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TO MY PARENTS AND PARENTS-IN-LAW

YONG DAL LIM

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ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ACW</i>	<i>Ancient Christian Writers</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>CCSL</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina</i>
<i>CO</i>	<i>Ioannis Calvini Opera quae supersunt omnia</i>
<i>Commentaries</i> [CTS]	<i>Calvin's Commentaries</i> [Calvin Translation Society]
<i>Creeds</i>	<i>Creeds of Christendom</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>DLGTT</i>	<i>Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms</i>
<i>DNB</i>	<i>Dictionary of National Biography</i>
<i>FC</i>	<i>Fathers of the Church</i>
<i>Institutes</i>	<i>Institutes of the Christian Religion</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
<i>NSHE</i>	<i>New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge</i>
<i>RD</i>	<i>Reformed Dogmatics</i>
<i>STC</i>	<i>Short-Title Catalogue</i>

ABSTRACT

The object of this study is to show how the covenant theology of Francis Roberts (1609-1675), an English Puritan, stands in the mainline of the Reformed tradition and assists in defining the seventeenth-century development of “covenant” or “federal” theology. In particular Roberts’ covenant theology not only reflects the development and refinement of English covenant thought after the Westminster Assembly but also evidences the ongoing dialogue between the English Reformed writers, the Scottish Reformed writers, and the Reformed thinkers in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands. To judge the place of Roberts’ covenant theology in relation to Reformed orthodoxy, the present study mainly concerns itself with the comparison of Roberts’ theology with that of his Puritan predecessors, and the ways in which it stands in continuity with earlier Reformed covenant thought.

Roberts divides God’s covenants into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith instead of separating them into the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. For he thinks that all covenants are the covenant of grace, yet the covenant of faith was made after the fall. Roberts is confident of the conditionality of the covenant of faith. While he firmly confesses the precedence of divine grace, he sees unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ as the requirement of man in the covenant of faith. Like his contemporaries in the latter half of the seventeenth century Roberts argues an initial, now abrogated, covenant of works.

Roberts divides the covenant of faith into the covenant of promise and the covenant of performance, that is, the new covenant. And he distinguishes the covenant of promise into six periods: (1) from Adam (after the fall) till Noah, (2) from Noah till Abraham, (3) from Abraham till Moses, (4) from Moses till David, (5) from David till the Babylonian captivity, and (6) from the Babylonian captivity till the death of Jesus Christ.

The thesis shows that Roberts’ version of “covenant theology” defies the simple analysis of covenant theology found in much earlier scholarship as falling into legalism and as discontinuous with the Reformation—or, alternatively, as a new biblical theology set against the Reformed orthodoxy of its age. Similarly the thesis shows that dichotomization of the covenant tradition into unilateral and bilateral approaches is unhelpful in the analysis of seventeenth-century English developments. Finally, the thesis offers Roberts’ covenant theology as a significant evidence of the continuities and contacts between British and continental Reformed theology.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The object of this study is to show how the covenant theology of Francis Roberts (1609-1675), an English Puritan, stands in the mainline of the Reformed tradition and assists in defining the seventeenth-century development of “covenant” or “federal” theology. In particular Roberts’ covenant theology not only reflects the development and refinement of English covenant thought after the Westminster Assembly but also evidences the ongoing dialogue between the English Reformed writers, the Scottish Reformed writers, and the Reformed thinkers in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands. English Puritans have been largely neglected in studies of Protestant orthodoxy, although their teaching falls generally within the bounds of mainline Reformed theology.¹ In general, continental Reformed thinkers have been the center of interest in the Reformed studies, and only some Puritan thinkers such as William Perkins and William Ames, who had enjoyed an international reputation in their lifetime, drew the attention of those who studied Reformed theology. The relationship of English and continental thought, however, was far deeper and more complex than can be inferred from examining the works of a few famous writers. What can easily be documented is a consistent flow of

¹Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1987), 34-35; Carl R. Trueman, *The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998), 6, 8, 13-24; P. G. Ryken, “Scottish Reformed Scholasticism,” in *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment*, ed. Carl R. Trueman and R. Scott Clark (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1999), 198-200; W. J. van Asselt et al., *Inleiding in de Gereformeerde Scholastiek* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1998), 100-101 and 131-133; Donald K. McKim, ed., *Encyclopedia of the Reformed Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), s.v. “Westminster Confession of Faith,” by John H. Leith.

ideas between England and the continent. Without due consideration of the English contribution to Protestant scholasticism, or, indeed, of the continental impact on the English, therefore, a full picture of Reformed orthodoxy cannot be presented.

Covenant theology was a main characteristic of Puritan thought even though it was neither originally developed nor exclusively possessed by Puritan thinkers. The Puritans played their part in making covenant theology flourish in the seventeenth century. In 1647 the Westminster Confession of faith, which may be the epitome of the Puritan faith, for the first time made the doctrine of the covenant binding for a major church.² Moreover, according to some scholars, the organizing principle of the confession was supplied by the covenant scheme.³ Except for some cases of renowned figures like Perkins, however, the covenant thought of most Puritan thinkers has not been examined in detail. Nor has the relationship of their thought to the broader Reformed tradition been studied.

Among the works of those inappropriately neglected Puritan thinkers, Roberts' immense book on covenant stands out. In 1657 Roberts published *The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man....*⁴ Considering the size of books

²Gottlob Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus, vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1923), 82. Jaroslav Pelikan properly translates the word "symbolisch" as "authoritatively binding" (*The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989], 4:365). For the text of the confession, see The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), in Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds*, 3:600-673.

³Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Westminster Assembly and Its Work," chap. in *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1931), 56-59. See also Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 239.

⁴Francis Roberts, *The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man, in the First Adam, before the Fall: and in the Last Adam Iesvs Christ, after the Fall; from the Beginning to the End of the World; Unfolded & Illustrated in Positive Aphorisms & their Explanations* (London: R. W. for George

published at that time, it was extraordinary to write more than 1,700 pages in folio on a single subject.⁵ In *God's Covenants* Roberts' citation of authors ranges widely from the early church to his own days. Roberts cites St. Augustine and John Calvin more often than any individual Puritan thinkers, including the divines of the Westminster Assembly. To judge the place of Roberts' covenant theology in relation to Reformed orthodoxy, the present study will mainly concern itself with the comparison between Roberts' theology and that of his Reformed precursors. The following historiography of Puritan covenant theology will enable us to set the issue of continuity between the Reformers' covenant thought and Puritan covenant theology into the context of modern scholarly discussion. This, in turn, will provide the basis for us to relate Roberts' covenant theology to the Reformers' theology.

A. The History and Historiography of Puritan Covenant Theology: A Survey

Puritan covenant theology has been variously interpreted in terms of its relation to the Reformers' theology, especially Calvin's thought. Some scholars contend that there was little influence of Calvin on Puritan covenant theology and that the covenant concept distinguished the Puritans' theology from Calvin's, while others argue continuity. Another group of scholars insists that in the Puritan covenant theology there were two lines that were influenced by two different streams of the Reformers: one was that of

Calvert, 1657). Vos identifies Roberts' *God's Covenants* as a major work on the covenants after the Westminster Confession of Faith ("Covenant in Reformed Theology," 241).

⁵Because of the immense size of *God's Covenants* modern writers sometimes make mention of the exact number of its pages (Vos, "Covenant in Reformed Theology," 241, and Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law* [London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1965; reprint, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993], 116, footnote 61). Its body alone is 1,721 pages.

Ulrich Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger, and the other was that of Calvin. These scholars try to set apart the Zwingli-Bullinger-Tyndale line of the bilateral conditional covenant and the Calvinist line of the unilateral unconditional testament in the Puritan covenant theology. Still others argue a more complex development in which the Reformers juxtaposed and reconciled the conditional and unconditional aspects of covenant, and the Puritan covenant theology followed the tradition of the Reformers.

1. The Argument for Significant Divergence of Puritan or Reformed Covenant Theology from Calvin's Theology

Perry Miller, dealing with Puritan thought in New England, asserts that the English Puritans devised the covenant theology to solve some problems of Calvinism.⁶ Miller says that “if Arminianism resulted from a feeling that Calvin was deficient in ethical sanctions, Antinomianism came from a conviction that it did not go far enough with the doctrine of assurance.”⁷ He does, however, acknowledge the errors of both: “Antinomians expected God’s grace to do all, Arminians attributed everything to our consent.”⁸ Miller sees that covenant theology succeeded in securing “a basis for moral obligation and for assurance of salvation,” of which Calvinism was attacked for its lack, “while yet not subtracting from God’s absolute power or imposing upon Him any

⁶Perry Miller, “The Marrow of Puritan Divinity,” chap. in *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956; reprint, New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 48-98. This article was originally published in *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, vol. 32 (1937), 247-300. See also his book, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* ([New York: Macmillan Co.], 1939; reissued, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1954), 94.

⁷Miller, *New England Mind*, 370.

⁸Miller, *New England Mind*, 389.

limitations prescribed by merely human requirements.”⁹ Miller does not ascribe the invention of the covenant theory to Perkins, for he admits its appearance in the writings of earlier Reformers. Yet he insists that Perkins’ works were the first in England to give the covenant concept the stress that became overwhelming in the sermons of John Preston.¹⁰ According to Miller, the covenant concept rudimentarily existed in Perkins’ works, and it was enormously extended and elaborated in the hands of his students, especially by Ames. Perkins and his successors, maintaining the Calvinistic tradition of the hidden and inscrutable God, proposed covenant as the only method by which God deals with man, thus making the divine mystery partly theorized, though not entirely.¹¹ Miller sees covenant theology, which is not found in Calvin, as a distinguishing feature of the Puritanism.

Miller is not alone in his insistence on the discontinuity between Calvin and Puritan thinkers. Contrasting Calvin’s theology with that of his successors, Basil Hall asserts that Perkins and other English Puritans, following Theodore Beza, distorted the balance of doctrines that Calvin had tried to maintain.¹² Hall finds careful balance of Calvin’s complementary doctrines in his *Institutio*, especially in the final Latin edition of 1559. In his articles Hall does not focus on comparing Calvin’s covenant thought and Puritan covenant theology. Yet he mentions that Perkins introduced the concept of the covenant of grace into the discussion of the sacraments “thereby making the force of the

⁹Miller, “Marrow of Puritan Divinity,” 63, and see 53-56. See also Miller, *New England Mind*, 373-374.

¹⁰Miller, *New England Mind*, 374.

¹¹Miller, “Marrow of Puritan Divinity,” 57-63 and 93-94.

¹²Basil Hall, “Calvin Against the Calvinists” and “The Calvin Legend,” in *John Calvin*, ed. G. E. Duffield (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966), 19-37 and 1-18, respectively.

sacraments dependent upon the administration of the Covenant in a way foreign to Calvin's method."¹³ Hall says that the work of the Westminster Assembly divines owed much to covenant theology and less to Calvin.¹⁴ For Hall, Puritan covenant theology had no relation to Calvin; moreover, it resulted in a kind of distortion of his theology.

R. T. Kendall also tries to separate Puritan theology from Calvin and to put it under Beza's influence. He insists that Puritan theology, especially that of Perkins, does not follow Calvin but Beza in its major doctrines such as assurance of salvation and predestination.¹⁵ According to Kendall, if men doubted their election, Perkins followed Beza and pointed men to their sanctification, whereas Calvin pointed them to Christ alone.¹⁶ Regarding covenantal thought, however, Kendall says that Perkins followed Zacharias Ursinus. A motif known as the two-covenant scheme was present in Ursinus' theology. Kendall thinks that the motif accorded well with the thinking of Beza, and it became an assumption in English Calvinism from Perkins onward.¹⁷ Yet Kendall denies the existence of the idea in Calvin that God initially made a covenant of works with man and later instituted the covenant of grace.¹⁸ Thus Kendall insists that the theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith is not Calvinistic, but it should be seen as the

¹³Hall, "Calvin Against Calvinists," 21 and 29.

¹⁴Hall, "Calvin Legend," 3.

¹⁵R. T. Kendall, "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 199-214.

¹⁶Kendall, "Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," 205.

¹⁷Kendall, "Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," 207.

¹⁸R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 27; idem, "Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," 207.

culmination of the Beza-Perkins tradition.¹⁹ Kendall describes the Puritan theology as a deviation from Calvin's theology, not a mere modification.

Going further, Holmes Rolston III insists that Puritan covenant theology and Calvin's covenant thought contradicted each other in terms of grace and law.²⁰ Rolston finds the main characteristic of covenant theology in its two-covenant scheme, which was given full confessional status for the first time in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Rolston thinks that the two-covenant scheme was dominated and colored by the first covenant, the covenant of works, the principle of which was not grace, but law. In Puritan covenant theology there is no place for the grace of God before man sins, because grace came only after sin.²¹ According to Rolston, covenant theologians define sin as man's breaking the law of God, whereas Calvin understands it as man's breaking of the original relationship of grace with God. As the covenant of works prescribes for man the attempt to rely on his obedience, Rolston asserts, there has crept into the two-covenant scheme a concept of man's merit that not merely modifies but reverses Calvin's thought about man's primal relation to God.²² Whereas Calvin thinks of man as accountable only under the governing principle of God's grace, the covenant theologians emphasize the responsibility of man under law, thus giving the law a certain permanent priority over the

¹⁹Kendall, "Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," 214; idem, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 204 and 208.

²⁰Holmes Rolston III, "Responsible Man in Reformed Theology: Calvin versus the Westminster Confession," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 129-156; idem, *John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1972).

²¹Rolston, "Responsible Man," 129, 131, 136 and 142.

²²Rolston, "Responsible Man," 142-143, 148-149 and 151.

gospel.²³ For Rolston, the Puritans' two-covenant scheme, especially that of the Westminster Confession of Faith, conflicts with Calvin's teaching about Adam's state before the fall, and thus his doctrine of grace. This theological critique is carried forward by James B. Torrance, who argues that the covenant of works represents a "legalism" in later Reformed and Puritan theology. Calvin, he argues, did not hold any such doctrine—particularly given Calvin's emphasis on grace and the tendency of the doctrine of the covenant of works to identify law as prior to gospel, legal demand prior to grace.²⁴

Hall, Kendall, Rolston, and Torrance thus agree with Miller in denying Calvin's influence on the Puritan covenant theology, whether Calvin is mainly compared with Perkins (Miller), with the Westminster standards (Rolston and Torrance), or with both of them (Kendall and Hall). Yet Miller differs from others in finding some problems in Calvin, while they devalue Puritan covenant theology. Whereas Miller thinks that Puritan theology, especially with the covenant scheme, solved some important problems that were found in Calvin's theology, some critics insist on a deterioration of Calvin's thought in the Puritans. Rolston and Torrance pass an especially negative judgment on the Puritan concept of the covenant of works as a main cause for such degeneration.

In a recent variant of this basic discontinuity thesis David A. Weir draws a historical line between the early Reformed theologians and the federal theologians. According to

²³Rolston, "Responsible Man," 152 and 155-156.

²⁴James B. Torrance, "Strengths and Weaknesses of the Westminster Theology," in *The Westminster Confession in the Church Today*, ed. Alasdair I. C. Heron (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, 1982), 48-50; idem, "Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth-Century Scotland," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 57-71; idem, "Calvin and Puritanism in England and Scotland—Some Basic Concepts in the Development of 'Federal Theology,'" in *Calvinus Reformator* (Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, 1982), 269-277; idem, "The Concept of Federal Theology - Was Calvin a Federal Theologian?" in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 30-32.

Weir, the prelapsarian covenant with Adam, the distinguishing characteristic of the federal theology, was a product of the Reformed theologians who tried to resolve the question of God's providential sovereignty and the fall of Adam.²⁵ Weir defines federal theology as a specific type of covenant theology that is characterized by a prelapsarian and postlapsarian covenant scheme.²⁶ According to him, Ursinus first proposed the idea of a prelapsarian *foedus naturale* with Adam in his *Major Catechism* written in 1561-1562.²⁷ And Dudley Fenner first called the prelapsarian covenant *foedus operum* and first integrated the idea with Ramist methodology.²⁸ As the idea of the prelapsarian covenant flowered everywhere in Reformed theology after 1590,²⁹ the use of the idea of the covenant of works could not be exclusive to the Puritans. Yet Weir emphasizes that it was the Puritans in England and America and the Presbyterians in Scotland who popularized the idea. Moreover, the Westminster Assembly approved the federal theology by including it fully in its Confession and Catechisms.³⁰

Weir acknowledges that the Calvinist use of the idea of a prelapsarian covenant was not absolutely new, for Augustine and Ambrosius Catharinus already proposed the idea.³¹ Also a hint of a prelapsarian covenant may be traced to Calvin's treatment of the tree of life as a sacrament, that is, for him a sign of a covenant between God and man. As Weir

²⁵David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 16, 22, 63 and 157.

²⁶Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 3.

²⁷Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 22 and 87.

²⁸Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 137-138.

²⁹Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 36.

³⁰Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 2 and 157.

³¹Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 12 and 101.

cannot find any specific reference to a prelapsarian covenant of works but only the concept of a postlapsarian covenant of grace in both Calvin and Bullinger, however, he does not refer to their covenant theology as federal theology.³² According to Weir, with the rise of federal theology the idea of covenant began to have a controlling influence in the systematic ordering of doctrine. Thus Weir draws a distinction between the Reformers' covenant theology and the Calvinist federal theology. But, unlike J. Wayne Baker who distinguishes between the unilateral covenant scheme and the bilateral one, Weir understands the double covenant scheme of federal theology as an attempt to bridge unilateral covenant and bilateral covenant.³³ Since Weir understands the use of the idea of the covenant of works as a very radical change in covenant thinking, he rather grudgingly acknowledges that the federal theology was in the line of the Reformers' covenant theology.

Yet a major defect of Weir's theory lies in his claiming without clear historical warrant that the notion of a prelapsarian or antelapsarian covenant arose to solve the questions of theodicy raised by mid-sixteenth-century predestinarian controversy.³⁴ As Lyle D. Bierma notes, Weir does not demonstrate an explicit historical connection between the predestinarian controversy of the 1550s and the idea of an antelapsarian

³²Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 9-12.

³³Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 32 and 62. The approach of J. Wayne Baker and others, who argue for two distinct trajectories of covenant thought (unilateral and bilateral), will be discussed below in the third section of the survey of scholarship.

³⁴Richard A. Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 78. See also Muller's review of *Origins of Federal Theology*, by Weir, in *Journal of Religion* 72 (1992): 597-598; and Lyle D. Bierma's review in *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991): 483-485.

covenant.³⁵ According to Richard A. Muller, moreover, what Weir identifies as a contradiction—the question of God’s sovereignty and Adam’s fall—was resolved by insisting on a category of divine permission, or by understanding God’s sovereignty in terms of a concurrence that supports but does not impede human willing, or by combining these two approaches with an emphasis on the mediation of the divine will in and through secondary causes.³⁶ Thus the idea of an antelapsarian covenant was not necessary to the resolution of the issue.

2. The Argument for the Continuity of Covenant Theology with Calvin’s Theology

Everett H. Emerson does not find any substantial difference between Calvin’s covenant thought and Puritan covenant theology in their approaches to the conversion process. He instead finds an essential but simple difference between Calvin and the Puritans in terms of their concern for the audience of sermons.³⁷ Regarding the comparison of Calvin’s covenant thought and Puritan covenant theology, Emerson points out an important mistake that some previous studies have made. For some scholars compared Calvin’s teachings in his textbook of theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, with the sermons of the Puritan covenant theologians. For Emerson, a comparison of this sort is neither useful nor fair. He says that it is more appropriate to use Calvin’s sermons as the basis of a comparison, although other writings should be additionally considered.³⁸ According to Emerson, although Calvin was not a covenant theologian, many of the implications of covenant theology were present in Calvin’s

³⁵Bierma, review of *Origins of Federal Theology*, 484.

³⁶Muller, review of *Origins of Federal Theology*, 598.

³⁷Everett H. Emerson, “Calvin and Covenant Theology,” *Church History* 25 (1956): 136-144.

teaching—“that man can know beforehand the terms of salvation, that man can prepare for salvation, [and] that conversion is a process in which man’s faculties are gradually transformed,” for instance. Yet Emerson thinks that these teachings were not as fundamental to Calvin as to the covenant theologians. Because Calvin usually assumed that those who heard his sermons were already converted, he was less concerned with conversion than with God’s glory in his sermons. Puritan covenant theologians were much more concerned with man’s salvation in their sermons, for they usually attempted to persuade the uncalled or exhorted those who regarded themselves as called to test their calling.³⁹ Except for the difference between their concerns about the audience, as Emerson properly understands, Puritan covenant theologians were substantially in the line of Calvin.

John von Rohr, as opposed to Miller, argues that the covenant of grace was a prominent, though not central, feature in Calvin’s theology. He concludes that the Puritan thinkers inherited the covenant paradigm from the Reformers and appropriated and refined it more fully for their own particular purposes.⁴⁰ Anthony A. Hoekema also argues that Calvin’s treatment of the covenant of grace constitutes an important aspect of his doctrinal teaching and has major themes consistent with the later development of covenant theology. Hoekema cites primarily Calvin’s sermons on Deuteronomy and the commentary on Psalms in substantiating the existence of major covenant themes in

³⁸Emerson, “Calvin and Covenant Theology,” 136.

³⁹Emerson, “Calvin and Covenant Theology,” 141-142.

⁴⁰John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), 9 and 19.

Calvin's thought.⁴¹ Hoekema admits that Calvin does not teach the doctrine of the covenant of works and the so-called *pactum salutis*, or covenant of redemption, which are characteristics of covenant theology. Yet Hoekema agrees with Abraham Kuyper that the basic issues underlying the doctrine of the covenant of works are found in Calvin—for example, the representative character of Adam and the guilt and depravity of man resulting from Adam's fall.⁴²

George M. Marsden strongly critiques Miller's presentation of Puritan covenant theology in its relation to Calvin's covenantal thought.⁴³ As Marsden points out, Miller is incorrect in saying that Calvin made scarce mention of the covenant. Calvin knew much of the covenant, and he developed its implications concerning the unity of Scripture, God's sovereignty, and man's responsibility in very nearly the same way as did the Puritans.⁴⁴ Thus Marsden agrees with Hoekema that "although the covenant of grace was not the one all-controlling principle in Calvin's theology, it was (at least by the time of the Deuteronomy sermons) 'the key to Calvin's understanding of the God-man relationship.'"⁴⁵ Like Hoekema, Marsden finds Calvin's fullest exposition of the implications of the covenant of grace for understanding God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in Calvin's sermons on Deuteronomy, preached in 1555 and 1556. Going

⁴¹Anthony A. Hoekema, "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching," *Calvin Theological Journal* 2 (1967): 136 and 141-161.

⁴²Hoekema, "Covenant of Grace in Calvin," 133-134. Here Hoekema quotes Abraham Kuyper, *De Leer der Verbonden* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1909), 62-64.

⁴³George M. Marsden, "Perry Miller's Rehabilitation of the Puritans: A Critique," *Church History* 39 (1970): 91-105. As the title shows, this article is Marsden's critique of Miller's book, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*.

⁴⁴Marsden, "Perry Miller: A Critique," 101.

⁴⁵Marsden, "Perry Miller: A Critique," 104. He quotes Hoekema, "Covenant of Grace in Calvin," 140.

further, Marsden thinks it possible that some of the Marian exiles in Geneva brought back Calvin's covenant teachings to Elizabethan England, because the period of Calvin's preaching of Deuteronomy sermons overlapped the Marian exile.⁴⁶ Over against Hall, Kendall, Rolston, Torrance, and Miller, Emerson, von Rohr, Hoekema, and Marsden argue forcefully that the Puritan doctrine of the covenant of grace is consistent with Calvin's teachings about the covenant.

Muller proposes a fundamental alternative to Hall and Kendall.⁴⁷ According to Muller, Perkins never distorted Calvin's theology; rather with his contemporaries he inherited and developed the theology of Calvin and other Reformed thinkers and provided Reformed theology with its second major synthesis and systematization of themes since the first codification of Calvin and his contemporaries.⁴⁸ Some writers in the nineteenth and the early twentieth century acknowledged doctrinal continuity between Calvin and the Calvinists only in terms of the use and development of predestination as a central dogma. More recent writers allowed a christological focus in the theology of Calvin but maintained that there was a departure from this center of doctrine in the theology of his successors. In the orthodox thinkers, however, Muller finds neither a

⁴⁶Marsden, "Perry Miller: A Critique," 102 and 104. In footnote 75, Marsden says that his suggestion is supported by Jens G. Møller's argument of the influence of the Geneva Bible (1560) in disseminating covenant views in England ("The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 14 [1963]: 57). Regarding the influence of the publication of the Geneva Bible, see also Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History* 20 (1951): 44-45; and Richard L. Greaves, "The Origins and Early Development of English Covenant Thought," *Historian* 31 (1968): 28-29.

⁴⁷Regarding specific errors of Kendall's view, see two critical reviews of his book, *Calvin and English Calvinism*: Paul Helm, "Calvin, English Calvinism and the Logic of Doctrinal Development," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 34 (1981): 179-185; and George W. Harper, "Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649: A Review Article," *Calvin Theological Journal* 20 (1985): 255-262.

⁴⁸Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1986; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 180-181.

single controlling dogma, like predestination, nor the establishment of one doctrine as central, in the sense of a single point according to which the whole system was designed and from which the whole system was deduced. Their theology, like that of their predecessors, crystallizes around multiple foci.⁴⁹ Muller argues that even though Protestant orthodoxy developed a doctrinal structure more formal in definition and more scholastic in method, it nevertheless concerned to maintain a doctrinal continuity with the soteriological emphasis and Christological center of the theology of Calvin and his contemporaries.⁵⁰ The Christological and soteriological emphases of Calvin and other Reformers were not merely inherited but were developed by Perkins and other Protestant orthodox thinkers. According to Ernest F. Kevan and Muller, moreover, the Reformed view of the covenant of works was constructed for the sake of supporting the Reformation principle of salvation by grace alone. For the Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century there could be no relationship between God and man apart from grace.⁵¹

⁴⁹Muller, *Christ and Decree*, 9 and 172. According to Muller, those who understood Protestant orthodoxy as a predestinarian system were Alexander Schweizer, Ferdinand Christian Baur, Wilhelm Gass, and Heinrich Heppe. Heppe took a more negative view toward the development of predestinarian structures than others. In twentieth-century scholarship, Hans Emil Weber followed Baur, and Ernst Bizer represented Heppe's theory. On the other hand, the Christocentrism of the theology of Calvin and other Reformers has been argued by Paule Wernle, Paul Jacobs, Gottfried W. Locher, and Wilhelm Niesel. Basil Hall represents those who insist that there is a distortion of Calvin's theology in his successors (Ibid., 1-9). Muller refutes those who reduce Protestant orthodoxy to a predestinarian system or misunderstand it as a distortion of Calvin's theology by examining Perkins' *A Golden Chaine* in his article, "Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*: Predestinarian System or Schematized *Ordo Salutis*?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 9/1 (1978): 69-81.

⁵⁰Muller, *Christ and Decree*, 10.

⁵¹Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 112-113; and Muller, "Covenant of Works and Stability of Law," 91-93.

3. The Argument for Two Covenant Traditions

Unlike those who deny Calvin's influence on Puritan covenant theology, some scholars assume two different traditions in the covenant theology of the Puritans. They ascribe one of them to Calvin and the other to Zwingli and Bullinger. Leonard J. Trinterud, unlike Miller, denies the origin of English covenant theology at the beginning of the seventeenth century and instead attributes the theological formulation of the covenant idea to William Tyndale, John Frith, and other English Reformers before the rise of Calvin's influence. Trinterud thinks that Tyndale and Frith wove the Augustinian tradition, which England had long cherished, into the covenant framework on which he acknowledges the influence of the Rhineland Reformers, especially Zwingli and John Oecolampadius.⁵² Trinterud assumes that there were two views of covenant among the Puritans. First, following Calvin and the Geneva Bible (1560), the covenant is God's promise to man, which obligates God to fulfill; second, following the Rhineland and English Reformers, the covenant is God's conditional promise demanding man's obedient response, thus creating a mutual pact or treaty.⁵³ For Trinterud, the doctrinal symbols of the Westminster Assembly are the classic formation of the covenant theology and at the same time the only official Reformed constitutional documents that embody the federal scheme of theology. Describing these documents as characteristic of the federal scheme over against that of Calvin, Trinterud maintains that the Assembly's doctrines are in line with those of the continental federal theologians and in direct

⁵²Trinterud, "Origins of Puritanism," 37, 40 and 50.

⁵³Trinterud, "Origins of Puritanism," 45.

continuity with the Tyndale tradition.⁵⁴ Trinterud does not merely deny Calvin's influence on the mainline Puritan covenant thought; he asserts that mainline Puritan covenant theology in the Rhineland-Tyndale tradition opposed that of Calvin.

Jens G. Møller, like Trinterud, attributes the beginning of Puritan covenant theology to Tyndale, not to Perkins. Unlike Trinterud, however, Møller places at least half of mainline Puritan covenant thinkers in the Calvinist tradition. Møller postulates two fundamentally different understandings of covenant in England: the line of Zwingli-Bullinger represented by Tyndale and the line of Calvin represented by the early Puritan systematic theologians, including Perkins.⁵⁵ Møller says that Calvin's covenant theology is primarily a theology of the covenant of grace that is opposed to the condemning function of the law. On this point he finds Calvin's most important contribution to covenant theology. According to Møller, apart from their teaching on the sacraments, which resembles Bullinger's, there is no substantial deviation from Calvin in the covenant theology of the early Puritan systematic theologians.⁵⁶ When Perkins and his fellow theologians deal with the covenant of works, Møller judges, they merely interpret "Calvin's thoughts on the Law and the *foedus legale*, as expressed in the second book of his *Institutes*."⁵⁷ Møller thinks that Perkins does not know of a covenant before the fall, for he discusses the covenant of works only after his treatment of the fall. Even though the Puritan theologians were without doubt Calvinists, Møller says, Puritan covenant theology shows a deviation from original Calvinism in the Puritans' general and

⁵⁴Trinterud, "Origins of Puritanism," 52.

⁵⁵Møller, "Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," 47 and 63.

⁵⁶Møller, "Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," 50 and 62-64.

