantal framework and that the Bible “forces” covenant theology on us by the covenant story it tells, the place it gives to Jesus Christ in that covenant story, the Adam-Christ parallel in Paul, and the testimony of Jesus to the covenant of redemption in the Gospel of John.<sup>5</sup>

Covenant theology sets the gospel in the context of God’s eternal plan of communion with his people and its historical outworking in the covenants of works and grace (as well as in the various progressive stages of the covenant of grace). Covenant theology explains the meaning of Christ’s death in light of the biblical teaching on the divine covenants, undergirds our understanding of the nature and use of the sacraments, and provides the fullest possible account of the grounds of our assurance.

To put it another way, covenant theology is the Bible’s way of explaining and deepening our understanding of at least four things:

1. The atonement (the meaning and significance of the death of Christ)
2. Assurance (the basis for our confidence of communion with God and our enjoyment of his promises)
3. The sacraments (signs and seals of God’s covenant promises—what they are and how they work)
4. The continuity of redemptive history (the unified plan of God’s salvation)

3. B. B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 56.

4. James Walker, *The Theology and the Theologians of Scotland* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1872), 40.

5. J. I. Packer, “Introduction on Covenant Theology,” in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (1677; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 20.



Covenant theology is also a hermeneutic, or an approach to understanding the Scripture, that attempts to biblically explain the unity of biblical revelation.

The Bible's teaching on the covenants is central, not peripheral, to the biblical story. When Jesus wanted to explain the significance of his death to his disciples, he went to the doctrine of the covenants (see Matt. 26; Mark 14; Luke 22; 1 Cor. 11). When God wanted to assure Abraham of the certainty of his word of promise, he went to the covenant (Gen. 12; 15; 17). When God wanted to set apart his people, ingrain his work in their minds, tangibly reveal himself in love and mercy, and confirm their future inheritance, he gave the covenant signs (Gen. 17; Ex. 12; 17; 31; Matt. 28; Luke 22; Acts 2). When Luke wanted to show early Christians that Jesus's life and ministry were the fulfillment of God's ancient purposes for his chosen people, he went to the covenant of grace and quoted Zechariah's prophecy, which shows that believers in the very earliest days of the fledgling Christian church understood Jesus and his messianic work as a fulfillment (not a "plan B") of God's covenant with Abraham (Luke 1:72–73). When the psalmist and the author of Hebrews wanted to show how God's redemptive plan is ordered and on what basis it unfolds in history, they went to the covenants (see Pss. 78; 89; Heb. 6–10).

Covenant theology is not a response to dispensationalism. It existed long before the rudiments of classic dispensationalism were brought together in the nineteenth century. Covenant theology is not sectarian but is an ecumenical Reformed approach to understanding the Bible, developed in the wake of the magisterial Reformation but with roots stretching back to the earliest days of catholic Christianity and historically appreciated in all the various branches of Protestantism under the influence of Reformed theology (Anglican, Baptist, Congregationalist, Independent, Presbyterian, Reformed). As one theologian stated,

The doctrine of the divine covenant lies at the root of all true theology. It has been said that he who well understands the distinction between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace is a master of divinity. I am persuaded that most of the mistakes which men make concerning the doctrines of Scripture are based upon fundamental errors with regard to the covenant of law and of grace. May God grant us now the power to instruct, and you the grace to receive instruction on this vital subject.<sup>6</sup>

Who said this? C. H. Spurgeon, the great English Baptist preacher! Certainly a man beyond suspicion of secretly purveying a Presbyterian view of the sacraments to the unsuspecting evangelical masses.

What Spurgeon's quote evidences is the influence of covenant theology in the Baptist tradition, and indeed, in our own day there is a revival of what is termed

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6. C. H. Spurgeon, *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 58, *Sermons Preached by C. H. Spurgeon During the Year 1912* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim Publications, 1978), 517.

“1689 Federalism”—that is, a distinctly Baptist approach to covenant theology derived from the Second London Baptist Confession (1689). Covenant theology, not dispensationalism, is the native soil of not only the Presbyterian, Congregational, and evangelical Anglican traditions but also of historic Baptist biblical theology.

### **Covenant Theology in the Westminster Confession**

Because Reformed Theological Seminary is committed to the inerrancy and authority of Scripture and to confessional Reformed theology, we are committed to covenant theology. The Reformed theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms (WLC and WSC, respectively) beautifully summarizes and expresses the main points of covenant theology in chapter seven of the confession, titled “Of God’s Covenant with Man”:

1. 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.

