

J. V. Fesko

# The Covenant of Redemption

Origins, Development, and Reception

V&R Academic

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J. V. Fesko

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## Abbreviations

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| aphr.   | aphorism   |
| ca.     | <i>circa</i>   |
| CH      | <i>Church History</i>  |
| comm.   | comments on  |
| CTJ     | <i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>                              |
| CTS     | Calvin Translation Society                                     |
| CTQ     | Concordia Theological Quarterly                                |
| DLGTT   | Muller, <i>Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms</i> |
| ET      | English Translation  |
| fl.     | flourished   |
| fol.    | folio  |
| HTR     | <i>Harvard Theological Review</i>                              |
| lect.   | lecture  |
| LW      | <i>Luther's Works</i>  |
| MAJT    | <i>Mid-America Journal of Theology</i>                         |
| misc.   | Miscellany   |
| NICNT   | New International Commentary on the New Testament              |
| NT      | New Testament  |
| NPNF    | Nicene Post-Nicent Fathers                                     |
| OT      | Old Testament  |
| prop.   | proposition  |
| PRJ     | <i>Puritan Reformed Journal</i>                                |
| PRRD    | Muller, <i>Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics</i>             |
| q., qq. | question(s)  |
| r       | recto  |
| rep.    | reprint  |
| SCJ     | <i>Sixteenth Century Journal</i>                               |
| serm.   | sermon   |
| SJT     | <i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>                            |

|       |                                  |
|-------|----------------------------------|
| s.v.  | <i>sub verbum</i>                |
| TrinJ | <i>Trinity Journal</i>           |
| v     | verso                            |
| WCF   | Westminster Confession of Faith  |
| WJE   | <i>Works of Jonathan Edwards</i> |

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## Preface

I can remember the first time I ever read about the doctrine of the covenant of redemption. I was immediately struck by the fact that it seemed a bit speculative. The book I was reading simply mentioned the existence of the covenant and moved on. In the author's mind, the doctrine was a settled fact, but it was anything but settled for me. Needless to say, I was still a theological neophyte and had much to learn about theology, church history, and most importantly, exegesis. The more I studied, I realized that the theological universe was a lot larger than I had originally imagined. As I learned more, I examined the exegetical footing for the covenant of redemption and concluded it was sound. I embraced the doctrine because I believed it was true, but at the same time I was unaware of its history.

In my historical research I regularly ran into the doctrine, different formulations, as well as variegated exegetical strategies to support it. The covenant of redemption was a common staple in Early Modern Reformed theology, but as I surfaced from the historical depths I found that the contemporary reception of the doctrine was quite hostile. Accusations of speculation, poor exegesis, no exegesis, proof-texting, sub-trinitarianism, cold-hearted transaction, and the like swirled about this once revered dogma. I also noticed that there were few published resources to aid those interested in studying it. There were numerous treatments of the covenant of redemption scattered throughout various theological works but only a handful of secondary sources. My desire, therefore, was to study the history of the doctrine for my own personal instruction. I wanted to see for myself whether the common accusations against the doctrine were true and learn from some of the church's best minds on one of the more complex theological subjects. I also sought to provide a resource for the church so that theological archaeologists, professional and novice alike, could unearth the riches of the Early Modern Reformed doctrine of the covenant of redemption. Given the paucity of sources on this doctrine, I hope to shed a little light on the subject so that others may undertake their own studies of the covenant of redemption.

All translations of foreign language sources are my own unless otherwise noted. I have left archaic English spellings in quotations intact. In a few places I offer my own translation of the biblical text, which I indicate in the footnote. Otherwise, I either quote the English Standard Version or the version cited in an author's work. And all confessional and catechism quotes come from Pelikan and Hotchkiss's *Creeds and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, unless otherwise noted.