⁵⁷Møller, "Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," 61. Italics his.

particular covenants, which stem from Tyndale and the Zurich theology.⁵⁸ For Møller, the covenant theology of the early Puritan systematic theologians, especially that of Perkins, inherited Calvin's theology of the covenant of grace, which was in opposition to the line of Zwingli-Bullinger.

Richard L. Greaves joins Trinterud and Møller in dividing the Puritan covenant theology into two different strands. He classifies the seventeenth-century English covenant theologians into three groups: moderate Calvinists, strict Calvinists, and antinomians.⁵⁹ According to Greaves, the moderate Calvinists conceived of the covenant more as a pact or contract, thus their ideas were more akin to the Zwingli-Bullinger-Tyndale tradition, while the remaining two groups were closer to the Calvin-Perkins-Ames tradition, which assumed that the covenant is more a testament or promise. The difference between the strict Calvinists and the antinomians was that the former allotted to the moral law a rightful place in the life of the believers, but the latter advocated the abrogation of the law for those who were under grace.⁶⁰ Following Trinterud, Greaves attributes the origin of the covenant concept in England to Tyndale and Frith, both of

⁵⁸Møller, "Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," 60-61 and 66-67. Von Rohr understands the "general and particular covenants" as "the Puritan practice of the vow, in which persons make specific promises in covenanting with God" (*Covenant of Grace*, 27).

⁵⁹Richard L. Greaves, "John Bunyan and Covenant Thought in the Seventeenth Century," *Church History* 36 (1967): 151-169.

⁶⁰Greaves, "John Bunyan and Covenant Thought," 152 and 158. In this article, besides pact-contract and testament-promise, Greaves uses several other key concepts for classifying the English covenant theologians. Those concepts are: the question of priority between the covenants (p. 153), the place of the Mosaic law in the covenants (p. 154), the relation of the covenant of grace and the covenant between the Father and the Son (p. 157), the limits of the application of the covenant of grace (p. 161), and the relation of law to the covenant of grace (p. 164). See also Greaves' other article, "Origins and Development of English Covenant Thought," 21-35. In this article Greaves retains the term "antinomians." He does not, however, use the terms, "moderate Calvinists" and "strict Calvinists." Instead, he uses the "Zwingli-Tyndale" tradition and the "Calvinist" tradition respectively.

whom were acquainted with the work of Zwingli and Oecolampadius.⁶¹ Greaves thinks that after the publication of the Geneva Bible the influence of Calvin's concept of the covenant increased much and came to constitute one of the two Puritan covenant streams, the other of which was the existing Zwingli-Tyndale tradition. Greaves finds the tendency to fuse the two streams in the covenant theology of Perkins and the anonymous author of *The Summe of Sacred Divinitie*. In Greaves' judgment, Perkins tended more toward Calvin's concept of the covenant, while the anonymous author relied more on the Zwingli-Tyndale tradition.⁶² Yet, in the seventeenth century the divergence of the two streams gradually increased. Greaves insists that the Calvinist theory of the covenant was distinctly expounded by Ames and eventually ended in the excesses of antinomianism, while John Ball was the representative of the Zwingli-Tyndale tradition, which included Richard Baxter, Thomas Blake, Anthony Burgess, and Samuel Rutherford.⁶³ Thus Greaves clearly divides seventeenth-century Puritan covenant theology into the Zwingli-Bullinger-Tyndale tradition represented by Ball and the Calvin-Perkins tradition that flourished in Ames and the antinomians.

Baker argues even more strongly than Trinterud, Møller, and Greaves in insisting on two divergent traditions in the Reformed theology. Baker asserts that Reformed Protestantism was not a unitary tradition but a dual tradition from the beginning. One thrust was the Calvinist Reformed tradition, and the other was the covenant tradition

⁶¹Greaves, "Origins and Development of English Covenant Thought," 26.

⁶²Greaves, "Origins and Development of English Covenant Thought," 28-30.

⁶³Greaves, "Origins and Development of English Covenant Thought," 32-33.

represented by Bullinger.⁶⁴ The Reformed tradition of Calvinist orthodoxy subordinated the matter of covenant to double predestination and so understood covenant as God's testament, a unilateral promise of salvation to the elect. On the other hand, Bullinger posited a conditional covenant that was a bilateral or mutual covenant.⁶⁵ According to Baker, Calvin's testament theology is similar to that of Augustine, while Bullinger's idea of bilateral covenant cannot be found in Augustine.⁶⁶ Baker postulates Bullinger's influence on the earlier Puritans such as Tyndale, yet he sees the relevance of Bullinger's covenant concept to Perkins' theology only in his dealing with the problem of condition, not in how he dealt with it.⁶⁷ Baker contends that the Zwingli-Bullinger-Tyndale tradition of covenant was found in Preston, Baxter, and Bishop Ussher, while the Calvinist testamental tradition was found in Perkins, Ames, and John Bunyan.⁶⁸

Charles S. McCoy agrees with Baker in that he insists on federalist strand as a major current distinguishable from Calvinist strand from the very beginning of the Reformed tradition.⁶⁹ McCoy and Baker contend that such differences between Calvin and

⁶⁴J. Wayne Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), xxiii.

⁶⁵Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and Covenant*, 53 and xxii. In his recent article, after reiterating the same view, Baker goes further: "Actually, I do not argue that Bullinger presented an alternative. Rather, I argue that Calvin presented the alternative doctrine on predestination within the Reformed tradition. The original Reformed point of view was Bullinger's carefully stated, moderate predestinarianism" ("Heinrich Bullinger, the Covenant, and the Reformed Tradition in Retrospect," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 29/2 [1998]: 374).

⁶⁶Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and Covenant*, 20 and 197. See also Charles S. McCoy and J. Wayne Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition*, with a Translation of *De testamento seu foedere Dei unico et aeterno* (1534) by Heinrich Bullinger (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 23.

⁶⁷Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and Covenant*, 207-209.

⁶⁸Baker, *Heinrich Bullinger and Covenant*, 166.

⁶⁹Charles S. McCoy, "The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1956), 82-83.

Bullinger formed the basis for the two alternative, though related, strands within the Reformed tradition—Calvinism and federalism.⁷⁰ According to McCoy and Baker, the concept of two covenants became necessary for the fusion of the two trends within Calvinist Reformed thought in the later sixteenth century—the rational thrust, often referred to as Protestant scholasticism, and the high Calvinist idea of double predestination. The Calvinist Reformed theologians closely connected the double covenant concept with their understanding of the eternal decree. The covenant of works was conditional, and its fulfillment was an obligation for the entire human race. The covenant of grace was unconditional and applied only to God’s elect. God’s decree of election and reprobation was thus executed within the framework of the two covenants.⁷¹ McCoy and Baker find in Perkins’ use of the double covenant scheme a particularly good example of how federalism blunted the rigidity of the double predestination system of the high Calvinist rationalists.⁷² According to McCoy and Baker, however, some seventeenth-century federal theologians felt uncomfortable with the idea that the covenant of grace was totally unconditional. They returned to Bullinger’s earlier perspective and restored the conditional element in the covenant of grace. Among these theologians McCoy and Baker count the federal theologians in England and New England who developed the idea of preparation.⁷³ For McCoy and Baker, like Trinterud,

⁷⁰McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism*, 24.

⁷¹McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism*, 25-26.

⁷²McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism*, 41.

⁷³McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism*, 26. Here McCoy and Baker do not mention specific Puritan theologians but ambiguously refer to a whole book by Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Spiritual Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966). Among the English preparationists, however, Pettit includes not only Preston, whom McCoy and Baker may want

the Westminster Confession of Faith was much more a product of the federal tradition than of the Calvinist element.⁷⁴ Thus McCoy and Baker clearly divide Reformed Protestantism, including Puritanism, into two traditions: a Calvinist tradition with the notion of a unilateral covenant of grace and a federal tradition with the concept of bilateral covenant of grace.

4. The Argument for the Complex Development of a Single Reformed Tradition

Hoekema, on the other hand, indicates that both divine sovereignty and human responsibility come into sharp and clear focus in Calvin's teachings on the covenant of grace. He explains Calvin's view: "God enters into covenant with us because he is graciously inclined toward us, while we, in turn, as participants in the covenant, are obligated to serve him with all our hearts. But it is only because of God's sovereign grace that our service is acceptable to him."⁷⁵ Hoekema acknowledges that Calvin did not use expressions of later covenant theology such as "the covenant of grace in *monopleuric* or *unilateral* in its origin, but *dipleuric* or *bilateral* in its fulfillment." Yet he thinks that Calvin expressed essentially the same thought in different words: "the covenant of grace has its origin wholly in the undeserved grace of God, but, when once established, that covenant imposes mutual obligations on both God and man."⁷⁶

to refer to, but also Perkins and Ames, whom they see as the Calvinist Reformed theologians (*Heart Prepared*, 48-85).

⁷⁴McCoy and Baker, *Fountainhead of Federalism*, 24. See also Baker, "Reformed Tradition in Retrospect," 375. Here Baker adds that, unlike the doctrine of covenants, the doctrine of predestination in the Westminster Confession of Faith is not Bullinger's but a product of the Calvinist Reformed tradition. Yet Baker does not explain how the Calvinist doctrine of predestination and Bullinger's concept of covenant are harmonized in the Westminster Confession of Faith even though he separates them into two different traditions.

⁷⁵Hoekema, "Covenant of Grace in Calvin," 160.

⁷⁶Hoekema, "Covenant of Grace in Calvin," 140. Italics his.

Hoekema insists that Calvin's covenant thought has a dual dimension: it is conditional as it requires man's response to God's promise in faith and obedience, yet it is absolute as man can only fulfill these conditions when God by his Holy Spirit enables him to do so.⁷⁷ Thus "these conditions are real, but they are not meritorious."⁷⁸ Similarly, Peter A. Lillback has shown that there are numerous covenantal themes in Calvin's theology—including themes that parallel the covenant of works.⁷⁹ Taken together, Hoekema and Lillback provide a counter to the anti-covenantal reading of Calvin found in Rolston and Torrance.

According to Bierma, Reformed covenant theologians in the sixteenth century—Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, Wolfgang Musculus, Ursinus, Caspar Olevianus, and Perkins—recognized both a unilateral (divine) and a bilateral (divine-human) dimension to the covenant of grace within the context of a monergistic soteriology.⁸⁰ Bierma does not see any essential differences in the early Reformed theologians (Zwingli, Bullinger, Calvin, and Musculus) who dealt with the covenant doctrine, especially between Calvin's understanding of the covenant of grace and that of Zwingli and Bullinger.⁸¹ He acknowledges that Calvin moves beyond Zwingli and Bullinger in his treatment of the

⁷⁷Hoekema, "Covenant of Grace in Calvin," 146-148.

⁷⁸Hoekema, "Covenant of Grace in Calvin," 155.

⁷⁹Peter A. Lillback, "The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985), 219-484. See especially pp. 446-484 for his discussion of a covenant of works in Calvin's theology. Cf. idem, "The Continuing Conundrum: Calvin and the Conditionality of the Covenant," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 42-74.

⁸⁰Lyle D. Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 183. See also Bierma's review of *Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition*, by J. Wayne Baker, in *Calvin Theological Journal* 16 (1981): 224.

⁸¹Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 61 and 44.

relationship between covenant and election, yet he does not think their disagreements are rooted in fundamentally different views of the covenant.⁸² For all stressed “both the conditions of human faith and obedience in the covenant and the divine sovereignty and initiative by which the elect are led to fulfill them.”⁸³ As Bierma properly points out, Baker’s appeal to Bullinger’s doctrine of single predestination as a necessary expression of his conditional covenant is of no help because his single predestination never implies conditional election.⁸⁴ Thus, in each of these thinkers there was both a unilateral and a bilateral dimension to the covenant of grace. As opposed to Baker who acknowledges only an unconditional and unilateral testament in the covenant theology of Olevianus, Bierma says that it has also a carefully qualified conditional and bilateral dimension. In Olevianus a monopleuric divine oath and a dipleuric divine-human pledge exist respectively as the promise of reconciliation and reconciliation itself.⁸⁵ Moreover, paying attention to a remarkable similarity of Perkins’ covenant theology to that of Olevianus, Bierma proposes the possibility of Olevianus’ direct influence on Perkins.⁸⁶ The understanding of Calvin as arguing both a unilateral and bilateral view of covenant has also been documented in detail by Lillback, who sees in Calvin’s commentaries and sermons a clear predecessor for later covenant theology.⁸⁷ Thus Perkins’ covenant theology was in the line of Calvin and Bullinger without any division.

⁸²Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 48-49.

⁸³Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 61.

⁸⁴Bierma, review of *Heinrich Bullinger and Covenant*, 224.

⁸⁵Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 74 and 76.

⁸⁶Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 176-181.

⁸⁷Lillback, “Binding of God,” 219-484; and idem, “Calvin and Conditionality of Covenant,” 42-74.

Von Rohr directs his attention to the Puritan thinkers and argues, very much like Bierma, that the concept of the covenant of grace is both conditional and absolute in Puritan thought.⁸⁸ It is conditional because the promises of the covenant are to those who present faith. Grace is given only if conditions are fulfilled. Yet the condition of faith to which divine promises are made is really an impossible condition to be performed of ourselves, and therefore it is itself God's gift. In this absolute dimension von Rohr finds "the recognition of the divine sovereignty in election and the affirmation that in the last analysis the chosen are God's chosen and not simply those who choose themselves."⁸⁹

According to von Rohr, the Puritan thinkers employed the covenant theme, especially the covenant of grace, for relieving the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility.⁹⁰ Opposing Trinterud and Baker, von Rohr finds in Calvin's covenant thought "a conditional factor for those within the covenant itself, for covenant inclusion mandates responsibility for faithfulness, that is, obedience to the requirements of God's law." On the other hand, he sees in Bullinger's theology that the covenant remained bilateral, contingent upon human response although salvation was *sola gratia*. Tensions remained between the grace of predestination and a bilateral covenant of grace.⁹¹ Von Rohr acknowledges the existence of different emphases and variations in tone within the Reformed tradition: within Reformed theology tensions continued between Bullinger's

⁸⁸von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 17, 21, 30, 33, 45, 53, 81, 135 and 188. See also his article where he deals with the nature of the early seventeenth-century Puritan concept of covenant in relation to the assurance of salvation ("Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," *Church History* 34 [1965]: 199-200, 201 and 202).

⁸⁹von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance," 200.

⁹⁰von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 1-2.

⁹¹von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 193-194.

emphasis upon a conditional dimension and Calvin's minimization of the conditional element in the covenant of grace.⁹² As in Bullinger and Calvin, von Rohr finds in the mainstream of Puritanism that "basically the bilateral and the unilateral were conjoined, human responsibility and divine sovereignty were unitedly maintained, and the covenant of grace was seen as both conditional and absolute."⁹³ According to von Rohr, Ball, whom Greaves views as representative of the Zwingli-Tyndale tradition in the seventeenth century, strongly emphasized the element of human responsibility in the covenant, yet he also wrote about the promise of grace.⁹⁴ In addition, while Baker interprets Perkins as holding to a covenant of grace entirely unconditional and associating conditionality only with the covenant of works, von Rohr indicates that the conditional is present along with the absolute in Perkins.⁹⁵ For von Rohr, the idea of the covenant of grace, which the Puritans inherited from the Reformers, with its dual dimensions enabled them to relieve the tension between man's responsibility and divine sovereignty.

Muller agrees with von Rohr and Bierma in that he puts Perkins' covenant theology in the undivided tradition of Calvin and Bullinger. Even though Bullinger, more than Calvin, stresses the mutual character of covenant and the necessity of obedience in the covenant relationship, this stress does not indicate widely deviating patterns in Reformed theology. For Bullinger never disrupts the basic monergism of the Reformed system. Muller explains that bilateral language describes not man's entrance into covenant but his life under the covenant, as implied in the normative use of the law. At this point a

⁹²von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 2 and 194-195.

⁹³von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 33.

⁹⁴von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 32, especially footnote 99.

⁹⁵von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 45, especially footnote 65.

distinction may be made between the emphases of Calvin and Bullinger regarding covenant, but doctrinal divergences do not exist. Synergism is definitely rejected when Bullinger defines justification as given by grace to faith and in turn faith as the gift of God. In addition, Calvin did not propose a unilateral testament in Christ to the exclusion of a bilateral covenant agreement between God and man. Thus, according to Muller, later Reformed writers could utilize both the unilateral and bilateral definition within a single system as representative of the two poles of Christian life, salvation by grace and human responsibility.⁹⁶

Perkins also presented a Christology in the historical line of the covenants.⁹⁷ Perkins emphasized the work of Christ and its application in covenant. His foremost pupil, Ames, carried forward the balance of system and piety focused on the work of Christ and the covenant. Both Perkins and Ames incorporated into their systems concepts of *foedus dipleuron* and *foedus monopleuron* to resolve the possible antinomy between their emphasis on the sovereignty of God's will in salvation and their commitment to high ethical norms.⁹⁸ Muller also argues that, after Perkins and Ames, John Downham's *The Summe of Sacred Divinitie* (1630) continues to reflect this double continental heritage of Reformed theology, the Genevan line represented by Calvin and Beza and the German Reformed line from Zwingli and Bullinger to the Heidelberg theologians. Like Perkins and Ames, Downham balances his soteriology carefully on the twin pillars of an absolute

⁹⁶Muller, *Christ and Decree*, 41 and 69.

⁹⁷Muller, *Christ and Decree*, 142, 146 and 172.

⁹⁸Richard A. Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980): 309-310. For the confluence of the federalist dipleuric conception of the covenant and the Calvinist monopleuric conception in Perkins' thought, see also Muller's argument in "Perkins' *A Golden Chaine*," 78-79.

decree and a conditional promise.⁹⁹ Muller indicates that Downham's interpretation of the covenant of works as an eternal witness to God's righteousness even after the entrance of the covenant of grace was quite typical and was embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith.¹⁰⁰ One can argue, therefore, a clear continuity between the Reformers' covenant theology and the Puritans' covenant theology down through the Westminster standards.

In the following examination of the thought of Roberts, we will test the claim that the covenant theology of the Puritan thinkers, including Perkins, was not their distinctive invention, but that they inherited the covenant thought from the Reformers, including Calvin. Moreover, we will show that the Puritan covenant theology was not a deviation from Calvin's thought or from Bullinger's, but that the Puritan thinkers appropriated and refined their inheritance more fully for their own particular purpose. With Roberts as a major example of the covenant tradition, we also will show that in Reformed Protestantism there was no division between the bilateral covenant line of Zwingli-Bullinger-Tyndale and the unilateral testament line of Calvin-Perkins; the Reformed covenant theologians (as exemplified by Roberts) recognized both a unilateral and a bilateral dimension to the covenant of grace within the context of a monergistic soteriology. The Puritan thinkers, including Roberts as well as Ball and the divines of the Westminster Assembly, inherited the Reformers' covenant thought and utilized its dual dimension as representative of the two poles of Christian life, salvation by grace and human responsibility.

⁹⁹Muller, "Covenant and Conscience," 314.

¹⁰⁰Muller, "Covenant and Conscience," 316.

B. The Life and Works of Francis Roberts

Francis Roberts was born in Yorkshire in 1609.¹⁰¹ His father was Henry Roberts,¹⁰² a “plebeian” or commoner.¹⁰³ He entered Trinity College, Oxford, in the beginning of 1625 and matriculated on November 3, 1626, earning a B.A. on February 12, 1629, and an M.A. on June 26, 1632. Having taken orders for the ministry, Roberts joined the Presbyterian party at the outbreak of the Civil War and subscribed to the Solemn League and Covenant. In 1643¹⁰⁴ he was appointed minister of St. Augustine’s, Watling Street, London, in the place of an ejected Loyalist.¹⁰⁵

Roberts was not an official member of the Westminster Assembly, but he was one of presbyters appointed for the examination and ordination of ministers in an ordinance passed by the Long Parliament on October 4, 1644.¹⁰⁶ And he was in a group of marginal

¹⁰¹Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 2d ed. (London: R. Knaplock, D. Midwinter, and J. Tonson, 1721), 551; Joseph Foster, *Alumni oxoniensis*, Early series (Oxford: Parker and Co., 1891-1892), iii, 1261; Hugh James Rose, *A New General Biographical Dictionary* (London: T. Fellowes, 1857), s.v. “Roberts, (Francis)”; James Darling, *Cyclopaedia Bibliographica* (London: James Darling, 1854-1859), s.v. “Roberts, Francis”; and, Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., *DNB*, s.v. “Roberts, Francis, D.D. (1609-1675),” by Charlotte Fell Smith. All these sources agree that Francis Roberts was born in Yorkshire. Regarding the more specific birthplace, however, they are split into two opinions. Wood, Foster, and Rose give Roberts’ birthplace as “Alslake,” “Aslack,” or “Aslake” in Yorkshire, while according to Smith, Roberts was born “at Methley, near Leeds.” The present writer could not locate Alslake, Aslack, or Aslake. Methley is located near Leeds in the West Riding of Yorkshire.

¹⁰²*DNB*, s.v. “Roberts, Francis,” by Smith.

¹⁰³Foster, *Alumni oxoniensis*, iii, 1261.

¹⁰⁴*DNB*, s.v. “Roberts, Francis,” by Smith. Correction of “About 1642 or 1643” based on *Commons Journals*, iii. 148.

¹⁰⁵Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 551. Cf. Roberts is found among those ministers of London who signed *A Vindication of the Ministers of the Gospel in, and about London* (London, 1648). See Tai Liu, *Discord in Zion: The Puritan Divines and the Puritan Revolution 1640-1660* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1973), appendix, pp. 162-163.

¹⁰⁶Liu, *Discord in Zion*, 162. Liu quotes C. H. Firth and Robert S. Rait, eds., *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum*, 3 vols. (London, 1911), 1:522.

participants who less frequently preached in the fasting program. The group consisted of those who have been born within the seventeenth century, and most of them received their baccalaureates during the 1630s. Many of them were Independents, although a few of them, including Roberts, were Presbyterians. John F. Wilson reasons that even though they were all Cambridge and Oxford graduates, they did not move on to university careers as frequently as members of the other groups because of their rather young ages.¹⁰⁷

On February 12, 1649, Roberts was presented by his patron, Arthur Capel, Earl of Essex,¹⁰⁸ to the rectory of Wrington in Somersetshire, Essex, which had been vacant after the death of another Presbyterian, Samuel Crook. Roberts was a zealous partisan of the Somerset Puritans and was appointed in 1654 as assistant to the commissioners, or triers, for the ejectment of scandalous, ignorant, and incompetent ministers and schoolmasters.¹⁰⁹ In those days Roberts had a close fellowship with Robert Baillie, who not only sat in the Westminster Assembly as one of the five Scotch clergymen for three years starting in 1643 but also took an active part in and wrote much about all the church controversies in his time.¹¹⁰ Quoting Baillie in *God's Covenants*, Roberts attaches “my godly and learned friend” or “my worthy friend” to Baillie’s name.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷John F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament: Puritanism during the English Civil Wars, 1640-1648* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 121 and 128-129.

¹⁰⁸The Lord Capel was made Earl of Essex (April 20, 1661) at the Restoration (*DNB*, s.v. “Capel, Arthur, Earl of Essex [1631-1683],” by Osmund Airy).

¹⁰⁹Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 551.

¹¹⁰Quoting some letters that Baillie wrote to Roberts, Robert S. Paul calls Roberts one of Baillie’s ministerial friends in London (*The Assembly of The Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the ‘Grand Debate’* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1985], 505). Here Paul refers to Robert Baillie, *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. David Laing, 3 vols. (Edinburgh: Robert Ogle, 1841-1842), 2:346 and 359. In *Letters and Journals of Baillie*, there are three letters that Baillie wrote

At the Restoration, however, Roberts conformed to the ceremonies and took the oaths.¹¹² Anthony Wood scornfully describes Robert's reversal:

After his majesty's return, he, rather than lose his living, and so consequently the comforts of this world, did turn about, took the oaths again (whereby he denied all those that he had taken in the interval) and conform'd himself, without hesitation, to the ceremonies of the Church of England.¹¹³

As William Howard Smith points out, Wood's harsh characterization of Roberts may have created a prejudice against him among later thinkers.¹¹⁴

Yet here Wood seems to have gone too far, for he was not backed up by others. Hugh James Rose, instead, defends Roberts: "At the restoration, however, he conformed, tired out, as many others were, by the distractions of the contending parties, and disappointed in every hope which the encouragers of rebellion had held forth."¹¹⁵ In addition, Wilfred W. Biggs says that Roberts may not be a very valiant figure, but he, and incumbents like him, may be regarded as not untypical of the clergy of the period.¹¹⁶ Thus Biggs advises not decrying the value of Roberts' work because of his lack of consistency during a time

Roberts and a letter Roberts wrote Baillie in 1646 (2:333, 345-346, 358-359). Regarding Baillie, see *NSHE*, s.v. "Baillie, Robert."

¹¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1312 and 1318.

¹¹²*DNB*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis," by Smith.

¹¹³Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 551.

¹¹⁴William Howard Smith, "Theological Interpretation of the Book of Psalms: A Model Developed from the Work of the Puritan, Francis Roberts, and Modern Exegesis" (Ph.D. diss., Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), 15.

¹¹⁵Rose, *New General Biographical Dictionary*, s.v. "Roberts, (Francis)."

¹¹⁶Wilfred W. Biggs, "Preparation for Communion: A Puritan Manual," *Congregational Quarterly* 32 (1954): 19. Here Biggs refers to A. G. Matthews' suggestion to the Congregational Historical Society (Cf. *Transactions*, vol. xvi, no. 4, pp. 176/7).

of great upheaval.¹¹⁷ The favorable understanding of Roberts by Rose and Biggs seems more tenable when Wood's slanderous character is considered.¹¹⁸

On the appointment of Lord Essex as Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Roberts was nominated (23 March 1673) his first chaplain and was honored with a Doctor of Divinity by the University of Dublin while in that office.¹¹⁹ He died at Wrington in the end of 1675 and was buried near his wife, who predeceased him. Five daughters survived him.¹²⁰

Roberts was not only a pious and learned minister¹²¹ but also a scholarly writer.¹²² According to Donald Wing's *Short-Title Catalogue*, Roberts left several theological books.¹²³ *A Synopsis of Theology* (1645) was published two years after he became the minister of St. Augustine's. According to Tessa Watt, the result of enthusiasm that carries the knowledge of Ramist logic into a ministerial work is seen in a number of

¹¹⁷Biggs, "Preparation for Communion," 19. William Howard Smith conjectures that Roberts was genuinely Puritan in his desire for reform and his commitment to biblical authority but that he was also loyal in politics to the king. Smith guesses that such a dual commitment, which was not unusual among the people of that day, made Roberts skeptical with the cause of revolution when he found himself swept along by events that were beyond his control ("Theological Interpretation of Psalms," 16-17). Yet it is not easy to confirm Roberts' exact motive for returning to the Church of England. The sources do not indicate his reasons for returning.

¹¹⁸*DNB*, s.v. "Wood, Anthony," by Andrew Clark. It was said of Wood that he "never spake well of any man." According to Andrew Clark, moreover, the *Athenae oxonienses* not unnaturally excited very bitter feelings. "Wood was himself fond of severe reflections, and all through his work had adopted reckless charges and criticisms from spiteful correspondents." Once Wood was prosecuted for libel, and found guilty.

¹¹⁹*DNB*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis," by Smith. Unlike Smith, Wood and Rose say that Roberts was appointed chaplain by his patron when the Lord Capel was made Earl of Essex (1661) (Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 551-2, and Rose, *New General Biographical Dictionary*, s.v. "Roberts, [Francis]").

¹²⁰*DNB*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis," by Smith.

¹²¹Darling, *Cyclopaedia Bibliographica*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis."

¹²²*DNB*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis," by Smith.

¹²³Donald Wing, comp., *STC*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis."

complex, convoluted tables of Roberts' "Synopsis of Theology or Divinity" produced "for the benefit of his flock."¹²⁴

A Broken Spirit, God's Sacrifices (1647)¹²⁵ was originally a sermon preached by Roberts before members of the Commons of the Long Parliament on December 9, 1646.¹²⁶ On January 8, 1641-2, by the parliamentary petition of December, Charles I issued a proclamation which was to become the charter for a program of monthly fasts or humiliations throughout the kingdom, including regular exhortation of the House of Commons. The monthly fasts common to parliament and the nation were held from February 1641-2, until April 1653.¹²⁷ The fast on the day when Roberts preached was not a monthly fast but a special one in response to excessive and unseasonal rain and flooding throughout the kingdom. Wilson sees the fast program as hardly influential or instrumental in the affairs of Westminster.¹²⁸ Yet Roberts was not out of touch with his times when he identified the excessive rain and flooding as God's great judgment. He warned that God uses calamities to punish people's iniquities. He cited the example of famine that has been threatened or inflicted upon a people for various iniquities such as the absence of considering God's ways, a country's grievous trespasses against God,

¹²⁴Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 242. Charlotte Fell Smith calls Roberts' 'Synopsis' "an ingenious chart" (*DNB*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis").

¹²⁵Francis Roberts, *A Broken Spirit, God's Sacrifices: or, the Gratefulnesse of a Broken Spirit unto God; Represented in a Sermon, before the Right Honourable House of Peeres, in K. Henry the Seventh's Chappell in the Abbey Westminster, upon Wednesday Decemb. 9. 1646. - Being a day of publike humiliation for removing of the great judgment of rain and waters then upon the kingdome, &c.* (London: George Calvert, 1647).

¹²⁶Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, 90, 248, 255 and 270.

¹²⁷Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, 60, 63, 237, 239 and 254.

¹²⁸Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament*, 90-91 and 248.

carnal confidence and pride of a king in the arm of flesh, Israel's breach of covenant with the Gibeonites, and opposing and threatening God's messengers for their messages.¹²⁹

Clavis Bibliorum: The Key of the Bible (1648)¹³⁰ is an analysis of the whole Bible and is said to be "a small work, but of considerable value."¹³¹ In its third edition (1665) Roberts appended a "Metrical Version of the Psalms."¹³² Its fourth edition was published in 1675, the year he died.¹³³ Smith investigates it in his dissertation in order to draw out from it a model of theological interpretation of the Book of Psalms for modern exegesis. Roberts categorized all of the psalms in terms of covenant. A psalm is either an expression of God's initiative toward his people or an expression of the believer's response to God.¹³⁴ Smith thinks these two poles form the basic framework of Roberts' approach.¹³⁵ According to Smith, moreover, Roberts made clear his Christological interpretation in almost every section of his introduction to the Book of Psalms.¹³⁶

A Communicant Instructed (1651)¹³⁷ is a practical manual for the worthy receiving of the Lord's Supper.¹³⁸ Its fifth edition was published in 1676, a year after the death of

¹²⁹Roberts, *A Broken Spirit*, "The Epistle Dedicatory."