2. The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam; and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.

3. Man, by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, 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, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe.

4. 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.

5. This covenant was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: 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 foreshadowing Christ to come; 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, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the Old Testament.

6. Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, 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: 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, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the New Testament. There are not

therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations.

Several things are to be observed here. First, the Westminster Standards set forth a bicovenantal structure of covenant, or federal, theology,<sup>7</sup> with a covenant of works and a covenant of grace providing the theological outline of the biblical story of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation (WCF 7.2–3). That is, even though the chapter heading speaks of God’s covenant (singular) with man, the chapter itself makes it clear that there is a fundamental division and distinction between God’s covenant relations pre- and postfall. Both covenants, as an expression of his one eternal decree, have in view God’s glory and our good, our imaging him and communing with him, to the praise of his glory. But the means by which the covenants of works and grace are secured are distinct, with the covenant of grace dependent on the mediator in the fulfillment of its conditions. To say this yet another way, the Westminster Confession’s presentation of covenant theology is not monocovenantal. It explicitly speaks of first and second covenants that are distinct: a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. Indeed, rightly understood, the covenant of works protects the grace of the covenant of grace.

Second, the Westminster Confession explains that God himself is the blessedness and reward of his people but that we could not have enjoyed him as such apart from his “voluntary condescension” (WCF 7.1). This is necessary because of the distance between God and humanity, which is not because of some inherent defect or lack in man but is inherent in the Creator-creature distinction and is because of the greatness of God and the finitude of man (WCF 7.1). The confession identifies God’s “voluntary condescension” with covenant in general and with the covenant of works in particular (WCF 7.1–2). For God to covenant is for God to lovingly and generously stoop down, to willingly associate himself with his inferior—that is, with humanity. It should be noted that the confession does not identify this “voluntary condescension” of God as “grace,” nor does it speak of “grace” in the context of its presentation of the prefall covenant. While some orthodox covenant theologians have spoken of God’s grace or graciousness in the covenant of works, the foregoing point should be borne in mind—it protects against a misuse and misunderstanding of “grace” in relation to the first covenant.

Third, the Westminster Confession identifies and summarizes the covenantal structure of Scripture using the “first” and “second” covenants (or the covenants of works and grace), rather than listing explicitly denominated biblical covenants (e.g., God’s covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses/Israel, David) as ways in which God secures his people’s enjoyment of union and communion with him. In doing so, the confession is using the categories of systematic theology. It uses these theological covenants to teach

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7. In this book, the term *federal theology* is used interchangeably with *covenant theology*, particularly stressing the representative aspect of two great “federal heads,” Adam and Jesus. *Federal* derives from the Latin *foedus*, which means “covenant.”

that the God of the Bible relates to his creatures covenantally, first in a covenant of works and then through the various administrations of the covenant of grace (WCF 7.5), and it sees all the explicitly designated postfall covenants of Scripture as a part of the one covenant of grace (“the second covenant,” WCF 7.3, 5–6). It is right, then, to see the covenant concept as an important architectonic principle of the theology of the confession.

Fourth, the covenant made with humanity before the fall, is identified by the Westminster Standards as a covenant of *works* (respecting its terms or conditions; WCF 7.2), a covenant of *life* (respecting its goal or end; WLC 20), a covenant with *Adam* (respecting its party or representative; WLC 22), and the *first* covenant (respecting its chronological priority and indicating that there is a successor; WCF 7.2). All four names are apt descriptors of the same prefall covenant and are aspects essential to it.

Fifth, this first covenant, or the covenant of works, entailed both promises and conditions (WCF 7.2). Furthermore, it comprehended Adam as federal head, or representative, and required of him perfect and personal obedience to the moral law (WCF 19.1–3; WLC 22). When Adam fell, however, he made himself and all his posterity by ordinary generation incapable of life by the covenant of works and plunged all mankind into a condition of sin and misery (WCF 7.3; WLC 22, 23–25). This lays the groundwork for understanding the work of Jesus Christ, the second Adam (WLC 31), the only mediator of the covenant of grace (WLC 36), who satisfied God’s justice (WLC 38) and performed obedience unto the law (WLC 39).