## Introduction

“All talk of God is hazardous,” writes John Webster.<sup>1</sup> Any time a theologian takes up his pen to write about God, there is the danger that he will misunderstand, misrepresent, or misstate the truth about who God is and what he has done. In the wake of the Enlightenment, theologians largely became reserved about their theological claims, and this reticence has only been intensified with the onset of postmodernity. Theologians have become suspicious of grand meta-narratives and attempts to assert anything definitive about God. These days, the greater part of theology is holding one’s convictions loosely and tentatively, given that no one can or should claim definitively to know God. Such a context sets a significant uphill battle for the subject matter of this present study, namely: the *pactum salutis*, or covenant of redemption. The *pactum salutis* (also *consilium pacis*, “council of peace”) is the eternal intra-trinitarian covenant to appoint the Son as covenant surety of the elect and to redeem them in the temporal execution of the covenant of grace. The *pactum salutis* rests in the cradle of the federal theology of the Reformed tradition, one that posits a covenant of works between God and man in the pre-fall state, and then subsequently a covenant of grace between God and the elect but fallen sinner.<sup>2</sup>

At first glance, to posit such a covenant perhaps elicits responses not unlike the notoriously common and ancient question, “What was God doing before he made heaven and earth?” St. Augustine (354–430) notes that this question was

---

1 John Webster, “Theologies of Retrieval,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster / Kathryn Tanner / Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 596.

2 Classic formulation of covenant theology appears in confessional form in WCF VII and in the following historical expositions: Thomas Boston, *Marrow of Modern Divinity; the first part, touching both the covenant of works, and the covenant of grace* (Edinburgh: R. Drummond, 1745); William Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants: Wherein the Nature, Differences, and Effects of the Covenant of Works and of Grace are Distinctly, Rationally, Spiritually and Practically Discussed* (London: J. M. 1678); Francis Roberts, *Mysterium & Medulla Bibliorum. The Mysterie and Marrow of the Bible. Vis. God’s Covenants With man* (London: R. W., 1657); Herman Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man* (Escondido: Den Dulk Foundation, 1992).



often answered, “He was preparing hell for people who inquire into profundities.” Augustine was willing to laugh at such rapier-like wit, but also recognized the legitimate question and preferred to answer, “I am ignorant of what I do not know.” He chose to admit his ignorance rather than ridicule someone who asked a penetrating and sincere question.<sup>3</sup> Augustine’s reply was one of informed ignorance, which is a likely response from many in the church. How can human beings possibly know what God was doing before the creation of the world, let alone pontificate upon the particulars of an eternal intra-trinitarian covenant?

If past generations were unrestrained in their theology and speculatively peered into things for which they had no right or ability to see, then principled ignorance or even stern rebuke for the curious is certainly in order. On the other hand, it is more likely that theologians in the past were reflecting upon scriptural texts and wrestling with how to assemble the seemingly disparate pieces of the puzzle into a coherent picture. In such a context perhaps the question of the viability and legitimacy of the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* deserves careful study and reflection. What are we to make, for example, of Christ’s statement to his disciples: “I covenant to you, as my Father covenanted to me, a kingdom” (Luke 22:29)?<sup>4</sup> Far from wandering too deep into the ineffable and blinding light that emanates from the glory of the triune God, if God has revealed that the trinity covenantally willed to redeem fallen and sinful people, then it behooves the church to explore, define, and press this scriptural teaching into service.

## State of the Question

But what is the present state of the doctrine? How has the doctrine been employed and received in the history of the Reformed church. The doctrine arose in the early seventeenth century and appeared in the disputations of Jacob Arminius (1560–1609), though there were earlier theologians who employed the idea, such as Caspar Olevianus (1536–87).<sup>5</sup> But it was an oration by David Dickson (1583–1662) at the 1638 General Assembly of the Scottish Kirk where the doctrine

3 St. Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), XI. xii.14.

4 Translation mine. Note, this is not a common sixteenth-century translation of this verse. The King James and Geneva Bibles employ the term *appoint* rather than *covenant*. Both Theodore Beza and Johannes Piscator, nevertheless, translated the Greek text and employed the Latin term for covenant.