¹³⁰Wing, comp., *STC*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis."

¹³¹William Orme, *Bibliotheca Biblica* (Edinburgh: Adam Black, North Bridge; and London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, Brown and Green, 1824), 375.

¹³²*Notes and Queries*, 4th series, vol. 5 (January-June 1870): 530, s.v. "Francis Roberts' 'Metrical Version of the Psalms,'" by A. G.

¹³³Wing, comp., *STC*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis."

¹³⁴Smith, "Theological Interpretation of Psalms," 85. In the appendix Smith cites "A Partition of the Book of Psalms" of Roberts from *Clavis Bibliorum* (1648), 111-112 ("Theological Interpretation of Psalms," 182).

¹³⁵Smith, "Theological Interpretation of Psalms," 85.

¹³⁶Smith, "Theological Interpretation of Psalms," 26.

¹³⁷Wing, comp., *STC*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis."

Roberts.¹³⁹ According to Biggs, in the manual primarily addressed to his own congregation at Wrington, Roberts deals more with self-examination than with the examination of prospective communicants by the church.¹⁴⁰ Biggs unsparingly praises Roberts' manual as "one of the loveliest and most rewarding of all these manuals" of the seventeenth-century Puritans.¹⁴¹

Roberts published *God's Covenants* a decade after the Westminster Confession of Faith was adopted. The treatise was based on his weekly lectures of almost six full years, which began on September 2, 1651, and continued until its publication in May 1657.¹⁴² James Darling calls it "a valuable work, and one of the scarcest in English theology."¹⁴³ And Charlotte Fell Smith sees it as "a learned commentary upon biblical texts."¹⁴⁴

Like most of his other works, however, *God's Covenants* had not been brought to the attention of scholars until Kevan dealt with it in his book, *The Grace of Law*.¹⁴⁵ Although Kevan's main concern is not Roberts' covenant theology but his contribution to the Puritan understanding of grace and law, Kevan's study provides insight into the relationship of covenant and law in Roberts' theology. Moreover, the importance of

¹³⁸Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses*, 552.

¹³⁹Wing, comp., *STC*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis."

¹⁴⁰Biggs, "Preparation for Communion," 19.

¹⁴¹Biggs, "Preparation for Communion," 19. Although Smith's main text is *Clavis Bibliorum*, he goes with Biggs in praising the clarity of style and depth of treatment in Roberts' works ("Theological Interpretation of Psalms," 11 and 15).

¹⁴²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, "An Epistolary Introduction for the better Understanding and Improving of the Ensuing Treatise."

¹⁴³Darling, *Cyclopaedia Bibliographica*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis."

¹⁴⁴*DNB*, s.v. "Roberts, Francis," by Smith.

¹⁴⁵Kevan's *Grace of Law* was first published in 1964.

Kevan's work for the present study stands out because it is the only directly referable source in book form.¹⁴⁶ Geerhardus Vos also mentioned *God's Covenants* in his survey of Reformed covenant theology, viewing it as an integral part of the Reformed development.¹⁴⁷

Following the present introductory chapter (Chapter I) Roberts' understanding of the nature of covenant is dealt with in Chapter II. Roberts distinguishes God's covenant dealings into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith instead of distinguishing them into the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. For he thinks that all covenants are the covenant of grace, yet the covenant of faith was made after the fall. Roberts is confident of the conditionality of the covenant of faith. While he firmly confesses the precedence of divine grace, he sees unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ as the requirement of man in the covenant of faith.

Chapter III is devoted to identifying the covenant of works in Roberts' theology. Like his contemporaries in the latter half of the seventeenth century Roberts endeavors to prove the existence of the covenant of works. After the consideration of those evidences that Roberts indicates, the nature of the covenant of works and its abolition is treated.

Roberts divides the covenant of faith into the covenant of promise and the covenant of performance, that is, the new covenant. And he distinguishes the covenant of promise into six periods: (1) from Adam (after the fall) till Noah, (2) from Noah till Abraham, (3) from Abraham till Moses, (4) from Moses till David, (5) from David till the Babylonian

¹⁴⁶Von Rohr includes Roberts' *God's Covenants* in the bibliography of his book (*Covenant of Grace*, 203). To our disappointment, however, von Rohr does not deal with Roberts' work at all.

¹⁴⁷Vos, "Covenant in Reformed Theology," 241 and 252.

captivity, and (6) from the Babylonian captivity till the death of Jesus Christ. In Chapter IV the nature of the covenant of faith and the gradual development of the covenants of promise in six administrations is treated.

Chapter V is devoted to the treatment of some significant issues about the Mosaic law. Roberts' understanding of the obligation or abrogation of the Mosaic law to believers under the New Testament is first considered. Then, his view of the Mosaic law as an administration of the covenant of faith is discussed.

Chapter VI covers Roberts' understanding of the new covenant as the covenant of performance. Jesus Christ and his mediatorship in God's covenants with man are discussed in detail.

Chapter VII evaluates Roberts' covenant theology contextually, identifying those respects in which Roberts follows his forerunners and those respects in which he develops their teaching further.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF COVENANT IN ROBERTS' THEOLOGY

A. The Distinction of Covenant into the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Faith (Promise and Performance)

In Roberts' view God is pleased to deal with his church and people by way of covenant in all times, from the beginning of the world to its end.¹ He describes the general concept of God's covenant with his people as "his gratuitous agreement with his people, promising them eternal happiness and all subordinate good: and requiring from them all due dependance upon God, and obedience unto him, in order to his glory."² Covenant is a gracious and intimate way of God's bringing man into "fellowship or communion" with himself.³ Even though the Triune God is eternally and infinitely happy in himself alone, he is pleased to make men share in his happiness by granting them a blessed communion with himself, which is natural, spiritual, and celestial. Natural communion was, by creation, between God and Adam in paradise before the fall. Spiritual communion is, by new creation, between God and all the elect in Jesus Christ, the second Adam since the fall. And celestial communion will be, by glorification, between God and all the elect in Christ in the highest heavens eternally. Into natural

¹Francis Roberts, *The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man* (London: R. W. for George Calvert, 1657), 3.

²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 14.

³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, "An Epistolary Introduction for the better Understanding and Improving of the Ensuing Treatise" (hereafter, "Introduction").

communion God brought innocent man by the covenant of works. Into spiritual communion God brings lapsed man by the covenant of faith, and by the same covenant men will be brought into celestial communion.⁴

Thus Roberts distinguishes God's covenant with man into two kinds: the covenant of works and the covenant of faith. The covenant of works was made with upright man in the first Adam before the fall.⁵ It promised the continuance of life and happiness to mankind upon terms of perfect and perpetual personal obedience, but it also threatened death and misery upon the least failing of it. That covenant was broken by Adam's disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit. The covenant of faith was concluded with lapsed man in Jesus Christ, the last Adam. It revealed and promised lapsed sinners recovery from sin and death and entrance into righteousness and life upon terms of unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ to the end. Roberts' distinction of God's covenant into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith is one of the main characteristics of his covenant theology. Roberts himself says that such a distinction is "most proper and agreeable to Scripture."⁶ The double covenant scheme was no novelty, as it had already been generally accepted by Roberts' contemporaries to the extent that it was included in the standards of the Westminster Assembly a decade earlier than the publication of *God's Covenants*.⁷

⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, Introduction. In another place Roberts replaces the classifying terms of the communion, 'natural, spiritual, and celestial,' with other terms, 'natural, gracious, and glorious,' which again correspond to 'terrestrial, spiritual, and celestial' paradises, respectively (pp. 132-133).

⁵On the covenant of works, see N. Diemer, *Het Scheppingsverbond met Adam bij de Theologen der 16e, 17e en 18e Eeuw in Zwitserland, Duitschland, Nederland en Engeland* (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1935).

⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, Introduction.

⁷The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), VII, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds*, 3:616-618.

Once Roberts has made these basic distinctions, he indicates differences of opinion among his predecessors and contemporaries. This discussion is highly significant, inasmuch as it reveals Roberts' use and understanding of English and continental sources. Commenting on other definitions of God's covenants, Roberts shows why his form of the separation into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith is preferable.

Roberts first considers Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf's approach to the partition of God's covenant into the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.⁸ Roberts thinks it inappropriate for Polanus to separate God's covenant into the covenant of works and covenant of grace. For he does not reckon the members of the distinction to be opposite to each other. Distinguished in that way, the covenant of works seems not to be based on divine grace. For Roberts, however, it was an act of God's grace and favor that he would enter into a covenant of works with Adam. The way of covenant was out of God's grace "before as well as after the fall."⁹

⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17, citing Amandus Polanus von Polansdorf, *Partitiones theologicae* (1623), lib. 1, pp. 108-109. Cf. Polanus, *Partitiones theologicae* (London, 1591), 53-54. Gottlob Schrenk sees in Polanus' distinction an influence of the Pauline-Augustinian foundational scheme of work and grace, or nature and grace. According to Schrenk, Zacharias Ursinus incorporated Philip Melanchthon's *lex naturae* into his covenant thought influenced by Heinrich Bullinger and John Calvin. Thus Ursinus distinguished God's covenant into *foedus naturale* and *foedus gratiae*. Stimulated certainly from Ursinus, says Schrenk, Franciscus Gomarus offers the distinction of *foedus naturale* and *foedus supranaturale*. Schrenk regards Polanus as one who wrestled with the division recommended by Gomarus, although he promoted the further shaping of the doctrine through the key words absent in Gomarus: *foedus operum* and *foedus gratiae*. It is incorrect for Schrenk to insist that Polanus' distinction followed that of Gomarus, however. Schrenk cites Gomarus' *Oratio de foedere Dei* (1594) and Polanus' *Sylloge thesium theologiarum* (1602) and *Syntagma theologiae christianae* (1609). Schrenk does not know of Polanus' *Partitiones theologicae* (1590), the later edition of which Roberts quotes. Schrenk's understanding of Polanus' covenant scheme in the line of the Pauline-Augustinian antithesis of work and grace is possible, yet he cannot put Gomarus' distinction as the basis of Polanus' distinction. See Gottlob Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus, vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1923), 57-59 and 63-65; also, Hermann Gunkel and Leopold Zscharnack, eds., *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart: Handwörterbuch für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft*, 2d ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1927), s.v. "Bund (Föederaltheologie, dogmengeschichtlich)," by Gottlob Schrenk; on the dating of Polanus' works, see Robert Letham, "Amandus Polanus: A Neglected Theologian?" *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21/3 [1990]: 464, footnote 9.

⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17.

Then Roberts looks at Edward Leigh's distinction between the legal and the evangelical covenants. Roberts sees that the term "legal" is questionable, for it is usually understood in terms of the Mosaic law. He says that it is a great mistake if by legal covenant Leigh means the law and covenant as published on Mount Sinai. For it was an evangelical publication of the covenant of faith, not of works. If by legal Leigh means God's covenant with Adam before the fall, says Roberts, then the legal and the evangelical covenants are the same in substance as the covenant of works and of faith. In that case, for Roberts, it is proper to distinguish covenants with clear terms like "works" and "faith" and to avoid ambiguous terms like "legal" and "evangelical."¹⁰

Lastly Roberts examines John Cameron's distinction of God's covenant into three: the covenant of nature, the covenant of grace, and another covenant "subservient to the covenant of grace" (*foedus gratiae subserviens*).¹¹ The first was made with Adam in his natural integrity, and the second with Adam, Abraham, and so forth after the fall through Christ. The third was made with Israel at Mount Sinai, and is called the Old Testament. Roberts presumes that Cameron devised this distinction to avoid some difficulties about the covenant of faith as published on Mount Sinai. Yet Roberts thinks that Cameron's distinction causes some troubles. For God's covenant with Adam in innocence was not so natural; it was also gratuitous, full of divine favor. With the term "nature" or "natural" a concept of creation seems to come directly into Roberts' mind. Thus he argues that

¹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17, citing Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises*, II.i. Cf. Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises: in five bookes* (London: George Miller, 1641), 111-153, especially 115-118.

¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17, citing John Cameron's *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses* (Geneva, 1642), Thesis 7. Cf. Cameron, *TA ΣΩΖΟΜΕΝΑ sive Opera* (Geneva, 1659), 544.

God might have exacted obedience from Adam, his creature, by an absolute command, yet he dealt so familiarly with Adam by way of covenant because of grace.¹²

Roberts finds an additional problem in Cameron's distinction. He thinks it inappropriate to separate the covenant on Mount Sinai (as "subservient to the covenant of grace") from the covenant of faith (i.e., Cameron's covenant of grace). For the Mosaic covenant is "not a distinct species or kind of covenant from the covenant of faith, or grace, but a distinct publication of the same covenant." Roberts acknowledges that since the manner of its administration was unique and the degree of its manifestation was clearer than all before it, the Mosaic covenant was indeed "subservient" to the covenant of faith, or grace. For it cleared the foregoing publications, and prepared for the following publications, especially the new covenant.¹³ Yet such singularity does not make Roberts see it as a separate covenant, and he puts it within the covenant of faith, or grace.

In Roberts' judgment neither the covenant of works, as in Polanus, nor the covenant of nature, as in Cameron, can appropriately be contrasted to the covenant of grace, since both of them are grounded in divine grace. If Roberts were asked to use the term "the covenant of grace," he would use it only for God's covenant as a whole. Thus, when he says the term "God's covenant," he always means the covenant of grace, that is, the covenant based on divine grace, which includes all covenants concluded before as well as after Adam's fall.¹⁴ It is worth noting that, although Roberts' terminology represents a

¹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17-18.

¹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 18.

¹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17-18, citing Polanus, *Partitiones theologiae*, lib. 1, pp. 108-109; and Cameron, *De triplici foedere*, Thesis 7. Cf. Polanus, *Partitiones theologiae*, 53-54; and Cameron, *Opera*, 544.

formal change in the doctrine, seventeenth-century Reformed theologians often argued the necessity of some sort of divine grace prior to the fall—echoing if not the medieval notion of the *donum superadditum* then certainly the root Augustinian conception of a necessary divine support or favor in the original state.¹⁵

Among the Puritans Roberts was not alone in ascribing the double covenant scheme totally to divine grace; arguably, the Puritans made the point more frequently and directly than the continental Reformed. According to Kevan, nearly all the Puritans ascribed to God's grace whatever good Adam would have received by his obedience.¹⁶ Thus, while acknowledging that for distinction's sake one covenant is called the covenant of works and the other the covenant of grace, Blake writes:

indeed the fountains and first rise of either, was the free grace and favour of God. For howsoever the first covenant was on condition of obedience, and engaged to the reward of works, yet it was of grace that God made any such promise of reward to any work of man.¹⁷

John Graile even holds that “the covenant with Adam, wherein works were enjoined, to be a covenant of grace...and thereupon divide the covenant of grace into the covenant of

¹⁵See Augustine, *The City of God*, XIV.27, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 2, p. 282. Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *RD*, 246-248 with Diemer, *Scheppingsverbond*, 7-8. Also note Richard A. Muller, “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 91-94, and see W. J. van Asselt's critique of Diemer in *Johannes Coccejus: Portret van een zeventiende-eeuws theoloog op oude en nieuwe wegen* (Heerenveen: J. J. Groen en Zoon, 1997), 195-196.

¹⁶Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1965; reprint, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 112. Here Kevan cites not only Roberts (*God's Covenants*, 17) but also Anthony Burgess (*Vindiciae Legis: or A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and more especially, Antinomians*, 2d ed. [London: James Young for Thomas Underhill, 1647], 129) and others. David Wai-Sing Wong argues a similar approach in John Owen's theology (“The Covenant Theology of John Owen” [Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1998], 145-149).

¹⁷Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis; or, A Treatise of the Covenant of God entered with man-kinde* (London: Abel Roper, 1653), 8-9. Cf. Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 112.

works, and the covenant of faith.”¹⁸ It is at least certain that Roberts’ *God’s Covenants* was not the first book that contained the double covenant scheme of the covenant of works and the covenant of faith.

To his words cited above, however, Blake quickly adds: “a more superabundant measure of grace is seen in Gods entrance into covenant with man in his fallen condition, infinitely more favour is shewn in his reconciliation, then in his preservation.” He attributes the title, the covenant of grace, to the “eminency” of the divine grace in the covenant after the fall.¹⁹ Even though the antelapsarian covenant is out of divine grace and favor, its fulfillment rested on Adam’s obedience in a state of innocence, in contrast to the faith required by the postlapsarian covenant. Thus a greater and, one might say, qualitatively different grace is needed for the postlapsarian covenant. Hence the latter is called the covenant of grace. Moreover, the antelapsarian covenant lacked a mediator, while the gift of grace in the postlapsarian covenant requires the mediatorial office of Christ.²⁰

Roberts would agree with Blake in acknowledging the greater amount of grace in the postlapsarian covenant than in the antelapsarian covenant:

The covenant of works, with the first Adam, as his creature, was gratuitous, Adam not deserving it from God: but the covenant of faith with us as sinful creatures, in Christ the last Adam, is double gratuitous, we deserving the contrary evil of punishments from God. And in this sense probably some stile this the covenant of grace; not so much by way of contrariety to the covenant of works, which also is

¹⁸John Graile, *A Modest Vindication of the Doctrine of Conditions in the Covenant of Grace* (London: M. Keinton, 1655), 26; quoted in Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 112. In *God’s Covenants* Roberts once refers to John Graile’s *Doctrine of Conditions in Covenant of Grace* regarding his view of the relation between God’s covenant and the divine love in election (*God’s Covenants*, 132). Regarding the distinction of God’s covenant, however, Roberts does not refer to him.

¹⁹Blake, *Treatise of Covenant of God*, 9.

²⁰John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, published by Simeon Ash (London: G. Miller for Edward Brewster, 1645), 9-10.

gratuitous, viz. in respect of the grace of benevolence: but rather by way of supereminency, this covenant being gratuitous both according to the grace of benevolence, and of commiseration.²¹

In Roberts' judgment, however, such supereminence of divine grace in the postlapsarian covenant provides no sanction to call it exclusively the covenant of grace.

Roberts admits that the postlapsarian covenant is usually called the covenant of grace. Yet he gives three reasons why he chooses rather to style it the covenant of faith. First, the covenant of works and the covenant of faith are denominations nearest to Scripture's own expressions, that is, "the law of works, and the law of faith."²² As the foundation of his distinction Roberts cites the apostle Paul's differentiation in Rom. 3:27: "Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? Nay: but by the law of faith." In this statement of Paul about God's free justification of us in Christ, which excludes all boasting, the law of works and the law of faith amount to the covenant of works and the covenant of faith respectively, says Roberts.²³ Considering the context, Roberts explains:

This 27th verse then shews; 1. That's Gods way of justifying sinners, which excludes all boasting from sinners. And, 2. Not the law of works, but the law of faith excludes such boasting. By, [law of works] understand, the doctrine of works; viz. that doctrine which prescribes and requires works as the condition and matter of our iustification. This is only the covenant of works. It is said, works: not work. Because it is not one, but all the works of the law for kind and degree perfectly and perpetually done in mans own person, that will justifie according to the covenant of works. By [law of faith] understand the doctrine of faith; viz. that doctrine which prescribes faith only as the instrument and condition of justifying. This is only the covenant of faith, the gospel.²⁴

²¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 106.

²²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 61.

²³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17 and 20. See also p. 61 and pp. 743-744.

²⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 173. Brackets his. Cf. p. 176, and note the virtually identical exegesis in Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962-1963), Rom. 3:27 (3:489).

Roberts' distinctions, therefore, attempt to echo the sense and substance of the apostle Paul.

Secondly, Roberts thinks it proper to divide God's covenant into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith because works and faith are distinct and opposite. Roberts also enumerates a series of other opposites that define the double covenant scheme. The covenant of works and the covenant of faith require the opposite stipulations: works and faith. They also have opposite foundations: the first Adam and the second Adam. And the states of mankind were opposite when the covenants were made: before the fall and after the fall.²⁵

Lastly, Roberts wants to avoid using the denomination of the covenant of grace because it is rather "co-incident" with the covenant of works, which was of mere grace and favor like this covenant. God was in no way obliged, debt-bound, or necessitated to either of them. Despite the difference of the quantity of grace, the antelapsarian covenant also derived from divine grace like the postlapsarian covenant. Thus it is not proper to use the term "grace" for the latter.²⁶

The three kinds of distinctions of God's covenant that Roberts examines are found essentially in *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (1645), a posthumous work of Ball.²⁷ Its preface consists of a recommendatory notice by Edward Reynolds, Thomas Hill, Daniel Cawdrey, Burgess, and Edmond Calamy, all of them the leading members of the

²⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17 and 61.

²⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 61.

²⁷Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 8. For his biography, see Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, eds., *DNB*, s.v. "Ball, John (1585-1640)," by A. B. Grosart.

Westminster Assembly.²⁸ Alexander F. Mitchell and, following him, George Park Fisher state that Ball's treatise shows the existence of "a fully developed 'doctrine of the Covenants' taught in Britain before the time of the Westminster Assembly."²⁹ Mitchell goes further to say that the treatise was apparently more harmoniously accepted than that which soon after was promulgated by Johannes Cocceius and gave rise to such a bitter controversy in Holland.³⁰ Vos sees a closer relationship between Ball's treatise and the Westminster Confession of Faith. Vos reasons that Ball's covenant theology influenced the formulation of the doctrine of covenant in the confession "because his treatise appeared during the sitting of the Westminster Assembly, just at the time when it set itself to framing the confession."³¹

Ball does not pay close attention to the difference of the denominations of covenants, however. He dismisses it merely by referring to the existence of such distinctions.³² In his treatise Ball basically uses the denomination of the covenant of works and the

²⁸Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, "To the Christian Reader." Regarding the activities of the recommenders in the Westminster Assembly, see S. W. Carruthers, *The Everyday Work of the Westminster Assembly* (Lancaster, PA: Lancaster Press, 1943; edited by J. Ligon Duncan III, and re-issued, Greenville, SC: Reformed Academic Press, 1994); and *NSHE*, s.v. "Burgess, Anthony."

²⁹Alexander F. Mitchell, *Catechisms of the Second Reformation* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1886), xlii; and George Park Fisher, *History of Christian Doctrine*, 7th impression (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1949), 348, footnote 1.

³⁰Mitchell, *Catechisms of Second Reformation*, xlii. Cocceius' major work on covenant, *Summa doctrina de foedere et testamento Dei* was published in Leiden in 1648 (*NSHE*, s.v. "Cocceius, Johannes, and His School," by E. F. Karl Müller). On Cocceius and his theology see W. J. van Asselt, *Amicitia Dei: een onderzoek naar de structuur van de theologie van Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669)* (Ede: Grafische Vormgeving ADC, [1988]); idem, *Johannes Coccejus: Portret*; and idem, "Voetius en Coccejus over de rechtvaardiging," in *De onbekende Voetius: Voordrachten wetenschappelijk symposium Utrecht 3 maart 1989*, eds. J. van Oort et al. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1989), 32-47.

³¹Geerhardus Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 241.

³²Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 8.

covenant of grace. Yet he does not use those names with prudent distinction. For example, he uses the terms “the covenant of nature” and “the covenant of works” interchangeably without any specific mention of the difference.³³

Ball cites Rom. 3:27, which includes the apostle Paul’s remark on the law of works being opposed to the law of faith, as the basis of his double covenant scheme.³⁴ It is the same verse that Roberts cites for supporting his distinction of God’s covenant as shown previously in this chapter. It is not easy to confirm whether Roberts followed Ball in citing the verse as the basis of the double covenant scheme, because Roberts does not refer to Ball regarding its citation.³⁵ Yet it is certain that in using the exact terms of Paul, Roberts is much stricter than Ball. While Ball without any hesitation sees the law of works and the law of faith as represented by the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, Roberts understands them as amounting to the covenant of works and the covenant of faith.³⁶

In order to emphasize the grace of all of God’s covenants, Roberts holds to his own partition of covenant, and he scrupulously avoids using other denominations. He once uses the covenant of faith and the covenant of grace interchangeably when he argues against Cameron’s addition of the Mosaic covenant as the third kind of God’s covenant.³⁷ In that case, however, Roberts’ use of the term, “the covenant of grace,” as referring to the covenant of faith, is only for the sake of argument. He merely uses Cameron’s own

³³Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 12-13.

³⁴Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 9.

³⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 17 and 20.

³⁶Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 9, and Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 17.

³⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 18.

term to argue against him. Except for such special occasions Roberts confines his denomination of the double covenant scheme to the covenant of works and the covenant of faith.

Strictly speaking, therefore, regarding the distinction of God's covenant the characteristic of Roberts' covenant theology does not lie in his distinction into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith but in his consistent adherence to using those two designations in his whole covenant scheme. By putting faith, instead of grace, against works, Roberts can attribute not only man's faith but also man's works to divine grace. Thus he strongly emphasizes divine grace as the sole origin of the antelapsarian covenant as well as the postlapsarian covenant.

In terms of content, however, Roberts' concept of the covenant of faith is not different from his contemporaries' understanding of the covenant of grace. Under the covenant of faith Roberts puts all the covenants that were concluded since the fall, whereas the majority of Puritans put those under the covenant of grace.

Roberts separates the covenant of faith into two main branches: the covenants of promise and the covenant of performance (or the new covenant). While the former had relation to "one peculiar sort of people only before Christ," the latter has relation to "all sorts of people, since Christ."³⁸ Roberts finds the scriptural ground of this distinction in Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, 2:11-12 [and 13]: "wherefore remember, that ye being in time passed gentiles in the flesh, – that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens

³⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 184.

from the common-wealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.”³⁹

According to Roberts, in this passage one member of the distinction is plainly expressed, that is, “covenants of promise.” Paying attention to the plural number, he judges that it cannot designate the covenant of works. For the antelapsarian covenant “was but only one single covenant, and had but only one single administration.” Then “the covenant of faith” is the only choice that “the apostle here intends by the covenants of promise: which though it be but one for substance, yet it had many several administrations, and hence is called covenants.”⁴⁰ Although the term “covenant of faith” distinguishes Roberts’ view from that of most of his predecessors and contemporaries, his identification of the Old Testament administrations as “covenants of promise” resembles the teaching of Ball and probably draws on it.⁴¹ Similarly, there are parallels between Roberts’ discussion of administrations of the covenant in the Old Testament and Ball’s presentation. On these points at least, Ball is Roberts’ clearest predecessor. There is no resemblance to Cocceius’ model of abrogations.⁴²

The problem of the different modes of administration of the covenant, specifically of the several eras or epochs of the Old Testament, raised two major issues for Reformed covenant theology, both of which are addressed by Roberts: the issue of a historical view of the covenants as distinct from a more doctrinal view and the issue of the precise nature

³⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 184. In the body of the text Roberts quotes only vv. 11-12, but he includes v. 13 in the margin reference.

⁴⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 185.

⁴¹Cf. Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 27-36.

⁴²On Cocceius’ doctrine of abrogations, see W. J. van Asselt, “The Doctrine of the Abrogations in the Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669),” *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 101-116.

and number of the epochs or administrations of the Old Testament. On the first of these issues, there are significant precedents on both sides in British covenant thought: when Fenner is compared with Perkins, we see (long before Cocceius and Roberts) the beginnings of the question of how to treat the covenant model—as a salvation-historical approach or as a more *ordo salutis* approach. Perkins sees the two covenants as basically law and grace, associating the covenant of works with Sinai.⁴³ Fenner sees the covenant of grace as inaugurated at the fall and traces out the administrations of the Old Testament covenant of grace in detail.⁴⁴ Ball is already looking for a compromise: a more careful and detailed analysis of the history but also a clearer and better way of identifying the end of the covenant of works without removing the law from the Old Testament economy of the covenant of grace.⁴⁵ Roberts certainly represents a later development of the same issue.

The second issue is broached by Roberts under the rubric of the “covenants of promise.” Here again, the model is Ball—now opposed to Cameron’s model of three covenants. Under this designation of “the covenants of promise,” according to Roberts, “the covenant of faith is intended, only as it was dispensed in several distinct administrations before Christs death: and not at all as it was dispensed after his death.” For, after Christ’s death there is only one administration of the covenant of faith, thus in

⁴³William Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard [*Pilgrim Classic Commentaries*, vol. 2] (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), 4:24-25 (p. 307) and 6:8 (p. 503); and see Michael McGiffert, “From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19/2 (1988): 131-155.

⁴⁴Dudley Fenner, *Sacra theologia, sive veritas quae est secundum pietatem* (London, 1585), IV.ii-iii (on the covenants of works and grace) and VI.vii-x; VIII.ii-iv; IX.i-v (on various administrations of the covenant of grace).

⁴⁵Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 27, 36 (on the administrations of the covenant of grace) and 93-143 (on the law under the covenant of grace).

that respect it cannot be called in the plural number unlike the case of the many administrations before Christ. Roberts gets more specific support of the biblical context for this. All the gentiles, including these Ephesians, were foreigners to the covenants of promise until Christ brought them near through his blood (Eph. 2:12-13). Therefore, concludes Roberts, “these covenants of promise, are the covenant of faith only as dispensed before Christs death, unto which all the gentiles were strangers, the covenants of promise peculiarly belonging to the commonwealth of Israel only.”⁴⁶

Roberts goes further and asserts that this passage consequently implies the other member of the distinction, that is, the covenant of performance, or the new covenant. He argues:

For the apostle saith not barely, they were strangers to the covenants; but exegetically and discretively he explains himself saying, at that time ye were strangers to the covenants of promise: implying there was now a covenant of performance, a new covenant in Christ performed, unto which they were not strangers as formerly they were to the covenants of promise.⁴⁷

Hence Roberts says, “Now, covenants of promise, and of performance, are members directly opposite and contradistinct: and mutually implying one another.”⁴⁸ Following Ball, Roberts argues that even though both of them belong to the covenant of faith, they are separated by Christ’s death into two periods: the time when Christ was promised and the time after Christ fulfilled the promise.⁴⁹

Here “Jesus Christ, the chief matter of the covenant of faith, is the foundation and original ground of this distinction” as he is considered differently, that is, “Christ being

⁴⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 185.