Sixth, the Westminster Confession does not equate the instrumentality of faith as it relates to justification in the covenant of grace with the obediential fulfillment of the conditions of the covenant of works (cf. WCF 7.2, “upon condition of perfect and personal obedience,” with WCF 7.3, “requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved”). It carefully distinguishes conditions from requirements, reminds us that even the faith of the elect is the gift of God, and draws a line from the conditions of the covenant of works to the work of Christ, not to the believer’s faithfulness or obedience (WLC 32). That is, the conditions that Adam failed to keep under the covenant of works, the second Adam, Jesus, kept on our behalf under the covenant of grace. Our obedience, thus, under the new covenant administration of the covenant of grace is as tied up with and dependent on Christ’s fulfillment of the conditions of the covenant, as was Israel’s with the sacrificial system under the old covenant (which was necessitated by and remedial of imperfect obedience). To put it yet another way, just as the Mosaic covenant isn’t “get in by grace, stay in by works” (“covenantal nomism”) but rather “get in by grace, stay in by mediator” (see, e.g., Ex. 19:3–6; 32), so also the new covenant isn’t “get in by grace, stay in by works.” Our obedience under the new covenant is evangelical obedience (WCF 11.1), obedience that is impossible apart from Christ’s active and passive obedience on our behalf, and the Spirit’s grace-work in us, and thus it is neither a substitute for nor a supplement to the work of Christ but rather its product in us, the evidence of

his grace, and the firstfruits of the whole goal of our creation and redemption, which is that we would be to the praise of God's glory.

Seventh, the terminological distinction between the covenants of works and grace highlights the fullness of the Westminster Confession's usage of the word "grace," which means not simply or merely God's undeserved favor but God's favor to those who deserve disfavor. Grace in its fullness is God's saving blessing to us despite our demerit. Thus there can be no grace (in the fullest sense of the word) without sin, since grace is the love and goodness of God to his people in spite of their sin and their deserving of curse, judgment, and disfavor. Hence, the Standards say, God in his love and mercy (WLC 30) made a second covenant, called the covenant of grace (WCF 7.3), in which he offers salvation to sinners by faith in Jesus Christ and promises to the elect the Holy Spirit (WCF 7.3).

Eighth, the confession indicates that any testamentary themes and terms in Scripture are to be subsumed under the overarching rubric of the covenant of grace (WCF 7.4). This is a unique statement in that it is an observation about the English translation of *διαθήκη* in certain places in the New Testament ("The covenant of grace is frequently set forth in Scripture by the name of a testament"; cf. the accompanying proof texts, Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25; Heb. 7:22; 9:15–17). Many modern subscribers to the Westminster Confession take exception to this assertion that "testament" occurs frequently (most scholars today agree that in only two possible places can *διαθήκη* be translated "testament," Gal. 3:15 and Heb. 9:15–17, though even in these passages there are good reasons to render *διαθήκη* "covenant").

Ninth, the Westminster Confession affirms that there is one covenant of grace in the Old Testament era ("the time of the law") and the New Testament era ("the time of the gospel") (WCF 7.5). Hence, the confession asserts the unity of the covenant of grace in its various administrations (WCF 7.6), while also affirming its diversity or progress. The confession is clear in its insistence that salvation is by faith in the Messiah, in the Old Testament as in the New (WCF 7.5).

Tenth, the Westminster Larger Catechism goes out of its way to indicate that the covenant of grace is made with the elect, or even more precisely, "with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed" (WLC 31). Thus, any attempt to make the covenant of grace apply equally to the elect and reprobate is contraconfessional. Furthermore, it is common in Reformed theology to use the term *covenant of grace* both broadly and narrowly, or externally and internally—that is, to speak of it entailing both everyone who is baptized into the Christ-professing covenant community (broad or external) and those who are elect, members of the invisible church, united to Christ by the Spirit through faith (narrow or internal). Nevertheless, the confession never speaks as if all those who are in the covenant of grace broadly or externally considered (the visible church) are recipients of the substance or saving benefits of the covenant of grace narrowly or internally considered (the invisible church). This is a vital

distinction, and so those who deny or confuse it, or who assert that all the benefits of the covenant of grace accrue to all who are baptized, do err and are out of accord with the confession.

