

# Peering Over the Fence: Presbyterian Reflections on Baptist Neighbors Doing Covenant Theology<sup>1</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

My wife and I are in the process of looking to buy a house. Property, houses, and neighborhoods have, therefore, been much on my mind recently. In regard to developing theological currents, thinking about it like navigating life with interesting neighbors might have some value. Reformed theology has long lived on a street called "Covenant Theology." In some ways, it used to feel like a somewhat secluded street. As I imagine life on this street, my backyard is complete with a stone birdbath.

After some time on my secluded covenant street with my birdbath, a new neighbor moves in. I can imagine looking over the fence into my

new neighbor's yard and seeing what I think is a big above-ground swimming pool. One day, I get to talk to my new neighbor over the fence. Obviously, I commend his lovely pool. To my surprise, he says, "No, no, that's a birdbath." Then he directs me to a small sign by what I thought was a pool, which reads, "birds must be fully immersed to be truly bathed." It dawns on me that not everyone on our covenantal street might see eye-to-eye about how to get things done.

After time goes by again, we finally get a neighbor on the other side of me. This neighbor seems very exciting because he builds a full waterslide with an above ground pool at the bottom in his backyard. On our first meeting, I certainly commend his amazing slide. As you probably guessed, however, he replies, "No, no, that's a birdbath." Readers are free to allegorize those neighbors as representatives for my two conversation partners if and as you see fit. The point is that, even if other parties feel like they've owned property on Covenant Theology Street, Reformed people rightly feel like no one else has been interested in living on it for some time. As a host of neighbors are moving in – whether purchasing property for the first time or finally building on a vacant plot that they have owned for a while is another question – we on the Reformed side are in the process of sussing out our new neighbors.

Baptist theology is witnessing a burgeoning interest in covenant. On the one hand, "progressive covenantalism" (hereafter PC) is developing in mainstream Baptist thought.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, "1689 federalism" has a growing contingent in minority confessional Baptist circles.<sup>3</sup> This article argues that both systems of Baptist covenant theology have incorrectly stated their relation to traditional Reformed covenant theology.<sup>4</sup> More pointedly, PC is closer to Reformed covenant theology than it has suggested but 1689 federalism is further from us than its proponents often claim.<sup>5</sup> This brief paper cannot provide wholesale critique of either position with any sort of fairness to their arguments, nor is it worthwhile to take a hard, quick crack at some particular doctrine within their systems. Rather, the focus is on big-picture perceptions — mainly pertaining to methodological issues — to increase clarity and charity within our discussions. The goal is that we all might recognize a birdbath when we see it, even if it's different from our own.

Two blanket admonitions for Reformed covenant theology, PC, and 1689 federalism might help us refine our discussion going forward. First, we should all put a moratorium on asserting that our view is "more biblical."

The claim, which inevitably irritates readers among the alternative systems, thoroughly begs the question since we are all striving to be biblical and each needing to demonstrate our position's biblical grounding. Second, the discussion needs to prioritize other issues besides ecclesiology and baptism. At least from the perspective of covenant theology, our emphasis on the unity of the covenants primarily concerned soteriology. My contention is that the baseline concerns in covenant theology's affirmation of one substance administered through various covenants should not be controversial. Until we clarify if and how we agree on foundational issues such as the one gospel delivered differently throughout redemptive history, any debate about the nature of church membership and sacraments hardly has a point.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the discussion must come to terms with the categories of systematic theology before the redemptive-historical contours of biblical theology matter.

### **PROGRESSIVE COVENANTALISM (PC)**

Good theological interaction cannot be just an onslaught of criticism if it is going to be constructive but must include appreciation and critique. For that reason, we first need to account for the positive. So, for what am I most thankful in PC?

- They consistently land profound and substantive criticisms against dispensationalism.<sup>7</sup>
- Their commitment to the unity of redemptive history, including one people of God.<sup>8</sup>
- Their perceptive insight about how typological structures drive the progress of revelation and redemptive history.<sup>9</sup>

These areas represent clear aspects of PC that seem emphatic and mostly uniform throughout its published corpus.

What would I change about PC? The question might seem like it inevitable leads to all the major points of disagreement. The answers posed here, however, do not aim at any specific views affirmed in the PC system. Rather, these desired changes suggest what seem to be genuinely feasible methodological adjustment that would improve discussions with

Reformed covenant theology by helping us to understand the PC system more fully and more clearly.

***1. PC tends to state disagreements with Reformed covenant theology when many instances seem to be a rejection of terminology rather than the substance of the doctrine.***

This change is needed because it creates confusion on the Reformed side followed by consternation on the PC side. When PC advocates have claimed to have developed a completely new system including differences about soteriology, Reformed covenant theologians have believed that it is truly on a totally other paradigm. Then, however, PC advocates become frustrated that we are criticizing their soteriology and have clarified that they are assuming the same *ordo salutis* as traditional Reformed theology, including how basically the same *ordo salutis* applied to OT believers as applies to NT believers.<sup>10</sup>

We need to work to avoid speaking past each other in these ways. Many conversations with Stephen Wellum and Richard Lucas have clarified for me that they are focusing their differences on matters of the *historia salutis*. Still, we could have avoided much confusion had PC either stated that it assumes a Reformed *ordo salutis*, including how that relates to OT soteriology, or simply not claimed to be developing an entirely different paradigm altogether—unless they very explicitly then outline points of agreement. Rightly or wrongly, when I read that PC is claiming that their view is a new paradigm, then I assume no agreement.

The issue driving this misunderstanding is the difference between rejecting and modifying existing doctrine. PC modifies several key Reformed doctrines but does not reject them. Wellum has outlined PC's basic thesis: "Progressive covenantalism argues that the Bible presents a *plurality* of covenants that *progressively* reveal our triune God's *one* plan for his *one* people, which reaches its fulfillment and terminus in Christ and the new covenant."<sup>11</sup> At least from the Reformed side, that thesis itself is not controversial and in no way differentiates PC from our view. The difference is in how they see the shape of the OT covenants pressuring the contours of redemptive history toward regenerate-only membership in the new covenant.

The paradigm is arguably a modification of a Vossian approach to redemptive-historical interpretation of the covenants without

rejecting the Reformed view of what covenants *do* in redemptive history. For example, *Kingdom through Covenant* argues: “Central to our purpose is that God’s *saving* kingdom comes to this world *through* the covenants in a twofold way.”<sup>12</sup> Further, “*Covenantalism* emphasizes at least two points: first, that *covenants* are theologically significant and the means by which God relates to his creatures and creation and establishes his kingdom, and, second, that God’s plan is unfolded *through the covenants*, which are all brought to their fulfillment in Christ.”<sup>13</sup> On the other side, even as far back as 1576, Caspar Olevianus (1536–87) argued, in his commentary on the Apostles’ Creed, that kingdom and covenant are necessarily and inextricably linked.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Meredith Kline, one of the most prominent covenant theologians of the twentieth century, argued: “Taking the kingdom of God as our central, organizing theme, we inevitably find ourselves fully involved with the divine covenants of Scripture; for to follow the course of the kingdom is to trace the series of covenants by which the Lord administers his kingdom.”<sup>15</sup> Further, “covenants function as administrative instruments of God’s kingly rule.”<sup>16</sup> Greater interaction with traditional Reformed covenant theology would help PC make things clearer for Reformed readers by helping us all see that their different inflections on this theme might amount to modifications of an idea but not rejection of a common notion.

A more pointed example is God’s covenant with Adam. Reformed theology has, since the mid-seventeenth century, most commonly named it “the covenant of works.” The specific designation should not occupy much debate. Even as Wellum’s more recent works attest, at least he is becoming more comfortable with nearly full-throated affirmations of what we basically mean by the covenant of works (and the pre-temporal covenant of redemption).<sup>17</sup> *Kingdom through Covenant* says: “In contrast to a covenant of works, which tends to create too sharp a disjunction between creation and the subsequent redemptive covenants, it is better to view the covenant of creation in more continuity with later covenants, as *foundational* to them and not as their foil.”<sup>18</sup> Although there are proponents who fail to represent the point cogently, consistently, and clearly, the *best* articulations of PC actually do affirm the same truth concerning *how* this covenant is a foil to all the postlapsarian covenants.

The specific issue of agreement is that this first covenant demanded perfect obedience to obtain eschatological reward but the only way to eschatological

life after the fall is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.<sup>19</sup> Inasmuch as proponents of PC are willing to affirm that OT believers were saved because the features of their covenants taught them about Christ, and that those believers trusted in Christ to receive all his benefits in advance but in their time, PC advocates agree with the Reformed regarding the dogmatic core of the substance of the covenant of grace being the same in every covenantal administration. At least *to some degree*, PC seems to be on similar ground with the Reformed when *Kingdom through Covenant* argues: “Thus it is clear, from even a few texts in the New Testament, that the covenant with Abraham is the basis and foundation for the gospel message announcing forgiveness of sins and justification through Jesus Christ.”<sup>20</sup> Further, PC seems to argue that the grace of Christ was communicated during the OT period in a way similar to how Westminster Confession 8.6 affirms that Christ’s work was applied to believers through the ordinances of the old economy, but they also argue similarly to how Westminster Confession 7.5–6 says this substance was fully exhibited.<sup>21</sup> Two examples:

No doubt, OT saints were forgiven of their sins and justified before God (Gen 15:6), but only in terms of God’s ultimate provision in Christ.<sup>22</sup>

For example, under the Old Testament covenants, God’s people were saved by grace through faith in the promises of God, and the same is true under the new covenant, yet now there is greater knowledge and clarity regarding how God’s promises reach their terminus and fulfillment in Christ (Gen. 15:6; Luke 24:25–27; Rom. 4:9–12; Gal. 3:6–4:7; Heb. 11:8–19).<sup>23</sup>

If I correctly understand PC to be saying that, before the fall, Adam could obtain eschatological reward by perfect obedience, but, after the fall, all eschatological and saving blessings come from Jesus Christ as believers received him through the promises and ordinances of the former covenants as they were ultimately about Christ, then PC agrees with traditional covenant theology about the main way that the covenant of works is a foil to the covenant of grace in establishing the law-gospel distinction.<sup>24</sup> The affirmation of the law-gospel distinction among the best proponents of PC should not be quickly overlooked, since it is a key piece of Protestant theology that unites us in clearly teaching the good news of Christ.