5 Jacob Arminius, “The Priesthood of Christ,” in *The Works of James Arminius*, 3 vols. (1825–75; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), I:416. On Olevianus, see Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 107–12.

was explained in greater detail.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the seventeenth-century the doctrine was widespread and found advocates in every quarter of the Reformed world, such as John Owen (1616–83), Patrick Gillespie (1617–75), Francis Turretin (1623–87), Johannes Cocceius (1603–69), and Herman Witsius (1636–1708).<sup>7</sup> The doctrine appeared in the *Sum of Saving Knowledge* (1649), written by Dickson and James Durham (1622–58), and was bound with published copies of the Westminster Standards.<sup>8</sup> The doctrine was codified in the Congregational Savoy Declaration (1658) and the Particular Baptist Second London Confession (1689).<sup>9</sup>

Although widespread, the doctrine was not universally accepted. There were some seventeenth-century theologians who believed that the distinction between the covenants of redemption and grace was unnecessary. They maintained that the covenant of grace had its roots in eternity, and the intra-trinitarian agreement was simply the eternal pole of the covenant of grace. Particular Baptist theologians such as Benjamin Keach (1640) in the seventeenth-century and John Gill (1697–1771) in the eighteenth-century advocated such a view.<sup>10</sup> Reformed theologians such as Thomas Boston (1676–1732) promoted a similar view.<sup>11</sup> Despite some dissent, the *pactum* was nevertheless accepted among eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Reformed theologians, such as Jonathan Edwards (1703–58)

6 David Dickson, “Arminianism Discussed,” in *Records of the Kirk of Scotland, containing the Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies, from the Year 1638 Downwards*, ed. Alexander Peterkin (Edinburgh: Peter Brown, 1845), 158–59.

7 John Owen, “Exercitation XXVIII: Federal Transactions Between the Father and the Son,” in *The Works of John Owen*, vol. 19, ed. William H. Goold (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1862), 77–97; Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption* (London: Tho. Parkhurst, 1677); Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1992–97), XII.ii.13–19; Johannes Cocceius, *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei*, in *Opera Omnia theologica, exegetica, didactica, polemica, philologica*, vol. 7 (Amsterdam: 1701), XIV. xxxiv.2 (p. 238); Witsius, *Economy*, II.ii.1–16.

8 See, e.g., *The Confession of Faith, the Larger and Shorter Catechisms, with the Scripture-proofs at Large: Together with the Sum of Saving Knowledge ... Covenants, National and Solemn League; Acknowledgement of Sins, and Engagement to Duties; Directories for Publick and Family Worship; Form of Church-Government ...* (Belfast: James Blow, 1729); *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 1995), Head II, 321–26.

9 *The Savoy Declaration*, VIII.i; and *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. With an Appendix concerning Baptism* (London: John Harris, 1688), VIII.i.

10 Benjamin Keach, *The Everlasting Covenant, A Sweet Cordial for a Drooping Soul: Or, The Excellent Nature of the Covenant of Grace Opened* (London: 1693), 18; John Gill, *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity: or A System of Evangelical Truths* (1809; Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 2007), II.vi–vii (pp. 211–17).

11 Thomas Boston, *Body of Divinity*, in *The Complete Works of the Late Rev. Thomas Boston*, vol. 1 (1853; Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker Publications, 2002), 333.

and Charles Hodge (1797–1878).<sup>12</sup> By the nineteenth-century theologians in some contexts believed that the doctrine had all but vanished. Such was the opinion of the Scottish Presbyterian theologian Robert Shaw (1795–1863).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949) initially demurred from the doctrine; he took a view similar to Boston’s and one of his Princeton predecessors, A. A. Hodge (1823–86), and was quickly criticized for his perceived heterodox novelty.<sup>14</sup> Given the heat, Vos retreated from his view to articulate the *pactum salutis* as distinct from the covenant of grace.