Eleventh, though the Westminster Confession does not deploy the term *covenant of redemption*, its teaching comports with such. WLC 31 in its description of the parties of the covenant of grace indicates a belief that is consistent with the idea of a pretemporal *pactum salutis* (“The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed”), as does WSC 20 (“God having, out of his mere good pleasure, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life, did enter into a covenant of grace, to deliver them out of the estate of sin and misery, and to bring them into an estate of salvation by a Redeemer”). As the confession suggests, the doctrine of the covenant of redemption serves to clarify who is included in the parties of the covenant of grace.

### **Zealous for the Covenant**

Sometime in the late second century, Eusebius of Caesarea tells us, Irenaeus (ca. AD 120–202/3) carried a letter to Rome from his fellow Christians in Lugdunum (Lyons), in which they commend him with these words: “We pray, father Eleutherus, that you may rejoice in God in all things and always. We have requested our brother and companion Irenaeus to carry this letter to you, and we ask you to hold him in esteem, *as zealous for the covenant of Christ*.”<sup>8</sup> The expression “zealous for the covenant of Christ” is unique in patristic literature. It is certainly appropriate for Irenaeus, whose *Demonstration of the Apostolic Teaching* reads like a second-century version of O. Palmer Robertson’s *Christ of the Covenants*.

As you search the Scriptures, and as you study the contents of this book, may you be so captivated by the truths of God’s word about his covenants that you, too, become “zealous for the covenant of Christ.”

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8. Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.4.2.

# INTRODUCTION

Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid,  
and John R. Muether

Humanity, as the bearer of the divine image, was created for fellowship with God. But how is a relationship possible between an infinite and all-powerful God and a mere creature? Most religions, Herman Bavinck contends, cannot solve this dilemma. They “either pantheistically pull God down into what is creaturely, or deistically lift him endlessly above it.” Fellowship can take place only when religion takes the shape of a covenant, according to Bavinck: “Covenant is the essence of true religion.”<sup>1</sup>

Most evangelical Protestants agree that God’s way with humanity is covenantal. The Bible often describes our relationship with God, both his promises to us and our duties toward him, in the language of covenant. And so, in this broad sense, they are covenant theologians.

But do we fully understand that term? Is it merely a helpful metaphor to describe the condescension of God in his goodness and faithfulness? Reformed theology believes that Scripture constrains us to go deeper. As we come to see the centrality of covenant to the Christian faith, it provides the foundation for a host of theological doctrines. The covenant of grace drives Christ to the cross in his atoning work, it secures our justification before God, it prompts the ministry of the Spirit in our growth in grace, and it forms our hope of heaven.<sup>2</sup>

This is not all. Sustained study on the covenant theme in Scripture has prompted Reformed theologians to expand beyond a single covenant of grace to a two-covenant scheme (including the covenant of works with Adam in Eden) and even to a three-covenant scheme (including the covenant of redemption, an intra-Trinitarian pact, made before

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1. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 569–70.

2. This is not to suggest that covenant theology is required to believe in Christ and the benefits he has secured for us, but it is to claim that covenant theology presents those precious truths in the most compelling and coherent way.



time, to establish the salvation of God's people). Together, these covenants help us interpret God's word more clearly and understand his redemption more fully. J. I. Packer goes so far as to assert that the Bible's covenant architecture is "pervasive, arresting, and inescapable."<sup>3</sup>

But many other Protestants have resisted the vocabulary and the categories that are employed in covenant theology. Elaborate covenant schemes appear too detailed and abstract for them. John MacArthur speaks for many when he claims that "theologically derived covenants . . . can alter God's intended revelation."<sup>4</sup> Covenant theology, then, is something unique to the Reformed tradition, and even in Reformed circles some question its value. Norman Harper, one of the early professors at Reformed Theological Seminary, lamented four decades ago that "the doctrine of the covenant of grace has received little emphasis in recent times even from those confessionally committed to covenant theology."<sup>5</sup>

The contributors to this volume, members of the faculty at Reformed Theological Seminary, gladly take on the defense of covenant theology, convinced that it is not a theological abstraction foisted on the Scripture but rather the clear teaching of Scripture itself. We present covenant theology through explorations in biblical, systematic, and historical theology, all from a confessional Reformed perspective. In the style of previous Reformed Theological Seminary faculty collaborations,<sup>6</sup> our goal is to address ourselves primarily to the church. This book is a resource for the student in the seminary class, the pastor seeking continuing education, and educated laypeople looking for enrichment in their knowledge of this vital area of biblical doctrine.

What should readers expect to find in the pages of this book? In this introduction, we want to draw attention to several features of our approach to covenant theology.