Even as PC elaborates their view of the creation covenant, its similarity to at least some Reformed constructions confirm that they have at most modified the Reformed view rather than rejected it. Two examples:

We affirm that Adam is created as God's image-son, a priest-king, and humanity's representative head, to rule over creation and to put everything under his feet (Gen. 1:26–31; Psalm 8). We also affirm that God, as Creator and Lord, rightly demands perfect obedience from his covenant partner.<sup>25</sup>

The Westminster Confession 7.2 states:

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.<sup>26</sup>

In his book *Christ Alone*, Wellum remarkably united these themes with the gospel by tying Christ's fulfillment of the law and completion of his active obedience to creational structures, which left me thinking that he undoubtedly believed in the covenant of works even if he had not named it as such.<sup>27</sup> Second, furthermore, Wellum explained the continuity of creation and covenant: "The command, then, given to Adam in Genesis 2:16–17 did not create a 'covenant of works' relationship subsequent to creation; instead, Adam, by virtue of his creation as God's image-son, was already in filial relation with his Creator-covenant Lord."<sup>28</sup> Johannes Cocceius argued the same idea in 1669: "Man, therefore, by the very fact that he was made according to God's image, has been constituted as in a covenant with God."<sup>29</sup> The upshot is that, using the covenant of works as an example, PC has often articulated versions of Reformed doctrines with at most modifications made, entailing that their stated disagreement with Reformed covenant theology is often overstated, concerning primarily terminology.

In *Reformed Covenant Theology*, I argued that the omission of the category of natural law in the discussion of *Kingdom through Covenant* makes it unclear *how* PC affirms the abiding validity of God's moral law while denying that the decalogue is distinct within the Mosaic law.<sup>30</sup> In traditional Reformed theology, the decalogue summarizes the natural law so remains the abiding rule of righteousness for Christians, not as Mosaic but inasmuch

as it summarizes our moral obligations from the natural law. Wellum has clearly affirmed the natural law, and perhaps my criticism for his lack of clarity in *Kingdom through Covenant* on this point might be overstated or be in need of refined precision.<sup>31</sup> My point, however, was not to deny that PC has a place for natural law but simply that, from the perspective of traditional Reformed theology, the affirmation of natural law is difficult to understand in light of the rejection of the decalogue as the summary of the moral law.<sup>32</sup> Reformed covenant theologians will be helped to know what PC holds as the summary of the natural and moral law if not the decalogue. This instance seems to be one where the revision of terminology is causing confusion about an issue where PC wants Reformed theology to understand their basic agreement with us.

## **2. Clarify the systematic implications of their positions.**

Sometimes PC argues for biblical-theological positions without fully spelling out the systematic implications. Reformed covenant theology would be helped by greater and more thorough explanation of what two of PC's positions mean in terms for soteriology. It is hard to accept the basic claim without knowing how that claim lands and plays out.

First, PC rejects that the Holy Spirit indwelt believers during the OT period.<sup>33</sup> My point is not presently to critique the idea but to ask what its ramifications are. How does this affect the doctrines of regeneration and perseverance? How does it not suggest a different *ordo salutis* for OT believers? Why is this an important feature of difference within the dynamic contours of redemptive history? What does it mean about the guarantee of an inheritance in Christ for OT believers? Does this view hold any wider systematic relevance that affects other aspects of the PC paradigm, meaning that it carries dogmatic weight outside itself? These questions do not insinuate any answers.

Second, PC argues that every covenant is conditional and unconditional.<sup>34</sup> This point needs elaboration for both the *historia salutis* and *ordo salutis* ramifications of the covenants. It is not clear in some ways what value this view has in the overall system. The discussion of conditionality might, in some ways, be tired and fit to be discarded, since too often scholars are debating the question of whether covenants are conditional without defining what that means in concrete terms. PC could help readers from the

perspective of Reformed covenant theology by explaining a few implications. Does a covenant's conditionality mean that works are part of the condition for our right relationship with God? Is the demand for obedience general, broad, and typological thereby showing our need for Christ? Or is it specific, narrow, and personal meaning that individual believers in the covenant are under conditions to render obedience in order to enter everlasting life? Further, what sort of conditions are in view? For example, the distinction of antecedent conditions (those necessary *for* salvation) and consequent conditions (those following *from* salvation) has historically played a significant role in how Reformed theology has explained conditionality in relation to the law-gospel distinction.<sup>35</sup> Are these sorts of conditions in view in PC?

The discussion of conditions can become rather winding. That potential is exactly why Reformed readers need further clarification for understanding precisely what PC is after in their affirmation that every covenant is conditional and unconditional. From the Reformed side, the most point question for this issue concerns its relation to soteriology. In other words, how does PC's use of this category relate to the doctrine of justification by faith alone? This issue is one where Reformed readers need help and clarification in relating this discussion to our cherished law-gospel distinction so that we can see how PC does not undermine this important premise. Again, the questions are requests for clarification, not insinuation of error. Further, the point that our potential understanding that this position might undermine the law-gospel distinction is a request for clarification on the assumption that clarification can be made unto satisfactory resolution concerning how the best proponents of PC argue their views.

### **3. Use real and trustworthy Reformed sources.**

PC sometimes uses infelicitous sources for engaging Reformed covenant theology. On a minor level, *Kingdom through Covenant* engages a Sydney Anglican theologian concerning the threefold division of the law.<sup>36</sup> Without assuming that the cited theologian disagrees with the tradition of covenant theology on this issue, Sydney Anglicanism hardly best represents the core trajectory of classic covenant theology when there are plenty of published works on the moral law from within the Reformed perspective.<sup>37</sup>

At the major level, alongside representatives of mainstream, classic, confessional Reformed covenant theology—which does contain legitimate diversity—*Kingdom through Covenant* cites theologians whose theology has been rejected by denominational reports from the major NAPARC communions as out of accord with the Reformed confessions.<sup>38</sup> In other words, PC arguments lump confessional covenant theology into the same group as if we cited—at least as some of us see it—the absolute worst of Baptist thought as representing PC ideas just because it was Baptist. I would rather see believers sitting under the ministries of the pastors whom I know in the PC and 1689 federalist camps than to see them in the churches of a few writers cited in *Kingdom through Covenant* as though they represent the view I too hold. Given that PC has objected to being confused with so-called “new covenant theology”—even though the first edition of *Kingdom through Covenant* itself identified progressive covenantalism as a species of new covenant theology—it seems fair to ask that PC would distinguish classic and confessional covenant theology from deviant versions that have been rejected in formal capacities.<sup>39</sup> The starting point for correction on this issue is perhaps to engage covenant theology *first* through its formulation in the Reformed confessions.

### **1689 FEDERALISM**

Again, we should balance appreciation and critique. So, for what am I most thankful in 1689 federalism?

- They seem to be clearly and consistently committed to the law-gospel distinction, especially as it relates to soteriology.<sup>40</sup>
- Their commitment to the abiding validity of God’s moral law, including the sabbath.<sup>41</sup>
- It grows within a commitment to doing theology in accord with confessional standards.<sup>42</sup>

In some ways, the clear and uniform affirmation of the law-gospel distinction among 1689 federalists ought to be the note that resounds the loudest in this whole discussion. Baptist and Reformed theologians might easily lose sight of this crucial bond of unity in the gospel amidst our other disagreements.

We ought not to lose sight of this foundational shared commitment even as we attempt to reckon with areas of difference.

What would I change in 1689 federalism? Reformed theology's interaction with 1689 federalism is more complicated and often produces more frustrations among conversation partners because of much agreement. Sam Renihan, 1689 federalism's most able teacher, is a dear friend. 1689 federalism agrees with traditional Reformed covenant theology about the basic notions of the covenant of works, the covenant of redemption, and that the covenant of grace is the one source of salvation across redemptive history.<sup>43</sup> Difficulty arises because some representatives of 1689 federalism use some different methods to explain what are in some ways some very similar ideas. These wished-for changes then address methodological features that seem to complicate the discussion. I understand in light of their strong application of the law-gospel distinction that advocates of 1689 federalism clear understanding and explanation of the gospel itself, meaning the reservations below regard the *clarity* of explanation concerning the OT saints' experience of the gospel. Admittedly, this issue is niche but is the area of most focused disagreement between traditional Reformed covenant theology and 1689 federalism.

### ***1. The concept of covenants.***

1689 federalism relies on the contention that covenants are entirely positive constructions, arguing that they are something fully *post hoc* to nature and, therefore, not mutually informing. Renihan writes, "That which God does beyond nature is supernatural. Covenants fall into the latter category. They are not part of the natural created order" and "Covenants, therefore, are not natural arrangements."<sup>44</sup> We should all agree that covenant is not identical to nature, as if creation and covenant can be completely conflated.<sup>45</sup> All the same, Renihan leans heavily on this distinction to emphasize further the distinctions of natural law from positive law and natural religion from instituted religion.<sup>46</sup>

It is worth noting already the 1689 federalism is at odds with both traditional covenant theology and PC at this point. Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1–2 states that "God gave to Adam a law, as covenant of works," which was later delivered in the Decalogue as a rule of righteousness, and Westminster Confession 4.2 already clarified that it was "the law of God

written on their hearts.”<sup>47</sup> In other words, the natural law was the basis of the covenant of works, which is exactly why some Reformed theologians have called it the covenant of nature.<sup>48</sup> In other words, Reformed theology saw continuity between creation and the covenant of works, rather than a strictly positivist relation. Similarly, PC argues: “Creation, then, with a pre-fall and post-fall distinction sets the context for subsequent covenants which ultimately find their fulfillment in Christ and the new covenant.”<sup>49</sup> PC recognizes the demand for perfect obedience *as grounded in creation* as driving the tension within the covenants forward toward Christ.<sup>50</sup> Considered from the vantage of strictly the *historia salutis*, this point is fully compatible with Reformed covenant theology.