⁴⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 185.

⁴⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 185.

⁴⁹Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 27.

the great promise; and the accomplishment of the promises.” This helps Roberts clarify the reason for “covenants in the plural, but promise in the singular number” in the covenants of promise. It is “because for substance the principal promised mercy, Christ, is but one; though for circumstance and manner of administration the tender of Christ of old was divers.”⁵⁰

As the scriptural ground for the designation, “the covenant of performance,” Roberts cites Luke 1:68-73, especially verse 72: “To perform the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember his holy covenant.” Roberts says, “As this subdistinction of the covenant” of faith “is warranted by Scripture: so it is grounded upon Christ as promised and performed, the chief matter and mystery of this covenant.”⁵¹

Roberts examines more specifically what the terms, the “covenants of promise” and the “covenant of performance,” mean. Roberts disagrees with Calvin’s rendering of Eph. 2:12 as “strangers from the tables of promise.”⁵² Calvin translated “τῶν διαθηκῶν” by “the tables,” because the tables of God’s covenant with Abraham and his posterity were confirmed by the hand of Moses, and entrusted, as a peculiar treasure, to the people of Israel, to whom, and not to the gentiles, belong the covenant.⁵³ Yet Roberts prefers the rendering “strangers from the covenants of promise,” because he thinks Calvin’s

⁵⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 185-186.

⁵¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 186.

⁵²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 186, citing John Calvin, *Commentarius*, Eph. 2:12. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Eph. 2:12 (pp. 233-234).

⁵³Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Eph. 2:12 (pp. 233-234). Cf. Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 186.

rendering is “too restrictive” to embrace the covenants that God had made with his people “long before any tables thereof were made.”⁵⁴

Roberts also disagrees with Paul Bayne who understands the “covenants of promise” as “the covenants of the law and of the gospel; for these two covenants were well known to Israel.”⁵⁵ Roberts thinks that explanation is “too narrow” because the covenants that God had made with Israel before the law would be excluded. Moreover, he does not think it proper to use the expression, “the covenants of the law and of the gospel.” For if by “covenants of the law” were meant the Mosaic covenant, it would not be opposed to the “gospel” but would belong to the covenant of faith, which includes the “gospel.”⁵⁶

By “covenants of promise” Roberts understands “Gods covenant and promise of Christ in due time to be exhibited, and of life by him to sinners through faith.” He adds that “from the fall of Adam till Christs incarnation” it was “one and the same for substance; therefore it is said, promise in the singular number; but was manifold and various for circumstance and manner of administration, and thereupon is called covenants, in the plural number.”⁵⁷

In interpreting Eph. 2:12 in this way, Roberts follows Jerome Zanchi and Beza.⁵⁸ The covenants that God made with Noah, Abraham, and Israel at Sinai, and so forth, were

⁵⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 186.

⁵⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 187, citing Paul Bayne, *Commentary on Ephesians*, [2]:12. Cf. Bayne, *An Exposition of Ephesians, Chapter 2:11 to 6:18* (N.p.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1959), 22 [Eph. 2:12].

⁵⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 187.

⁵⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 187.

⁵⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 187, citing Jerome Zanchi, *Commentarius*, Eph. 2:12; and Theodore Beza, *Annotationes*, Eph. 2:12. Zanchi's Latin text that Roberts cites in the margin: “Conditiones, qua[s] stipulabatur Deus, ad summam & in substantia, eadem fuerunt. Fides scilicet viva cum Dei dilectione conjuncta, & obedientia. Sed pro diversitate temporum, in accidentibus fuerunt variat[a]e. Quia ante

“not many covenants really and substantially distinct: but one and the same covenant in Christ, under many several dispensations and administrations.”⁵⁹ After Adam’s fall until Christ’s death, all the covenants and all the promises meet in one fundamental promise of Christ, and are called the “covenants of promise.”⁶⁰

By the “covenant of performance” Roberts understands the dispensation of the “covenant of faith in Christ actually performed and exhibited for sinners salvation.” He finds the scriptural ground for the term, “a new covenant,” in Jer. 31:31 and Heb. 8:8. Roberts says that Scripture styles it “a new covenant, because this dispensation should still continue new, and never wax old or wear away till the worlds end,” unlike the former dispensations that waxed old and vanished away.⁶¹

Even though not all the titles that Roberts uses for distinguishing God’s covenants may be directly seen in Scripture, he tries to be thorough in using titles with scriptural foundation. Rom. 3:27 is the scriptural basis for Roberts’ distinction of God’s covenants into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith. Eph. 2:11-13, especially verse 12, offers him the ground for dividing the covenant of faith into the covenants of promise and

Mosen paucas instituit ceremonias; per Mosen, multas; per Christum abrogatæ istæ fuerunt, & pauciores & faciliores substitutæ. Atque hoc sibi voluit apostolus, cum unam promissionem nominavit, & plura pacta.” Cf. Zanchi, *Commentarius in Epistolam Sancti Pauli ad Ephesios*, 2 pts. (Amsterdam, 1888), pt. 1, p. 190 [Eph. 2:12]. Beza’s Latin text that Roberts cites in the margin: “Et extraneos a fœderibus promissionis. Una fuit promissio, si rem ipsam spectes: sed sæpius sancita. Ideo διαθήκας scripsit multitudinis numero. Possumus etiam tabulas metonymice interpretari? Nomen autem τῆς ἐπαγγελίας, veteres codices secuti, cum præcedentibus coniuuimus, quod nonnulli ad ἐλπίδα connectunt, eadem tamen manente sententia, cum nihil sperandum sit nisi quod promissum est, & vicissim nulla sit extra fœdus promissio.” Cf. Beza, *Annotationes maiores in Novum Dn. Nostri Iesu Christi Testamentum* ([Geneva], 1594), pt. 2, p. 360 [Eph. 2:12].

⁵⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 187.

⁶⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 187.

⁶¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 187. Here Roberts also cites Heb. 8:13. Cf. the similar understanding of the Old Testament administrations as “covenant of promise” superseded by the gospel in Christ—not in substance but in form and finality in Poole, *Commentary*, Jer. 31:31 (2:591).

the covenant of performance. Luke 1:68-73, especially verse 72, is the ground for the appellation, the covenant of performance, while the term, the new covenant, is directly seen in Jer. 31:31 and Heb. 8:8. Thus Roberts builds his covenant theology on the firm basis of Scripture, not on mere speculation just as he refines his vocabulary to support the Reformed understanding of the new covenant in Christ as the fulfillment of the one covenant of grace.⁶²

The original ground of Roberts' separation of the covenant of faith into the covenants of promise and the covenant of performance is Christ, the only mediator and foundation of this covenant and his different representations in its administrations. In the covenant of faith Christ was initially represented as promised to come to accomplish our redemption; that is how he was set forth in the covenants of promise to Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel on Mount Sinai, David, and the Jews in the Babylonian captivity. Then Christ was represented as performer incarnate and having suffered already, thus he was set forth in the new covenant or testament solemnly established by his death.⁶³

The covenants of promise and the new covenant are "essentially one and the same covenant of faith."⁶⁴ Thus the covenant of faith comprehends them both. The same Christ is revealed in all the covenants since the fall. Roberts compares them to many cabinets "one within another" and says that Christ has been within them all. Roberts explains the same Christocentric nature of various kinds of the covenant of faith: "All their promises lead to him, and center in him, all their commandments refer to him, all

⁶²Cf. the exposition in Heppe, *RD*, 394-395, 404-409.

⁶³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 16 and 18. Cf. pp. 185-186.

⁶⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 18.

their threats drive to him, all their ceremonies typifie him, all their sacraments signifie him, all their ordinances magnifie him.”⁶⁵

Roberts says that the covenants of promise and the new covenant “differ only gradually and accidentally.”⁶⁶ The same Christ was represented differently in every covenant since the fall. In the first covenant he was depicted as the seed of the woman bruising the serpent’s head; in the second as the true Noah saving an elect remnant in the ark of the church; in the third as the seed of Abraham in whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed; in the fourth as the prophet like Moses raised up from among Israel to be listened to in all things; in the fifth as the royal seed of David who would sit upon his throne, ruling the house of Jacob, the church of God, forevermore; in the sixth as the true David, shepherd, prince, and king of the redeemed captives forever; and in the seventh as God manifested in the flesh, crucified, dead, buried, risen, ascended, and set down at the right hand of God for the actual accomplishment of his elect’s redemption.⁶⁷ This definition of the unity of the covenants of promise with the new covenant has echoes of Calvin’s definition and is similar to Ball’s. It stands in continuity with the broad outlines of Reformed orthodox doctrine.⁶⁸

Roberts sees that in the first three covenants is represented the person of Christ, the God-man. His manhood is seen as the seed of woman, the seed of Noah, and the seed of Abraham; his Godhead is revealed in his being able to bruise the serpent’s head, to save

⁶⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, Introduction.

⁶⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 18.

⁶⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, Introduction.

⁶⁸Cf. John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.x.1; xi.1 (1:428-429, 449-451); and Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 23, 31-32, 163-166. And see Heppe, *RD*, 404-408.

his elect remnant, and to bless all the nations of the earth. Much more significantly, Roberts points out that in the fourth and fifth covenants is set forth Christ's "triple mediatory office": his prophecy under the type of Moses, his priesthood under the type of Aaron, and his kingship under the type of David.⁶⁹ The doctrine of a *munus triplex*, Christ's threefold office, is a characteristic of the Reformed doctrine of the work of Christ. As Robert S. Franks points out, it was first taught by Calvin,⁷⁰ and it became standard among Reformed theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Thus the Westminster Confession of Faith states that God was pleased to ordain Jesus Christ to be "the mediator between God and man, the prophet, priest, and king."⁷¹ Roberts' understanding of the Mosaic and Davidic covenants in terms of the threefold office of Christ clearly puts his covenant theology in the line of the Reformed tradition, especially that of Calvin.

Roberts says that in the sixth covenant, with the captives in Babylon, is set forth the notable efficacy of Christ's office, that is his redeeming, cleansing, and sanctifying his guilty and polluted people. But in the seventh covenant, that is the new covenant, Christ is represented in his person, offices and efficacy of his offices toward both Jews and gentiles more clearly, fully, and gloriously than in all the foregoing covenants.⁷²

⁶⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, Introduction.

⁷⁰Robert S. Franks, *A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ: In Its Ecclesiastical Development*, 2 vols. (London; New York; Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, [1918]), 1:429-432. Calvin discusses the threefold office of Christ in *Institutes*, II.xv (1:494-503). Cf. the definition in Richard A. Muller, *DLGTT*, s.v. "munus triplex."

⁷¹Westminster Confession of Faith, VIII.i (*Creeds*, 3:619). See Heppe, *RD*, 452-487.

⁷²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, Introduction. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, VIII.i (*Creeds*, 3:619), especially the latter part.

Vos properly sees a similarity between Ball's *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* and Roberts' *God's Covenants*, especially in their treatment of the various administrations of the postlapsarian covenant.⁷³ In his treatise Ball divides the postlapsarian covenant into six. They are the covenants with Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Israel in exile, and the new covenant.⁷⁴ Vos says that Ball's treatise is the "fullest in its discussion of the successive dispensations of the covenant of grace." Then he adds that "in Roberts, too, the tendency to stress the development of the economies emerges clearly enough." Vos specifically pays attention to the fact that Roberts' treatment of the covenants in general, although it is "still always detailed enough," takes up much less space than his treatment of the various stages. Vos is correct in seeing that both Ball and Roberts attach great importance to the gradual development of the postlapsarian covenant because both of them devote most of the pages of their works to discussion of the various stages of the postlapsarian covenant.⁷⁵

Yet it is not exactly correct for Vos to say that the sequence of the various stages of the postlapsarian covenant in Roberts is the same as that in Ball. For while Ball does not refer to God's covenant with Noah in his treatise, Roberts puts it as the second administration of the covenants of promise.⁷⁶ Regarding the division of the covenants of promise, Roberts says that other writers generally omit God's covenant with Noah

⁷³Vos, "Covenant in Reformed Theology," 240-241.

⁷⁴Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 27-350.

⁷⁵Vos, "Covenant in Reformed Theology," 240-241. Compare the pages that Ball and Roberts use to deal with covenants. Ball: the covenants in general, 1-6; the covenant of works, 6-14; the covenant of grace in general, 14-27; the five administrations of the covenant of grace before the new covenant, 27-194; and the new covenant, 194-350 (*Treatise of Covenant of Grace*), and Roberts: the covenants in general, 1-18; the covenant of works, 19-60; the covenant of faith in general, 61-190; the six administrations of the covenants of promise, 191-1227; and the new covenant, 1229-1721 (*God's Covenants*).

without proper cause. Thus he adds it and makes them six.⁷⁷ Roberts' separation of the covenants of promise into six individual administrations is characteristic of his covenant theology, and it represents a more elaborate structure than was typical of seventeenth-century Reformed thought.⁷⁸

B. The Conditionality of the Covenant of Faith

When Roberts considers whether God's covenant is conditional or not, he focuses only on the covenant of faith. For the mid-seventeenth-century Puritan thinkers, including the antinomians, took the conditionality of the antelapsarian covenant for granted.⁷⁹

Roberts says that the covenant of faith is conditional "in a right and sound sense." Being conditional is "not repugnant to, or inconsistent with, the nature of the covenant of faith." For while God on his part promises what he will do and what he will be for Christ's seed, they on their part "restipulate" or promise back what they will do and what they will be. What they will do is accepting "Christ and all covenanted mercies in him by faith" and walking "worthy of him and them in all well-pleasing, according to the gospel," and what they will be is becoming God's covenant-people in Jesus Christ. Thus

⁷⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 248-285.

⁷⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 18.

⁷⁸Cf. Heppe, *RD*, 394-395, for the more usual three-part division: Adam to Abraham, Abraham to Moses, Moses to Christ.

⁷⁹For example, see Tobias Crisp, a representative antinomian, acknowledging that the covenant of works stands upon the terms of perfect obedience (*Christ Alone Exalted in the Perfection and Encouragement of the Saints, notwithstanding Sins and Trials*, 5th ed., corrected, [London: L. I. Higham, 1816]; reprint in 4 vols. [Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, n.d.], Sermon 16, II, 52-53).

Roberts says, “All this God conditioneth with them, and requires from them. So that this covenant is conditional, God therein imposing terms and conditions upon Christs seed.”⁸⁰

Roberts sees such conditions or covenant duties required on man’s part in all administrations of the covenant of faith. Explaining the conditions of God’s covenant with Abraham, Roberts asserts that those “who absolutely oppose all conditions in the covenant of grace, do greatly err, because they know not the Scriptures, nor duly consider Gods admirable contrivance of his covenant.”⁸¹ To deny the conditionality of the covenant of faith is “absurd, and contrary to the nature of a covenant,” for “covenants imply reciprocal obligations between federates.”⁸²

For Roberts, the very nature of all God’s covenants with man necessarily implies and requires in them “conditions, terms, restipulations, re-promissions, re-engagements from man to God: without which, nothing can properly and exactly be called a covenant.”⁸³

Among the many ways that God expresses his will to man, Roberts compares the way of covenant with those of promise, threats, and command:

Every of these, in the nature of the thing, have a precise and peculiar propriety of essence, differencing and distinguishing them one from another. By promise, God declares what good he will do for man: by threatning, he declares what evil he will inflict upon man: by command, he declares what duty and performance he expects from man: but by covenant, he declares, both what mercies and blessings he will on his part perform to man; and what duties man should on his part perform reflexively towards God. This is the proper nature of a covenant. It compriseth in it, mutual consent and agreement of the federates about some mutual performances, and reciprocal obligations. A bare naked promise holds forth mercy from God, but not any duty from man: a bare naked command holds forth duty from man, but not any mercy or blessing from God: but a covenant wherein God and man convene and agree, holds forth, both mercy from God, and duty from man. So that, a

⁸⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 111.

⁸¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 120-121 and 466.

⁸²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 124.

⁸³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 119.

promise, or a command, in the precise nature thereof, may be without mutual obligation: but a covenant hath in it always a mutual obligation betwixt God and man, the federal parties. To speak therefore of a covenant of God with man without conditions required on mans part, is a contradiction in the adject. Whatsoever promise hath in it the proper nature of a covenant; is conditional, expressly or implicitly: and whatsoever promise is conditional, hath in it the nature of a covenant. All Gods covenants with man, are either of works, or of faith.⁸⁴

Unlike promise, threatening, or command, which are naturally unilateral, covenant denotes in its nature bilateral character.

As the conditionality or absoluteness of the covenant of faith, or grace, was a “troublesome question” in his days, Roberts deals with it rather minutely. Regarding the question, he groups thinkers into two sides. The first group of thinkers insists that God made the covenant of faith, or grace, “absolutely without all conditions on mans part.”⁸⁵ Roberts puts those who incline to “the Antinomian misapprehensions,” including Tobias Crisp and John Saltmarsh, in this group. The other group, on the contrary, maintains the conditionality of the postlapsarian covenant. Roberts puts most of the “eminently godly, learned, and judicious” thinkers, or “the general current of sound writers, both ancient and modern, and these both forrain and domestical” in this group.⁸⁶

Roberts first clarifies the notion of the word “condition,” or “conditional.” Here, condition means

the moderation, circumscription, limitation or restriction of any thing: as by certain exceptions, provisoes, terms, qualifications, etc. propounded or imposed. Hence, conditional is opposed to absolute, simple, etc. because a condition is accounted amongst the ways, manners, or means, whereby any thing may be framed, obtained or compassed.⁸⁷

⁸⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 119-120.

⁸⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 111.

⁸⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 111, footnotes (e) and (f).

⁸⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 112.

Thus, Roberts paraphrases the question of the conditionality of the covenant of faith as

whether God hath so framed and propounded in his word the covenant of faith to man, in and through Christ, as that he hath moderated, circumscribed, limited, restrained it with certain terms, proviso's, obligations, qualifications, yes and duties imposed and requir'd of them that shall joyn in this covenant with God: or whether this covenant be not laid down absolutely and simply, without any limitation or imposition of qualifications, terms, tythes or duties at all upon those that enter into this covenant with God?⁸⁸

Then Roberts distinguishes conditions in reference to God's covenant. He classifies the conditions with regard to three senses: (1) most largely; (2) more restrictively; and (3) most strictly. In the first of these three senses, moreover, conditions may be distinguished into three kinds: (1) "antecedent, or going before"; (2) "concomitant, or accompanying"; and (3) "consequent, or following our entring into, or joyning in covenant with God, in order to justification, or salvation."⁸⁹ Ball also referred to these three kinds of condition regarding the postlapsarian covenant.⁹⁰ He does not argue it more specifically, though.

Roberts lists "conditions antecedent, or going before Gods covenanting with man, especially before his conversion, regeneration and justification" again under three heads: (1) "meritorious"; (2) "impulsive"; and (3) "preparatory."⁹¹ As the Roman Catholics insist on meritorious conditions, "their grand champion" Robert Bellarmine asserts that a person unreconciled "may by works of repentance impetrate and of congruity merit the

⁸⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 112-113.

⁸⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 113.

⁹⁰Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 20. Roberts directly quotes the relevant passage in *God's Covenants*, 117-118.

⁹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 113.

Grace of” reparation as well as justification.⁹² Pointing out that Bellarmine makes such works “an antecedent meritorious cause or condition of justification, and consequently of covenanting with God whereby justification is actually applied,” Roberts firmly denies “all merit in man: much more all meritorious conditions or dispositions in unreconciled man to Gods covenant of faith or justification.” Instead, he acknowledges “only Christs pre-ordained merit, to be the sole antecedent meritorious cause or condition of our covenanting with God, justification and salvation.”⁹³

According to Roberts, the Arminians insist on “impulsive conditions moving and inclining God to work faith in one rather than in another, and to regenerate one rather than another (and consequently to bring one into covenant with God effectually rather than another).”⁹⁴ Nicolas Grevinchovius says that “littleness and humility is pre-required of God as a condition, unto this, that he will beget faith in Paul rather in Caiaphas.”⁹⁵ Simon Episcopius maintains that “repentance, faith, and even the performance of the commandments are pre-required, unto this, that any one become partaker of the promises of the new-covenant, among which is regeneration.”⁹⁶ Yet Roberts denies “all such impulsive or moving causes or conditions in the creature, inclining God to bring man into covenant of faith with himself, or to give him the justifying or saving graces of the

⁹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 113, citing Robert Bellarmine, *De iustificatione*, V.xxii. Cf. Bellarmine, *Opera omnia, ex editione Veneta, pluribus tum additis tum correctis, iterum edidit Justinus Fèvre*, 12 vols. (Paris, 1870; reprint, Frankfurt: Minerva, 1965), 6:386.

⁹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 113.

⁹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 113. Parentheses his.

⁹⁵Nicolas Grevinchovius; quoted in Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 113. In the margin Roberts puts Grevinchovius' words in Latin, but he does not indicate the source.

⁹⁶Simon Episcopius, *Thes. Privat.*, Disp. 3 and 40; quoted in Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 113-114.

covenant,” for they have no ground in Scripture.⁹⁷ Instead, he acknowledges “Gods meer grace” as “the sole antecedent impulsive or moving cause of his bringing one man rather then another into covenant with himself, and into the grace of the covenant.”⁹⁸ Thus Roberts firmly says, “Antecedent impulsives or motives in man, we leave to the remonstrants and papists: antecedent merits to the papists. The perfectest believers cannot properly merit, at all: much less unbelievers.”⁹⁹ Instead, he attributes the meritorious condition to Christ’s merit and the impulsive condition to God’s grace.

Roberts accepts that God requires of us “preparatory conditions fitting and disposing, both for entring into the covenant of faith with God, and for regeneration and justification, the benefits of that covenant.” Yet he quickly adds that all preparatory conditions are “given of God to us as well as required by God from us.” Those preconditions are hearing God’s covenant preached, conviction of the necessity of such a covenant-state for remedy of their sin and misery, and effectual calling. Roberts says that these “antecedent preparatory conditions or qualifications rendring the subject capable and more immediately fit for entring into covenant with God in Christ, God requires of us, and works in us.” Yet he firmly denies “any antecedent preparatories, as in and from our selves, by any power of free-will, disposing to accept grace tendered, or to persevere in grace received, or to merit grace or glory.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 114.

⁹⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 114. For a biblical ground, Roberts refers to Rom. 3:24, 4:16, 5:15-18, 20-21, 9:15-16, 18, Eph. 1:4-5, 7, 9 and 11.

⁹⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 119.

¹⁰⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 114-115. Cf. p. 122.

Roberts accepts “conditions concomitant, or accompanying Gods entring into covenant with man,” which are “the acting, actual exercising, using or putting forth of such preparatory habits of grace as are already received, to close with God actually in his covenant, according as the nature of his covenant requires.” God requires of his confederates genuine expression of self-denial, repentance, faith, and love. As “conditions consequent, or following Gods taking man into covenant with himself,” Roberts points out “sincere universal and constant evangelical obedience to God according to the mandatory part of his covenant.” Such consequent conditions are not only the duties that God requires of his confederates, but also the “proper fruits, effects and consequences” of “a true covenant-state.”¹⁰¹

More restrictively considered, however, the condition of the covenant of faith signifies for Roberts the “special instrumental cause, or mean whereby we accept or receive the federal benefits promised, which is only true faith.”¹⁰² “In the restrictive sense, unfained faith, and that alone, is the condition of the covenant of faith,” for faith alone is the “supernatural instrument whereby a man actually on his part (through the grace of God) accepts the covenant, and the promised mercies of the covenant.”¹⁰³ He emphasizes that this very faith makes the covenant of faith or grace “most directly opposed and contradistinguished from the covenant of works; the special condition whereof was works, done by a mans own ability.”¹⁰⁴ Thus he agrees with Jeremiah

¹⁰¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 115-116. Cf. p. 122.

¹⁰²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 117.

¹⁰³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 119. Parentheses his.

¹⁰⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 117.

Burroughs who says, "Faith hath the greatest honour above all other graces, to be the condition of the covenant."¹⁰⁵

Yet Roberts cites Ball much more favorably:

By repentance we know our selves, we feel our sickness, we hunger and thirst after grace: but the hand which we stretch forth to receive it, is faith alone; without which repentance is nothing but darkness and despair. Repentance is the condition of faith, and the qualification of a person capable of salvation: but faith alone is the cause of justification and salvation on our part required.... Faith is a necessary and lively instrument of justification, which is amongst the number of true causes, not being a cause without which the thing is not done, but a cause whereby it is done....¹⁰⁶ If then, when we speak of the conditions of the covenant of grace, by condition we understand what is required on our part, as precedent, concomitant, or subsequent to justification, repentance, faith and obedience are all conditions: but if by condition we understand what is required on our part, as the cause of the good promised, though only instrumental, faith or belief in the promises of free mercy is the only condition.¹⁰⁷

As it is evident from comparison, Roberts accedes to Ball in essential parts of his argument on the conditionality of the postlapsarian covenant. The difference between these two thinkers is that the successor much more minutely elaborates the concepts that the forerunner put very succinctly. For both of them, faith, the instrumental cause of justification, is the only condition required on man's part in the postlapsarian covenant.

Most strictly, however, the condition of God's covenant only refers to the condition of obedience required in the covenant of works. For the rigorous condition that is required of man in the antelapsarian covenant is perfect, perpetual, and personal obedience to God. Hence, the condition of obedience in the covenant of works is the only condition in its strictest sense. Thus Roberts says that in the strictest sense, no

¹⁰⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 117. He quotes from Jeremiah Burroughs, *Moses His Self-Denyall*, 188. Cf. Burroughs, *Moses His Self-Denyall: Delivered in a Treatise upon Hebrewes 11. the 24. verse.* (London: T. Paine, 1641), 188.

¹⁰⁶Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 18-19; quoted in Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 117.

¹⁰⁷Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 20; quoted in Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 117-118.

condition “is imposed or required by God upon, or from his people in any dispensation of the covenant of faith, so as the least gradual fayling of that compleat exactness should utterly dissolve and break the covenant.” For “such an exact rigorous obedience was the condition of the covenant of works, imposed on Adam in innocency.”¹⁰⁸ No condition, not even faith, is in such rigorous sense required in the covenant of faith, but every condition is evangelically softened and sweetened with “the adjunct of integrity and sincerity.” Unfeigned faith is accepted, although it is with “some gradual weakness and imperfection.” Thus Roberts says that in this covenant of faith “God requires strict, exact and perfect obedience: but accepts sincere, uniform, impartial obedience.” For, if “exactness were not required: gradual failings and other infirmities would not be reputed sins, mourned for, and striven against. If uprightness were not accepted, no flesh could be justified or saved.”¹⁰⁹

To sum up, Roberts distinguishes between two groups of conditions regarding the covenant of faith: the conditions not relevant to it, and those required in it. The condition in its extremity of strictness and rigor is that of the covenant of works and not relevant to the covenant of faith. Among the conditions considered most largely, he does not acknowledge meritorious and impulsive conditions, which are included in the antecedent conditions, as required for the covenant of faith. Yet he admits preparatory conditions, which are also antecedent conditions, in the covenant of faith. He also includes concomitant and consequent conditions in the covenant of faith. In the more restrictive

¹⁰⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 118.

¹⁰⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 118.

sense, however, Roberts accepts unfeigned faith as the only condition of the covenant of faith.

Roberts firmly says that the conditionality of the covenant of faith does not mitigate but rather much advances “the glory of Gods free grace.” For he repudiates and disowns all antecedent conditions that are either meritorious or impulsive. Instead he avows concomitant and consequent conditions with preparatory antecedent conditions in the covenant of faith and regards them “wholly supernatural,” that is “of divine grace, not at all of humane nature; wholly of God, and not of our selves at all.”¹¹⁰ Roberts ascribes all steps of covenanting to God’s grace.

Of meer grace, God contrived his covenant for us, God revealed his covenant to us, God prepares us for his covenant, God instates us in his covenant, and of the same meer grace he enables us to walk according to his covenant proportionably: all is entirely of his meer grace. Therefore herein we take no glory at all to our selves, but return the whole glory entirely to God alone. For what have we, but we have received it of him? He works in us both to will and to do, of his good pleasure. He draws, and we come. He quickens us: and then lives in us, and we by him. He works all in us, and for us without whom we can do nothing. To him we herein ascribe, the first grace, principling us; and the second grace, actuating those principles: preventing grace, and subsequent grace: operating grace, and cooperating grace; knocking grace, opening grace, entring grace: we ascribe all to him, and to his grace. For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things.¹¹¹

Moreover, Roberts sees “the special condition of faith, whereby we receive the covenant and covenanted inheritance” as “most subservient to grace,” for the apostle Paul says, “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace.” Roberts explains: “If the inheritance were by works, it should be of debt: but being by faith, it is of grace. Faith and Grace go together. Grace freely gives, faith alone receives: grace is the fountain:

¹¹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 122-123.

¹¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 123.

faith the cistern.”¹¹² He says, referring to the same passage of Paul, “grace and faith are inseparable relatives, which stand or fall together. If it be a covenant of faith, for the condition of it; it must consequently be a covenant of grace, for the foundation of it: and so on the contrary.”¹¹³ Treating the conditions of God’s covenant with Abraham, Roberts remarks, “Grace and faith are so far from destroying, that they preserve each other: and necessarily infer each other.”¹¹⁴ Elsewhere, he goes further:

Grace is the foundation of it, on Gods part: faith the condition of it, on ours. And yet that faith not of our selves: it is the gift of God. Therefore Gods covenant, and the sureness thereof, hath no dependance at all upon us, or upon any thing that is ours, but only upon God: seeing both the foundation and condition of it are from God.¹¹⁵

Although faith is required on man’s part in the covenant of faith, faith as well as grace comes from God. Roberts’ arguments here echo his earlier analysis of the covenantal character of the Psalms: there is divine initiative and human response—the initiative is unilateral, the resulting gracious covenant is bilateral.¹¹⁶

Roberts’ thought on this is clearer when he distinguishes the covenant of faith from the covenant of works regarding conditions. Roberts calls the conditions of the covenant of works “legal conditions” and the conditions of the covenant of faith “evangelical

¹¹²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 123, citing Rom. 4:16.

