

Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace by J. Mark Beach, under the supervision of R. A. Muller, L. D. Bierma, J. Bolt, W. J. Van Asselt. Pp. x + 436.

ABSTRACT

The subject of this dissertation is Francis Turretin's federal theology as a defense of the doctrine of grace. Specifically, it deals with Turretin's exposition of the twofold covenant of God—that is, the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace. In treating this subject, the dissertation has a twofold objective—first, to contribute to an understanding of the theology of Turretin; second, to offer an evaluation regarding the validity of certain trajectories of scholarship pertaining to federal theology in general.

This study, in its analysis and exposition of Turretin's understanding of the twofold covenant, deals with several issues that have arisen in the secondary literature on federal theology, namely whether it is a species of legalism, whether it emerged in an effort to escape certain questions surrounding the doctrine of predestination, and whether it remained entangled in a doctrine of double predestination which prevented it from articulating a scriptural conception of the covenant. Related to these issues is whether there are two distinct and opposing traditions within sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theology. Each of these issues, then, has a bearing upon the proper interpretation of the federal movement. In view of the quite divergent interpretations and assessments of federal theology relative to the earlier codification of Reformed theology under Bullinger and/or Calvin, this dissertation differs with each of the above mentioned interpretations of federal theology. Instead, this study agrees with the line of scholarship that sees essential continuity between federal theology and the earlier codification of Reformed theology, especially relative to the doctrine of divine grace.

In analyzing Turretin's explication of the twofold covenant, the dissertation shows how already in the covenant of nature God's gratuitous relationship with humans comes to expression in that God, according to his goodness and justice, establishes the way humans might relate to him righteously and receive the gift of eternal blessedness. After the fall into sin, God does not abandon the standards of his holiness, nor does he abandon humans to the eternal penalty of their disobedience; rather, by the covenant of grace he redeems fallen humans by fulfilling the stipulations of the law on behalf of fallen people—all of which demonstrates that federal theology, according to Turretin's articulation of it, is nothing less than a defense of a theology of grace and therefore does not compromise the doctrine of grace codified by the early Reformers.