1689 federalism parts ways with both camps on this issue. This difference emerges even in the Second London Baptist Confession as it omits the full-orbed discussion of the covenant of works that was contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith. As they revised the Westminster Confession for their use, the framers of the Second London Baptist Confession omitted the explicit statement of the covenant of works entirely from their chapter on the covenants.<sup>51</sup> This omission does not set the Second London Baptist Confession at odds with the covenant of works, and proponents of 1689 federalism have readily defended that doctrine as compatible with their confession.<sup>52</sup> Even though the covenant of works is mentioned elsewhere in this confession (20.1), its omission — for whatever historical reason — under the direct discussion of the covenants is striking.<sup>53</sup>

1689 federalism’s difference with traditional Reformed covenant theology is not limited to a mere omission of an explicit statement of the covenant of works in our confessional chapters on the covenants. The difference is arguably clearest in the confessional statements about creation. Westminster Confession 4.2 outlines how God created man “endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after his own image, having the law of God written in their hearts and the power to fulfill it.” After this description of the natural law, it affirms in the same paragraph that “Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; which while they kept they were happy in their communion with God, and had dominion over the creatures.”<sup>54</sup> Westminster’s formulation then certainly relates the command about the prohibition against the tree of knowledge as an additional, positive command to the

natural law but keeps them together as the natural and positive aspects of the covenant of works. The act of combining our description of that positive law so closely to our formulation of the natural law suggests, as was commonplace in Reformed theology, that the tree command was simply a symbolic representation of our natural obligations for the period of Adam's covenantal probation.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast, the Second London Confession makes a hard separation of these ideas. Its formulation makes two paragraphs where Westminster had only one. Second London 4.2 somewhat follows Westminster's position on natural law but does rework it:

After God made all other Creatures, he created man, man and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, rendering them fit unto that life to God, for which they were created; being made after the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness; having the Law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject to change.<sup>56</sup>

The broad contours align with Westminster 4.2, but significant details differ. This natural law rendered Adam "fit unto that life to God, for which they were created." Is that life merely continuation in the natural but upright state or is it eschatological? As we will continue to see, the combination of concepts in Westminster Confession 4.2, 7.2, and 19.1 suggest that the Reformed perceived at the confessional level that Adam was naturally oriented toward eschatological life with God, which the covenant of works as founded in the natural law with a symbolic positive law enabled Adam to attain.

The Second London Confession 4.3 then separates the positive law about the tree from its formulation of natural law.

Besides the Law written in their hearts, they received a command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; which whilst they kept, they were happy in their Communion with God, and had dominion over the Creatures.<sup>57</sup>

The wording follows the end of Westminster Confession 4.2 exactly, but the paragraph break has wider implications. For this Baptist formulation, the condition of maintaining communion with God was located specifically in

the positive command about the tree. Reformed theology bound natural and positive law together in covenantal union whereas early-modern Baptist theology was separating them to tie covenants to the positive laws alone.

A comparison of the confessional discussion of God's law continues to reveal that deeper rift between the Baptist and Reformed confessional formulations of the covenants. Westminster Confession of Faith 19.1 states:

God gave to Adam a law, *as a covenant of work*, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.<sup>58</sup>

The Second London Confession 19.1 reads:

God gave to Adam a Law of universal obedience, written in his Heart, and a particular precept of not eating the Fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil; by which he bound him, and all his posterity to entire exact and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it.<sup>59</sup>

The notable omission in the Second London Confession is that the law written on Adam's heart was given to him *as the covenant of works*. Although Second London 20.1 explicitly mentions the covenant of works, its formulation of the law refused to equate the natural directly with the covenant of works.<sup>60</sup> Given that Second London 4.3 tied the maintenance of communion with God exclusively to the positive law, the aspects of the covenant of works affirmed after the semi-colon in 19.1 should also likely be tied exclusively to that positive law. After all, in comparison to Westminster 19.1, the framers of the Second London Baptist inserted this description of the positive law as the direct antecedent to what they accept about the covenant of works.

At the confessional level, Baptists historically articulated a greater divide between nature and covenant than Reformed theologians have. Given my argument above, we should then be clear that early-modern Baptists were not following Reformed theology directly or identically about the relationship of covenant to creation. 1689 federalism has picked up that

difference to emphasize the positivist nature of covenants wherein, as positivism accentuates, the singular and conventional is stressed to the exclusion of relations that are inferred according to some other principle than sense experience.<sup>61</sup> Its formulation—inasmuch as voluntarism emphasizes what is chosen over what has an underlying reason—propounds a more voluntarist notion of covenants, especially the creation covenant than either traditional Reformed covenant theology or PC. Why is this issue so important?

First, it affects how we think of our covenantal anthropology. Certainly, the *distinction* between creation and covenant is commonplace in Reformed theology.<sup>62</sup> Nonetheless, 1689 federalism's *separation* of creation and covenant presses their position toward a Roman Catholic anthropology, wherein the doctrine of pure nature divides our supposedly natural and supernatural ends according to what belongs to our base nature and what is superadded to our nature by grace. That Roman doctrine draws heavily upon the distinction of natural and supernatural religion, especially concerning how we are ordered to a supernatural end in the beatific vision and how to attain that superadded end. Regarding our eschatological orientation, Renihan writes: "Confirmed eternal life and immutable perfect communion with God were not part of Adam's natural constitution."<sup>63</sup> On this point as such, everyone agrees so far as it goes. The real question, however, is whether God had created Adam *naturally* oriented toward that eschatological life. If yes, then the covenant is not *entirely* positive or disconnected from nature. If no, then God had to add that eschatological orientation to Adam's base constitution, producing the Roman Catholic doctrine of pure nature. Renihan's best published formulations of this consideration of orientation are ambiguous:

The attachment of the promise of the reward of life to Adam's obedience establishes the identity of this covenant. Adam's obedience would not have been meritorious for any reward at all, not to mention the 'reward of life,' were it not for an arrangement established by God to arrange it. The only reason that Adam's obedience to the positive laws would be meritorious for eternal life, was because God condescended to make it so according to covenant.<sup>64</sup>

The claim, however, that “in God’s dealings with Adam, God advanced him beyond his created state” might suggest something along the lines of the pure nature idea.<sup>65</sup> The problem is that in Reformed theology, we are fundamentally a religious creature even naturally ordered toward a relationship with God in consummate, eschatological communion. In traditional Reformed covenant theology, the covenant was often the judicial mechanism enabling Adam to attain his eschatological end for which God had created him.<sup>66</sup> For PC to seek reproachment with 1689 federalism on this point of the relationship of creation and covenant would seem to entail a wholesale repudiation of their paradigm, which gravitates away from positivist principles.

This positivist concept of covenant has serious bearing on how 1689 federalism relates the various biblical covenants. Renihan connects it to a methodological concern:

The all-important connection of these truths for the relationship between biblical theology and systematic theology is that because covenants are not natural arrangements, “not found in nature’s garden,” there are certain senses in which they are not the proper subjects of consequential, or inferential, arguments. And thus, one must be careful not to over-systematize or draw connections and proportions from that which is what it is only by virtue of sovereign institution. To put it another way, necessary consequences don’t work for covenants because there is no necessity in covenants. Covenants are not natural. They are not part of the created order.<sup>67</sup>

Other statements confirm a consistent implementation of this premise: “And thus, what one covenant is has no necessary connection to what another covenant is. This clarifies the connection of the distinction between creation and covenant to the distinctions between natural law and positive law, as well as natural religion and instituted religion.”<sup>68</sup> “The point is simply that they are not *necessarily* true because the features of one covenant cannot be used to determine the features of another covenant. There is no natural necessity, inference, or proportion between things instituted, things positive, things supernatural, things covenantal.”<sup>69</sup> 1689 federalism then denies that the various covenants are mutually informing.

The positivist notion of covenant means that no covenant has any integral relation to another covenant. This point is, first, at odds with the redemptive-historical outlook of PC that argues that patterns, structures, types, and foundations built into creation itself establish the forward motion of Scripture's narrative through the covenants.<sup>70</sup> Methodologically, 1689 federalism and PC move opposite directions about the baseline concept of a covenant, especially in how mutually informing they are, and how covenants press toward their fulfillment in Christ. Philosophically, the positivist premise that covenants cannot be used to understand the features of other covenants, as a dismissal of inferential interpretation, entails that every covenant is a particular simply designated as a covenant, but no real universal category of covenant exists. Hence, the 1689 federalist notion of covenant is nominalist. As Matthew Barrett has effectively shown, nominalism ran contrary to the main thrust of Reformation doctrine, which is clearest in soteriology.<sup>71</sup>

Although no 1689 federalists have applied their positivist principles to the conditions of justification before God, the insistence upon entirely positivist conditions as the terms of each covenant unintentionally opens the door for a possibility to introduce works in soteriology. Emphatically, the potential liability to an error is not the same as making it, and no 1689 federalists, at least insofar as I am aware, have made this error—their conscious commitment to the law-gospel distinction is a hard guardrail against it. Nonetheless, no reason is immediately obvious why, if covenantal conditions are purely positive, God could not assign the performance of imperfect works as the terms for obtaining salvation. If the condition for eschatological life is not grounded in the natural demand according to humanity as God made us undamaged and with original righteousness, then why could not accept the imperfect performance by sinners of some positively stipulated condition? After all, some 1689 federalists have posited that sinners could earn access to the substance of covenants that had works as the condition when the substance pertained to earthly blessings.<sup>72</sup> Given this voluntarist basis, 1689 federalism needs to clarify—according to their system—what real principle inherently prevents the same sort of positivist grounds of merit from applying to sinners concerning heavenly rewards. This call for clarification and consistency in no way suggests that 1689 federalists have made the error that is a possibility within their system's operative principles.