In the early twentieth century the doctrine had other proponents, such as Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), Herman Bavinck (1854–1921), Geerhardus Vos (1862–1949), Louis Berkhof (1873–1957), and G. C. Berkouwer (1903–96).<sup>15</sup> But there were a number of detractors. Karl Barth (1886–1968) is famous for his characterization of the doctrine as “pure mythology”.<sup>16</sup> Herman Hoeksema (1886–1965), Klaas Schilder (1890–1952), and John Murray (1898–1975) also objected to the doctrine as it was commonly formulated.<sup>17</sup> A common criticism was that theologians extracted the doctrine largely from one text, namely, Zechariah 6:13, “And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between the both.” Schilder, for example, said the doctrine was an instance of “scholastic tinkering”.<sup>18</sup>

The reception of the doctrine in the present day follows a similar pattern found in the early twentieth-century. Proponents include R. Scott Clark and David VanDrunen of Westminster Seminary California, who published an essay

12 Jonathan Edwards, Misc. 1062, “Economy of the Trinity and Covenant of Redemption,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards: The “Miscellanies”* (Entry Nos. 833–1152), vol. 20, ed. Amy Plantinga Pauw (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 430–43; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (rep.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), II:354–62.

13 Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (1845; Fearn: Christian Focus, 1998), 127.

14 Cf. Geerhardus Vos, “To B. B. Warfield, 7 July 1891,” in *The Letters of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2005), 160–64; A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology* (1860; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 369–70.

15 Abraham Kuyper, *Dictaten Dogmatiek: collegedictaat van een der studenten*, vol. 3, *Locus de Providentia, Peccato, Foedere, Christo*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Kampen: Stoomdrukkerij van J. H. Kok, n. d.), § V, 90; Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols., trans. John Vriend, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005–09), III:212–16; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology: New Combined Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 265–71; G. C. Berkouwer, *Divine Election* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 163–71.

16 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 14 vols., eds. G. W. Bromiley, T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1936–68), IV/1:65;

17 Klaas Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, 3 vols. (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1947–51), I:382–83; Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (1963; Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1985), 285–336; John Murray, “Covenant Theology,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 4, *Studies in Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 216–40, esp. 234–38.

18 Schilder, *Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, I:383.

on the history and theology of the doctrine.<sup>19</sup> Others have offered historical theological surveys of the doctrine. Most notably, Richard A. Muller has published a survey of the origins and development of the doctrine, and a small handful of historical-theological essays cover the views of Gillespie, Witsius, Bavinck, and Robert Rollock (1555–99).<sup>20</sup> Theologians also continue to critique the doctrine; Robert Letham, for example, argues that the doctrine is inherently “sub-trinitarian”.<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, though with greater rhetorical flair, Cornelius Plantinga contends that the *pactum* is a “grotesque” and “barbaric idea” where “a merciful Son volunteers to bear our stripes in order to placate a vengeful Father, thus effecting a catharsis and an *Umstimmung* in the Father.”<sup>22</sup> Other theologians positively mention the doctrine and sometimes offer brief exposition but do not provide large-scale treatment of it, including Michael Horton, John Frame, Scott Oliphint, J. van Genderen, W. H. Velema, Wayne Grudem, Peter J. Gentry, Stephen J. Wellum, Kevin Vanhoozer, and John Webster.<sup>23</sup>

19 R. Scott Clark and David VanDrunen, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2007), 167–96.

20 Richard A. Muller, “Toward the *Pactum Salutis*: Locating the Origins of a Concept,” *MAJT* 18 (2007): 11–65; Carl Trueman, “The Harvest of Reformation Mythology? Patrick Gillespie and the Covenant of Redemption,” in *Scholasticism Reformed: Essays in Honour of Willem J. Van Asselt*, ed. Maarten Wisse / Marcel Sarot / Willemein Otten (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 196–214; Laurence O’Donnell, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in John Owen’s ‘Covenant of the Mediator’ Formulation: A Case Study in Reformed Orthodox Formulations of the *Pactum Salutis*,” *PRJ* 4/1 (2012): 91–134; idem, “Not Subtle Enough: An Assessment of Modern Scholarship on Herman Bavinck’s Reformulation of the *Pactum Salutis* Contra ‘Scholastic Subtlety,’” *MAJT* 22 (2011): 89–106; Mark Jones, “Covenant and Christology: Herman Bavinck and the *Pactum Salutis*,” in *Five Studies in the Thought of Herman Bavinck, A Creator of Modern Dutch Theology*, ed. John Bolt (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 129–52; J. Mark Beach, “The Doctrine of the *Pactum Salutis* in the Covenant Theology of Herman Witsius,” *MAJT* (2002): 101–42; Brannon Ellis, “The Eternal Decree in the Incarnate Son: Robert Rollock on the Relationship Between Christ and Election,” in *Reformed Orthodox in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology 1560–1775* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2015), 45–66.