¹¹³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 137.

¹¹⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 465, citing Rom. 4:16.

¹¹⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 154.

¹¹⁶Cf. Francis Roberts, *Clavis Bibliorum, the Key of the Bible* (London: George Calvert, 1648), 111-112; quoted in William Howard Smith, “Theological Interpretation of the Book of Psalms: A Model Developed from the Work of the Puritan, Francis Roberts, and Modern Exegesis” (Ph.D. diss., Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988), 182, with *ibid.*, 85. Note also the parallel here with Calvin’s argumentation: see Anthony A. Hoekema, “The Covenant of Grace in Calvin’s Teaching,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 2 (1967): 155-159.

conditions.”¹¹⁷ For, while the antelapsarian covenant requires “perfect and perpetual personal obedience, denouncing the curse upon the least failing,” the postlapsarian covenant requires “faith in Christ, and endeavours of obedience with integrity.” Yet the more important difference between these two covenants lies in “their assistance to the performing of their conditions respectively.”¹¹⁸

The covenant of works requires perfect and perpetual obedience in our own persons: but promiseth no ability at all to perform such obedience, nor any pardon to failings and imperfections. The covenant of faith so requires faith, that it promiseth to work it in us; yea, and instrumentally doth work it in us: so requires obedience, as it promiseth to put Gods Spirit, and fear, and law within us, and to cause us to walk in his statutes, etc. Yea further it promiseth pardon of all our imperfections, and obliteration of all our transgressions. And offers us all these promises sealed up and ratified unreversably in Christs blood. So that the covenant of works since the fall requires mere impossibilities: the covenant of faith nothing but possibilities. How happy therefore is a believers condition in the covenant of faith with God: beyond every carnal mans condition under the broken covenant of works.¹¹⁹

Unlike in the covenant of works, then, in the covenant of faith not only the benefits God promised to man, but also the duties imposed upon him—that is, the conditions—are the “advantages” of man.¹²⁰ As he attributes even all conditions of the covenant of faith to God’s grace, Roberts asks, “Why then should it be thought harsh, strange, inconvenient, or any way prejudicial to assert the conditionality of this covenant of faith?”¹²¹

Roberts is quite confident that all sound writers, godly and learned, ancient and contemporaneous, foreign and domestic, are on his side and approve the conditionality of

¹¹⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 465.

¹¹⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 466.

¹¹⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 466.

¹²⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 466.

¹²¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 122.

the covenant of faith or grace in the sense that he explains. To substantiate his statement Roberts devotes several pages to quotations from various ancient and contemporaneous writers. Considering that the major part of *God's Covenants*, especially the earlier part, was based on his weekly lectures, Roberts' long notes in the extraordinarily immense margin are worthy of scrupulous investigation. For they contain precious referential works, supporting his concept of the conditionality of the covenant of faith, which he might have omitted in his preaching.¹²²

Roberts acknowledges that ancient writers "speak more sparingly of Gods covenant of grace, and so consequently of the conditions therein required on our part." Yet he adds: "they frequently urge the necessity and use of repentance, faith, obedience, etc. in order to the attainment of the respective blessings spiritual and eternal promised, which is as much for substance."¹²³ Clement of Rome affirms justification by faith and exhorts us to repentance and obedience to inherit the promises of God.¹²⁴ Justin Martyr declares the necessity of repentance and faith to get righteousness.¹²⁵ Cyprian incites us to faith whereby we not only are justified but also receive the abundant endowments of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁶ Ambrose urges us to faith as necessary for salvation.¹²⁷ Jerome asserts that

¹²²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 125-131 with Introduction.

¹²³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 125-126.

¹²⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 126, citing Clement of Rome, *Clementis ad Corinthios epistola prior* (Oxford, 1633), 10-12 (repentance), 41-43, 45-47 (faith), and 12-15 (obedience). Cf. Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, in *ANF*, vol. 1, pp. 7 and 13-14.

¹²⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 126-127, citing Justin Martyr, *Dialogus cum Tryphone Judaeo* (1593), 177-178 (repentance) and 250 (faith). Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue of Justin, Philosopher and Martyr, with Trypho, a Jew*, in *ANF*, vol. 1, pp. 200-201 and 245.

¹²⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 127, citing Cyprian, *Testimoniorum libri III*, III.42 (1593), p. 428, and *Epistola*, II.2 (Goulart), pp. 2-3. Cf. Cyprian, *Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews* (Treatise XII), in *ANF*, vol. 5, p. 545, and *To Donatus* (Epistle I), *ibid.*, p. 276.

certain promises are upon condition.¹²⁸ John Chrysostom states that we are justified by faith alone.¹²⁹ Augustine says that we are justified by faith in Christ, not by good works. After a person is justified, faith works by love and produces good works.¹³⁰

In Roberts' judgment, however, "Modern writers proceed to more exact consideration of Gods covenant, and plainly assert the conditionality thereof in express terms."¹³¹ He first considers continental writers including the Reformers. Calvin speaks of the righteousness in covenant between God and the Israelites as applied to both parties, thus the mutuality and reciprocity of the covenant. The consent of our faith follows God's precedent grace.¹³² Martin Luther declares that we deal with God by way of faith

¹²⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 127, citing Ambrose, *Commentarius in Epistulam ad Romanos* (1567), chap. 4, p. 189, and *Commentarius in Epistulam ad Corinthios secunda*, chap. 3, p. 299. Cf. Ambrosiaster, *Ambrosiastri qui dicitur Commentarius in Epistulas Paulinas*, in CSEL, vol. 81, pars 1, *In Epistulam ad Romanos*, 4:5 and 7 (pp. 131 and 133), and pars 2, *In Epistulas ad Corinthios, Ad Corinthios secunda*, 3:17 (p. 219). Like others in his days Roberts identifies Ambrose of Milan with Ambrosiaster. For "Ambrosiaster," see *NSHE*, s.v. "Ambrosiaster," by A. H. Newman.

¹²⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 127, citing Jerome, *Commentariorum in Isaiam* (1553), cap. 60, p. 228, Tom. 5. Cf. Jerome, *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera*, I.2A, CCL, vol. 73A, p. 699 [regarding Isa. 60:6-7].

¹²⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 127, citing John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Epistle to the Romans* (Paris, 1633), Homily 2, p. 28 [regarding 1:17], and Homily 7, p. 79 [regarding 3:27]. Cf. Chrysostom, *Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 11, pp. 349 and 379.

¹³⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 127-128, citing Augustine, *De fide et operibus* (Basel, 1569), cap. 16, p. 71, and cap. 14, p. 68, Tom. 4, and *De natura et gratia*, cap. 41, p. 750, and cap. 44, p. 751, Tom. 7. Cf. Augustine, *St. Augustine: On Faith and Works*, in *ACW*, no. 48, pp. 28-29 and 34, and "On Nature and Grace," in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 5, pp. 138-139.

¹³¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 126.

¹³²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 128, citing Calvin, *Commentarius*, Hos. 2:19 and 23: "Nunc declarat quibus legibus hoc facturus sit: nempe, *In iustitia & iudicio*:[...] hoc est, in ejus federe nihil fuit simulatum vel fallax. Quum ergo sincere Deus populum adoptasset, quibus vitiis opponit iustitiam & iudicium? Respondeo, hæc nomina ad utramque partem contrahentem referri. Iustitiam ergo Deus intelligit, non suam duntaxat, sed quæ mutua sit & reciproca, ut loquuntur," and "*Et ipsa dicet mihi, Tu Deus meus*. Propheta enim significat Deum antevertere nos federe suo, quia alioqui arcemur ab accessu. Deus ergo sponte nos prævenit & porrigit nobis manum, deinde subsequitur consensus fidei nostræ." Cf. Calvin, *Commentarius in Hoseam*, 2:19 and 23, in *CO*, vol. 42, pp. 249 and 255, with idem, *Commentaries* [CTS], Hos. 2:19 and introduction to chap. 3 (pp. 112-113 and 121). In citing the Latin text, however, Roberts puts the term "federe" instead of "favore." Thus, the original passage, "Deum antevertere nos favore suo," changed into "Deum antevertere nos federe suo" in the citation of Roberts. Then, "that God precedes us with his favor" becomes

because he deals with us by way of promise.¹³³ Peter Martyr Vermigli asserts the mutual stipulation of the confederates, that is, God and his people.¹³⁴ Cameron describes faith in Christ as the condition of the covenant of faith and asserts that in that covenant God stipulates and requires faith from us.¹³⁵ Ursinus says that men should exercise repentance and faith with which they receive great benefits that God offers. For God's covenant is a mutual promise and agreement between God and men.¹³⁶ Marcus Friedrich Wendelin insists on the conditionality of the covenant of grace.¹³⁷ The four learned professors of

"that God precedes us *with his covenant*." Even if we suppose that Roberts replaced "favore" by "federe" intentionally, the meaning did not undergo a big change. There is no forcing of text when the context is considered. Yet we cannot be certain whether the difference was intentional or accidental.

¹³³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 128, citing Martin Luther, in Tom. 2, Latin, p. 280, A.: "Deus non aliter cum hominibus unquam egit, aut agit, quam verbo promissionis: Pursus nec nos cum Deo unquam agere aliquid possumus quam fide in verbum promissionis ejus. Opera ille nihil curat, nec eis indiget, quibus potius erga homines & cum hominibus & nobis ipsis agimus. Indiget autem ut verax in suis promissis in nobis habeatur, talisque longanimiter sustineatur, ac sic fide, spe & caritate colatur. Quo fit ut gloriam suam in nobis obtineat, dum non nobis currenribus, sed ipse miserente, promittente, donante, omnia bona accipimus & habemus."

¹³⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 128, citing Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci communes*, classis 2, caput 16, sectio 1: "Quæ autem promissa utrinque servanda fuerint, Scriptura non semel docet. Deus enim pollicitus est, se futurum populi sui Deum, nempe qui adisit ei juvando, eripiendo, & modis omnibus quoad omnia bonorum genera orando. Populus vicissim recepit se Dominum Jehovah pro Deo suo credendo, colendo & obediendo, habiturum. Christus autem in federe, tanquam mediator, inter utramque partem intercedit. Hæc est federis inter Deum & homines initi explicatio & natura." Cf. Vermigli, *Loci communes* (London, 1583), II.xvi.1 (p. 398).

¹³⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 128, citing Cameron, *De triplici foedere*, Theses 82, 11, and 14: "Foedus gratiæ est illud quo Deus, propositâ conditione fidei in Christum remissionem peccatorum in ejus sanguine, & vitam cœlestem pollicetur, idque eo fine, ut ostendat divitias misericordiæ suæ," "Quomodo differat fides illa quam præsupponit justitia exacta in foedere naturæ ab ea fide quam stipulatur Deus in foedere gratiæ," and "In hoc convenire cum fide quæ postulatur in foedere gratiæ,—At fides quæ requiritur in foedere gratiæ." Cf. Cameron, *Opera*, 545 and 551.

¹³⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 128, citing Zacharias Ursinus, *Explicationibus catecheticis*, pars 2, quaestio 18, De foedere Dei, sectiones 1 & 3. Cf. Ursinus, *Corpus doctrinae orthodoxae, sive, Catecheticarum explicationum* (Heidelberg, 1612), 108-109, with idem, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus, OH, 1852; reproduction, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., [1985]), question 18, Of the Covenant of God, i and iii (pp. 97-98).

¹³⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 129, citing Marcus Friedrich Wendelin, *Christianæ Theologiae*, liber 1, caput 19, Thesis 9 and Explicatio: "Fœdus gratiæ, est dispositio Dei gratuita, quâ per mortem filii sui salutem æternam promittit hominibus, obedientiam fidei repromittentibus & præstantibus. Materia sunt personæ seu partes fœdus ineuntes, 1. Deus promittens vitam sub conditione fidei & cultus sui. 2. Homines fidem & obedientiam repromittentes. Forma est mutua partium secundum certas condiciones obligatio.—Et vel maxime

Leiden, Johann Poliander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Walaeus, and Antonius Thysius, assert the conditionality of the new covenant.¹³⁸

To confirm the conditionality of the postlapsarian covenant Roberts then considers English writers, most of which are his contemporaries. Ball's expression on the conditionality of the covenant of grace is the closest to that of Roberts. According to Ball, man's stipulation consists of repentance, faith in Christ, and walking before God in sincere obedience.¹³⁹ George Walker indicates that in the covenant of grace no condition is required to be met by man himself as in the covenant of nature. Yet Walker acknowledges that repentance, faith, and other saving graces are required to be in man to make him an actual partaker of Christ and of other benefits in him. Roberts concludes that Walker agrees with him in denying all conditions of and from ourselves and attributing all conditions met by us merely to God's grace.¹⁴⁰ William Pemble understands the essential difference

huic commendat Dei gratiam & misericordiam[.] Quod ad præscriptæ conditionis impletionem ipse hominem disponit per gratiam non tantum sufficientem quâ possit, sed & efficacem quâ velit implere conditionem. Hos. 2.19, 20, Phil. 2.13." Cf. Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae libri duo* (Amsterdam, 1657), I.xix.9 (pp. 324-325).

¹³⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 129, citing Johann Poliander, Andreas Rivetus, Antonius Walaeus and Antonius Thysius, *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, Disputatio 23, Theses 27-29: "Sed hoc negamus quod illi volunt, Novum Testamentum proprie dictum, quatenus est promissionis gratiæ in Christo datæ doctrina requirere conditionem totius legis implendæ, quod vult Bellarmin. *Justificat.* lib. 4, cap. 2 aut justos non esse liberos ab observatione legis divinæ, quatenus illa exigit obedientiam perfectam quâ ex debito justus aliquis pronunciat. —Deinde, non omnem conditionem negamus in evangelio & Novo Testamento requiri ad salutem: Requiritur enim conditio fidei & novæ obedientiæ quæ ubique urgetur. Sed hæ conditiones à Deo gratis donantur; neque imperfectione suâ si modo sinceræ sint, impediunt salutem quæ ab alia causa manat. At non ita sentiendum de conditione totius legis implendæ quam statuunt illi salutis causam, & quæ à Deo nemini in hac vita donatur talis ut iudicium Dei sustinere possit. Iac. 3.2 & 2.10." Cf. Poliander et al., *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, ed. Herman Bavinck (Leiden, 1881), XXIII.xxvii and xxix (pp. 218-219).

¹³⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 129, citing Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 43, 48, 132-133, 134, 136-137, 149 and 198.

¹⁴⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 129-130, citing George Walker, *Compendious Treatise of Old and New Covenant* (London, 1640), chap. 4, pp. 48-49; and chap. 5, pp. 50-51 and 55-56. Cf. Walker, *The Manifestation of God: In the divers dispensation of Grace by Iesus Christ, in the Old [and] New Testament, in the Covenant of Faith [and] Workes, their Agreement and Difference* (London: R. H. for John Bartlet, 1640), chap. 4, pp. 48-49; and chap. 5, pp. 51 and 55-56.

between the covenants of works and of grace with the distinction between the law and the gospel. While the former gives life to the just upon condition of perfect obedience in all things, the latter gives life to sinners upon condition of their repentance and belief in Christ Jesus.¹⁴¹ John Owen expresses the dissimilarity between the two covenants a bit differently: “The Lord did in the old only require the condition; now in the new he will also effect it in all the federates to whom the covenant is extended.”¹⁴² Similarly, Perkins had argued that, like righteousness and life everlasting, the substance of the covenant of grace given to God’s people by Christ, faith and repentance, man’s condition in the covenant of grace, are by grace.¹⁴³ According to Reynolds, between the “first covenant” (i.e., the covenant of works) and “new covenant” (i.e., the covenant of grace) there are differences not only in the conditions but also in the manner of performing the conditions. The condition of the first covenant is legal obedience, and that of the new covenant is faith and repentance. In the first covenant man was to fulfill the condition by his created and natural strength. Yet in the new covenant God works first upon us and in us. He does not only command us, but he provides us with his own grace and Spirit to fulfill the command.¹⁴⁴ The Westminster

¹⁴¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 130, citing William Pemble, *A Treatise of Justification by Faith* (London, 1635), sect. 4, chap. 1, pp. 214-217. Cf. Pemble, *Vindiciae Fidei, or A Treatise of Justification by Faith*, sect. 4, chap. 1, in *The Workes of that late learned minister of God’s Holy Word, Mr William Pemble* (Oxford: Henry Hall for John Adams, Edward and John Forrest, 1659), 215 and 217.

¹⁴²John Owen, *A Treatise of Redemption* (London, 1648), bk. 3, chap. 1, pp. 103-104; quoted in Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 130. Cf. Owen, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ: A Treatise in which the whole controversy about Universal Redemption is fully discussed* (reprint from Owen’s *Works* [1852], ed. William H. Goold; London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1959), bk. 3, chap. 1, p. 125.

¹⁴³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 130, citing William Perkins, *The Order of Causes of Salvation*, chap. 31, [*Workes*] (London, 1626), vol. 1, p. 70, and *Reformed Chatholique, of Justification*, 11. Difference about the manner of Justification, [*Ibid.*], vol. 1, p. 571. Cf. Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: John Legatt, 1616-1618), 1:70 and 571.

¹⁴⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 130-131, citing Edward Reynolds, *The Life of Christ* (London, 1632), 512. Cf. Reynolds, *The Whole Works of the Right Rev. Edward Reynolds*, 6 vols. (London: B. Holdsworth, 1826; reprint, Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992), 1:455.

Assembly of Divines professes in the Westminster Confession of Faith that the covenant of grace requires of sinners faith in Jesus Christ that they may be saved.¹⁴⁵ The Larger Catechism states that in the second covenant God requires “faith as the condition to interest them in him, promiseth and giveth his holy Spirit to all his elect to work in them that faith with all other saving graces, and to enable them unto all holy obedience.”¹⁴⁶

Now Roberts refutes some antinomian objections against the conditionality of the postlapsarian covenant raised by Crisp, who argues that “if the covenant stands upon any conditions to be performed on mans part, it cannot be an everlasting covenant” because man is not so confirmed not to fail in it.¹⁴⁷ Roberts acknowledges that this “objection holds against conditions most strictly taken, such as was Adams obedience to the first covenant: but such conditions we [also] disclaim.”¹⁴⁸ Yet he denies it to hold against the condition of the covenant of faith. Quoting Rom. 4:16, Roberts says that the condition of faith rather ensures the promise: “Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace: to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed.” For the “perpetuity of the covenant stands not, is not founded or bottomed, upon conditions in us: but upon Gods free-grace, inviolable truth and

¹⁴⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 131, citing Assembly of Divines, *Confession of Faith*, chap. 7, sec. 3. Cf. Westminster Confession of Faith, VII.iii (*Creeeds*, 3:617).

¹⁴⁶Recited from Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 131, citing Larger Catechism (London, 1648), p. 8. Cf. The Westminster Larger Catechism, Answer to Question 32, in the Presbyterian Church in the United States General Assembly, *The Confession of Faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States; Together with the Larger Catechism and the Shorter Catechism*, rev. ed. (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, [1960]), 203.

¹⁴⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 131-132. Roberts cites Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted* (London, 1643), Sermon 6, p. 160. Cf. Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 1:86-87.

¹⁴⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 131.

faithfulness, and Christ's all-sufficient everliving merit." The conditions of the covenant of faith do not damage the perpetuity of the covenant; rather they establish it.¹⁴⁹

The second objection is that since the whole performance of the covenant lies upon God alone, there is no obligation upon man to fulfill the covenant. Roberts can agree with Crisp that man has no obligations if we take conditions for antecedent impulsive, or meritorious causes, or most strictly as in the covenant of works. If we take conditions most largely for antecedent preparatory, concomitant, and consequent conditions or more restrictively for the instrumental causes, however, Roberts is sure that man has many obligations upon him.

Recalling the nature of covenant, he says decisively, "If God absolutely and properly do all in the covenant, then it is not properly a covenant but a promise."¹⁵⁰ Roberts explains:

God...undertakes in the covenant both to perform his part, and to enable us in an evangelical sense to perform our part, giving both to will and to do, both first grace and second grace, infusing habits, and drawing them into act; notwithstanding, *acti agimus*: being acted by him, we act with him. God works not upon us, as men upon stones. He draws, and we come. He is author and finisher of faith: yet we believe. Efficiently God performs all, by enabling us to perform: but formally and subjectively we perform from him.¹⁵¹

Even though the covenant of faith is performed by God's grace, faith is required of man as his obligation.

The third and last objection is that the actual substance of covenant, that is, God's being the God of his people, is performed for a person before he can do anything because of God's eternal love. Roberts acknowledges that God's love in election is cast upon man before the world was, thus long before man can do anything. Yet he quickly adds:

¹⁴⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 131.

¹⁵⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 131-132. Roberts cites Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, Sermon 6, pp. 161-165. Cf. Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 1:87.

¹⁵¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 132.

“This love is not Gods covenant: the covenant is the effect of this love.”¹⁵² Roberts properly distinguishes the substance of God’s covenant from its cause, which is God’s love or grace for us.

Roberts acknowledges the conditionality of the postlapsarian covenant within the limit of divine grace that is the framework of God’s covenants. Like the mainstream of ancient and contemporaneous Christian writers, he firmly confesses the precedence of divine grace and sees unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ as the requirement of man. Even though the covenant of faith is performed by God’s grace, faith is required of man as his obligation. In the covenant of faith, thus, Roberts affirms concomitant and consequent as well as antecedent preparatory and instrumental conditions even though he rejects both meritorious and impulsive conditions as well as the most strict condition, which is the condition of the covenant of works. Faith does not contradict grace; rather, they go together since not only grace but also faith is from God. Because of his grace God works in us even faith in Christ and accepts our obedience of integrity, although it is imperfect. Thus the conditionality of the covenant of faith does not mitigate divine grace but rather gives it glory.

Examination of Roberts’ basic definitions already permits some conclusions concerning the nature of seventeenth-century English Reformed covenant theology. In the first place, his basic definitions do not fit the generalizations found in much of scholarship. Against Rolston and Torrance, Roberts’ acceptance of the Westminster Confession of Faith’s formulation of a covenant of works in no way points toward legalism. Roberts is clear that all divine covenants are gracious. In the second place, the

¹⁵²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 132. Roberts cites Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, Sermon 6, p. 165. Cf. Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted*, 1:89.

massive citation and analysis of Protestant theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both British and continental, demonstrate the international scope of Roberts' Reformed theology, his conscious identification with the broader Reformed tradition, and his continuity on many points with the thought of Reformers like Luther, Calvin, and Vermigli. In addition, contrary to Baker's view of the tradition of conditional or bilateral covenant language, Roberts recognizes Calvin, not Bullinger, as an antecedent to his own teaching on the conditionality of the covenant of grace or faith.

CHAPTER III

THE COVENANT OF WORKS IN ROBERTS' THEOLOGY

A. The Evidences of the Covenant of Works

The concept of God's covenant with Adam before the fall entered Reformed theology in the middle of the sixteenth century.¹ It was accepted as basic orthodoxy among Calvinist theologians by 1600.² In 1647 the antelapsarian covenant was confirmed by the Westminster Assembly as a foil for the postlapsarian covenant in the double covenant scheme.³ Yet it was not universally accepted even in the seventeenth century when covenant theology flourished most. Francis Turretin states that Episcopius and other remonstrants denied the existence of a covenant made with Adam before the fall.⁴ In the second half of the seventeenth century Balthasar Bekker, who was accused of Socinianism, declared against the antelapsarian covenant "on the ground that it was an

¹Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *Geschichte des Pietismus und der Mystik in der reformirten Kirche, namentlich der Niederlande* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1879), 208-211, with Richard A. Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus à Brakel," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994): 87, with Robert Letham, "The *Foedus Operum*: Some Factors Accounting For Its Development," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 14/4 (1983): 463, and with David A. Weir, *The Origins of the Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 22.

²Weir, *Origins of Federal Theology*, 22. Cf. Michael McGiffert, "From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19/2 (1988): 132, with Letham, "Foedus Operum," 467.

³The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), VII, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds*, 3:616-618.

⁴Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992-1997), VIII.iii.6 (1:575). Turretin's *Institutio theologiae elencticae* was published in 1679-85 (*NSHE*, s.v. "Turretini [Turretin]," by E. Choisy).

invention of the theologians of that period and was not encountered in the older Reformed theologians.”⁵ The Socinians rejected the doctrine of the antelapsarian covenant altogether, and Roman Catholic and Lutheran theologians made very little response to it.⁶ Thus it was important for the covenant theologians in the second half of the seventeenth century to prove the existence of the antelapsarian covenant.⁷

Roberts calls the covenant into which God entered before the fall with the first Adam and his natural seed the covenant of works. He acknowledges that this covenant is “not positively and plainly said in Scripture.” Its characters and footsteps are “not so expressly discovered” in Scripture, either. Yet he enumerates four evidences that he thinks are sufficient to prove the existence of the covenant of works. They are (1) the moral law in Adam’s heart before the fall, (2) God’s positive law regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, (3) the intended use of two trees in paradise, and (4) the sad result of the first Adam’s fall in all his ordinary posterity.⁸

First, Roberts finds evidence of the covenant of works in its inscription in Adam’s heart when God created him. God entered into covenant with Adam by writing the

⁵Geerhardus Vos, “The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology,” in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1980), 237. Balthasar Bekker (1634-1698) was a Dutch precursor of rationalism (*NSHE*, s.v. “Bekker, Balthasar,” by H. C. Rogge).

⁶Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 4th revised and enlarged ed. (1941; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 212.

⁷Cf. Francis Roberts, *The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God’s Covenants with Man* (London: R. W. for George Calvert, 1657), 20-22, with Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, VIII.iii.6-9 (1:575-576), and with Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service in which Divine Truths concerning the Covenant of Grace are Expounded, Defended against Opposing Parties, and their Practice Advocated as well as the Administration of this Covenant in the Old and New Testaments*, trans. Bartel Elshout, 4 vols. (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1992-1995), 1:355-367. *De Redelijke Godsdienst* of Brakel was first published in 1700 (Joel R. Beeke and Bartel Elshout, “Preface,” *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:xix).

⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 19-22.

covenant of works, that is, the substance of the moral law, perfectly in his heart before the fall. Here Roberts identifies the covenant of works with the moral law itself. For he thinks that the moral law is called by the apostle Paul the law of works, which is set in opposition to the law of faith. Here Roberts cites Rom. 3:27 and Gal. 3:18. The law of works and the law of faith amount, in effect, to the covenant of works and the covenant of faith respectively. There is another reason why Roberts regards the moral law as the covenant of works. Righteousness and life came at first by the moral law, and that arrangement would have continued if man's sin had not made the law unable to give righteousness and life. The law required obedience and promised life upon that condition, so it must be a covenant, and it is a covenant of works, as works are its proper condition.⁹

The interpretation of Rom. 3:27 as referring to the covenant of works is already seen in Ball. He acknowledges that in Scripture the covenant of works is not found "to the letter." Yet he thinks Rom. 3:27 is the clearest verse to show the covenant of works opposed to the covenant of grace.¹⁰ Here, however, Ball merely argues for the distinction of the double covenant scheme and does not develop his argument further in order to use the verse as evidence for the covenant of works. Regarding Rom. 3:27 Roberts not only more strictly uses the apostle Paul's exact terms in it than Ball does but also further uses the verse as the scriptural evidence for the covenant of works.¹¹

⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 20-21. Roberts actually uses the covenant of works and the law of works interchangeably (*God's Covenants*, 57-58).

¹⁰John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, published by Simeon Ash (London: G. Miller for Edward Brewster, 1645), 9.

¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 17 and 20.

Wilhelmus à Brakel, like Roberts, points to the moral law in Adam to verify the existence of the covenant of works. He also says that the law God gave Adam was “as far as content is concerned, the law of the Ten Commandments.” Unlike Roberts, however, Brakel does not use Rom. 3:27 but instead refers to Rom. 2:14-15 and 8:3-4 to confirm the existence of the moral law that amounts to the covenant of works. In their arguments, Roberts gives more attention to the identity of the moral law and the covenant of works, whereas Brakel stresses more the existence of a law that pertains to all men even before the fall.¹²

Second, the covenant of works can be demonstrated by God’s express prescription of “a positive law” to Adam regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God’s positive law of “not eating of the tree of knowledge under pain of death” is laid down in Gen. 2:16-17: “And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayst freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”¹³ Roberts calls this “a positive law,”

because it merely depended upon the will of the imposer: the not eating of that tree was not engraven in nature, but merely imposed at the pleasure of the law-giver. The subject-matter of the law, viz., the eating or not eating of the tree of knowledge, was not bad or good in it self, more then of other trees; but only in respect of Gods prohibition, it became bad and unlawful to eat of it. This positive law some call a symbolical precept, because Adams obedience thereto was to have been a symbol or outward testimony of his obedience and service to God; his homage-penny, etc. Some call it a precept of exploration, because it was given as a special law for tryal and discovery of Adams obedience.¹⁴

¹²Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:356-359, cf. Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 20.

¹³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 21 and 31.

¹⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 31. Roberts himself elsewhere calls the positive law the “symbolical law” (*God’s Covenants*, 57).

Turretin similarly explains that the special law in Gen. 2:16-17 is called “‘a positive law’ because it did not bind man from the nature of the thing (which was in itself indifferent), but from the mere will of God.” Turretin also adds that God selected the tree to “explore” the obedience of Adam, and it is called “‘symbolic’ because it was given for a symbol and trial of the obedience of man.”¹⁵ The prohibition of eating from the tree was called a “positive” law because it was formally laid down or prescribed as a law by God even though the original nature of the act had nothing to do with good or bad.

In terms of the way of institution “positive” law is opposed to “natural” law. Considering Roberts’ and Turretin’s use of the term “positive,” its opposite term is “natural.”¹⁶ Although Brakel does not use the term “positive law,” he also contrasts the command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil with “the law of nature.” For he says that “in addition to the law of nature God gave Adam a command which in his sovereignty he could or could not have given: the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”¹⁷ Not only for Roberts, but also for Turretin and Brakel, the command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is understood as opposed to natural law, or at least different from it, in the matter of enactment.