That connection to nominalism traces out in how 1689 federalists interpret the covenant formula of God's repeating promise that "I will be God to you" (e.g., Gen 17:7; Exod 6:7; 19:5–6; 29:45–46; Jer 7:23; 24:7; 31:1, 33; Ezek 34:24, 30; 2 Cor 6:16–17; Rev 21:3, 7). For 1689 federalism, God's promise "to be God to you" does not mean the same thing in every covenant but is the summary of whatever blessing belongs to that covenant.<sup>73</sup> On the one hand, Renihan implements this point concerning 1689 federalism's understanding of how the revealed terms of a covenant determine if it is a covenant of works or grace, articulating how the grounds for God to be God to his people change the basis for how the people experience that blessing.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, Pascal Denault draws upon the nominalist principle of refusing to let any covenant have necessary relation to another by applying the same argument to what the blessing itself is:

In other words, what having God as one's God implies must be determined based on the terms of the covenant by which God commits to being God for his people. As the Creator, is not God the God of all men (Ps. 24.1; Mal 2.10; Mt 5.45; 1 Tim. 4.10; 2 Pet 2.1)? As the redeemer of Israel, he was the God of all people without all people necessarily benefitting from the grace of salvation (Rom. 9:6–8; nevertheless, this same people is often called the people of God (Deut. 27.9; 2 [sic] Rom 9.6; Ps.50.7). By committing to being the God of Israel, the Lord was promising her superiority over other nations, protection, the possession of Canaan, the blessing of her land ... [sic] (cf. Deut. 28.1–14). On the terms of the covenant concluded in the Sinai desert can tell us to what God was committing by promising to be the God of Israel.<sup>75</sup>

Although Renihan's argument addresses how the terms of the covenant determine the way that people obtain the blessing of having God as their God, Denault inverts the point to say that the terms and the type of covenant determine what the blessing even means that God is God to a people. He made this point clear in explaining the new covenant:

To be God's people under the New Covenant, is guaranteed by the forgiveness of sins obtained by the mediator of this covenant; this is why Christ is presented as the one who is its guarantor (Heb. 7.22)... What is more, to have the Lord as one's God under the Old Covenant did not confer the same blessings as

under the New Covenant: the first guaranteed earthly blessings, the second, heavenly blessings: eternal life.<sup>76</sup>

Renihan is on firmer conceptual ground since he did not leave the meaning of the covenant formula entirely up for grabs. Denault, however, has assigned entirely different blessings to the same words.

The significance of Denault's maneuver leaves the principal basis for biblical theology in question. Progressive revelation is not static but develops in continuity with previous revelation. Even as later writers develop themes by invoking phrases and concepts, that development and change occurs on the basis of assuming the same meaning as its earlier use and then reshaping it in a new context. That method of development, however, presumes that meaning carries over. Denault use of the nominalist/positivist concept of covenants omits that continuity of meaning, which is the basis of development. When Revelation 21:3 invokes the covenant formula from Leviticus 26:11–12 and Ezekiel 37:26–28, the intent is to describe the new heavens and new earth as the ultimate consummation God's promised covenant blessings from the OT—going all the way back to Abraham—rather than to revise the meaning of those blessings.<sup>77</sup> In 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:1, Paul enlists the same covenant formula from Leviticus 26:11 with exhortations from Isaiah 52:11 and Ezekiel 20:34 to show how the consummate reality of this old covenant blessing in the church should motivate Christians to holiness.<sup>78</sup> The positivist concept of covenants in 1689 federalism then leaves much for them to clarify to hold a cogent system together.

## ***2. Dialectic Reasoning.***

The tendency toward nominalist formulations also produces a dialectic tension in 1689 federalism when it comes to the unity of salvation across redemptive history. The insistence that the new covenant alone is the covenant of grace and that the previous covenants had their own distinct substance, therefore not administering the substance of the covenant of grace, produces a strained explanation of how old covenant believers received salvation. The effect is affirmations of seemingly incompatible ideas. Second London Baptist Confession 8.6 outlines the issues:

Although the price of Redemption was not actually paid by Christ, till after his Incarnation, yet the virtue, efficacy, and benefits thereof were communicated to the Elect in all ages successively, from the beginning of the World, *in and by those Promises, Types, and Sacrifices*, wherein he was revealed, and signified to be the Seed of the Woman, which should bruise the Serpents head; and the Lamb slain from the foundation of the World: Being the same yesterday, and today, and forever.<sup>79</sup>

Given that this statement is very close in wording to Westminster Confession 8.6, it helpfully sets out an area where there should be unflinching agreement as Baptists have historically confessed that the blessings of Christ's work—the substance of the new covenant—were distributed to believers through the ordinances of the OT covenants.<sup>80</sup>

In some ways similar to Reformed covenant theology, 1689 federalism argues that there is one covenant of grace providing salvation across the scope of redemptive history. Denault summarizes the position:

The Baptists maintained unity with the Presbyterians by affirming the unity of the Covenant of Grace. Baptist theology subscribed fully to the notion of their [sic] being only one Covenant of Grace in the Bible, which bring together all who are saved as one people ... The Baptists considered that the Covenant of Grace started immediately after the Fall and that the substance of this covenant, even under the Old Testament, was salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>81</sup>

Although this statement seemingly aligns with mainstream Reformed covenant theology, this expression of 1689 federalism denies that the same substance—namely Christ and his benefits—belongs to the Old and NT covenants: “The Baptists saw a unity of substance in the Covenant of Grace from Genesis to Revelation, but they didn't see this same unity between the Old and the New Covenants. They therefore did not accept the idea that those two covenants were two administrations of a same covenant [should be “same substance”].”<sup>82</sup> This formulation raises the question about how OT believers received that salvation.

The tension comes because 1689 federalism insists that the new covenant is exclusively the covenant of grace but denies that there have been diverse administrations of its substance. Drawing upon the distinction

between the revelation and the administration of the covenant of grace, Denault concluded: “The Baptists believed that before the arrival of the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace was not formally given, but only announced and promised (revealed).”<sup>83</sup> To reconcile how the covenant of grace could grant its benefits before Christ enacted the new covenant, Denault contended: “This distinction: (revealed/concluded) summarized the difference between the Covenant of Grace in the Old Testament and the Covenant of Grace in the New Testament. In the Old, it was revealed, in the New, it was concluded (fully revealed according to the expression of the 1689).”<sup>84</sup> In this respect, “Before the establishment (νενομοθέτηται) of the New Covenant, the Covenant of Grace did not have a concrete manifestation, any cultus or ceremony; it was not a covenant, but a promise revealed in an obscure manner under types and shadows.”<sup>85</sup> This formulation demands an explanation for how believers received the grace of the new covenant/covenant of grace during the OT period.

Without a doubt, 1689 federalism affirms that believers during OT period did receive Christ’s grace. The explanation of how that occurred introduces the dialectical aspect of their reasoning. Denault writes:

The Presbyterians and the Baptists both believed that Christ’s sacrifice was effective before being offered, however they saw the relationship of this effectiveness with the Old Covenant differently. Many paedobaptists considered that it was through the Old Covenant that Christ offered the benefits of his mediation to the believers that were under this covenant, while the Baptists affirmed the effectiveness of Christ’s death from the revelation of the Covenant of Grace, but exclusively by virtue of the New Covenant. These two conceptions were very different; according to the paedobaptist conception, the work of Christ was communicated to believers both *by* the Old and New Covenants.<sup>86</sup>

The tension in this argument is that the Second London Confession also says that Christ’s work was communicated believers specifically “in and by” the old covenants’ ordinances, which Denault flatly denied. Any attempt to affirm the confessional language of “by” while also directly criticizing it seemingly involves some sort of dialectic language game grounded in nominalist principles.<sup>87</sup>

The confusion arises because of the dialectic between, on the one hand, 1689 federalism's attempt to affirm that OT believers received the grace of Christ and, on the other hand, their denial that the OT covenants were administrations of that substance. The problem is that we cannot truly have it both ways. Either the blessings of Christ's new covenant mediation were delivered in advance without the same external means as we have in the new covenant, or they were not. 1689 federalism affirms that Christ's blessings were applied to believers but wants to deny that it was administered differently. Eventually, they must affirm that one substance was differently administered, even if they parse that differently than the Westminster Confession. Denault writes: "Those who were saved before Christ were saved because of an oath; those who were saved after Him were saved because of a covenant."<sup>88</sup> Certainly, he means that the old covenant saints were saved because of Christ's work. That work was applied to old covenant believers, however, with the substance of the covenant of grace (for them, the new covenant) being given via an oath rather than a covenant. In other words, the substance was administered differently. It has to be so unless we are going to embrace full-throated dispensationalism even for a different manner of salvation. We end up with the same structure of one substance administered in different ways regardless of how we parse the method of administration. The simple fact is that the same covenantal benefits (substance) that we receive from Christ in the new covenant were either applied to believers before his coming through other means than we have now (particularly either through other but nonetheless sacramental ordinances or somehow with a lack of sacramental ordinances entirely) or it was not given at all until Christ came.