21 Robert Letham, “John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic / Mark Jones (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), 196; idem, *The Westminster Assembly: Reading Its Theology in Historical Context* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2009), 235–37; cf. idem, *The Work of Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 52–53, 254 n. 34.

22 Cornelius Plantinga Jr., “The Threeness/Oneness Problem of the Trinity,” *CTJ* 23/1 (1988): 37–38.

23 Michael S. Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 303, 309, 446; John Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2013), 59–60; K. Scott Oliphint, *God With Us: Divine Condescension and the Attributes of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 106–09; J. van Genderen and W. H. Velema, *Concise Reformed Dogmatics*, trans. Gerrit Bilkes and Ed M. van der Maas (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008), 200–08; Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 518–19; Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*

Aside from these scattered essays and comments, to date, there are very few monographs on the doctrine. As best as I can determine, since Dickson's 1638 speech at the Scottish Kirk's General Assembly, numerous theologians treat the subject as part of larger dogmatic works, but only three theological monographs on the subject and five historical-theological works have been written, for a total of eight entries.<sup>24</sup> The first theological monograph comes from Patrick Gillespie, a Scottish Covenanter. Gillespie's work, *The Ark of the Covenant Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ*, was published in 1677. This work was part of a larger two-volume project, with the second volume covering the subject of the covenant of grace. John Owen wrote the foreword to this work and spoke of the doctrine being the place where numerous scriptural teachings intersected, and hence was of the greatest importance. Gillespie offered his work as a polemical thrust against Socinian views on Christ's role as covenant surety, Antinomian views that contended that God did not make the covenant of grace with believers but with Christ alone, and Arminians who offered their own unique take on the common Reformed doctrine of the covenant of grace.<sup>25</sup>

The second monograph comes from Samuel Willard (1640–1707), an American colonial congregational theologian who lived in Concord, Massachusetts. Willard's work, *The Doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption* (1693), was published sixteen years after Gillespie's book. Willard was interested in informing his readers that, in addition to the covenants of works and grace, there was another covenant, namely, that between the Father and the Son. Within this covenant, Willard eagerly informed his readers that they would encounter gospel mysteries with "brevity and perspicuity." He listed Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), Gerhard Vossius (1577–1649), Turretin, Gisbert Voetius (1589–1676), Abraham Heidanus (1597–1678), Owen, and Westminster divines Anthony Burgess (d. 1664) and William Twisse (ca. 1577–1646) as advocates of the doctrine.<sup>26</sup>

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(Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 59–60; Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Remythologizing Theology: Divine Action, Passion, and Authorship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 259; John Webster, "'It Was the Will of the Lord to Bruise Him': Soteriology and the Doctrine of God," in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson / Murray A. Rae (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 15–35, esp. 30–31.

24 There are some works, e. g., that include the covenant of redemption among other topics such as, James Hog, *The Covenants of Redemption and Grace Displayed* (Edinburgh: John Morton, 1707). Other works treat the covenants of works and grace, but then distinguish between the covenants of redemption and grace (so William Norcutt, *A Compendium of the Covenants* [London: Richard Hett, 1731]).

25 Gillespie, *Ark of the Covenant*, 2–3.

26 Samuel Willard, *The Doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption* (Boston: Benj. Harris, 1693), preface.