But Turretin and Brakel, unlike Roberts, do not separate the command regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil from natural law or moral law in order to use the

¹⁵Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, VIII.iv.4 (1:579). Parentheses his.

¹⁶Regarding such a use, *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines the term “positive” as “formally laid down or imposed; arbitrarily or artificially instituted; proceeding from enactment or custom; conventional; opp. to natural” (2d ed., prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989], s.v. “positive”).

¹⁷Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:359.

former as evidence of the existence of the covenant of works.¹⁸ For Roberts, even though the natural law and the positive law are opposed to each other in terms of the way they are imposed, both of them imply the existence of the covenant of works between God and man by requiring Adam's obedience to God.

In the positive law Roberts finds the substance of an express covenant even though he acknowledges that it may not be formally called a covenant. God and Adam are agreeing on terms and covenanting reciprocally on matters. Adam on his part was to be obedient to God by refraining from eating of the tree of knowledge. God on his part, for the present, permits Adam to eat of all other trees of the garden and implicitly promises him unending life upon his obedience. The implicit promise can be reasoned from God's explicit threatening of death in case of disobedience.¹⁹

Third, Roberts finds the evidence of the covenant of works in the purpose and use of the two prominent trees in the midst of the garden, that is the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. He thinks that the intended use of these two trees in paradise was sacramental. Thus they are called "symbolical trees" and "sacramental trees." The tree of life signified to Adam that if he continued in his obedience and later was allowed to eat of that tree, he would live forever. Roberts says that this can be reasoned from God's words after Adam's fall: "And now lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (Gen. 3:22). The tree of knowledge of good and evil, by contrast, signified to Adam that if he disobeyed and ate of that tree, on that very day he would certainly die. "The former was a sacrament of life,

¹⁸Cf. Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, VIII.iii.7 (1:575-576), with Brakel, *Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:359-360, and with Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 21.

¹⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 21.

this of death: that for confirmation in obedience, this for exploration of obedience, and caution against disobedience.”²⁰

Regarding the signification of the tree of life, Roberts mentions Calvin’s opinion. For Calvin, the tree signifies “Christ the Son of God, in whom was life, and that life the light of men” (John 1:4). Calvin says that the tree of life was named so not because it could confer on man the life with which he had been previously endowed but “in order that it might be a symbol and memorial of the life which he had received from God.”²¹ And Calvin agrees with Augustine and Eucherius that “the tree of life was a figure of Christ, inasmuch as he is the Eternal Word of God,” for “it could not indeed be otherwise a symbol of life, than by representing him in figure.”²² According to the sacramental signification of the tree of life, the everlasting life was to have been confirmed by “the Son of God”²³ but “not as God-man, nor as mediator.”²⁴ For Calvin, the tree of life signifies Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity.

Calvin leaves room for interpreting the tree of life as the sacrament of the antelapsarian covenant by specifying the object of its figuration as Christ in his Godhead alone. In his commentary on Genesis Calvin does not mention the antelapsarian

²⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 21.

²¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 21, citing John Calvin’s *Commentarius*, Gen. 2:9. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Gen. 2:9 (1:116); “ut symbolum ac memoriale esset vitae divinitus acceptae” (*Commentarius in Genesin*, in *CO*, 23:38).

²²Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Gen. 2:9 (1:117); “fuisse arborem vitae Christi figuram, quatenus sermo est aeternus Dei: imo non aliter quam eum figurando vitae symbolum esse potuit” (*CO*, 23:38). The Latin term “sermo” is used for rendering the Greek term “lógos.” Thus “sermo Dei” is “the Word of God.” The term “verbum,” or “uerbum” as rendering of the divine “lógos” is later than “sermo” (Alexander Souter, comp., *A Glossary of Later Latin: To 600 A.D.* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949], s.v. “sermo,” and “uerbum”).

²³Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Gen. 2:9 (1:117); “fili[us] Dei” (*CO*, 23:39).

²⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 21.

covenant, so there is no mention of its relation to the tree of life. In his *Institutes*, however, Calvin speaks of the tree of life as a “sacrament” thus as a proof and seal of God’s covenant.²⁵ Calvin identifies God’s covenants with his promises, and he sees sacraments as “tokens” of the covenants.²⁶ The sacraments are “exercises which make us more certain of the trustworthiness of God’s Word.”²⁷ Thus in its wider sense sacrament embraces “all those signs which God has ever enjoined upon men to render them more certain and confident of the truth of his promises.”²⁸ Among those signs Calvin includes the tree of life for Adam and the rainbow for Noah. Adam and Noah regarded them as sacraments “because they had a mark engraved upon them by God’s Word, so that they were proofs and seals of his covenants.”²⁹ Yet Calvin specifies the object of the figuration of the tree of life only to Christ, “the Eternal Word of God” or “the Son of God.”³⁰ Christ’s mediatorship is required for redemption.³¹ Before the fall of the world the remedy is not yet necessary. So when discussing the knowledge of God the creator, Calvin does not deal with the “covenant by which God adopted to himself the sons of

²⁵John Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xiv.18 (2:1294); “sacrament[um]” and “documenta...testamentorum eius ac sigilla” (*Institutio Religionis Christianae* [1559], in *CO*, 2:955).

²⁶Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xiv.6 (2:1280-1281); “quando Dominus promissiones suas foedera nuncupat, sacramenta symbola foederum...” (*CO*, 2:944-945).

²⁷Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xiv.6 (2:1281).

²⁸Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xiv.18 (2:1294); “omnia generaliter signa complectitur quae unquam hominibus mandavit Deus, ut certiores securosque de promissionum suarum veritate redderet” (*CO*, 2:955).

²⁹Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xiv.18 (2:1294); “quia notam a verbo Dei insculptam habebant, ut documenta essent testamentorum eius ac sigilla” (*CO*, 2:955).

³⁰Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Gen. 2:9 (1:117); “sermo...aeternus Dei” and “fili[us] Dei” (*CO*, 23:38-39).

³¹In *Institutes*, I.xiii.9 (1:131), discussing the knowledge of God the creator, Calvin says that he does not touch on the person of the mediator there, but postpones it until he deals with the topic of redemption. Thus he discusses the mediatorship of Christ in II.xii-xvii (1:464-534).

Abraham, or that part of doctrine which has always separated believers from unbelieving folk, for it was founded in Christ,” the mediator.³² Christ, the mediator, is the foundation of the postlapsarian covenant, which includes God’s covenant with Abraham. For Calvin, therefore, the tree of life should be a sacrament of a covenant that existed before the fall happened, not a sacrament related to the postlapsarian covenant that required and was based on Christ, the mediator.

This sacramental understanding of the tree was also typical of Reformed orthodoxy. Treating the sacrament of the covenant of works, Cocceius expresses what is implied in Calvin’s teaching on the signification of the tree of life. For Cocceius, the tree of life indicates Christ not as the mediator of the covenant of grace but only as the Son of God.³³ Christ is the mediator only when the covenant of grace comes.³⁴ Thus, Cocceius says, the tree of life “does not indicate the Son of God as Christ, or rather, the mediator because the Son of God is the mediator of the covenant of grace.”³⁵ This sacramental

³²Calvin, *Institutes*, I.vi.1 (1:70-71); “Deinde adiuncta fuit altera interior, quae sola mortuas animas vivificat, qua Deus non tantum mundi conditor, et omnium quae fiunt unicus autor et arbiter cognoscitur, sed etiam redemptor in *mediatoris persona*. Caeterum quia nondum ad mundi lapsum et naturae corruptionem ventum est, de remedio etiam tractare supersedeo. Meminerint ergo lectores, me nondum de *foedere* illo disserere, *quo sibi Deus adoptavit Abrahæ filios, et de illa doctrinae parte qua proprie segregati semper fuerunt fideles a profanis gentibus, quia in Christo fundata fuit*; sed tantum quomodo ex scriptura discere conveniat, Deum, qui mundi creator est, certis notis ab omni commentitia deorum turba discerni” (CO, 2:53-54. All italics are mine, and they, except “*mediatoris persona*,” amount to the directly quoted part in the body of text).

³³Heinrich Heppe, *RD*, 296.

³⁴Gottlob Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus: vornehmlich bei Johannes Coccejus* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1923), 87.

³⁵“Non tamen significabat arbor hæc Filium Dei, ut Christum sive Mediatorem; quia Filius Dei est Mediator fœderis gratiæ.” Johannes Cocceius, *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere & Testamento Dei*, II.39, in *Opera omnia theologica, exegetica, didactica, polemica, philologica*, 3d ed., 10 vols. (Amsterdam, 1701), 7:51. Translation mine. *Foedere & Testamento Dei* was first published in 1648. Cf. W. J. van Asselt, *Johannes Coccejus: Portret van een zeventiende-eeuws theoloog op oude en nieuwe wegen* (Heerenveen: J. J. Groen en Zoon, 1997), 196.

understanding of the trees in the garden is also found in Perkins.³⁶ Even though Ball does not deal separately with the signification of the tree of life, he also points out that God made the antelapsarian covenant with man “without a mediator: for there needed no middle person to bring man into favour and friendship with God, because man did beare the image of God, and had not offended: nor to procure acceptance to mans service, because it was pure and spotlesse.”³⁷ Roberts similarly elaborates on why the tree of life does not indicate Christ the mediator, when he writes,

Adam before he brake this covenant of works, neither had, nor needed a mediator of reconciliation. He needed not the mediation of Jesus Christ the second or last Adam; either for satisfaction, for he had no way sinned: or for intercession, for Adam wanted nothing, and was completely acceptable to God in his person: or for imputation of Christs righteousness and obedience to him, for Adam was perfectly upright and obedient in himself. O what a difference betwixt Adam then, and Adams posterity now! He needed no Christ, we need nothing more, etc.³⁸

Roberts’ emphasis lies in the sacramental aspect of the tree of life, however. He says that the tree of life was not “typical,” that is, “a type of Christ” to set out a mediator but “sacramental” to assure Adam of the continuance of his life if he had continued his obedience and ate of it.³⁹ Roberts agrees with Augustine in considering the tree of life in Eden “symbolical” and “sacramental.”⁴⁰ Yet he rejects Augustine’s interpretation of Rev. 22:2, “The tree of life [in the new Jerusalem is] the holy of holies, even Christ,” as

³⁶William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: John Legatt, 1616-1618), 1:152.

³⁷Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 9.

³⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 34.

³⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 34-35.

⁴⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 21-22, citing Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* (Basel, 1[5]69), lib. 8, cap. 4, Tom. 3: “Erat ei ergo in lignis cæteris alimentum, in illo autem sacramentum, &c.” Cf. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis*, in *ACW*, no. 42, p. 38.

an unfounded “allegory.”⁴¹ This does not mean that Roberts sees the nature of the tree of life in Eden and in the holy city differently, but that he understands it as a sacrament rather than a type of Christ.

Here again, Roberts echoes the views of the continental Reformed. Johannes Wollebius says: “Therefore the tree of life was not named after the innate enlivening capacity, but after the sacramental meaning.”⁴² Similarly, Turretin denies that the tree of life “was so called effectively because it had an innate power of vivifying man...and of conferring upon him absolute immortality.”⁴³ Citing the same words of Augustine that Roberts quotes,⁴⁴ Turretin also ascribes the name of the tree to the fact that “it was a sacrament and symbol of the immortality which would have been bestowed upon Adam if he had persevered in his first state.”⁴⁵ When he interprets the tree of life in Rev. 2:7, however, Turretin agrees with Augustine rather than with Roberts. Turretin writes: “Truly he is the only tree because no one except Christ is the author of eternal life...No one except Christ is in the midst of paradise (Rev. 2:7) and of the street of the city (Rev. 22:2).” Turretin resembles Calvin in citing John 1:4 in relation to the tree of life. Yet he goes much further and says that he in whom was life is, “as mediator,” “the prince of life giving life to the world and eternal life in heaven by glory; for he is ‘the resurrection and

⁴¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 35, citing Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XIII.21: “lignum vitae, sanctum sanctorum, uti[que] Christum.” Cf. Augustine, *The City of God*, XIII.21, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 2, p. 256.

⁴²“Arbor igitur vitæ, non ab insitâ vivificandi facultate, sed à sacramentali significatione sic dicta est.” Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium theologiæ christianæ* (London, 1760), I.viii.4 (p. 39). Translation mine. Wollebius’ *Compendium theologiæ christianæ* was first published in 1626 (*NSHE*, s.v. “Wolleb, Johannes,” by W. Hadorn).

⁴³Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, VIII.v.2 (1:580).

⁴⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 22, and Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, VIII.v.3 (1:581). Both Roberts and Turretin cite Augustine’s *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, VIII.4.

⁴⁵Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, VIII.v.3 (1:581).

the life.”⁴⁶ Unlike Calvin who confines the signification of the tree of life to Christ as the Second Person of the Trinity, Turretin seems to relate the tree even to Christ the mediator.

Regarding the interpretation of the tree of life, Brakel clearly parallels Roberts. Ironically, however, Brakel’s explanation sheds light upon the speculative part of Turretin’s interpretation of the tree of life. Explaining why the tree of life “did not typify the second Person of the Godhead, that is, the Son,” Brakel says,

The Lord Jesus Christ, the mediator of the covenant of grace, is called the tree of life (Rev. 2:7; 22:2). He is not called thus because he was typified by this tree, for Adam in the state of perfection neither had need of a mediator nor had it been revealed to him that a mediator would come. Although he was capable of believing everything which God would present to him as an object to be believed in, he nevertheless did not believe in Christ, who had not been revealed to him. If the tree had been a type of Christ, Adam, being in the covenant of grace, would have been permitted to eat from this tree, which, on the contrary, he was forbidden to do. Christ, however, is called the tree of life by way of application and by way of comparison due to the efficacy of his mediatorial office, by virtue of which he is the life of his people and grants them eternal life. The tree of life was a type and sacrament of this for Adam.”⁴⁷

For Brakel, the tree of life does not typify Christ, the mediator of the covenant of grace. But in Rev. 22:2 Christ is called the tree of life because of his power and role as the mediator who offers eternal life to his people. For the same reason Christ the mediator may be called not only “the bread of life” (John 6:35) but also “the light of life” (John 8:12). Here, too, one may see the difference between the “gracious” character of the covenant of works and the fully gracious gift of the covenant of grace—or, in Roberts’ terms, covenant of faith—insofar as the Augustinian understanding of sacrament is “a

⁴⁶Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, VIII.v.6 (1:582). Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Gen. 2:9 (1:117).

⁴⁷Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:327-328.

visible sign of invisible grace.” The divine favor is present in the tree of life, but the work of the mediator is not—not even typologically.

Regarding the limit of Adam’s belief in the mediator, the former part of Brakel’s paragraph cited above has much in common with Roberts’ explanation. Before the breach of the covenant of works, Adam “neither had, nor needed a mediatour, so he neither had, nor needed faith in a mediatour.” In Adam’s faith, Roberts says, there was “no particular acting of faith on a mediatour” but “a remote capacity of believing any particular revelation God should make touching a mediatour.” In that it does not need belief in the mediator, Adam’s faith under the covenant of works differs much from our faith under the covenant of faith.⁴⁸

Despite their various interpretations of the tree of life Reformed thinkers in the seventeenth century did not hesitate to include the tree among the sacraments of the covenant of works. Regarding the other sacraments of the covenant, however, they had various opinions. According to Heinrich Heppe, the majority of them, including Cocceius, saw paradise and the tree of life as two sacraments of the covenant. Yet, like Roberts, others described the tree of life and the tree of knowledge as the two sacraments of the covenant of works. There were some others, like Herman Witsius, who spoke of three or four sacraments.⁴⁹ For Witsius, four symbols under the covenant of works are: (1) paradise; (2) the tree of life; (3) the tree of knowledge of good and evil; and (4) the Sabbath.⁵⁰ In Brakel’s case the tree of life alone is acknowledged as a sacrament of the covenant of works.⁵¹

⁴⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 35.

⁴⁹Heppe, *RD*, 296-298.

⁵⁰Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending A Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (London: R. Baynes, 1822), I.vi.2 (1:105).

Against the designation of the tree of knowledge as a sacrament Johannes Braun

insists,

It was not a sacrament (1) because the nature of sacraments consist[s] in the natural use of the sign to denote a spiritual good: now the natural use of fruits is eating; but the use of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, i.e. eating, was not conceded but prohibited; (2) sacraments signify spiritual benefits: but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil threatened and brought death; hence (3) man could not use a forbidden tree but only abuse it.⁵²

Braun enumerates some sacraments that he thinks correspond to their signs and natural uses. They are “the tree of life, the paschal lamb, the circumcision, the baptismal water, the Lord’s Supper, etc.”⁵³

Yet Braun’s definition of the nature of sacrament was neither normative nor decisive. As Wollebius earlier stated it, “sacrament is the sacred action divinely established” and is “sealed with visible signs by God.”⁵⁴ According to Calvin, “those signs which God has ever enjoined upon men to render them more certain and confident of the truth of his promises” are not always presented “in natural things,” but they are sometimes set forth

Witsius’ *De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus* was first published in 1677 (*NSHE*, s.v. “Witsius, Hermannus [Hermann Wits],” by S. D. van Veen).

⁵¹Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:362 and 365.

⁵²Johannes Braun, *Doctrina foederum sive Systema theologiae didacticae et elencticae* (Amsterdam, 1688), I.III.2.20; quoted in Heppe, *RD*, 297-298. Cf. Johannes Braun, *Leere der Verbonden, ofte kort begryp der onderwysige en wederleggige godgeleerdheid*, 3d ed. (Amsterdam: Isaac Stokmans, 1723), 288 [stuk I, deel III, hoofdstuk ii, 20].

⁵³Braun, *Leere der Verbonden*, I.III.ii.20 (p. 288). This passage is not seen in Heppe’s quotation of Braun’s Latin edition. The following is the whole passage that amounts to the omitted part in Heppe’s work: “welk een overeenkomste heeft met het teeken en desselfs naturelyk gebruik / gelyk blykt in den Boom des levens, het Pascha, de Besnydenisse, het Badwater des Doops, Heilige Avondmaal enz” (ibid., slash original).

⁵⁴“Sacramentum est actio sacra divinitus instituta...à Deo visibilibus signis obsignatur...” Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae*, I.xxii (p. 102). Translation mine. In the chapter Wollebius deals with the seals or sacraments of the covenant of grace.

“in miracles.”⁵⁵ For examples of the latter kind of sacraments, Calvin mentions a light in a smoking fire pot God showed to Abraham (Gen. 15:17), the miracles God worked for Gideon to convince him of victory (Judg. 6:37-38), and God’s reversing the sundial to signal that Hezekiah would be safe (2 Kings 20:9-11; Isa. 38:7).⁵⁶ It is not necessary that the sign of a sacrament should be natural, because the requirement for the sign of sacrament is not its natural use but its spiritual use.

Regarding the spiritual use of the trees, Roberts quotes Joseph Hall: “Neither did these trees afford [Adam] onely action for his hands, but instruction to his heart: For here he saw Gods sacraments grow before him. All other trees had a natural use; these two in the midst of the garden a spiritual.” The tree of life was “for confirmation” and showed Adam “what life he should have,” whereas the tree of knowledge was “for tryal” and showed him “what knowledge he should not desire to have.”⁵⁷ Roberts thinks Perkins’ statement is more persuasive and confirming.⁵⁸ According to Perkins, Adam’s two sacraments, the two trees in Eden, “did serue to exercise Adam in obedience vnto God,” for “the tree of life, was to signifie assurance of life for euer, if he did keepe Gods commandements: the tree of knowledge of good and euill, was a sacrament to shew vnto him, that if he did transgresse Gods commandements, he should die.”⁵⁹ Ames puts these

⁵⁵Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xiv.18 (2:1294); “signa... quae unquam hominibus mandavit Deus, ut certiores securosque de promissionum suarum veritate redderet. Ea vero in rebus naturalibus nonnunquam exstare voluit, nonnunquam in miraculis exhibuit” (CO, 2:955).

⁵⁶Calvin, *Institutes*, IV.xiv.18 (2:1295).

⁵⁷Joseph Hall, *Contemplations*, I, Of Paradise, p. 816; quoted in Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22. Cf. Hall, *Contemplations on the Historical Passages of the Old and New Testament*, 3 vols. (London edition, 1833; Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1995), 1:16 [bk. I, contemplation iii: Of Paradise].

⁵⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22.

⁵⁹Perkins, *Exposition of Symbole*, in *Workes*, 1:152. Besides citing this passage, Roberts refers to Perkins’ *A Golden Chaine: or, The Description of Theologie*, in *Workes*, 17 and 18 (*God’s Covenants*, 22).

two sacraments of the antelapsarian covenant into clearer contrast: “The reward for obedience was marked by a tree, namely, that of life, and the punishment for disobedience was marked by a tree, namely, that of the knowledge of good and evil. The one was the sacrament of life and the other the sacrament of death.”⁶⁰ Thus Roberts deduces the existence of the covenant of works from the sacramental nature of the two trees. “If these two trees were two sacraments, assuring of life in case of obedience, and of death in case of disobedience,” then we may conclude that “God not only entered into a covenant of works with the first Adam, but also gave him this covenant under sacramental signs and seals.”⁶¹

Fourth and finally, the covenant of works can be evidenced from the sad result of the first Adam’s fall in all his ordinary posterity, that is guilt of sin and death. Following Ludovicus de Dieu and Anthony Burgess, Roberts understands the apostle Paul’s words in 1 Cor. 15:22 and Rom. 5:12 to mean “in one Adam’s sinning, all sinned: and in one Adam’s dying all dyed.”⁶² He considers how all men sinned in Adam, for it was not by imitation of Adam as an evil example.⁶³ “All have not sinned actually, as Adam sinned:

Though Roberts cites from and refers to the 1626 edition of *Workes*, its pagination for the relevant passages is the same as that of the 1616 edition.

⁶⁰William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology: William Ames, 1576-1633*, trans. John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968; reprint, Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1983), I.x.33 (p. 113). Ames’ *Medulla ss. theologiæ* was first published in 1623 (NSHE, s.v. “Ames, William,” by E. F. Karl Müller).

⁶¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22.

⁶²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22, citing Ludovicus de Dieu, *Animadversiones in Epistolam ad Romanos*, 5:12; and Anthony Burgess, *The true doctrine of iustification*, Lecture 21, p. [183]. Cf. Ludovicus de Dieu, *Critica sacra, sive animadversiones in loca quaedam difficiliora Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (Amsterdam, 1693), Rom. 5:12 (pp. 645-646); and Burgess, *The True Doctrine of Justification Asserted and Vindicated, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and more especially Antinomians* (London: A. Miller for Thomas Underhill, 1651), Lecture 21, p. 183.

⁶³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22.

for many dye before they are capable of actual sinning.”⁶⁴ Nor was Adam’s guilt transmitted by propagation as corrupted branches spring from a corrupt root. In the fifth chapter of Romans Paul describes Adam and Christ not only “as two common roots” but also “as two common publike or universal persons.” Although our immediate parents are corrupted roots and we inherit corruption from them, their actual sins are not made ours as Adam’s sin is.⁶⁵ But Roberts says that we all became sinners in Adam’s first sin “by imputation.” Adam was a “universal person,” and all of mankind was one in him “by Gods covenant of works.” Citing Augustine who states that “all were that one man,”⁶⁶ Roberts founds imputation, the way of all men’s sharing of Adam’s sin, specifically on “federal consociation.”⁶⁷ Thus Roberts says: “Adam was a publike person...all mankind were in him, and all in covenant with God with him. He standing, all stood: he falling, all fell.”⁶⁸ In the fall “not only Adam, but all mankind in Adam were covenant-breakers with God.”⁶⁹ As God entered into the covenant of works with Adam, and in him with all

⁶⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 24. See also p. 22. In both places he cites Rom. 5:14.

⁶⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22.

⁶⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22. In the margin, without indicating the exact source, Roberts cites Augustine: “Omnes ille unus homo fuerunt.” See Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione et de baptismo parvulorum*, I.x.11, in *CSEL*, vol. 60, p. 12. Yet it is probable that Roberts did not write the exact source intentionally for so many similar expressions, though they are not exactly the same as the one here, are scattered here and there in his writings. To locate the exact source I used a computer program, CETEDOC Library of Christian Latin Texts: Database Latin Church Fathers, Brepols, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, 1991. Cf. Augustine, *On the Merits and Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants*, I.x.11, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 5, p. 19.

⁶⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22. Here “consociation” may be understood as ‘(union in) fellowship,’ ‘companionship,’ ‘close or familiar association,’ or ‘alliance’ (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “consociation”).

⁶⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 41.

⁶⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 52.

his posterity, Adam's breach of the covenant fell not only upon him but also upon all his posterity.⁷⁰

Roberts compares the relationship between Adam and his posterity to the connection between "head and members, root and branches." As "God deals with Adam and his posterity proportionably" by taking "them all into covenant with Adam the common head, and root of them all," Adam's sin is imputed to his all posterity.⁷¹ Regarding the covenant of works, the comparison of the relation between Adam and his posterity to that of "head and root" and "branches and members" is already seen in Ball.⁷² Whether Adam kept or broke the covenant of works, the effect would have been the same for his whole posterity because the covenant that was made with head and root reached all the branches and members issuing from them. Here Ball refers to Rom. 5:17 and 1 Cor. 15:22, 47.⁷³ But Ball dismisses the transmission of original sin by merely saying that "this covenant was so made with Adam the root of all mankind, that if transgressed, his whole posterity should be liable to the curse temporall and eternall, which entred upon his fall."⁷⁴

The passages that Roberts cites for the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity, Rom. 5:12 and 1 Cor. 15:22, are explained in detail by Turretin and Brakel for the same

⁷⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 22.

⁷¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 24.

⁷²Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 11. See also Westminster Confession of Faith, in which Adam and Eve are called as "the root of all mankind" (VI.iii; *Creeds*, 3:615). Cf. the expression, "as from a corrupt root," in Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.14 (2:251).

⁷³Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 11.

⁷⁴Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 11.

purpose.⁷⁵ The Westminster Assembly also included them among the proof texts for the transmission of the first parents' sin to their posterity.⁷⁶ Traditionally, however, much more attention has been paid to the former of these two passages, especially to interpreting its last four words, “ἐφ’ ᾧ πάντες ἥμαρτον,”⁷⁷ particularly given Augustine’s rendering of the phrase and its importance to the Augustinian doctrine of original sin.⁷⁸ Specifically, Augustine follows the old Latin translation of Rom. 5:12, reading it as “propterea sicut per unum hominem in hunc mundum peccatum intravit, et per peccatum mors, et ita in omnes homines mors pertransiit, in quo omnes peccaverunt.” Gerald Bonner puts it into English as “therefore, just as sin entered this world by one man and through sin, death; so death passed into all men, in whom all sinned.”⁷⁹ In other words, ἐφ’ ᾧ is incorrectly

⁷⁵Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, IX.ix.16-18 (1:617-620); and Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:384-387.

⁷⁶Westminster Confession of Faith, VI.iii (*Creeds*, 3:615).

⁷⁷Even in Turretin and Brakel much more space has been devoted to explaining Rom. 5:12 (Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, IX.ix.16-17 [1:617-620, on Rom. 5:12] and IX.ix.18 [1:620, on 1 Cor. 15:22], and Brakel, *Christian’s Reasonable Service*, 1:384-386 [Rom. 5:12] and 387 [1 Cor. 15:22]). Petrus van Mastricht also refers to Rom. 5:12 and 1 Cor. 15:21-22 to show the imputation of Adam’s covenant-breaking to the entire human race (*Theoretico-practica theologia*, 2 vols. [Utrecht, 1699], IV.ii.19, cf. Heppe, *RD*, 346), but he puts Rom. 5:12 as the scriptural passage representing the whole chapter (*Theoretico-practica theologia*, IV.ii: “De peccato originali”).

⁷⁸Cf. Adolf von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, tr. Neil Buchanan, 7 vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), 5:198, 212 and 215, with Reinhold Seeberg, *Text-book of the History of Doctrines*, tr. Charles E. Hay, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1961), 1:342, with J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, revised ed. (New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 363, with George Park Fisher, “The Augustinian and the Federal Theories of Original Sin Compared,” chap. in *Discussions in History and Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1880), 360-361, 372-373, and 403-404, with Stanislas Lyonnet, “Rom. V, 12 chez Saint Augustin: Note sur l’élaboration de la doctrine Augustinienne du péché originel,” in *L’homme devant Dieu – Mélanges offerts au père Henri de Lubac*, vol. 1, *Exégèse et Patristique*, by Jacques Guillet, et al. ([Paris]: Aubier, [1963]), 327-339, with Heppe, *RD*, 345-348, and with Heinrich Schmid, *The Doctrinal Theology of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, tr. Charles A. Hay and Henry E. Jacobs, 3d ed. (1899; reprint, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, [1961]), 239-244.

⁷⁹Gerald Bonner, *St Augustine of Hippo: Life and Controversies* (SCM Press, 1963; reissued & revised, Norwich: Canterbury Press Norwich, 1986), 372; cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition: A History of the Development of Doctrine*, 5 vols. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971-1989), 1:299.

translated as *in quo*. Still, Augustine's theory had broader theological moorings:

Augustine states that the great sin of Adam vitiated human nature, and his corrupt nature has run on through all by natural descent.⁸⁰ There are, in other words, two aspects to Augustine's doctrine: (1) our participation in Adam's perversion, and (2) the vitiation of human nature as a consequence of Adam's rebellion, which is also ours.⁸¹ Augustine clearly says that Adam's sin has been transmitted to all men by "propagation."⁸²

Regarding men's participation of Adam's sin, he says, "By the evil will of that one man all sinned in him, since all were that one man, from whom, therefore, they individually derived original sin."⁸³ Elsewhere, Augustine explains more specifically how all men sinned in Adam:

For we all were in that one man, since we all were that one man, who fell into sin by the woman who was made from him before the sin. For not yet was the particular form created and distributed to us, in which we as individuals were to live, but already the seminal nature was there from which we were to be propagated; and this being vitiated by sin, and bound by the chain of death, and justly condemned, man could not be born of man in any other state.⁸⁴

As all future generations were present in Adam's loins at the time of the fall, "all mankind participated, in some mysterious fashion, in the sin, and drew upon itself condign punishment."⁸⁵

⁸⁰Augustine, *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, II.viii.20, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 5, pp. 290-291. See also II.xxxiv.57 (5:307).