Among some representatives of 1689 federalism, this dialectical tension wherein the covenant of grace both communicated Christ's benefits and was not administered ends up breaking the wrong direction. Although the covenants of the old economy "carried the promise of another covenant," they revealed but did not apply the substance of this covenant of grace.<sup>89</sup> More specifically, "Through typology, the Old Covenant portrayed salvation in Jesus Christ, but it did not offer salvation in and of itself."<sup>90</sup> This point becomes clear as Renihan argued: "The covenant of grace is the in-breaking of the covenant of redemption into history through the progressive revelation and retroactive application of the New Covenant."<sup>91</sup> For

Reformed covenant theology, the ordinances of the OT covenants serve as means of grace to apply Christ and his benefits proactively, namely in advance, to believers before Christ came.<sup>92</sup> The 1689 federalist position that new covenant blessings retroactively applied to OT believers entails that those saints did not receive the full experience of saving benefits until after Christ inaugurated the new covenant.<sup>93</sup> Far from reading too much into infelicitous words, Renihan has written a whole volume explicitly defending the notion that OT saints did not enter heaven until after Christ came in the incarnation.<sup>94</sup> Although he affirmed that OT believers trusted in Christ, which guaranteed their future rescue from Sheol as a place of privation, he nonetheless resolved the dialectical tension about the lack of administration for the covenant of grace by rejecting that OT believers had the full experience of Christ's blessings, specifically in that they did not enter heaven until Christ came in the incarnation.<sup>95</sup>

Similar to the way that 1689 federalism's positivist construction of covenants facilitates a Roman Catholic doctrine of pure nature in anthropology, their denial of the same substance diversely administered starts to resemble a Roman reading of redemptive history. Cardinal Thomas Cajetan (1469–1534) articulated his understanding—positivist at that—of the redemptive historical development of the covenants:

For we often read in the Old Testament that God deigned to make a pact with men. Indeed in Genesis 9, God's covenant is written about the future of not another universal flood. And in Genesis 15, God made a covenant with Abraham to give the land of Canaan to his seed. And Genesis 17. The covenant of circumcision is written. And Exodus 24, Moses says, This is the blood of the covenant, etc. Jeremiah 31. God clearly speaks of the covenant of the new law and the old ... For it is clear from these events that merit's condition can be found even legally in our works related to the first thing about which an agreement [conventio] was made with God.<sup>96</sup>

The notion that OT saints did not experience the full benefits of Christ until he came in redemptive history because the covenants of the old economy had another substance has an antecedent, but it is outside the Reformed tradition.

This redemptive-historical issue clearly pertains most forcefully to the ordinances or sacraments in the covenants of the old and new economies. At least for some 1689 federalists, the ordinances of the old economy, particularly circumcision, concerned merely the earthly promises to Abraham concerning a physical offspring, a land, and kingship rather than the spiritual realities of Christ.<sup>97</sup> Charles Hodge noted that Roman Catholics rejected the identity of substance across the covenant of grace precisely to differentiate the old and new sacraments. Because they believe the sacraments effectually communicate saving grace and saw that many Israelites rejected salvation, they teach that the ordinances of the old economy merely signify grace while the new convey it. This premise grounds Rome's reasoning for the *limbus patrum*, wherein OT believers did not enter heaven until after Christ came, namely because the covenantal ordinances of the OT could not directly communicate Christ and his benefits.<sup>98</sup> In arguing against the Anabaptists about the nature of salvation across the covenant of grace, Hodge said, "It follows from the same premises in opposition to the Romanists, that the salvation of the people of God who died before the coming of Christ was complete. They were truly pardoned, sanctified, and, at death, admitted to that state into which those dying in the Christian faith are now received."<sup>99</sup> The Reformed tradition has then long appealed to the unity among sacraments of the Old and NT in applying Christ and his benefits precisely to argue against the Roman notion of the *limbus patrum*.<sup>100</sup> Baptist theologian Craig Carter has articulated a stronger way forward in recognizing a real Christological ontology to the OT.<sup>101</sup> This model coheres well with traditional Reformed categories that effectively explain how the effects of Christ's mediation could be applied in full even before his historical work in the incarnation.<sup>102</sup>

The tension behind this matter of the proleptic application of Christ's benefits, which is bound into the nature of how OT ordinances could communicate salvation, rests partly on a confusion concerning external-internal issues. For some 1689 federalists, this confusion carries into even the new covenant itself. Baptists want to affirm that only those with the substance of the covenant of grace are in its administration. Denault thus criticized Reformed covenant theology for separating substance and administration: "We believe that it was arbitrary on the part of paedobaptists to link baptism, not to the internal substance, but to the

external administration of the Covenant of Grace since baptism symbolizes union in the death and resurrection of Christ (the ultimate spiritual substance of the Covenant of Grace.”<sup>103</sup> The criticism itself is confused, however, because baptism—as I think everyone understands it—is an external rite applied tangibly to the body through the use of water.

The criticism also fails because it cannot cash out its own terms. Denault asserts: “In fact, the Scriptures declare that no member of the New Covenant can be deprived of its substance, the latter being nothing less than salvation in Jesus Christ.”<sup>104</sup> The claim is patently false, however, since every communion has the problem of baptized and communing members proving that their profession of faith was false. Unless it is affirmed that every baptized person is truly and certainly saved, which likely necessitates an Arminian soteriology that none in this conversation employ, then we all have to admit that people can illicitly participate in the administration of the covenant of grace—however defined—without truly partaking of its substance. Renihan affirms clearer and better lines concerning the substance-administration distinction:

We would agree with the distinction between the substance of the covenant—its inward invisible benefits—and the external administration of the covenant. So, not everyone who’s eating the bread and drinking the cup is necessarily feeding on Christ by faith, not everyone who’s baptized is partaking of Christ by faith in baptism, etc. We acknowledge that ... But the idea that there is the inward, invisible benefits of the covenant—the substance—and the outward visible administration of it in its ordinances, we would absolutely affirm that.<sup>105</sup>

1689 federalism would be helped by implementing this solid understanding of the substance-administration discussion more thoroughly and consistently throughout the explanation of their system. The consistent application of this distinction would have helped avoid some of the problems about relating the substance of the new covenant to the covenantal administrations during the OT period.

This criticism about confusion over internal-external issues is not simply crossed-wires as if a Reformed covenant theologian is trying to fit Baptist theology into his Procrustean bed. Jordan Steffaniak has well

argued that Baptist covenant theology should align itself more thoroughly with Westminster federalism on all issues save the structure of the new covenant administration. He has leveled the same critique of confusion about the internal-external issues against Baptist compatriots:

Second, the New Testament is also marked by an external physical sign: water baptism. It is not as if the New Testament suddenly sheds all external signs that point toward an inward reality. Water baptism guarantees a baptized heart as much as physical circumcision guarantees a circumcised heart. Why do Baptists think the New Covenant is purely internal when they have an external and physical sign in water baptism?<sup>106</sup>

Further, Steffaniak also recognized that we all share the same problem of explaining how some participate in the covenant's administration without partaking of its substance: "Baptists seem to forget that baptism is both a physical and spiritual reality—like outward and inward circumcision. There are plenty of people Baptists have baptized who are not carrying the internal reality of spirit baptism."<sup>107</sup> Steffaniak exemplifies the sort of theological reasoning that is highly conducive to greater reproachment among Baptist and Reformed explanations of covenant theology. We should *aim* for maximal agreement rather than independent systems.

Ultimately, 1689 federalism seems inconsistent with its own positivist criteria for determining the substance of specific covenants. This inconsistency occurs as they blend the OT covenants. Renihan clearly outlined the 1689 federalist paradigm for the terms-substance relation:

You know what a covenant is based on what it grants. And the old covenant purifies the flesh. It doesn't purify the conscience, so therefore because it has an inferior promise and an other promise, a different promise from that of the new covenant, it cannot be the same for substance. The fact that the grace of Christ is presented to believers secondarily through typology still doesn't make the old covenant the new covenant. It just means that it's a type of the new covenant and that the grace of Christ is made known there.<sup>108</sup>

That criterion is not fully and consistently applied, however, concerning covenants besides the new covenant. Renihan cited Benjamin Keach, who

taught that the Adamic and Sinaitic covenants were different in “end and design” but “both, as to the Essence and Substance of them but one and the same Covenant.”<sup>109</sup> Given the 1689 federalist premise of positive laws as defining a covenant’s terms, these covenants are certainly different since the law for Adam concerning the tree is not the Mosaic laws. How, then, can these covenants be the same in substance? 1689 federalism sets aside the criteria for positivist terms determining a covenant’s substance when it comes to relating the various OT covenants, resulting in an erroneous blending of those economies together.<sup>110</sup>

The attempted resolution of the dialectical relationship of the substance of Christ’s benefits being administered before the incarnation is two-tier typology. Renihan specifies: “Integral to the Particular Baptists’ covenant theology was their view of typology. Types revealed antitypes, but were distinct in substance from them.”<sup>111</sup> If 1689 federalists truly affirm Second London Baptist Confession 8.6, the promises, types, sacrifices, and general ordinances of the OT covenants did deliver the antitypical substance, thereby administering the same substance, then it is hard to fathom how they can reconcile that affirmation with the premises of their typology. Yet, Renihan noted about the old economy ordinances that “the question arose as to whether their typical character made them distinct from the blessings to which they pointed. If there were a difference in substance between the type and antitype, one would have to acknowledge a difference in substance between the Old and New Covenants.”<sup>112</sup> The two-tier explanation does not seem to harmonize this aspect of the 1689 federalist dialectic fully with their confession.

The argument for harmonization is to attach the spiritual component to the secondary layer of the types. Relying on John Cameron’s covenant theology, 1689 federalism asserts that old covenant types were primarily about earthly realities and secondarily means of grace communicating Christ to the elect.<sup>113</sup> According to 1689 federalism, that a type primarily concerns something at the earthly level, only secondarily signifying the spiritual reality, makes the substance of the new covenant different from that of all the other covenants.

From the Reformed perspective, the two-level typology of 1689 federalism makes a type’s relationship to Christ merely accidental, rather than inherent, conflicting with Hebrews’ insistence that God established types precisely because of spiritual realities (Heb 8:1–7).<sup>114</sup> Two-

level typology's suggestion that a type's first-level typological significance is substantially distinct from its meaning in Christ seems to confuse the relationship of type and antitype. For example, the suggested two levels of animal sacrifices are (1) meeting the requirements of the Mosaic covenant and (2) pointing to Christ's work.<sup>115</sup> It is not clear, however, how meeting the Mosaic covenant's requirements is a distinct level of typology apart from pointing to Christ. The animal sacrifices providing for tenure in Canaan is simply the type, and its antitype is Christ's death to provide for entrance into the new creation. Reading another level into the Mosaic sacrifices' significance arbitrarily disconnects one feature of the whole type and divests it of spiritual significance. In every example, it seems that the "first level" is simply what has been traditionally called the type—the earthly aspect—and the "second level" is simply the antitype—its eschatological fulfillment. The type is obviously not its fulfillment, but if its meaning as a type is "substantially distinct" from its fulfillment, then it is no longer a type.<sup>116</sup>

The culminating observation is that if OT ordinances were only secondarily about Christ, they were primarily about something else. In other words, 1689 federalism seems at odds with the inherent unity of progressive revelation concerning, as PC would put it, the plurality of covenants drive the metanarrative of God's one plan culminating in Christ.<sup>117</sup> For 1689 federalism, the OT covenants are only secondarily about that one plan. 1689 federalism should help its Reformed readers by clarifying how their two-tier typology does not make the OT primarily about something other than Christ, implicitly veering toward dispensationalist structures.