The church would have to wait nearly three hundred years before another monograph on the *pactum salutis* would emerge. The third and only other dogmatic monograph on the *pactum* comes from Bertus Loonstra's *Election – Atonement – Covenant: The Reformed Doctrine of the Pactum Salutis Described and Reviewed* (1990).<sup>27</sup> Loonstra's project is both a work of historical and systematic theology, though his interest is primarily dogmatic. In his work Loonstra seeks to eliminate the "contract-idea" from the covenant of redemption as well as from covenant theology in general.<sup>28</sup> The fourth monograph on the *pactum* is a 2005 doctoral dissertation written by Carol Williams, "The Decree of Redemption is in Effect a Covenant: David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption."<sup>29</sup> Williams's work is one of historical theology; in her dissertation she traces the roots and explores the theological context of Dickson's doctrine of the *pactum*. The fifth monograph comes from a 2013 doctoral dissertation by Reita Yazawa, "Covenant of Redemption in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards: The Nexus Between the Immanent and Economic Trinity."<sup>30</sup> The sixth entry is a 2015 doctoral dissertation by Byunghoon Woo, "The *Pactum Salutis* in the Theologies of Witsius, Owen, Dickson, Goodwin, and Cocceius."<sup>31</sup> The seventh and eighth monographs are historical-theological studies on the reception of the doctrine in Dispensational theology.<sup>32</sup>

The current status of the doctrine indicates that, while it has received broad acceptance in the past, it has not found many proponents and only slender expositions in recent years, at least in published works. Critics have characterized and described the doctrine as mythology (Barth), scholastic tinkering (Schilder), grotesque (Plantinga), and sub-trinitarian (Letham). But even then, these censures present little careful study of the history, exegesis, or theology of the doctrine. While theologians are certainly free to reject doctrines, they should only offer such negative characterizations with significant historical, exegetical, and

27 Bertus Loonstra, *Verkiezing – Versoening – Verbond: Beschrijving en beoordeling van de leer van het pactum salutis in de gereformeerde theologie* ('s-Gravenhage: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum B. V., 1990).

28 Loonstra, *Verkiezing – Versoening – Verbond*, 385–87.

29 Carol A. Williams, "The Decree of Redemption is in Effect a Covenant: David Dickson and the Covenant of Redemption," (Ph.D. Diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2005).

30 Reita Yazawa, "Covenant of Redemption in the Theology of Jonathan Edwards: The Nexus Between the Immanent and the Economic Trinity" (Ph.D. Diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2013). I am grateful to Laurence O'Donnell for alerting me to this source.

31 Byunghoon Woo, "The *Pactum Salutis* in the Theologies of Witsius, Owen, Dickson, Goodwin, and Cocceius," (Ph.D. diss., Calvin Theological Seminary, 2015).

32 J. R. Graves, *The Work of Christ in the Covenant of Redemption: Developed in Seven Dispensations* (Texarkana, TX: Baptist Sunday School Committee, 1928); J. Michael Montgomery, "The Covenant of Redemption in Dispensational Theology" (Th. M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1959). My thanks to Laurence O'Donnell for pointing out these sources.

theological argumentation, not simply verbal dismissal. Moreover, questions undoubtedly appear as to why the doctrine would be accepted so quickly and then seemingly fall out of favor among Reformed theologians. Even among advocates, the absence of monographs on the subject possibly belies a degree of ambivalence towards the doctrine. Or perhaps advocates believe the doctrine appears clearly enough in Scripture that it requires little justification. By comparison and stark contrast, there are numerous monographs specifically on the covenant of grace.<sup>33</sup> It seems that theologians have been willing to expound the historical manifestation of redemption in the covenant of grace in great detail, but less willing to do the same regarding coordinating the concept of covenant with the eternal origins of God's saving activity. Another possible reason that stands behind the lack of specific attention given to the *pactum salutis* was the eventual collapse of Reformed Orthodoxy and with it, the covenantal theology that undergirded its doctrinal expositions. Given the lack of attention to this doctrine, it seems ripe for retrieval.

## Argument for retrieval

C.S. Lewis (1898–1963) once opined that reading old books brought the fresh breeze of centuries past into our minds so that we would encounter truths that our generation has long forgotten and give us a different perspective on problems common to humanity throughout the ages.<sup>34</sup> Of course, some might contend that the *pactum* would not bring a fresh breeze but rather a malodourous stench.