### **Covenant Theology Is Exegetical**

As a faculty, we submit unwaveringly to the inspiration and authority of the Bible, the infallible rule of faith and practice for the church. We are constrained, then, first and foremost to make a biblical case for covenant theology. Covenant theology mines the Scripture to find a concrete basis for our relationship with God. Through the "architecture" of the covenant, the purposes and promises of God become increasingly legible in the pages of the Bible.

This book begins, in part 1, "Biblical Covenants," with the biblical revelation of the covenants of redemption and works, which, as we will see, establish the foundation for

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3. Packer, "Introduction on Covenant Theology," in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending a Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2010), 1:42.

4. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, gen eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 871.

5. Norman E. Harper, *Making Disciples: The Challenge of Christian Education at the End of the 20th Century* (Memphis, TN: Christian Studies Center, 1981), 34.

6. See Miles V. Van Pelt, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016); Michael J. Kruger, ed., *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).



properly understanding the covenant of grace. This may appear as an inauspicious start, because skeptics of covenant theology are generally most doubtful about these covenants. They are right, of course, when they note that neither the covenant of redemption nor the covenant of works is identified in Scripture by these terms. But covenant theology does not emerge from the slim evidence of a proof text or two. Rather, as Guy Richard writes, early covenant theologians derived these covenants from “complex and thoroughgoing examination” of Scripture.<sup>7</sup> Careful exegesis of a variety of texts reveals their covenant features, often by “good and necessary consequences” (WCF 1.6), even when the word itself does not occur.<sup>8</sup>

Covenants are the Bible’s way of displaying the grand sweep of redemptive history. Because the covenant of grace—which is “one and the same, under various dispensations” (WCF 7.6)—progresses in its development in the pages of Scripture, it is fitting that this book devote ten chapters to its organic development from promise to fulfillment. In each stage of Old Testament covenantal administration, the picture of the Redeemer to come grows deeper and richer. After the fall of our first parents, God promises that the seed of the woman would destroy the seed of the serpent. That promise is reinforced with the pledge to Noah that common grace will extend throughout redemptive history, guaranteeing the success of the seed. God promises that Abraham will be the father of a great family that will spread God’s blessings to the nations. The family is constituted a nation at Sinai, pointing to a new Moses who will lead a new exodus and a true Israel who will obey the Father. When the nation formally comes under the rule of David and his descendants, the promise takes the form of a triumphant Son and an anointed King. Each covenant builds on the previous, all foreshadowing the new covenant that becomes the focus of the message of the prophets. As Michael McKelvey notes, yet another dimension emerges in the prophetic forecast of the new covenant: it will come in the form of a servant, who will fulfill the promises in his suffering.

When the New Testament reveals the Redeemer of God’s elect in the person and work of Christ, the language of covenant actually recedes significantly (except in the book of Hebrews). For some interpreters, this is reason enough to dismiss the covenant as a redemptive-historical theme. Two things must be observed in response. First, as Christ is the “substance” of the covenant of grace (WCF 7.6), to exhibit Christ is to reveal the covenant, and to be united to Christ is to be in covenant with him. Thus, covenant theology, far from distracting us from Christ, emphatically drives us to Christ.<sup>9</sup>

7. See p. 50 below.

8. John Bolt rightly describes resistance to the biblical covenants as “methodological Biblicism”—that is, a wooden insistence that any implicit or indirect teaching in the Bible is a “theological imposition” on the text. John Bolt, “Why the Covenant of Works Is a Necessary Doctrine: Revisiting the Objections to a Venerable Reformed Doctrine,” in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 186.

9. Sinclair Ferguson is particularly compelling in arguing this point: “Christ *is* the covenant.” Foreword to Cornelis Venema, *Christ and Covenant Theology: Essays on Election, Republication, and the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017), xi.

Second, as several contributors observe, the New Testament writers were themselves covenant theologians. Michael Kruger notes that the Gospel writers describe the movement from promise to fulfillment in covenant logic: Christ as the second Adam, the seed of the woman, the new Moses, the true Israel, the greater Son of David, and the suffering servant—all this is covenant-enriched language. As Christ brings the organic development of the old covenant to its intended fulfillment, none of the redemptive plans of God are altered, replaced, or terminated.