From a Reformed perspective, the problem in 1689 federalism concerning typology and substance is tied into a misunderstanding of sacramental function. Renihan outlined the 1689 federalist premise for distinguishing the type's meaning from the antitype's meaning: "On the earthly level, animal sacrifices had a real function and purpose and meaning. And that meaning was *substantially distinct from its antitypical meaning*. The blood of goats and bulls is not the blood of Christ, and their forgiveness is not the forgiveness that Christ's blood affords. Nevertheless, they made Christ's forgiveness known."<sup>118</sup> The move to distinguish the substance of a type from its antitypical significance aims to keep the substance of the covenant of grace from belonging in any inherent way to the covenants of the old economy: "Thus the Old Covenant and the New, though closely

connected through typology, were not the same thing. They were not one in substance. And their differences could not be reduced to external administrative changes.”<sup>119</sup> Thus, 1689 federalism denies that type and antitype have the same substance in order to keep the substance of the covenant of grace from having any direct or inherent relationship to the ordinances of the OT covenants.

The claim that a type cannot be the substance of its antitype, from the vantage of sacramental function, misses the point entirely. The premise itself confuses the nature of typology. The type *as type* is necessarily about its antitype, else it is not serving as a type. For example, if we consider the animal sacrifices without reference to their divinely intended meaning in fore-signifying Christ’s sacrifice, then we are no longer discussing them as types. The sacrifices’ truly historical — albeit proleptic — correspondence to their fulfillment in Christ is what makes them typological.<sup>120</sup> Outside that relationship to an antitype, they cannot be a type. This same premise considered in the example of animal sacrifices applies to all types. 1689 federalism seems to miss that they cannot validly speak of a type outside of its relation to its fulfillment in its antitype. Outside that relation, the person, event, or institution that is a type in relation to the antitype becomes just something that happened in history. The 1689 federalist model of typology then risks evacuating the *inherent* spiritual valence from the OT and the God-appointed features of religious life for the believers who lived during that OT period.<sup>121</sup> 1689 federalism can help its Reformed readers by clarifying how it maintains that necessary *inherent* connection between type and antitype.

This skewed premise of typology disrupts a properly sacramental understanding of the OT types and ordinances. Since Augustine, Christians have always had a distinction between signs and the realities signified.<sup>122</sup> So, of course a type, since it is a *sign*, is not *itself* the substance of its antitype, which is the signified reality. Nonetheless, the same is true of ordinances in the new covenant since the sign baptism is not *itself* the reality of regeneration and the signs of the bread and the cup in the Lord’s Supper are not *themselves* the physical body and blood of Christ. Thus, in the new covenant, we also have signs that have a sacramental relation to the spiritual realities that they signify. Interestingly, the catechisms most closely linked to the network of churches that composed the Second London Baptist Confession omit the language of

signs and seals from their discussion of baptism and the Lord's Supper, thus departing from the standard Augustinian pattern and creating a precedent for the lack of sacramental awareness in 1689 federalism.<sup>123</sup>

The sacramental function of the OT types and ordinances is again simply what Second London Confession 8.6 affirms. Namely, the virtue, efficacy, and benefits of Christ's incarnate work were applied to believers during the OT period "in and by those Promises, Types, and Sacrifices."<sup>124</sup> Certainly, those types and ordinances proleptically revealed and signified Christ and his work. They also applied, as means of grace, Christ and his benefits to believers who made use of those ordinances with true faith in the reality therein signified. Daniel Block outlines this sacramentality well:

when God observed faith demonstrated in a pure life and rituals performed as he instructed, he applied to that person the forgiveness made possible through the blood of Christ, whose redemptive work was "foreknown" (Gk. *proginōskō*; cf. the use of this verb in Rom. 8:29; 11:2) and who was slain from "before the foundation of the world" (cf. 1 Pet. 1:20).<sup>125</sup>

Block says essentially the same as theologians on both sides of the baptism debate have affirmed in Westminster Confession 8.6 and Second London Confession 8.6.

1689 federalists obviously affirm the statements of their confession. Nonetheless, their version of typology has seemingly disconnected the OT typological ordinances from their sacramental function. If the types and ordinances of the former covenants truly delivered Christ and his benefits to those who used them in true faith—in the same way as the Word, baptism, the Lord's Supper, and prayer serve as means of grace unto Christ for us today—then those types applied the substance of the covenant of grace (even if the covenant of grace is defined as the new covenant). The point has never been that a sacramental ordinance is the substance or reality signified. The point is that God has used these signifying and/or typological ordinances as means of grace to bring spiritual realities to bear upon believers. Inasmuch as God used the features of religious life during the OT to create, confirm, and cultivate faith in Christ, they administered the substance of the covenant of grace. 1689 federalism can help its Reformed readers by explaining, clarifying, and developing its understanding of

the sacramental role that OT ordinances had in truly applying Christ and his benefits, that is the substance of the covenant of grace.

### **3. *Manner of Engagement.***

The scholars and teachers in 1689 federalism, inasmuch as I know them, are fine and godly men. I count several of them as my friends—you will have to ask them about their opinion of me. The adherents, however, are often hard at war. 1689 federalism, even according to Renihan, is largely an online movement with certain liabilities that are inherent to that medium.<sup>126</sup> Some of the most prominent advocates of 1689 federalism are these online figures, who seemingly fail to make good-faith efforts at doing theology.

They often twist alternative arguments into the worst possible meaning, even despite the clarification, objection, and insistence of the people who made those arguments. Ironically, they also persistently claim to be misunderstood and misrepresented without offering full explanation to address what has been misunderstood. Often this tactic simply leans on one side of their dialectic structure as is advantageous to the moment without holding it together with the opposing side of the dialectic.

It is hard to take the claim of misrepresentation seriously any longer unless a clearer interpretation is proved and demonstrated from the existing published material as it is worded presently. Richard Lucas has noted that 1689 federalism has not published with mainstream evangelical publishers, instead producing material through self-publication and “in-house small publishing efforts.”<sup>127</sup> The lack of any major publisher’s editorial team might explain why Reformed and PC readers seem, at least from the 1689 federalist perspective, to misunderstand them so frequently and thoroughly: no rigorous grid of consistency and cogency has been forced upon writings from the 1689 federalist perspective. On the other hand, if I might blurt for a moment, perhaps that lack of consistency, cogency, and clarity could be a reason why 1689 federalists have not been able to land their writings with those mainstream publishers. The point is that 1689 federalist writings themselves may lend to misinterpretation because of an inherently non-cogent and internally confused nature. The 1689 federalist claim to be misrepresented would then be the boy who cried wolf.

1689 federalism can help its conversation partners from Reformed covenant theology (and PC for that matter) by toning down the aggression

and limiting its tendency toward heated debate. Many Reformed theologians are losing interest in 1689 federalism because we feel its representatives want us to engage with them only so that they can have another platform to debate us. All of us — and I certainly do — should lament any contention or ungodliness in how our party conducts itself in theological discussion. Reformed theologians have undoubtedly been guilty of this fault at times, and we should repent if we are liable of it. We should all should work toward more cordial interaction aimed at friendship and greater agreement.

### **CONCLUSION**

Scripture makes great use of covenant as an important theme, which Baptist and Reformed theologians have rightly recognized. We often struggle to understand each other well concerning how we are interpreting the covenants when we come at them from varying hermeneutical and systematic standpoints. Before criticizing each other on particular aspects of our systems, we should strive for greater methodological clarity as we press for greater, even maximal, agreement on foundational matters. It is worth stating those areas of agreement and appreciation before rushing to contend over areas of disagreement. Accordingly, covenant theologies of varying kinds should not limit the discussion to ecclesiology since that is the primary area of divergence and will short circuit discussion on other fronts. This essay has tried to outline ways in which Reformed covenant theology, at least as I understand it, struggles to accept certain methodological aspects of PC and 1689 federalism in hopes that its suggestions might foster clearer discussion and even mutual methodological refinement moving forward. Thankfully, even though someone in this discussion necessarily fails to recognize a birdbath, ultimately Christ washes the chicks he gathers to himself to make us clean before God's throne. Someone will be shown as wrong about whom gets how much water. Blessed are we all to know that Christ is the power behind that cleansing water for all who trust in him.