33 See, e.g., John Ball, *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace* (London: G. Miller, 1645); Thomas Blake, *Vidiciae foederis, or, A treatise of the Covenant of God entered with man-kinde in the several kinds and degrees of it* (London: Abel Roper, 1658); Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened, or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: A. Anderson, 1655); Joseph Alleine, *Heaven Opened: or, A Brief and Plain Discovery of the Riches of God's Covenant of Grace* (New York: American Tract Society, 1852); Peter Bulkeley, *The Gospel Covenant or The Covenant of Grace Opened* (1651); John Preston, *The new Covenant, or, The Saints Portion: A Treatise Unfolding the All-Sufficiency of God, man's uprightness, and the covenant of grace* (London: I. D., 1631); Thomas Hooker, *The Covenant of Grace Opened* (1649); Patrick Gillespie, *The Ark of the Testament Opened, or, The Secret of the Lord's Covenant Unsealed in a Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London: R. C., 1681); Thomas Boston, *A View of the Covenant of Grace from the Sacred Records* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming and Co., 1734); Matthew Henry, *The Covenant of Grace*, ed. Allan Harman (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2002); John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblico-Theological Study* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1987); William Hendricksen, *Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978); John Von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2010); Herman Hanko, *God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Assn., 1988).

34 C. S. Lewis, "On the Reading of Old Books," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics*, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 200–07.

Perhaps there is a good reason that so few books have been written on the subject. Perhaps the doctrine is better left in the theological crypt, out of sight, and out of mind.

While some likely believe the doctrine is best left alone, an oddity, a museum relic of a by-gone era, given its scope and the doctrines it purports to envelope (christology, soteriology, theology proper, covenant, etc.), the doctrine ought to be retrieved and revived. A number of criticisms against traditional Reformed doctrines have likely suffered from a lack of attention to the *pactum salutis*. Some have argued, for example, that the Reformed doctrine of election is an abstract choice on God's part—a cold piece of calculus, but hardly an expression of grace or love.<sup>35</sup> Others have contended that the doctrine of election has historically been devoid of Christ.<sup>36</sup>

At the present time a number of theologians have written about the doctrine of union with Christ as the panacea for all that ails Evangelical and Reformed theology.<sup>37</sup> If the church can only recognize the all-important doctrine of union with Christ, so the argument goes, then we can have a greater understanding of redemption and even repair the doctrinal breach between the so-called Old and New Perspectives on Paul, and perhaps even mend the relationships between Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox communities.<sup>38</sup> Rarely, however, in these various and sundry discussions has anyone asked what stands behind the believer's mystical union with Christ. To answer this question, we must push behind the curtain of history, to the eternal moment when the elect were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). Such a move inevitably brings us to the ideas that God chose people and in some sense united them to the *Christ*, a title laden with covenantal freight, and a move that pushes us into the realm of the *pactum salutis*. Moreover, there appear to be a number of exegetical indicators present within the Scriptures that warrant careful study and construction of the doctrine such as Luke 22:29. When, for example, did the Father covenant a kingdom to the Son? By studying the history of the origins,

35 See, e.g., Basil Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Appleford: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1966), 19–37; J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980).

36 Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, II/2:155, 158, 187–88.

37 Marcus Peter Johnson, *One With Christ: An Evangelical Theology of Salvation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 25–28; William B. Evans, *Imputation and Impartation: Union with Christ in American Reformed Theology* (Eugene: Paternoster, 2008), 259–66.

38 Cf. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Wrighting the Wrongs of the Reformation? The State of the Union with Christ in St. Paul and Protestant Soteriology," in *Jesus, Paul and the People of God: A Theological Dialogue with N. T. Wright*, ed. Nicholas Perrin / Richard B. Hays (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 235–58, esp. 247–57; Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, ed., *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).



development, and reception of the *pactum salutis*, theologians can examine a number of issues from a different vantage point, one where theology (proper), christology, election, soteriology, and the doctrine of the covenant converge.