### **Covenant Theology Is Trinitarian**

*Covenant Theology* offers a Trinitarian approach to the covenants. For example, Guy Richard takes note that the mission of God to save his people is based on the uniqueness of the persons of the Trinity, appropriate to the personal properties of each member of the Trinity: “Each person of the Godhead acts in a way that is suited to his own person and mission.”<sup>10</sup> In underscoring the finished work of the Son in his death and resurrection and the ongoing work of the Spirit in applying that work to God’s elect, we maintain important Trinitarian distinctions.

Similarly, Greg Lanier observes that in the Johannine corpus, “covenantal thinking permeates [John’s] description of each divine person.”<sup>11</sup> This yields, he goes on to explain, a particularly expansive view of the person and work of the Spirit, who serves as the covenant witness in Revelation. Indeed, the new covenant is particularly the ministry of the Spirit, as Guy Waters explains in his chapter on Paul: all that the second Adam accomplished is for the Spirit to apply.

### **Covenant Theology Is Eschatological**

Yet another feature of this book is the eschatological direction of covenant theology. Robert Cara’s study of covenant in Hebrews helpfully highlights that redemptive history is not only horizontal progress (in the movement from the first Adam to the second Adam) but is also a vertical movement from earthly types to heavenly realities. Adam’s prefallen communion with God in the garden of Eden was only a provisional arrangement. From the beginning of biblical revelation, the goal of the covenant of works was to bring the people of God into the glorified state of confirmed righteousness in a consummated order of eternal Sabbath rest.

What is the destiny of those united to Christ in his obedience to the covenant of works? We experience not the earthly joy of returning to Eden but the realization of an eternal and heavenly joy. Rather than a recovered innocence, we follow Christ in his consummated glory, the reward that Adam forfeited having been obtained for us by the second Adam. Guy Waters writes, “Christ has not only undone what Adam did; he

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10. See p. 60 below.

11. See p. 269 below.

has done what Adam failed to do.”<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the Scriptures close with a vision of that consummated glory of the new Jerusalem expressed in the very promise of the covenant: “The one who conquers will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son” (Rev. 21:7).

Eschatological life is a higher life; it is resurrection life of a different order. Moreover, this abundant life does not merely await the believer’s entrance into glory. Even now, in the certainty of our entitlement to heaven, we have confidence to serve God in the power of the resurrection.

### **Covenant Theology Is Historical**

To repeat, our case for covenant theology emerges from Scripture, not from Christian antiquity or from church tradition. We trust that readers will find that this book has met that burden. Still, it is incumbent for advocates of covenant theology to demonstrate some continuity of the covenant theme through church history and the benefits of the church’s exegesis and theological reflection on the subject. *Covenant Theology* is sensitive to the historical development of covenant theology as it turns, in part 2, to historical studies.

Diverse streams of influence have given shape to covenant theology. The seeds of covenant theology are broad and varied in the early church, as Ligon Duncan demonstrates. While it is not a major feature in medieval theology, Douglas Kelly reveals that covenant theology is still present and assumed.

The first generation of sixteenth-century Reformers began thinking covenantally to reinforce their gospel claims. Howard Griffith demonstrates that covenant served Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger’s desire to stress the unity of God’s saving purposes against Anabaptist dismissals of the Old Testament. John Calvin’s theology of the covenant emerged as the foundation both of the *historia salutis* (the execution of God’s sovereign election in the saving work of Christ) and the *ordo salutis* (the sealing of Christ’s benefits by the Spirit). After Calvin, theological reflection on the covenant became increasingly explicit to the point where, by the turn of the seventeenth century, the covenant became an organizing principle in Reformed theological systems.

In complementary studies of the post-Reformation era, Blair Smith (focusing on Puritanism) and Bruce Baugus (focusing on the Dutch Reformed tradition) survey this era of covenant refinement. Far from a departure from the theology of the Reformers, Protestant scholastics established the wider covenantal framework in which to explain Reformation truths such as the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. There is continuity, but there is also expansion and nuance in covenant thinking, especially as new challenges threatened Reformed orthodoxy. These historical pieces, we believe, should put to rest the claim that covenant theology is a Reformed invention. If the

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12. See p. 88 below.

Reformation was an exercise in retrieval and development, that included the doctrine of the covenants.

### **Covenant Theology Is Confessional**

These historical chapters stress that proponents of covenant theology, as part of an international confessional movement, were churchmen. Diverse formulations of the covenants largely stayed within the confessional standards of Reformed churches. This confessional consensus guarded the development of covenant theology from idiosyncrasy and provincialism.