⁸¹Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, 363-365.

⁸²Augustine, *Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*, I.ix.10 (5:19). Cf. Pelikan, *Christian Tradition*, 1:300.

⁸³Augustine, *Marriage and Concupiscence*, II.v.15 (5:288).

⁸⁴Augustine, *City of God*, XIII.14 (2:251).

⁸⁵Bonner, *Augustine of Hippo*, 371-372.

Roberts' view clearly echoes this traditional Augustinian view, at the same time that it dialogues with the Reformed federal tradition. Roberts argues that "not only Adam, but all mankind in Adam were covenant-breakers with God" inasmuch as "by Adams one offence, all men are condemned: and that before they actually sin, or are originally unclean. How can this be, but in reference to the covenant, wherein Adam and all his posterity, were one party, as God the other?"⁸⁶ Here Roberts develops what Fisher identified as the typical seventeenth-century "Augustino-federal theory" of original sin, which joined a covenant doctrine with the Augustinian principle of men's participation in the first sin.⁸⁷ Roberts also appears to stand in the mainline of Reformed orthodoxy in assuming the immediate imputation of Adam's sin to all his posterity, on grounds of their federal participation in him.⁸⁸

When interpreting the biblical passages regarding original sin, Roberts' approach, like Augustine's, is more theological than exegetical. Like Augustine, who finds in 1 Cor. 15:22 and Rom. 5:12 a support for his theory of original sin, Roberts understands these two passages as supporting his own theory of original sin.⁸⁹ While the Pelagians read Rom. 5:12 into the theory of imitation, Augustine interprets it with his theory of propagation. Thus Augustine says that the verse indicates "propagation, not imitation."⁹⁰ For Roberts, however, neither the Pelagian theory of imitation nor the Augustinian theory

⁸⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 24 and 52.

⁸⁷Fisher, "Augustinian and Federal Theories of Original Sin," 356-357, 364-365.

⁸⁸Cf. Heppe, *RD*, 331-334.

⁸⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 22.

⁹⁰Augustine, *Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*, l.ix.10 (5:19). Cf. "hoc propagationis est, non imitationis" (Augustine, *De peccatorum meritis et remissione*, p. 12).

of propagation was enough to explain the transmission of Adam's sin to his posterity. Instead, he interprets 1 Cor. 15:22 and Rom. 5:12 with the concept of imputation. Roberts understands the imputation of Adam's sin to his posterity in terms of covenant relationship. For Roberts, therefore, the sad result in Adam's posterity of his first sin indicates the existence of the covenant of works that Adam broke. Moreover, he interprets Augustine's expression, "all were that one man," not in terms of propagation but in terms of federal consociation.⁹¹

Like the English tradition generally, as distinct from the continental writers, Roberts does not see in Hos. 6:7 any evidence of the existence of the covenant of works.⁹² By contrast, both Turretin and Brakel cite Hos. 6:7 and Job 31:33 to describe Adam's breach of the antelapsarian covenant, and they commonly interpret the former as "transgressed the covenant like Adam" and the latter as "my transgressions as Adam."⁹³ Therefore, it is correct to say that Hos. 6:7 was taken by some Reformed thinkers as a proof of the existence of God's covenant with Adam before the fall.

⁹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 22. Cf. Augustine, *Merits and Forgiveness of Sins*, I.x.11 (5:19).

⁹²Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 458-463.

⁹³Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, VIII.iii.8 (1:576); and Brakel, *Christian's Reasonable Service*, 1:365-367; cf. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 214-215. Contra Weir's claim that the Protestant tradition did not cite Hos. 6:7 in evidence of the covenant of works (*Origins of Federal Theology*, 14-15). While the Geneva Bible and the King James Version render אָדָם in Hos. 6:7 indefinitely as "men," both translate אָדָם in Job 31:33 as a proper noun, "Adam." Cf. "thei like men haue transgressed y couenant" and "if I haue hid my sinne, as Adam" (*The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* [Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969], in loc.), with "they like men haue transgressed the couenant" and "if I couered my transgressions, as Adam" (*The Holy Bible: 1611 Edition*, King James Version [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982], in loc.).

B. The Covenant of Works and Its Abolition

Roberts describes the nature of the “covenant which God made with the first Adam and his posterity before the fall” as “Gods gracious agreement with Adam, and with his posterity, in him, to give them eternal life and happiness, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” Among the various names that were given to the antelapsarian covenant, Roberts prefers “a legal covenant, or covenant of works.” Some call it “a covenant of amity, or friendship,” as the parties to this covenant, God and Adam with his posterity, were “in perfect amity” when it was made and “there was no enmity or discord at all betwixt them.” Others, like Ball, even though they emphasize the element of “friendship,” call it “a covenant of nature” because it was “founded upon creation, and the integrity of mans nature,” and it required “only a moral righteousness.”⁹⁴ It was also called “a covenant of life” in the Shorter Catechism “in respect of that happy life which God implicitly promised to Adam therein.” For the promise of life is implied in case of obedience under the expressed threat of death in case of disobedience. Yet Roberts favors “a legal covenant, or covenant of works, in respect of Adams restipulation of exact obedience required of God,” and because the perfect “legal works in all points” were “the condition of this covenant.”⁹⁵ Roberts prefers the term “covenant of works” to the term “legal covenant.” For by “legal covenant” some do not mean “Gods covenant with Adam before the fall” but “the law and covenant as published on Mount Sinai,” which was “a

⁹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 24-25, citing Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 11; and John Cameron's *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses* (Geneva, 1642), Theses 7-9. Cf. Cameron, *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses*, Theses 7-9, in *TA EZZOMENA sive Opera* (Geneva, 1659), 544-545.

⁹⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 25. Cf. The Shorter Catechism (1647), question 12, in Schaff, ed., *Creeds*, 3:678.

publication evangelical of the covenant of faith, not of works.” Roberts also thinks that “covenant of works” is the best term in consideration of the biblical usage.⁹⁶

To show the nature of the covenant of works more specifically Roberts explains the following four elements: its author, parties, form, and matter. First of all, the author of the covenant of works is God. Here the divine initiative is evident. Even in his innocent state Adam could not stand “upon equal terms with God, but infinitely below him, as a creature below his creator.” Adam could merely humbly and thankfully accept the covenant God imposed. Roberts sees God’s authorship of the covenant of works specifically in his establishment of its substance and sacraments. God gave Adam the substance, the “law and rule of this covenant,” both inwardly “in his engraving the substance of the moral-law upon his heart” and outwardly “in that express positive law about the tree of knowledge.” While the former was “the general rule for his direction in obedience,” the latter was “the special touchstone for exploration and detection of his obedience.” God attached “two tokens or sacramental signs” to this covenant. The tree of life was given to assure Adam of the certainty of life promised in case of perfect obedience, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to assure him of the certainty of death in case of disobedience.⁹⁷ In terms of authorship the covenant of works was of divine initiative, thus clearly unilateral.

Roberts refers to the second element by saying that the parties to the covenant of works are God and Adam with his posterity. God, as a creator, covenants with Adam as his creature. The third element, the form of the covenant of works, consists in the

⁹⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 17 and 25.

⁹⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 25.

agreement between God and Adam. Even though it is an agreement between two parties, God proposes it and annexes two sacramental trees for confirming it, and Adam accepts it. Thus it is more appropriately called “Gods gracious agreement with Adam.”⁹⁸ Here again Roberts emphasizes the divine initiative in the covenant of works.

The fourth element is the matter of the covenant of works. Roberts divides it into the matter on God’s part and that on Adam’s part. The matter of the covenant on God’s part is the “blessing promised and curse threatned.” Roberts interprets the positive law of Gen. 2:17, that “in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely dye,” as implying that “till the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely live.”⁹⁹ Roberts clarifies the meaning of life and death related to the covenant of works in the form of questions and answers.¹⁰⁰

Roberts begins by looking at the nature of life that Adam enjoyed in innocence. More specifically, he considers whether Adam was mortal or immortal in innocence. Following Rivetus and David Pareus, Roberts examines various meanings of immortality. If it is absolutely incorruptible—having no possible cause of corruption inwardly and outwardly—it is the immortality that only God owns. If it is inwardly incorruptible by reason of the perfection of its nature, although it may be destroyed from outside as from God, it is the immortality that angels and souls of men have. If it is in its own nature corruptible, yet by the power of the grace of God it is preserved so that it neither is nor can be corrupted, it is the immortality that the spiritualized bodies of the saints in heaven or the

⁹⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 24-26.

⁹⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 26.

¹⁰⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 26-30.

bodies of reprobates in hell have. If it has a power not to die because of some gift of God, although it is corruptible in its own nature, it is the immortality that Adam enjoyed in innocence. In innocence Adam was immortal “not by an inability of dying, but by an ability of not dying.” Adam and his posterity would have enjoyed the ability of not dying if he had not fallen. Before the fall Adam had “a mortality, or remote capacity of dying: yet since the fall both he, and all his, have an actual necessity of dying.”¹⁰¹ Roberts adds that “saints in glory shall have an impossibility of both sinning and of dying.”¹⁰² Roberts summarizes his discussion by saying that “Adam in paradise before his fall, had a *posse non mori*, an ability of not dying: After the fall, a *non posse non mori*, an impossibility of not dying: in heaven he shall have, a *non posse mori*, an impossibility of dying any more.”¹⁰³ This argument resembles very much that of Augustine on the comparison between the abilities of the first man and the man in heaven: “the first immortality was to be able not to die, the last will be much greater, not to be able to die.”¹⁰⁴ To describe Adam’s ability before the fall Roberts also uses Augustine’s expression of “to be able not to sin.”¹⁰⁵

Now Roberts considers the nature of life God promised Adam for remaining obedient. It is clear that not only temporary life but also eternal life was promised to Adam in case of perfect obedience. Therefore not only temporary but also eternal death was threatened to

¹⁰¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 26-27, citing Andreas Rivetus, Gen. 2, *Exercitationes* 19-21; and David Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 2:7. Cf. Rivetus, *Exercitationes theologicae & scholasticae*, Gen. 2, *Exercitationes* 19-21, in *Operum theologicorum*, 3 vols. (Rotterdam, 1651-1660), 1:79-93; and Pareus, *Commentarius in Genesin*, 2:7, in *Operum theologicorum exegeticorum*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1647), pt. 1, pp. 60-65, especially 63.

¹⁰²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 27.

¹⁰³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 30.

¹⁰⁴Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, chap. xii.33, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 5, p. 485.

¹⁰⁵Augustine, *On Rebuke and Grace*, xii.33 (5:485). See Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 41. Yet Roberts does not include any reference.

Adam and his posterity for disobedience. It is not certain whether Adam would have enjoyed this eternal life in the earthly paradise, or after some time would have been moved to the heavenly paradise. Yet it is undeniable that his everlasting life would have been a most sweet and happy life with God. Roberts also considers the nature of death that God threatened Adam with in case of disobedience. Considering God's threat of death in Gen. 2:17, he understands death in contrast to life. He says that in general, death is "the privation of life." While life consists in union with "the principle or fountain of its living," death consists in disunion or separation from it. However, there are many kinds of death, and Roberts classifies them as temporal and eternal death. Temporal death of the soul can be distinguished from that of the body. The temporal death of the soul is separation from God on account of sin. The temporal death of the body occurs not only when the body separates from the soul by natural dissolution, which is the common description of death, but also when it is gradually disposed or prepared for such separation by afflictions, pains, diseases, and so forth. An eternal death of both body and soul takes place when by damnation they are separated from the glorious enjoyment of God and his favor forever. This is called "the second death" or "everlasting punishment."¹⁰⁶

Roberts states that God threatened Adam with all these kinds of death in case of disobedience. First of all, the eternal death of both body and soul is "the most full adequate proportionable wages of sin." This guilt of eternal death comes upon all Adam's posterity by his fall. The temporal death of the soul arises as sin in its own nature alienates and separates a person from God, which is also the spiritual death of the soul until it is reconciled to God. Roberts says that God's threat of the temporal death of

¹⁰⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 27-28.

the body became his sentence of corporal death (Gen. 3:19) upon Adam after his fall. Finally, under the name of death all kinds of evils and afflictions were threatened to Adam.¹⁰⁷

The last question that Roberts considers for clarifying the matter of the antelapsarian covenant on God's part is how his threatening was truly fulfilled even though Adam did not die on the day he ate of the forbidden tree but lived many hundreds of years after (Gen. 5:5). Roberts cannot accept that Adam, although he died almost a thousand years after his fall, died the same day he fell because with the Lord a thousand years are but as one day and vice versa (2 Peter 3:8). In historical books like Genesis the word "death" is always taken literally. He also doesn't agree with some Jewish scholars that God's speech of Gen. 2:17 was not decisive but only threatening—like that pronounced against the Ninevites (Jonah 3:4)—in which case when Adam repented, he did not immediately die. Putting aside the fact that Adam did not repent until God forced him to, he immediately died, as will be explained below. Roberts disapproves of linking the words "in the day" only to Adam's eating but not to his dying then taking the words "thou shalt surely dy" absolutely. For this, like the foregoing two explanations, forces the text too much.¹⁰⁸

Roberts thinks the best interpretation is that Adam died on the same day that he sinned, and the threatening was immediately fulfilled upon his sinning. For, in his soul, Adam was immediately separated from God by sin and thus died spiritually (Gen. 3:7-8 and 10). As soon as Adam sinned, he was "deprived of the image of God, of the favour

¹⁰⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 28.

¹⁰⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 29.

of God, and of communion with God, which was the life of his soul.” Moreover, also in his body Adam died on the same day that he sinned, although Roberts acknowledges that Adam did not actually perish on that day. In his body, first of all, Adam died on the same day in respect to “the guilt of death corporal.” As Adam came under the sentence of death, he was counted a condemned man, thus a dead man.¹⁰⁹ Now Adam was “a condemned malefactor: dead in law, civilly dead; to be executed at the Judges pleasure”—only the execution of corporal death upon Adam was relieved temporally.¹¹⁰ Roberts indicates that Adam died on the same day in respect to “the experimental beginnings, symptomes, signs, and harbingers of death corporal.” In short, Adam began dying the day he sinned. Yet these two explanations are less persuasive than the following. Adam died on the same day he sinned in that he faced “the inevitable necessity of death corporal.” Adam became immediately mortal, although he did not immediately die. He no more had the ability of not dying than he had had before his fall; instead, he had the impossibility of not dying. Thus Roberts prefers to render Gen. 2:17 as “thou shalt be mortal” rather than “thou shalt dy.” On the exact day Adam fell he lost a *posse non mori* and became subject to a *non posse non mori*. Finally, in both his soul and body Adam immediately became subject to “eternal death, the proper wages of sin, and under the arrest of Gods wrath and curse.”¹¹¹ In the margin Roberts cites Ursinus: Adam “did not, indeed, instantly suffer temporal death, yet he straightway became mortal, and by degrees died, whilst he already experienced the beginning of eternal

¹⁰⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 29.

¹¹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 54.

¹¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 29-30.

death.”¹¹² Through his fall Adam died spiritually and became mortal since his soul and body immediately became subject to eternal death. This completes Roberts’ dealing with the matter of the covenant of works on God’s part.

The “duty restipulated,” the matter of the covenant of works on Adam’s part, is “perfect and perpetual personal obedience.” To elucidate man’s duty in the covenant of works Roberts employs two questions and answers. The first question that Roberts tackles is: ‘What are the evidences of the perfect and perpetual personal obedience required of Adam in the covenant of works?’ The requirement of such obedience is evident in various ways. It is seen first of all from the stern manner of God’s threatening in Gen. 2:17. Present death was threatened upon “the least single act of Adams personal disobedience.” Thus Adam was required to obey God both perfectly and constantly. In the second place, the requirement is seen from the nature of the covenant of works, which commands “all exactness of personal obedience both for kind, degree and duration, under a curse.” Explaining that although the written law was not given as a covenant of works, the moral law was given to Adam in his innocence, Roberts cites Gal. 3:10: “Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law to do them.”¹¹³

Third, the requirement is evident from God’s immediate judgment of Adam and his posterity upon his single act of disobedience. Had it not been for the covenant of works,

¹¹²Zacharias Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus, OH, 1852; reproduction, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., [1985]), question 40, ii (p. 221). The Latin quoted in the margin of Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 30: “Adam non quidem e vestigio moriebatur morte corporali; statim tamen fiebat mortalis, paulatim moriebatur; & mox erat mortuus morte æterna” (Ursinus, *Explicationibus catecheticis*, part 2, question 40). Cf. Ursinus, *Corpus doctrinae orthodoxae, sive, Catecheticarvm explicationum* (Heidelberg, 1612), pars 2, quaestio 40, sec. 2 (p. 254). Instead of “mox” there is “jam” in this edition.

¹¹³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 30.

says Roberts, God would not have exacted this punishment. Fourth, the requirement of obedience is clear from God's mysterious repair of the first Adam's breach of the covenant of works. God accepted the last Adam's obedience as exact fulfillment and satisfaction of the covenant of works. The last Adam, Jesus Christ, fulfilled and satisfied the covenant of works both passively and actively. Passively, he submitted himself to death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8), and became a curse to redeem us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13) or of the covenant of works. By doing so he fully satisfied divine justice for our breach of covenant in Adam. Actively, he kept and fulfilled the whole law, or the covenant of works, and so the whole obedience and righteousness of Christ can be imputed to us through faith (Rom. 5:18-19; 10:4). If "the breach of the covenant was made up again by the last Adams perfect and constant personal obedience: sure that breach was made by the first Adams failing in such obedience," and "therefore perfect and constant personal obedience was required of the first Adam therein."¹¹⁴

The second and last question that Roberts considers for clarifying Adam's duty in the covenant of works is: 'What is the law or rule for Adam's obedience?' More generally it was the whole covenant of works, yet more particularly the two kinds of laws entailed in that covenant. The first is the moral law engraved on Adam's heart. Roberts argues that it was surely engraved on Adam's heart before the fall "because even pagans which have not the written law, yet have the work of the law written in their hearts, doing by nature the things contained in the law, after the fall" (Rom. 2:14-15). Here Roberts does not see the condition of unbelievers' hearts as equal to that of Adam's heart before the fall, but he merely acknowledges the existence of the moral law in both of them as not directly related to the covenant of faith. The second is the positive law of not eating of the tree of

¹¹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 30-31.

the knowledge of good and evil under the threat of death. As explained previously, Roberts calls it a positive law because it was not engraved in nature but it depended on the will of the Law-giver.¹¹⁵ Once given, it was the fundamental law for Adam's obedience to God.

Roberts says that the forbidden tree was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil by way of prolepsis. As in the cases mentioned in Gen. 21:14, 31 and Num. 13:23[-24], it is usual in Scripture by way of prolepsis to give names to things. Thus Roberts calls the knowledge "experimental knowledge," for upon eating of the tree "Adam should experimentally know, to his sorrow, from how much good he had lapsed, and how much evil he had contracted upon himself."¹¹⁶

Roberts gives three reasons for God's imposition of the positive law in addition to the natural law engraved on Adam's heart. First, God imposed the positive law to clarify his absolute dominion over Adam. God's supremacy over man is not as evident when God commands or forbids things that in themselves are consonant or dissonant with human reason, for they are founded also on man's reason and conscience. Yet God's absolute supremacy and dominion over man is manifested when God commands or forbids a thing that is in itself neither good nor bad but becomes good or bad from the mere will of God.¹¹⁷ Second, positive law is necessary for the more evident trial and manifestation of man's subjection and obedience to God. Here Roberts cites Augustine:

If a man be charged not to touch a poysonous herb, because it will be hurtful to him that toucheth it; or not to touch another mans money, because it will be evil to the

¹¹⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 31.

¹¹⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 32, citing Rivetus, Gen. 2, Exercitatio 18; and Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 2:9. Cf. Rivetus, *Exercitationes*, Gen. 2, Exercitatio 18, in *Operum*, 1:74; and Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 2:9, in *Operum*, pt. 1, p. 66.

¹¹⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 32-33.

owner; this is no such trial of obedience, because the evil of the thing forbidden restrains, and not only the authority of him that commands or forbids. But when a man forbears, what is forbidden: which had it not been forbidden, he needed not at all to have forborn.¹¹⁸

Although it is expressed differently, the second reason is the other side of the first one.

For the relation between the divine supremacy and man's subjection is the same as that between the palm and the back of the hand. Third, God imposed positive law to show the greater aggravation of Adam's sin in case of disobedience. It was very easy for Adam to observe the prohibition against eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for God had granted him liberty to eat of all other trees in the garden. As the forbidden tree should be forborne simply because God had forbidden it, eating of it was a clear disobedience and rebellion against God. Thus Adam's disobedience in eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is his proper sin (Rom. 5:19).¹¹⁹

Roberts affirms Adam's complete ability to keep the covenant of works before the fall. In his innocence there was no cause of disability in Adam. Sin, the only disabling impediment, did not exist yet because Adam had neither original sin nor actual sin when God entered into the covenant with him. Instead, Adam had all necessary and sufficient causes of ability in him. He was created upright, as he had the perfection of God's image. Thus he had all necessary abilities to perform God's will: "a knowing mind, a pure conscience, an obedient and dutiful will, a loving heart, a tractable and obsequious body, all upright." In addition to these abilities Adam had the moral law inscribed on his heart and the positive law verbally expressed. Hence Adam had a perfect inward and

¹¹⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 33. Roberts quotes from Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, lib. 8, cap. 13, Tom. 3. Cf. Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis*, in *ACW*, no. 42, pp. 52-53.

¹¹⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 33.

outward rule for steering his obedience. Moreover, the denial of Adam's ability is absurd because then God would have required impossible things of Adam. Also, the penalty of death in case of disobedience would have been unjust if God had never given Adam complete ability for obedience. Since Adam was fully able to keep the covenant of works, however, his breach of the covenant was without any excuse. He must justify God and condemn himself under several penalties for breach of the covenant, for God gave him the power to completely keep it.¹²⁰

As Adam had complete ability to keep the covenant of works before the fall, adds Roberts, he did not have or need either a mediator or faith in him.¹²¹ Adam did not need the mediation of Jesus Christ for satisfaction, for intercession, or for imputation, since he was perfectly upright in himself and had no sin. For Roberts, therefore, the tree of life did not typify or set out a mediator, but it was sacramental to assure Adam of the continuance of his life in case of perfect and persistent obedience and eating of it. As Adam did not need a mediator before the fall, he did not have faith in a mediator, either. Thus Roberts clearly distinguishes Adam's faith under the covenant of works from ours under the covenant of faith. In respect of foundation, Adam's faith leaned on his perfect and upright nature given by God, while ours leans on the faithful and free promises of God in Christ. In respect of action, furthermore, Adam's faith acted toward God without any consideration of a mediator, while ours acts toward God by Christ the mediator.¹²²

¹²⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 33-35.

¹²¹Without any clear reference, this stands in contradiction to Calvin's comment in *Institutes*, II.xii.1 (1:464-465).

¹²²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 34-35.

Roberts devotes the latter half of the chapter that deals with the covenant of works to an explanation of Adam's utter breach of the covenant through disobedience. Adam's breach of the covenant of works is evident primarily from the testimonies of the Scripture: the narration of the breach of the covenant in the Old Testament, and an explication of Adam's breach and his posterity's joining in it in the New Testament. It is also evident from the sad experience that Adam's ordinary posterity has had to this day as the result of his breach of the covenant. The manner of God's administration after Adam's disobedience is another evidence of his breach of the covenant. After the fall God utterly set aside the covenant of works and instead advanced the covenant of faith in Christ, the second Adam. It implies that the covenant of works was utterly broken by the first Adam's sin.¹²³

Roberts indicates diverse causes for Adam's breach of the covenant of works. Roberts points to the serpent and the Devil in him as the remote instrumental cause and to Adam's wife as the immediate cause. Yet Roberts denies the existence of an "efficient cause" for Adam's sin and instead brings up the problem of its "deficient cause." For "God neither directly nor indirectly could be any cause of it at all."¹²⁴ There was no efficient cause for sin either in the creator or in the things created. Adam's sin arose merely out of a deficiency in his willing. Even though he was created upright, he was created also mutable, having a will flexible to good or to evil. Being "left to his own power and liberty" to choose, "(for God was not bound to confirm, and uphold him,) he

¹²³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 36. Roberts cites the third chapter of Genesis in the Old Testament and Rom. 5:12 and 19 in the New Testament respectively.

¹²⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 37, citing Eccles. 7:19 and James 1:13. While his rendering of the latter ("he cannot be tempted with evil, so he tempteth no man to evil") is correct, his rendering of the former ("God made man upright") seems not to be quite accurate. Cf. *Holy Bible: 1611 Edition*, Eccles. 7:19 ("Wisedome strengtheneth the wise, more then ten mightie men which are in the citie").

declined unto evil, and became like the beasts that perish.” Ascribing the origin of Adam’s sin to a deficient cause, not to an efficient one, Roberts sets his position firmly in the Reformed as well as Augustinian tradition.¹²⁵

Roberts, however, is much more interested in the consequences of Adam’s fall than in its causes. After explaining the causes of the fall rather briefly, he deals with its miserable consequences at length. Adam’s breach of the covenant of works was extremely grievous and heinous, because he not only had the ability not to sin before the fall, but also was a public person representing all mankind in him. Adam’s sin was inexcusably heinous because he had no sinful inclination in him before the fall but sinned willingly. Although “some other sins, as the unpardonable sin against the Holy-Ghost, may be greater then this sin of Adam, intensively, yet Adams sin is the very greatest and most grievous sin in the world, extensively considered.” In its degree Adam’s sin is not the worst, but its pervasive effect makes it the most heinous sin. For by that single sin Adam “made himself and all his posterity sinners from the beginning to the end of the world.”¹²⁶

According to Roberts, the law against which Adam sinned also made his sin remarkably greater. The positive law in Gen. 2:16-17 was of greatest importance “both as an original covenant, and as an original law.” As an original covenant, the positive law had the nature of a covenant, whose four elements were described previously. It was the covenant of works, the first covenant made in the world, in which God and all mankind in Adam were covenanting parties. Thus to sin against the positive law was “to

¹²⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 37. Parentheses his. Cf. Richard A. Muller, *DLGTT*, s.v. “causa” and “causa deficiens.”

¹²⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 41.

break covenant, and to make himself and all mankind as covenant-breakers guilty of death.”¹²⁷ As the positive law was the outward law or rule for the covenant of works, its transgression becomes the breach of the covenant. To show the positive law as an original law Roberts quotes from Tertullian: “This law being given, all laws were given, which were afterwards published by Moses...for it was an original law which was given to Adam and Eve in paradise, as it were the womb of all Gods precepts.”¹²⁸ The positive law did not include the moral law as a whole, but it was the embryo of the divine law later expressly published by Moses. Thus Roberts says that “to transgress a law of such consequence, which was Gods federal law with mankind; and so comprehensive a law containing as it were all other laws in its fruitful womb, must needs be the deeper transgression.”¹²⁹ The graveness of Adam’s sin was proportional to the weight and importance of the positive law.

Roberts enumerates the manifold evils of sin and punishment that related to Adam’s fall and extremely aggravated his sin. He divides the evils of sin pertaining to the fall into three groups, antecedent, concomitant, and consequent. Among the antecedent evils of sin in the fall Roberts puts idleness, presumptuous curiosity, unbelief toward God, rash and headlong credulity of the serpent and of Satan in him, and so forth. Concomitant evils of sin that accompanied the fall include Eve’s tempting her husband, Adam’s inappropriate following his wife, direct disobedience to God’s explicit command, covenant breaking with God, and so forth. Consequent evils of sin, which followed the

¹²⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 43.

¹²⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 25 and 44, citing Tertullian, *Adversus Judaeos*, cap. 2. Cf. Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, in *ANF*, vol. 3, p. 152.

¹²⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 44.

fall, included an evil conscience, flight from God, hypocrisy, the “universal corruption of the whole nature of man-kind,” and all the actual sins in the world.¹³⁰

For Roberts, thus, the Augustinian concept of original sin is one of the consequent evils of sin in the fall. He explains that the

corruption of nature is commonly called original sin, as being the original spawn and spring-head of all actual sins: and it is propagated by natural generation from our first parents to all their ordinary posterity. ...All the actual sins...have taken their rise from Adams disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit. For, all actual sins flow immediately from original: and original sin from Adams sin. Hence is that school-distinction of original sin, into original sin originated, and original sin originating. That, is the corruption of nature, the immediate original of all actuals; this, is Adams sin, the immediate original of the corruption of nature.¹³¹

All actual sins immediately originate from the corruption of nature, which is “original sin originated,” or “original sin” commonly called. The corruption of nature immediately originated from Adam’s sin, which is “original sin originating.” The corruption of nature is transmitted from the first parents to all their posterity by natural generation. Yet the imputation of Adam’s sin to all mankind rested on “federal consociation,” or Adam’s vicarious representation of the whole humanity as its federal head.¹³²

Roberts enumerates eight kinds of evil of punishment ensuing Adam’s fall. They are the obliteration of God’s image, shame, a self-condemning conscience, the inability to stand in God’s judgment, two punishments peculiar to females (multiplied sorrows and aggravated subjection to their husbands), a curse upon the earth, the dooming of Adam and his posterity to a miserable life and death, and the expulsion of man out of

¹³⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 46-48.

¹³¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 48; cf. Heppe, *RD*, 330.

¹³²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 22, 24 and 48. Cf. Muller, *DLGTT*, s.v. “peccatum originale.”

paradise.¹³³ Roberts does not mention God's punishment upon the serpent here but elsewhere in relation to the covenant with Adam after the fall, that is, the first administration of the covenants of promise.¹³⁴

Roberts describes the miserable state of Adam and his posterity in him under the penalty of the broken covenant of works as "covenantless." In that state Adam had neither the covenant of works nor the covenant of faith in Christ, for the former was broken and the latter was not yet revealed. There was neither remedy nor hope. To this state Roberts adds three more states after the breach of the covenant of works. They are "carnal," "gracious," and "glorious." Adam's posterity is by nature in a "carnal fleshly sinful state" from the promise of Christ until their actual receiving of Christ by faith. During this state they are under the curse and penalty of the covenant of works, that is, death, even though Jesus Christ, the remedy against sin and death, was already revealed to them. Those who are transplanted out of the first Adam into Jesus Christ the second Adam by effectual calling are in a gracious state. During this state, although they are not totally freed from death, yet they are delivered from its curse through Christ. And both the spirits and bodies of all the elect will be in a glorious state after the judgment day.¹³⁵

As Adam utterly broke the covenant of works by disobedience, this covenant breach is absolutely irreparable by the first Adam or by any of his ordinary posterity. It is evident from the nature of the covenant of works. God would give Adam life upon perfect and perpetual personal obedience and would inflict death upon the least failing in

¹³³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 49-51.