## Aim of the present study

There is a twofold aim for this present study: (1) survey the origins, development, and reception of the *pactum salutis*, and (2) identify the key doctrinal issues that arise, which set the stage for a retrieval of the doctrine. Studying the history of the doctrine does not establish its dogmatic legitimacy, but it does establish parameters so that theologians can consider the doctrine's claims, test its formulations, and examine its exegetical footings. Through a conversation with the historical past, the present generation can enter a dialogue with the church across the ages rather than merely conduct a monologue only with the living. By entering this dialogue and excavating the theological past, we can also identify the chief issues that arise with the *pactum salutis*, which include:

1. Theological methodology – Early modern Reformed theologians are often accused of proof texting—extracting a doctrine from one biblical text. This study will reveal, however, that proponents of the *pactum* construct their doctrine canonically. One can eliminate various texts from consideration (e.g., Zech. 6:13) and have the doctrine remain intact because it rests on numerous passages of Scripture.
2. Reason or revelation – proponents of the doctrine have been accused of relying upon the raw power of reason to formulate the *pactum*—they are guilty of gross speculation. The survey will reveal another picture, one that shows how proponents exegetically wrestled with a number of scriptural texts. They were convinced that the doctrine was revealed and not the result of speculation.
3. Trinitarianism – critics have argued that the *pactum* subverts the doctrine of the trinity. Yet critics fail to account for the different versions of the doctrine, whether the christological or trinitarian models. In other words, is the covenant of redemption about the appointment of Christ to his office as covenant surety, or does it also involve the Holy Spirit? Moreover, a number of theologians contend that the *pactum* is the fruit of the trinitarian *consilium Dei*. Proponents of the doctrine were keen on preserving the fully trinitarian character of their theology but did so with an eye on explaining how to account for the scriptural language that the Father sent the Son into the world to save sinners.
4. Predestination – critics in recent years have accused Reformed theologians of promoting a Christless doctrine of election, one where God makes an abstract

- choice devoid from Christ. The various formulations of the *pactum*, however, coordinate and connect election and christology, as the covenant of redemption is the appointment of the surety, the covenant head, of the elect.
5. Justification and imputation – as the doctrine began to develop, theologians connected Christ’s appointment as covenant surety to justification, specifically the doctrine of imputation. In simpler terms, When, precisely, do the elect receive the imputed righteousness of Christ? This is a question that receives different answers depending on the theologian: some contend the elect receive it in the *pactum* and are justified from eternity, others maintain that God decrees to impute Christ’s righteousness in the *pactum* but the elect do not receive it until they profess faith in Christ. In this respect, some advocates of the *pactum* employ the distinction between active and passive justification—the imputation of Christ’s righteousness in the *pactum* and its subsequent reception by faith.
  6. The order of salvation – in the present day the concept of the *ordo salutis* is a vilified doctrine, a teaching that supposedly only rests upon one proof text, Romans 8:28–30. But once again, this study will show that the *ordo salutis* materially finds its origins in the *pactum salutis*, and as the doctrine develops, theologians make this connection explicit. The *ordo salutis*, therefore, rests upon broad exegetical and theological considerations, not one isolated proof text.
  7. Love – in what is perhaps one of the more underappreciated and ignored ideas, this historical survey will show how frequently theologians invoke the idea of love. Far from a cold legal transaction, or a business deal, proponents of the *pactum* characterize the intra-trinitarian agreement as a manifestation of love among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, one that overflows to the elect. As such, the *pactum* acts as an anchor, a source of assurance and hope, to encourage believers that their redemption is eternally secure because of the inviolable intra-trinitarian covenant.

There are other ancillary issues that will arise in the course of this survey, but these aforementioned ideas are the major themes that accompany the various formulations of the *pactum salutis*.

## Plan for the present study

One of the benefits of doctrinal retrieval is that earlier theological formulations, debates, and discussions open new vistas upon present doctrinal dilemmas. As Lewis has observed, previous generations are fallible, but they do not necessarily