Like the voices from our Reformed past, the authors of this book are also united in our cordial agreement with historic covenant theology, especially as it finds expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith. As the doctrinal standard for the seminary and the churches we serve, we are duty bound to teach it. Where many theologians in our anticonfessional age might fear doctrinal standards as curtailing freedom in theological reflection, we believe that Scripture and confession promote exegetical reflection and theological creativity, and it is in this context that we approach the subject of covenant theology.

### **Covenant Theology Is Technical**

While it is the desire of this book to communicate accessibly to the church, covenant theology can be a complex subject. Debates in covenant theology wade into deep waters of highly technical matters of difference with competing interpretive theories. Here the readers are also exposed to the rise and fall of particular schools of thought that have held sway in the past: the two traditions of covenant theology (which claimed to identify a divergence between the bilateral covenantal approach of Bullinger and the unilateralism of Calvin), Calvin versus the Calvinists (which drove a wedge between the spirit of the sixteenth-century Reformation and the post-Reformation era on several related topics, including the covenant), and Perry Miller's recasting of Puritanism (where covenant became the means to escape the iron cage of Calvinistic predestinarianism).

Other technical issues are addressed in part 3, "Collateral Studies." Nicholas Reid, in one of the more challenging essays in the book, takes on ancient Near Eastern parallels to the biblical covenants. This has been a growing field of investigation with recent archaeological discoveries that have raised questions concerning whether similarities between Deuteronomy and ancient Hittite treaties support an early date (and Mosaic authorship) of the book. Reid points to new evidence and constantly changing theories that question earlier assumptions. This reality places limits on the conclusions that comparative studies can draw, and Reid urges caution against relying on extrabiblical evidence at the expense of exegesis. Peter Lee pronounces a similar caution in his look at Second Temple Judaism, another area of contemporary interest. Surveying a wide

range of intertestamental literature, he identifies several competing covenantal systems and concludes that popular proposals (such as the “covenantal nomism” of E. P. Sanders) struggle to account for all the traditions of this period.

### **Covenant Theology Is Charitable**

To be sure, covenant theology developed in a polemical age, in the context of intense debates between Reformed theologians and Socinians, Arminians, Antinomians, and others. Later, the church faced different challenges. Mark McDowell surveys the particular criticism from Karl Barth and his theological descendants. Michael Allen demonstrates why covenant theology has fallen into neglect among modern theologians, though he does highlight the promising work of two notable exceptions. There are competing hermeneutical frameworks today—including dispensationalism, the New Perspective on Paul, and progressive covenantalism. These challenges oblige the contributors to this book to engage their opponents polemically.

Still, it is the desire of the authors to present the case for covenant theology with charity. As Scott Swain reminds us, disagreements can have a sanctifying effect on our theology. If opposition served to sharpen the focus of covenant theology in the past, we hope and expect that new challenges will do the same today. Readers can detect in all the contributors a desire to engage respectfully those with whom they disagree.

*Covenant Theology* is indebted to a rich tradition of reflection on the covenant. This book does not claim to be the only word—nor the last word—on the subject of covenant theology. We lean on the work of others, and names like Calvin, Bavinck, and Geerhardus Vos are frequently invoked. Readers can also find some of the diversity in the Reformed tradition on the covenants in these pages. The faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary are not in complete agreement on the details of the doctrine of the covenant. The nature of the Noahic covenant, the differences between John Murray and Meredith Kline, and the question of republication in the Mosaic covenant—on these and other areas there are differences among us, all within common confessional commitments. In this way, the book is a window into the faculty of Reformed Theological Seminary, and as editors we have been pleased at the spirit of unity that has characterized work in the project.

### **Covenant Theology Is Practical**

Finally, *Covenant Theology* seeks to be practical. As noted above, the very real purpose of this volume is to help Bible study leaders, pastors, and Christian leaders teach and apply the word of God, with an eye toward edifying God’s people as they grow in grace. Kevin DeYoung’s afterword, for example, demonstrates how covenant theology and its implications for Christian living can be communicated in simple terms from the pulpit of the church.

