ABSTRACT

This dissertation employs exegetical history to explain the development of Reformed federal thought, investigating the interpretation of Hebrews 7:1-10:18 in the Reformation and Post-Reformation period, with special reference to the Epistolae ad Hebraeos explicato (1659) of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669). This exegetical method demonstrates the shortcomings of current dogmatic explanations of the origin of federal theology, thereby providing new insights into the doctrine of the covenant.

Hebrews 9:16 raises the problem of the relation of the Hebrew term for covenant, berith, with its Greek parallel, diatheke. During the Reformation, this problem — aggravated by the Humanist turn ad fonts — led to the development of a technical Latin terminology which differentiated carefully between foedus, testamentum, and pactum. Not unrelated was a contemporaneous reappraisal of the relation between the Old and New Testaments. Protestant soteriological developments suggested a contrastive relation between Law and Gospel, while the Anabaptist challenge required a strong affirmation of testimonial continuity. Hebrews 8 served as a locus for gathering these diverse heads of doctrine that would in time develop into a distinct theological topic, de foedere.

The Hebrews exegesis of Cocceius reflects both of these previous interpretive concerns. He applies a distinctive terminology, unavailable prior to sixteenth-century developments, wherein foedus, pactum, and testamentum each represent distinct legal relations. The commentary also evinces a polemical nature, opposing the Socinian denigration of the Old Testament and urging Jewish opponents to see the consummation of their Scriptures in Christ. Cocceius thus emphasizes both testamental continuity, denying that the Mosaic administration is in any way foedus operum, and soteriological discontinuity, positing two modes of justification before and after the advent of Christ, πάρεσιζ (“passing over”) and ἀφεσιζ (“remission”).

The Explicatio of Cocceius focuses on the relation between the two testaments, whereas his Summa doctrinae do foedere et testamento (1648) is structured by five federal abrogations. Long the
focus of Cocceius studies, these federal abrogations are altogether absent from the Hebrews commentary. By drawing attention to the importance of testamentary relations in Cocceius’s thought, this dissertation relates his mature federalism to sixteenth-century developments, demonstrating significant continuities within the Reformed federal tradition.