- 1 I was privileged to present a version of this paper as part of a panel, including Stephen Wellum, Richard J. Lucas, Daniel Scheiderer, and Robert Howel, focused on Baptist Covenant Theology at the Evangelical Theological Society 2023 annual meeting. I am thankful for the opportunity to have a serious but encouraging interaction with these dear brothers about a topic of increasing importance to us all.
- 2 Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World* (Short Studies in Biblical Theology; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (eds.), *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2016); Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," in Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (eds.), *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 74–111; Stephen J. Wellum, "Reflections on Covenant Theology from a Progressive Covenantal View," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26 no. 1 (2022): 164–87; Richard Lucas, "The Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology: Comparing 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26 no. 1 (2022): 116–63.
- 3 Samuel Renihan, *The Mystery of Christ: His Covenant and His Kingdom* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2020); Samuel D. Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance: The Federal Theology of the English Particular Baptists (1642–1704)* (Oxford: Regents Park College, 2018); Pascal Denault, *The Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology: A Comparison between Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist and Paedobaptist Federalism*, rev. ed. (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2016); Richard C. Barcellos (ed.), *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014); Richard C. Barcellos, *Getting the Garden Right: Adam's Work and God's Rest in Light of Christ* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2017); Samuel D. Renihan, "Above and Beyond: Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26 no. 1 (2022): 90–114.
- 4 Even representatives of 1689 federalism have noted that PC rejects paedobaptism more than covenant theology wholesale, e.g. Samuel D. Renihan, "Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants, A Review Article," *Journal of the Institute of Reformed Baptist Studies* 1 no 1 (2014): 163.
- 5 The assumption sometimes is that PC and 1689 federalism should and must be in close agreement because they are both Baptist movements; Daniel Scheiderer, "Progressive Covenantalists as Reformed Baptists," *Westminster Theological Journal* 82 (2020): 137–52; Blake Wade Johnson, "One Position, Two Administrations: Exploring the Theological Overlap Between 1689 Federalism and Progressive Covenantalism" (ThM thesis, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2021). This assumption can hold only if the baptismal debate is the tail that is wagging the dog of Baptist covenant theology, as Reformed theologians have often suspected.
- 6 On this point of emphasizing focus on the major premises in the covenant discussion, Jordan Steffaniak's assertion that most paedobaptists assume that covenant theology entails our sacramental practice seems to run both ways, since Baptist theologians — Steffaniak excepted — rarely affirm the full covenantal system with modifications only concerning new covenant ecclesiology; Jordan Steffaniak, "Reforming Credobaptism: A Westminster Alternative for Reformed Baptist Identity," *Journal for Biblical and Theological Studies* 4 no 2 (2019): 280n2, 296–97; also Patrick Abendroth, *Covenant Theology* (Omaha, NE: Pactum Publishing, 2023). In contrast to Steffaniak's claim of that Reformed theologians assume that covenant theology "necessarily implies paedobaptism," my own view is that covenant theology eventually entails paedobaptism. The central premises of paedobaptism are (or should be) built from explicit NT arguments. Nonetheless, the soteriological core of covenant theology likely has stopping points within the linear development toward ecclesiological implications where Baptists could revise certain premises while still agreeing with us about the continuity of salvation across redemptive history.
- 7 Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 39–68; Richard J. Lucas, "The Dispensational Appeal to Romans 11 and the Nature of Israel's Future Salvation," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 235–54; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 748–49, 799–807.
- 8 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 799–807; Wellum, "Reflections on Covenant Theology from a Progressive Covenantal View," 170–71.
- 9 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 657–60; Wellum, "Reflections on Covenant Theology from a Progressive Covenantal View," 177–80.
- 10 Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, "Rejoinder to Review of *Kingdom through Covenant*," *Westminster Theological Journal* 76 (2014): 450–52.
- 11 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 35 (italics original).

- <sup>12</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 34 (italics original).
- <sup>13</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 35n8 (italics original).
- <sup>14</sup> Casper Olevianus, *An Exposition of the Apostles' Creed*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma (Classic Reformed Theology; Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009), 9–15. Thanks to R. Scott Clark for this reference and for his feedback on this entire essay.
- <sup>15</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2006), 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 4.
- <sup>17</sup> Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 168, 170, 171, 175–76; Samuel D. Renihan, Guy Prentiss Waters, Stephen J. Wellum, and Michael Beck, "Covenant Theology Roundtable," *The London Lyceum* (September 12, 2022; accessed at <https://youtu.be/uu7O2YbmSFM?feature=shared&t=2328>), 38:48–39:50.
- <sup>18</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 677.
- <sup>19</sup> The point of the covenant of works was never that Adam had to merit God's continued favor in the original state. Rather, Adam's covenantal condition of obedience pertained to obtaining eschatological advancement; cf. Lucas, "Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology," 125.
- <sup>20</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 335; Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 183.
- <sup>21</sup> Philip Schaff (ed.), *The Creeds of Christendom*, 3 vol. (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1877), 3:617–18, 621–22.
- <sup>22</sup> Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 183.
- <sup>23</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 748.
- <sup>24</sup> Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 169, 173–75; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 616, 666–68.
- <sup>25</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 675–76.
- <sup>26</sup> Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom*, 3:616–17.
- <sup>27</sup> Stephen Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 40–52.
- <sup>28</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 676.
- <sup>29</sup> Johannes Cocceius, *Commentarius in Pentateuchum, Josuam, et Librum Iudicum* (Amsterdam, 1669), 38 (Homo igitur eo ipso, quod fuit factus ad imaginem Dei, fuit constitutus quasi in foedere Dei).
- <sup>30</sup> Harrison Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology: A Systematic Introduction* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024), 428n52, 429n57.
- <sup>31</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, "The Law of God," *The Gospel Coalition* (Concise Theology Series; accessed on October 22, 2023 at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-law-of-god/>).
- <sup>32</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism and the Doing of Ethics," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 215–33; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 782–98; Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 171.
- <sup>33</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 142n91; Lucas, "Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology," 133.
- <sup>34</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 88–91; Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 167–70, 172–73, 177–78, 187n27.
- <sup>35</sup> For more theological elaboration of this antecedent-consequent distinction, see Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology*, 212–13, 237–40, 416–28.
- <sup>36</sup> Michael Hill, *The How and Why of Love: An Introduction to Evangelical Ethics* (Kingsford, Australia: Matthias Media, 2002), cited in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 784–98.
- <sup>37</sup> e.g. Philip S. Ross, *From the Finger of God: The Biblical and Theological Basis for the Threefold Division of the Law* (Fearn: Mentor, 2010); J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life*, trans. Nelson D. Kloosterman (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1996); Michael S. Horton, *The Law of Perfect Freedom: Relating to God and Others through the Ten Commandments* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 1993).
- <sup>38</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 76n84, 87n128, 90n136, 99n169, 104n180.
- <sup>39</sup> Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 166, 184–86; Stephen J. Wellum with Brent E. Parker, "Introduction," in *Progressive Covenantalism*, 2–4, 7; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 24–25.

- 40 Samuel D. Renihan, "Above and Beyond: Seventeenth-Century Particular Baptist Covenant Theology," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26.1 (2022): 91–93; Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 17–67; Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 20–22.
- 41 Richard C. Barcellos, *Getting the Garden Right: Adam's Work and God's Rest in Light of Christ* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2017), 81–269.
- 42 James M. Renihan, *A Toolkit for Confessions: Helps for the Study of English Puritan Confessions of Faith* (Recovering our Confessional Heritage; Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2017); Rob Ventura (ed.), *A New Exposition of the London Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* (Fearn: Mentor, 2023).
- 43 Samuel D. Renihan and Harrison Perkins, "Clarifying Some Confusions: Covenant Theology in Baptist and Presbyterian Perspective," *The London Lyceum* (March 13, 2023; accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8cylBBJWpU>), 7:54–9:38.
- 44 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 13, 14.
- 45 David VanDrunen, *Divine Covenants and Moral Order: A Biblical Theology of Natural Law* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), 83–86.
- 46 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 15.
- 47 Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3:640, 611
- 48 E.g. Zacharius Ursinus, *Catechesis, Summa Theologiae*, in *Opera Theologica*, 3 vol. (Heidelberg: Johannes Lancelot, 1612), 1:14; Robert Rollock, *Tractatus De Vocatione Efficaci* (Edinburgh, 1597), 9; Franciscus Turretinus, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 3 vol. (Geneva, 1679–85), 8.3.5; Petrus Van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, trans. Todd M. Rester, ed. Joel R. Beeke, 7 vol. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017–), 1.3.12.5, 9–11.
- 49 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 177.
- 50 Wellum, "Reflections on *Covenant Theology* from a Progressive Covenantal View," 178.
- 51 Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3:616–17; *A Confession of Faith Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of many Congregations of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country* (London: Benjamin Harris, 1677), 26.
- 52 Richard C. Barcellos, *The Covenant of Works: Its Confessional and Scriptural Basis* (Recovering our Confessional Heritage; RBAP: Palmdale, CA, 2016); Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 59–77.
- 53 *Confession of Faith ... of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 67.
- 54 Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 611–12.
- 55 For theological and historical defense of this claim, see Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology*, 41–45
- 56 *Confession of Faith ... of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 17–18.
- 57 *Confession of Faith ... of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 18.
- 58 Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3:640 (emphasis added).
- 59 *Confession of Faith ... of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 62–63.
- 60 *Confession of Faith ... of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 67.
- 61 Bernard Wuellner, SJ, *Dictionary of Scholastic Philosophy* (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce Publishing Co., 1956), 93.
- 62 Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5 vol. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012–14), 2:32; Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum Hominibus*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (1694), 1.2.1.
- 63 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 66.
- 64 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 67–68.
- 65 Renihan, Waters, Stephen J. Wellum, and Michael Beck, "Covenant Theology Roundtable," 8:35–8:43.
- 66 For more considerations on this point in connection to Reformed covenant theology, see Harrison Perkins, *Righteous by Design: Covenantal Merit and Adam's Original Integrity* (Mentor, 2024).
- 67 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 17.
- 68 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 18
- 69 Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 19.
- 70 Stephen J. Wellum, "Progressive Covenantalism," in Brent E. Parker and Richard J. Lucas (eds.), *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies: Four Views on the Continuity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 90; Stephen J. Wellum, "A Progressive Covenantalism Response," in *Covenantal and Dispensational Theologies*, 205–7; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 675–77.
- 71 Matthew Barrett, *The Reformation as Renewal: Retrieving the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2023), 251–83. See also Heiko A. Oberman, *The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