Assurance of salvation appears as a recurring theme throughout this book. The eternal covenant of redemption and its historical outworking in the covenant of grace serve to guarantee the salvation of the elect, because what stands behind them is the unchangeable oath of God. We join with Calvin in believing that “we have no reason to be afraid that God will deceive us if we persevere in his covenant.”<sup>13</sup> Derek Thomas invites us to grow in the assurance of faith, especially through the God-appointed means of covenant signs and seals. Covenant theology directs us to “improve” (make proper use of) our baptism, especially in time of temptation, and we come to the end of all doubt when we commune with Christ and all his benefits in the Lord’s Supper.

All of us at Reformed Theological Seminary want you to be knowledgeable of and passionate about the Bible’s teaching on the covenants. This book is designed to give you, our readers, a clearer understanding of the exegetical foundations and theological implications of covenant theology, in the hope that as students of Reformed theology, you will be better equipped to defend and propagate the Reformed faith. More than that, the editors are bold enough to hope that you will emerge encouraged in your understanding of the joy of covenant life.

May this book leave you, the reader, with the great hope and consolation of the gospel: our covenant-making God is a covenant-keeping God. He is “the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments,” whose ear remains attentive and his eyes open to the prayers of his servants (Neh. 1:5).

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Three of the contributors to this volume are formers faculty members at Reformed Theological Seminary. O. Palmer Robertson, Douglas Kelly, and Howard Griffith were influential and beloved figures in the life of the seminary.

One of the early members of the faculty, Dr. Robertson taught in Jackson from 1967 to 1972 and subsequently at Westminster (Philadelphia), Covenant, and Knox Seminaries, as well as African Bible Colleges in Malawi and Uganda. He has devoted a lifetime to the study of the covenants, especially in his influential *Christ of the Covenants*. His essay “Israel and the Nations in God’s Covenants,” in this volume, is a fitting convergence of his love for covenant theology and his passion for the worldwide witness of the church.

Dr. Kelly began his career at the Jackson campus (1984–1994) and then taught at the Charlotte campus for over two decades, until his retirement in 2016. He mentored many of the contributors of this book as a professor and as a senior colleague on the faculty, impressing on us all the value of the whole history of Christ’s church.

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13. John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 22 vol. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1979), 4:424 (comm. on Ps. 25:10).

Dr. Griffith's devotion to covenant theology grew in his seminary studies under Meredith G. Kline and Richard B. Gaffin Jr. After pastoring in Richmond, Virginia, for twenty-five years, he joined the faculty at Reformed Theological Seminary, Washington, DC, in 2007, teaching systematic theology and guiding the faculty as academic dean. He finished his contribution to this book only a month before his sudden passing. His mining of Calvin's covenant theology, especially through the Reformer's sermons, testifies to Howard's passion for the preached word in his years of pastoral ministry.

We honor these three faithful instructors, devoted preachers, meticulous scholars, colleagues, and fathers in the faith by dedicating this book to them.





PART 1



BIBLICAL COVENANTS



# THE COVENANT OF REDEMPTION

Guy M. Richard

Perhaps the most questionable element of historical federal theology is the covenant of redemption—the idea that there is a pretemporal agreement between the persons of the Trinity to plan and carry out the redemption of the elect. Many people today have reservations about the biblical warrant for such an idea.<sup>1</sup> The biblical proof texts employed to support it have come under a fair amount of criticism in recent years. Moreover, there is a sense in which the covenant of redemption feels speculative and unnecessary, because it deals with things happening within the mind of God before the creation of time and because it seems to run counter to the unity of God. If God really is one God with one mind and will, then why would the persons of the Trinity need a covenant to establish agreement between them? Would there not already be agreement by virtue of the fact that all three persons share one and the same mind and will?<sup>2</sup> The covenant of redemption has, for all these reasons, fallen on hard times within the Reformed community at large.

But as we shall see, the covenant of redemption was not always so suspect. It was, in fact, a commonly accepted idea from at least the middle part of the seventeenth century until the early twentieth century. From the moment it was formally expressed in writing, the covenant of redemption was embraced almost universally within the Reformed

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1. The influence of Karl Barth and, to a lesser degree, John Murray, Herman Hoeksema, O. Palmer Robertson, and Robert Letham helped cultivate many of these reservations regarding the covenant of redemption within the broader Reformed world. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956), 4.1:64–66; John Murray, “The Plan of Salvation,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 130; Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 1966), 285–336; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 53–54; Robert Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in Its Catholic Context,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), 196.

2. Barth offers a similar criticism as this one in *Church Dogmatics*, 4.1:65; as does Letham in “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity,” 196.