- 72 Concerning the covenant of works: “The only reason that Adam’s obedience to the positive laws would be meritorious for eternal life, was because God condescended to make it so according to covenant.” (Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 67–68; emphasis added) Drawing the same connection between positive ordinances and the works principle for sinners to earn blessing in covenant with God: “In other words, this is a demand for strict obedience from Abraham and his descendants. The way in which they will keep the covenant is the *circumcision* of all males on the eighth day after their birth . . . Consequently, this covenant can be classified as a covenant based on works, or obedience.” (Renihan, *Mystery of Christ*, 92, 94)
- 73 Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 253–58.
- 74 “[W]hen God pledges to be God to a people in covenant, one cannot instantly assume that this is the covenant of grace.” Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 257. 1689 federalism seems to suggest that the Old Testament covenants were all covenants of works: “In any covenant, God was the God of the covenant people. The question to be asked was, on what basis did God covenant himself to be the God of a given people? . . . His [Thomas Patient] arguments, then, were designed to prove that although God was indeed the God of Abraham’s offspring according to the flesh, it was on the basis of their continued obedience to laws, not promises which God committed to perform.” Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 134.
- 75 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 108.
- 76 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 109.
- 77 G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 1046–48.
- 78 Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 350–58.
- 79 *Confession of Faith . . . of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 32 (emphasis added).
- 80 Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3:621–22.
- 81 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 56.
- 82 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 58.
- 83 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 62.
- 84 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 64
- 85 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 65; also “Before Christ, the Covenant of Grace was announced; after Christ, it was decreed (νενομοθετηται).” Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 66.
- 86 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 72 (emphasis added).
- 87 By “language game,” I of course mean in the technical, philosophical sense developed by Wittgenstein and do not suggest any sort of ethical sense as if 1689 federalist scholars are trying to play games with their words.
- 88 Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 66–67.
- 89 Renihan, *Mystery*, 186. “These passages emphasize and reinforce the fact that the Abrahamic Covenant is first and foremost an earthly covenant of national promises.” Renihan, *Mystery*, 97. “In other words, this [Abrahamic] covenant provides a descendant who will bless. But it *does not provide a relationship* to the descendant beyond common genealogy.” Renihan, *Mystery*, 89 (emphasis added).
- 90 Renihan, *Mystery*, 37 (emphasis added). I understand that Renihan was here likely wanting to assert that the types did not *themselves* achieve salvation for God’s people. Yet, this idea is not a matter of dispute between Reformed and 1689 federalist theology, since Reformed covenant theology affirms that the former types and ordinances applied *Christ and his benefits* to believers. 1689 federalists have often mischaracterized Reformed theology on this point and argued against a strawman. Still, Renihan’s words state that the old covenant did not *offer* salvation in and of itself, which proves to be true since the doctrine of the *limbus patrum* means that the OT believers did not receive the full benefits of salvation until after Christ came.
- 91 Micah Renihan and Samuel Renihan, “Reformed Baptist Covenant Theology and Biblical Theology,” in Richard C. Barcellos (ed.), *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014), 477 (emphasis added).
- 92 Westminster Confession of Faith 8.6, in Schaff, *Creeks of Christendom*, 3:621–22.
- 93 I previously interpreted these same passages assuming too much agreement between 1689 federalism and Reformed covenant theology; Harrison Perkins, “Engaging Confessional Baptists on Covenant Theology (Part 2): Unity of Salvation in the Old and New Testaments,” *The Heidelblog* (September 20, 2022; <https://heidelblog.net/2022/09/engaging-confessional-baptists-on-covenant-theology-part-2-unity-of-salvation-in-the-old-and-new-testaments/>). In light of other 1689 federalist literature and more conversations, my assumption that the language used entailed that OT believers did not have the full experience of Christ’s benefits until after Christ came was correct.

- <sup>94</sup> Samuel D. Renihan, *Crux, Mors, Inferi: A Primer and Reader on the Descent of Christ* (Monee, IL: Independently Published, 2021). Renihan himself even documents how his view of Christ's descent runs against the mainstream trajectory of Reformed theology as well as his own Baptist confession; Renihan, *Crux, Mors, Inferi*, 105–29.
- <sup>95</sup> "Rather, there were many prior to Christ who trusted in Him through the mystery that made Him known and thus received all of the blessings that Jesus secured in His life, death, and resurrection. They believed the gospel, the good news, and were the children of the New Covenant." Renihan, *Mystery*, 192.
- <sup>96</sup> Thomas de Vio Cajetan, *de Fide et Operibus adversus Lutheranos*, ch. 7, in *Opuscula Omnia* (Lyon, 1562), 290 (Saepe enim legimus in veteri Testamento, Deum dignatum esse pacisci cum hominibus. Genesis enim 9. Scribitur pactum Dei de non futuro amplius universali diluvio. Et Genesis 15. Foedus inquit Deus cum Abraham de terra Chanahan danda semini eius. Et Genesis 17. Foedus circumcisionis scribitur. et Exodus 24. Moyses dicit, Hic est sanguis foederis, etc. Hier. [Jeremiah] Quoque 31. De foedere novae legis ac veteris Deus manifeste loquitur).
- <sup>97</sup> Jeffrey D. Johnson, "The Fatal Flaw of Infant Baptism: The Dichotomous Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant," in Richard C. Barcellos (ed.), *Recovering a Covenantal Heritage: Essays in Baptist Covenant Theology* (Palmdale, CA: RBAP, 2014), 223–56.
- <sup>98</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vol. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2008), 2:367.
- <sup>99</sup> Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 2:373.
- <sup>100</sup> Turretinus, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*, 12.11.1–17; 19.9.1–18; Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:102–4.
- <sup>101</sup> Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018).
- <sup>102</sup> Perkins, *Reformed Covenant Theology*, 116–22, 187–216.
- <sup>103</sup> Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 87.
- <sup>104</sup> Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 152.
- <sup>105</sup> Samuel D. Renihan and Harrison Perkins, "Clarifying Some Confusions: Covenant Theology in Baptist and Presbyterian Perspective," *The London Lyceum* (March 13, 2023; accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S8cylBBJWpU>), 53:02–53:27, 53:50–54:01.
- <sup>106</sup> Steffaniak, "Reforming Credobaptism," 291.
- <sup>107</sup> Steffaniak, "Reforming Credobaptism," 292.
- <sup>108</sup> Samuel Renihan, "What is the Substance of a Covenant? Old vs New," (accessed on April 1, 2023 at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89ZL-x3hrT8>), 0:32–1:01.
- <sup>109</sup> Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 288n96, quoting Benjamin Keach, *The Ax laid to the Root Part II* (London, 1693), 15.
- <sup>110</sup> According to Denault: "We believe that the establishment of the Old Covenant started before the arrival of the Sinaitic Covenant. This covenant was concluded on the basis of a covenant between Abraham and God." (Denault, *Distinctiveness of Baptist Covenant Theology*, 99) Renihan explained how Philip Cary associated God's covenants with Abraham and at Sinai with his covenant with Adam in Eden using the logic of the same substance among them; Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 277.
- <sup>111</sup> Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 325; also Renihan, *Mystery*, 33, 38.
- <sup>112</sup> Renihan, *Mystery*, 36.
- <sup>113</sup> Renihan, *From Shadow to Substance*, 48–57, 98, 214–15, 245; Renihan, "Above and Beyond," 98–102; Renihan, *Mystery*, 36.
- <sup>114</sup> Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 5:89–90, 94–100; Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 778; Q 313–15 in John Calvin, *The Catechism of the Church of Geneva*, trans. Elijah Waterman (Hartford, MA: Sheldon and Goodwin, 1815), 88–89; Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956), 49–68. Note that "spiritual" is primarily eschatological in this context, not some Platonic notion of a non-earthly blessings. The spiritual realities concern Christ's work for us, which is historical, even though its efficacy was communicated in advance.
- <sup>115</sup> Renihan, *Mystery*, 33.
- <sup>116</sup> The preceding paragraph previously appeared in Harrison Perkins, "Engaging Confessional Baptists on Covenant Theology (Part 1): Typology," *The Heidelberg* (September 13, 2022; accessed at <https://heidelberg.net/2022/09/engaging-confessional-baptists-on-covenant-theology-part-1-typology/>).
- <sup>117</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 35.
- <sup>118</sup> Renihan, *Mystery*, 33 (emphasis added).

- <sup>119</sup> Renihan, *Mystery*, 38.
- <sup>120</sup> James M. Hamilton Jr., *Typology: Understanding the Bible's Promise-Shaped Patterns* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2022), 19–28.
- <sup>121</sup> Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology*; Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*; Hans Boersma, *Scripture as Real Presence: Sacramental Exegesis in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).
- <sup>122</sup> Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 2.1, in Philip Schaff (ed.), *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series 1*, 14 vols. (New York, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1887), 2:535; Augustine, *On Catechizing the Uninstructed*, 50.26, in Jacques Paul Migne (ed.), *Patrologia Cursus Completus: Series Latina*, 221 vols. (Paris, 1844–64), 40:344 (signacula quidem rerum divinarum esse visibilia, sed res ipsas invisibiles in eis honorari); Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book 1: The Mystery of the Trinity*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2007), 1.1.1; Peter Lombard, *The Sentences: Book 4: On the Doctrine of Signs*, trans. Giulio Silano (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010), 1.4.2; St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (New York, NY: Benziger Bros., 1948; repr. Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 1981), 3.60.2; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 4.14.1. For summary concerning early modern Protestantism, see Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England, c. 1530–1740* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; repr. 2004), 508–13.
- <sup>123</sup> E.g. Benjamin Keach, *Instructions for Children*, 9<sup>th</sup> ed (London, 1710), 97–101; William Collins, *A Brief Instruction in the Principles of Christian Religion* (London, 1695), 18–19. For more detailed exposition of this point, see Harrison Perkins, “Sacraments as Signs, Seals, and Means of Grace: A Guided Tour of Seventeenth-Century Catechisms in England,” *Modern Reformation* 32 no. 3 (May/June 2023): 18–27.
- <sup>124</sup> *Confession of Faith . . . of Christians (baptized upon Profession of their Faith)*, 32.
- <sup>125</sup> Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 272.
- <sup>126</sup> Renihan and Perkins, “Clarifying Some Confusions,” 37:55–38:50, 41:00–41:07.
- <sup>127</sup> Lucas, “Past and Future of Baptist Covenantal Theology,” 146–47. The standout exception here is Scheiderer, “Progressive Covenantalists as Reformed Baptists,” which was published in the *Westminster Theological Journal* and represents a significant achievement in satisfying an unsympathetic process of peer review.