¹³⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 197-199.

¹³⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 54-56.

any one particular. As Adam failed in keeping the positive law, the covenant of works was violated and could never be repaired by him. It is evident also from the requisites for repairing of the broken covenant of works. For the past, there should be full satisfaction of divine justice for the breach of covenant by undergoing the threatened death. Yet no mere finite creature is able to undergo death corporal, spiritual, and eternal, so as fully to satisfy God's infinite justice. For the present, there should be a full personal conformity to the covenant. Even when Adam had the ability to keep the covenant, he did not do so. After the breach it was much harder for Adam and his ordinary posterity to conform to the covenant. For the future, there should be a complete fulfilling of the covenant of works. Yet it is impossible for any of the ordinary posterity of lapsed Adam to perform perfectly, because they are all under sin.¹³⁶

In spite of its extremely miserable consequences, Roberts understands Adam's breach of the covenant of works in terms of the divine decree. For he says that the "breach of the covenant of works by the disobedience of the first Adam, did wonderfully make way for the establishment of the covenant of faith by the obedience of the second Adam." To explain the divine decree, Roberts touches upon the doctrine of predestination: "God before the foundation of the world, purposing to glorify himself more peculiarly, by mankind, elected some out of mankind unto the adoption of children in Jesus Christ, according to the good-pleasure of his will." Yet Roberts does not follow Calvin thoroughly as he affirms the concept of the divine *permissio*: God "leaves man to himself and permits him to fall from his integrity, by breaking this covenant, into a miserable state of sin and death. And all this in order to the accomplishment and execution of his eternal decree." Calvin typically rejects the concept of permission for explaining the

¹³⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 57.

origin of sin.¹³⁷ Considering the Reformed tradition regarding the divine permission, however, the exception is not Roberts' view but Calvin's.¹³⁸ God permitted Adam's breach of the covenant of works "grounded on mutable nature" to wonderfully make way for the erecting of the covenant of faith "founded upon immutable grace." Also in relation to mediatorship, Adam's fall proved to be in the divine decree: "Till the fall, Adam needed neither covenant of faith nor pardoning mercy, no mediator: But after his fall he so needs them all, that without them he dyes eternally."¹³⁹ Thus Roberts summarizes:

If the first covenant had not been marred; the second and more excellent covenant had not been made. If the first earthly Adam had not been ruined; the second heavenly Adam Christ had not been promised. If one sin in Adam had not been so grievous: Gods superabounding grace in Christ had not appeared so glorious.¹⁴⁰

Understanding Adam's breach of the covenant of works within the divine permission, Roberts sets his position firmly in the Reformed tradition.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 59-60. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xviii.1, II.iv.3, and III.xxiii.8 (1:228-231, 311-312; 2:956-957).

¹³⁸Ursinus, *Commentary on Heidelberg Catechism*, ques. 7, 'Of the Fall, and First Sin of Man,' iv (pp. 35-36); Westminster Confession of Faith, VI.i (*Creeds*, 3:615); and Heppe, *RD*, 274-276.

¹³⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 59-60.

¹⁴⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 59.

¹⁴¹Cf. Heppe, *RD*, 307-311.

CHAPTER IV

THE COVENANTS OF PROMISE IN SIX ADMINISTRATIONS

A. The Nature of the Covenant of Faith

As indicated in his initial definitions, Roberts has a strong preference for the term “the covenant of faith” rather than “the covenant of grace.” He believes that the first term more closely reflects the apostle Paul’s contrast of “the law of faith” and “the law of works” in Romans 3:27. Roberts gives more reasons for his preference. While the condition, or man’s stipulation in the antelapsarian covenant is works, that of the postlapsarian covenant is faith, not grace. Since both covenants are based on divine grace, the expression “the covenant of grace” is “rather co-incident” with “covenant of works.”¹ Even though both covenants are the result of God’s grace, Roberts acknowledges that the postlapsarian covenant is “double gratuitous.”² Therefore the designations that he gives to the two covenants are based on their respective stipulations on man’s part, not on their common foundation, divine grace.³ Thus Roberts defines the covenant of faith as:

Gods gracious compact or agreement with Jesus Christ the last Adam, and in him with all his seed, after the fall, touching their recovery out of the state of sin and death, into a state of righteousness and eternal life, by Christ, that in him the Lord

¹Francis Roberts, *The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God’s Covenants with Man* (London: R. W. for George Calvert, 1657), 61. Cf. my discussion of why Roberts distinguishes God’s covenant into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith in the present work, pp. 39-49.

²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 106.

³Cf. Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 14, where he says that all God’s covenants with his people are “most variously administred to them in their greatest varieties of conditions, both before and after the fall.”

may be their God, and they his people: they accepting Christ and these covenanted mercies by true Faith and walking worthy of them according to the gospel.⁴

To show more specifically the difference between the covenant of faith and the covenant of works, Roberts explains the following elements: author, parties, matter, and form. The author or “the efficient cause” of the covenant of faith is God. The Scripture ascribes this covenant to God alone. And only God could devise and execute this covenant by way of remedy against the breach of the covenant of works. For, although God had revealed this covenant in many degrees under the Old Testament, even angels did not fully understand it until the time of the New Testament.⁵

Even though God was the author of both the covenant of works and the covenant of faith, the authorship of the latter had a far different meaning from that of the former. In the covenant of works God, as creator, dealt immediately with upright man without a mediator; in the covenant of faith God, as redeemer, deals mediately with lapsed man by a mediator, Jesus Christ. Roberts sees that God and man were in perfect friendship with each other when the covenant of works was made, yet they were at enmity against each other because of the fall, and reconciliation was needed when the covenant of faith was made. Thus Roberts thinks it proper to call the covenant of works “*foedus amicitiae*, a covenant of amity, or friendship,” and the covenant of faith “*foedus reconciliationis*, a covenant of reconcilment.”⁶ Although Roberts does not cite Cocceius, this language of covenantal *amicitia* certainly reflects Cocceius’ usage.⁷

⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 69.

⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 69-70.

⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 70.

⁷See Johannes Cocceius, *Summa theologiae*, XXII.17, in *Opera omnia theologica, exegetica, didactica, polemica, philologica*, 3d ed., 10 vols. (Amsterdam, 1701), 7:206. Cf. W. J. van Asselt, *Amicitia*

As in the covenant of works, divine grace was the only “impulsive” cause that inclined God to devise this covenant of faith.⁸ Yet Roberts sees a difference of degree between the covenant of faith and the covenant of works regarding their impulsive cause. While God’s grace of “benevolence” toward his innocent creatures moved him to make the covenant of works, his grace of “mercy” toward his sinful creatures, who deserved nothing good from their creator, moved him to make the covenant of faith. Thus, says Roberts, “though in some sense the covenant of works was of grace: yet the covenant of faith is of grace much more peculiarly and eminently. Hence by way of singular eminency it is called the covenant of grace.”⁹ One might call these distinctions merely semantic—how does it alter the argument to distinguish between a grace of benevolence before the fall and a grace of mercy after it, instead of restricting grace to the postlapsarian dispensation? Roberts’ point appears to be that no covenant is either necessary or deserved and that grace is always characteristic of God’s relationship with creatures—although it is administered very differently before and after the fall.

When the parties to the covenant of faith are considered, its difference from the covenant of works becomes clearer. The two parties covenanting in the covenant of faith are God on the one hand and Christ the last Adam and all his seed in him on the other hand. For Roberts it seems very clear that God, not as “a bountiful creator” but as “a most merciful restorer of his lapsed and miserable creature,” is one party to the covenant of faith. Since he thinks that proper attention has not been paid to how Christ the last

Dei: een onderzoek naar de structuur van de theologie van Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669) (Ede: Grafische Vormgeving ADC, [1988]), 111.

⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 70. Cf. p. 174.

⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 175-176.

Adam and his seed are a joint party to this covenant of faith, however, he presents four parallels between the first Adam and the last Adam. Firstly, as the first man of the earth is called the first Adam, the second man, Jesus Christ, the Lord from heaven, is called the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45, 47). Here Christ is called the second man not as the second man brought into the world but as “the second publick man, the root and representative of his posterity.” As the first Adam was “a figure or type of Christ” (Rom. 5:14), Jesus Christ is called the second Adam.¹⁰

Secondly, as the first Adam had his natural seed and posterity, all mankind, the last Adam, Jesus Christ, has his supernatural seed and spiritual posterity, all the elect.¹¹

Roberts argues that the elect alone are Christ’s spiritual seed for the following reasons:

1. By decree, being elected in Christ. 2. By generation, being begotten again by Christ the everlasting Father, viz. meritoriously, by his death, and resurrection: efficaciously, by his word and Spirit. So that they become his children, and are counted to him for a generation. 3. By conformity to Christ, as children to a father. They bear his image, and go like him: especially, in grace; in godly life; in suffering; and in glory. 4. By filial affection and service to him: as children love and serve their parents. And all Christs posterity shall be most chearful voluntiers herein. 5. By participation with Christ in his spirituals and eternals. Mens posterity share with them in their states and inheritances: and Christs seed partake with him in his spiritual priviledges and eternal enjoyments.¹²

Thirdly, as God made the covenant of works with the first Adam and with all his natural seed in him, God made the covenant of faith with Christ the last Adam and with all his supernatural seed in him. On the one hand, those who are without Christ are mere strangers to the covenant of faith and all its promises (Eph. 2:12). Quoting Zanchi, Roberts explains their being without Christ as the foundation of all their ensuing misery

¹⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 71-72.

¹¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 72.

¹²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 73.

since Christ is “the gate and door to the possession of all good things, of the present and future life.” They are also strangers to the covenants of promise because Christ is the foundation of the covenant and promises.¹³ Roberts thinks that the covenant of faith and its promises are peculiar indications of God’s fatherly love and favor to the elect. He quotes Calvin: “God is not a propitious father to us, but onely in Christ: and his promises are testimonies of his paternal benevolence towards us: consequently they are fulfilled through him alone.”¹⁴ On the other hand, those who are Christ’s have the covenant of faith and all its promises as theirs (Gal. 3:29). Yet they can have those benefits as theirs “only in Christ.” In terms of order, God’s covenant of faith and its promises are first made to Christ then to his seed in him. Here Roberts understands “the word, Christ, not distributively, as intending only Christs Person; but collectively, as comprehending Christs mystical body, head and members: eminently and primarily, Christ the head; secondarily, his church the body.”¹⁵

Roberts finds the last parallel between the first Adam’s “covenant-breaking disobedience” that “involved all his seed with himself in sin and death” and the last Adam’s “covenant-keeping obedience” that “restored all his seed with himself to righteousness and life.” Here, however, a great dissimilitude exists between the efficacy of Christ’s obedience and that of Adam’s disobedience, for the former incomparably transcends and surpasses the latter.¹⁶

¹³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 73-74, citing Jerome Zanchi, *Commentarius*, Eph. 2:12. Cf. Zanchi, *Commentarius in Epistolam Sancti Pauli ad Ephesios*, 2 pts. (Amsterdam, 1888), pt. 1, p. 189 [Eph. 2:12].

¹⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 74, citing John Calvin, *Commentarius*, 2 Cor. 1:20. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], 2 Cor. 1:20 (2:137).

¹⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 75-76.

¹⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 79.

The matter of the covenant of faith embraces the recovery of Christ's seed from sin and death into righteousness and eternal life by Christ, God's lordship over them in Christ, their acceptance of Christ and the covenanted mercies by true faith, and their walking worthy of Christ and those mercies according to the gospel. Here Roberts classifies these matters into two kinds: matters covenanted between God and Jesus Christ, the last Adam, and matters covenanted between God and the seed of Christ in him.¹⁷

According to Roberts,

Matters covenanted and agreed upon in that blessed and heavenly transaction betwixt God the Father, and Iesus Christ the last Adam, touching the recovery of his seed; are in order of nature antecedaneous to the other betwixt God and his seed, as the foundation thereof; and therefore are first to be cleared. And they are either, 1. Matters covenanted and promised to Christ, on the part of God the Father. 2. Matters restipulated to God the Father, on the part of Iesus Christ. Formerly hath been shewed, that God covenanteth with Christ, and in him onely with his seed, as a joynt-party; now is to be declared, what God covenanteth with Christ, as well as with his seed; and Christ with God. Writers are generally silent about this mysterious transaction: but Scriptures are very pregnant and evident.¹⁸

Thus Roberts affirms the pretemporal covenant made between God the Father and Jesus Christ in heaven. Regarding the pretemporal covenant, however, Roberts does not mention the Holy Spirit. This is a difficulty in the doctrine identified later by John Gill.¹⁹

The pretemporal covenant, often called the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), is a characteristic of seventeenth-century Reformed covenant theology.²⁰ Puritan thinkers understood the source of the covenant of grace to be in the covenant of redemption. Von Rohr points out that antinomians tended to identify the covenant of grace with the

¹⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 79-80.

¹⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 80.

¹⁹Cf. Richard A. Muller, "The Spirit and the Covenant: John Gill's Critique of the *Pactum Salutis*," *Foundations* 24 (1981): 4-14.

²⁰Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *RD*, 375-382.

covenant of redemption in order to “keep the covenant as far away as possible from human contracting.” For the majority of Puritans, however, the covenant of redemption is “not itself the covenant of grace, but it is the source of the covenant of grace.”²¹

The origin of Roberts’ views of the pretemporal covenant is of interest if only because the concept is so strongly and closely associated with the work of Cocceius, published a decade before Roberts’ treatise. This is also a point on which Roberts differs significantly with his major English predecessor, Ball, who did not discuss the concept. Unfortunately, Roberts cites no Reformed predecessor or contemporary at this point. There is a lengthy discussion of the pretemporal covenant between the Father and the Son in Rutherford’s *The Covenant of Life Opened* (1655) but Roberts does not reflect Rutherford’s terminology.²² Nor, indeed, does Roberts draw his views from Crisp’s treatment of the subject in *Christ Alone Exalted* (1643). Roberts’ views on the pretemporal covenant rather counter Crisp’s antinomian tendencies by clearly distinguishing the pretemporal covenant between the Father and the Son from the temporal covenant of faith in which the elect are also a party.²³ The other possible sources for the doctrine are, most probably, continental. Roberts definitely knew the works of Arminius, in whose doctoral oration, an early form of the doctrine can be found, and he also knew Ames’ treatise against Grevinchovius, in which Arminius’ doctrine is mentioned—and Arminius did use the language of “stipulation” that is found in Roberts’

²¹John von Rohr, *The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1986), 43-45. Cf. Richard A. Muller, *DLGTT*, s.v. “pactum salutis.”

²²Cf. Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened: or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: Andro Anderson for Robert Broun, 1655), 282-339.

²³Cf. Tobias Crisp, *Christ Alone Exalted in the Perfection and Encouragement of the Saints, notwithstanding Sins and Trials*, 5th ed., corrected ([London: L. I. Higham, 1816]; reprint in 4 vols., Choteau, MT: Old Paths Gospel Press, n.d.), Sermon VI (1:79-99).

definitions.²⁴ A more probable source for some of this language and definition, however, is Cameron's *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses* (1642), where (as will be noted shortly) the concept of a "stipulation" and "restipulation" of covenant obedience carries through the entire work, much as in Roberts' work.²⁵

Roberts explains the matters of the pretemporal covenant in terms of Christ's mediatory office. He partitions this heavenly transaction into matters promised to Christ on the part of God the Father and matters "restipulated," or pledged in return, to God the Father on the part of Jesus Christ. He begins by explaining the matters God the Father covenanted and promised to Jesus Christ, the last Adam, for the recovery of his seed in terms of a mediatory office. God promised Christ to invest him with a mediatory office that is threefold: a priest, a prophet, and a king. Roberts says, "Christ meritoriously purchaseth" or, in the *pactum salutis*, more properly defined, pledges to purchase, "recovery for his seed, as a priest: clearly revealeth this recovery purchased, as a prophet: and effectually applyeth to his seed, this recovery purchased and revealed, as a king."²⁶ He explains also the matters Jesus Christ, the last Adam, promised on his part to God the Father in terms of the mediatory office. Christ willingly and faithfully agreed to accept and undertake the mediatory office imposed on him by the Father in order to recover his

²⁴Cf. Jacobus Arminius, Oration IV, *The Priesthood of Christ*, in *The Works of James Arminius*, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1986), 1:416-419; and William Ames, *Rescriptione ad Grevinchovium*, cap. 1; quoted in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending A Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (London: R. Baynes, 1822), II.ii.16 (1:176).

²⁵Cf. John Cameron's *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses*, in *TA ΣΩΖΟΜΕΝΑ sive Opera* (Geneva, 1659), 544-551.

²⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 80-82, citing Ps. 110:4 (priest); Isa. 42:6-7 (prophet); and Ps. 2:6-9, Rev. 2:26-27; 19:15 (king). See also p. 134.

seed, the elect.²⁷ By understanding the heavenly transaction between God the Father and Jesus Christ, the last Adam, in terms of the threefold office of Christ, Roberts not only establishes the foothold of his covenant theology on the tradition of Calvin but also applies the doctrine of *munus triplex* to the pretemporal covenant.²⁸ By implication, therefore, the pretemporal covenant, as framed by the work of the mediator, is the foundation only of the covenant of faith and not of the covenant of works—yet another point of distinction between these two nominally gracious covenants.

Roberts separates the matters agreed upon and covenanted between God and Christ's seed in him into the promise on God's part and the "restipulation," or obedient response, on the part of Christ's seed. God's promise to Christ's seed includes their recovery from sin and death to righteousness and life and the divine lordship in them. The recovery comprises many spiritual blessings. It is obtained by redemption that consists of Christ's mediation, satisfaction, and reconciliation.²⁹ As the application of this recovery Roberts presents the *ordo salutis*: conviction, conversion, adoption, justification, sanctification, and glorification.³⁰ Some distinction is necessary here between the pretemporal covenant and the covenant of faith. In the former, only God the Father and God the Son, strictly

²⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 85-86.

²⁸Cf. Calvin's discussion of the threefold office of Christ in his *Institutes*, II.xv (1:494-503), with Heppe, *RD*, 452-487; The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), VIII.i, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds*, 3:619; Robert S. Franks, *A History of the Doctrine of the Work of Christ: In Its Ecclesiastical Development*, 2 vols. (London; New York; Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, [1918]), 1:429-432; Muller, *DLGTT*, s.v. "munus triplex." Unlike in Roberts, the mediatory office of Christ was scarcely discussed by his immediate precursor, John Ball. Cf. Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, published by Simeon Ash (London: G. Miller for Edward Brewster, 1645), 127 (doctor, priest and king); 271-272 (doctor or teacher); 279-280 (priest); and 306-307 (king).

²⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 87-88.

³⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 107. In pp. 88-89, instead of sanctification Roberts puts the donation of various spiritual privileges including perseverance.

speaking, are parties contracting for the redemption of the elect; in the latter, the elect are a party to the covenant, as indicated by their responsibilities. As the covenant of faith was contracted between God and Christ with his seed, the elect, these grand benefits are intended only for the elect. For they alone were eternally elected in Christ to receive these benefits before the foundation of the world, and they alone are the persons for whom Christ shed his blood in order to purchase these mercies. The other element of God's promise is divine lordship: he will be a God to Christ's seed. This is "the highest, fullest, surest, and sweetest," says Roberts, "of all federal clauses and promises in Gods book."³¹

The obedient response on the part of Christ's seed, the elect, consists in accepting Christ and the covenanted mercies in him by unfeigned faith, walking worthy of Christ and of all those mercies according to the gospel, and becoming God's people in Christ. According to Roberts, walking worthy of Christ and of the covenanted mercies in him can be reduced to two things: true repentance and new obedience. The covenantal pledge to become God's people in Christ embraces all their beings, all their possessions, and all their abilities. It also includes willingness to suffer for God and his truth.³²

Roberts denies that these conditions required of Christ's seed in the covenant of faith are opposed to the free grace upon which this covenant is founded, thus making it like the covenant of works, which requires perfect personal obedience. He admits that in the covenant of faith, like in the covenant of works, God requires conditions to be met by those who are covenanted with him. Yet he quickly adds that "it is not formally and

³¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 89-90.

³²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 91-95.

properly a covenant, but rather a bare promise, where there is not a mutual agreement and stipulation betwixt parties covenanting for performance of certain terms or conditions to each other reciprocally.”³³

Moreover, Roberts emphasizes that the conditions required of Christ’s seed in the covenant of faith are quite different from those required of the first Adam and his seed in the covenant of works.³⁴ Roberts sees that faith required in the covenant of works agrees with faith demanded in the covenant of faith, in that both of them originate from God, tend to persuade man of God’s love, and arouse in man love to God. Like Cameron, however, Roberts sees some differences between those two.³⁵

1. In the manner of Gods requiring it. Faith in the covenant of works is required, not expressly, but only implicitly and by consequence; because in innocency man had not the least cause to doubt or suspect Gods love to him. But faith in the covenant of faith is required expressly and directly; because after the fall the conscience of the sinner terrified with the guilt of sin, death, and divine wrath, cannot possibly be raised up to true hope and comfort, but by Gods free promises embraced by faith. 2. In the foundation thereof. Faith restipulated in the covenant of works, as it was bestowed of God (*per modum naturae*, as the schools speak,) in a natural way: so it is grounded and leaneth upon the title of perfect nature. But the faith of this covenant of faith, as it is from God, (*per modum gratiae supernaturalis*,) by way of supernatural grace, so it is bottomed and leans upon Christs supernatural righteousness and Gods promise in him. 3. In the fruit and effect thereof. The faith of that covenant, having but a changeable principle of nature, produced in Adam only a changeable righteousness, which was finally and totally lost: but the faith of the covenant of faith, arising from an eternal and unchangeable principle, the spirit of grace; breedeth a righteousness like it self, eternal and unchangeable, which can never be lost finally and totally.³⁶

³³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 95-96.

³⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 96.

³⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 177, citing John Cameron’s *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses* (Geneva, 1642), Theses 12-14 (p. 545). Cf. Cameron, *Opera*, 545.

³⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 177. Parentheses his.

The parallel of this argument is seen not only in Cameron but also in Ball.³⁷ At least in this argument, both Ball and Roberts exactly follow Cameron.

Roberts also finds some differences between obedience required in the antelapsarian covenant and that commanded in the postlapsarian covenant. While obedience required in the covenant of works was to be performed to God only as man's creator, obedience in the covenant of faith is directed to God not only as man's creator but also as his redeemer in Jesus Christ. Obedience according to the antelapsarian covenant was to be perfect, perpetual, and personal, "admitting no mediatur," but obedience according to the postlapsarian covenant is "to be accurately perfect and perpetual in Christs person as the sinners mediatur and surety: and sincerely perfect, upright and constant in the believers person in and through Christ." The perfect, perpetual and personal obedience according to the antelapsarian covenant was the condition for Adam's justification, but according to the postlapsarian covenant "Christs perfect and perpetual obedience active and passive in his own person, imputed by faith, is the only matter of sinners righteousness, whereby he is freely and fully justified before God." Thus the justified person's obedience in the covenant of faith is not in any sense the cause or ground of his justification before God. Rather, the works of the justified person are the fruit and effect of justification—the way a person expresses thanksgiving to God. Finally, according to the covenant of works the least failing in obedience was punished by death without any hope, yet according to the covenant of faith "the justified persons upright obedience is in Christ accepted, and all

³⁷Cf. Cameron, *De triplici foedere*, Thesis 14, in *Opera*, 545, with Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 12-13.

the imperfections, infirmities and failings thereof covered, of meer grace and mercy in Christ, through faith and repentance.”³⁸

In the covenant of faith, therefore, faith is neither the efficient nor material but “the instrumental cause of justification covenanted; repentance is the qualification of the person capable of life and salvation; and new-obedience is the way to, not the cause of glorification.”³⁹ All the matters covenanted stem from grace, whether promised on God’s part or pledged on the elect’s part. Divine grace is the efficient cause of justification; Christ is its material cause; and faith is merely the tool, or the instrumental cause, which is secondary or subordinate to those primary causes.⁴⁰

Roberts divides the form of the covenant of faith into two: inward and essential, and outward and accidental. The inward and essential form of this covenant is “mutuall stipulation” between the parties covenanting, that is both between God and Christ, and between God and Christ’s spiritual seed in him. This reciprocal stipulation is an essential form because a covenant cannot exist without it.⁴¹

The outward and accidental form of this covenant consists in its gradual discoveries, various administrations, testamentary disposition, and so forth. While the covenant of works was revealed all at once to Adam on the day he was created, the covenant of faith was not revealed all at once but at various times and by steps and degrees. Roberts explains that it was unfolded gradually because of both the surpassing greatness of its

³⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 177-178.

³⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 97. Cf. Roberts’ quotation of Ball in *God’s Covenants*, 117, with Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 18-19.

⁴⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 107-108.

⁴¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 97. Cf. p. 174.

mystery, “too high and transcendent to be revealed all at once unto the world,” and “the incapacity and weakness of the church in her primordial state.” Even though the administrations of this covenant were various, and in its ministration there were differences before and after Christ, its substance was always the same. The disposition of this covenant is testamentary as well as federal. Thus the ratification of this testament was done “instrumentally, by the sacraments, baptism and the Lords Supper: fundamentally, by the death of Iesus Christ the Testator.” According to Roberts, the “tender” of the covenant of faith is very broad, for it is offered not only to the elect, but also to the whole visible church and the pagans. For “the elect seed of Christ may be effectually called and gathered, from among the corrupt mass of mankind,” and “reprobates who neglect so great salvation tendered, may be left without excuse: and their condemnation more justly aggravated.”⁴²

B. Six Administrations of the Covenants of Promise

Roberts follows Ball in understanding the entire Old Testament administration of the covenant of faith (or, in Ball’s case, covenant of grace) as consisting in the covenants of promise.⁴³ Both Ball and Roberts stand in some continuity with Calvin’s definition of a covenant that is one in “substance” under several “administrations” and with the Reformers’ concern to identify clearly the similarities and distinctions of the Old and

⁴²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 97-101.

⁴³Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 27.

New Testaments.⁴⁴ Here Roberts draws heavily on Ball but also elaborates and refines the model.

1. God's Covenant of Promise at Adam's Fall

The Puritans saw the beginning of the postlapsarian covenant in the garden of Eden, and its first statement in Gen. 3:15.⁴⁵ Citing that verse, Perkins says that the covenant of grace was “first of al revealed and delivered to our first parents in the garden of Eden, immediatly after their fal by God himselfe.”⁴⁶ Ball further says that it was given immediately after the fall and promised the coming of Christ in the flesh, although his promised incarnation was not as clear as in the new covenant.⁴⁷

Roberts is confident that Christ was promised to Adam immediately after his fall. Moses, says Roberts, “wrote first of Christ, and of Gods gracious promise and covenant in him towards sinners after Adams fall.” Roberts finds Moses’ “first record of Gods promise and covenant in Christ for recovery of sinners after the fall of Adam” in Gen. 3:14-15, especially verse 15: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thine head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” Roberts calls these words “the first and most ancient gospel recorded in the Bible, almost as old as the very foundation of the world: whence the gospel is stiled the everlasting

⁴⁴Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.x.2; xi.1 (1:429-430, 449-451), with Philip Melancthon, *Loci communes* 1543, trans. J. A. O. Preus (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1992), locus 10 (pp. 117-125), and with Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 28 and 31-32.

⁴⁵Ernest F. Kevan, *The Grace of Law* (London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1965; reprint, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993), 119.

⁴⁶William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles*, in *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: John Legatt, 1616-1618), 1:164.

⁴⁷Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 36.

gospel.” He adds that Moses was the first to write about the gospel and rightfully can be called the first evangelist. Indeed, Christ and his apostles frequently referred to Moses’ writings to confirm their evangelical doctrine. In Gen. 3:15, says Roberts, “God began to lay the first foundation-stone of the covenants of promise, and to open his rich cabinet of grace and mercy towards sinners.”⁴⁸ Thus he sees this primitive promise as the mother of all gospel promises—“yea, the great grand-mother promise of all the promises of God in the whole Scripture.”⁴⁹

Roberts understands the serpent in Gen. 3:14-15 as both the corporeal and incorporeal serpent, that is, “the serpent which was one beast of the field, and the old serpent the Devil and Satan.” Yet he quickly adds that “the letter of the text intends both; but the serpent immediatly and less principally, the Devil mediatly and more principally.” In interpreting the serpent both materially and spiritually Roberts, like many modern writers, follows Chrysostom. Seeing the apostle Paul’s words in Rom. 16:20, “God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly,” as alluding plainly to the passage in Gen. 3:15, Roberts says, “as the corporal serpent is bruised under foot corporally; so the incorporeal serpent spiritually. He implies that: expresseth this.”⁵⁰

Roberts opposes the popish writers who construe the woman in Gen. 3:15 as the Virgin Mary and so render the key phrase as “shee shall bruise thine head.” For they

⁴⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 192. On the antiquity of the gospel Roberts comments further on p. 203.

⁴⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 235.

⁵⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 194, citing John Chrysostom, Gen. 3, Homilia 17; Joannes Mercerus, *Praelectiones*, Gen. 3; Andreas Rivetus, Gen. 3, Exercitatio 35; David Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 3:14, &c.; and Calvin, *Commentarius*, Gen. 3:14-15. Cf. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1-17*, Homily 17, in *FC*, vol. 74, pp. 233-238; Rivetus, *Exercitationes theologicae & scholasticae*, Gen. 3, Exercitatio 35, in *Opus theologicorum*, 3 vols. (Rotterdam, 1651-1660), 1:138-142; Pareus, *Commentarius in Genesin*, 3:14, in *Opus theologicorum exegeticorum*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1647), pt. 1, p. 101; and Calvin, *Commentaries [CTS]*, Gen. 3:14-15 (1:165-171).

improperly ascribe “the bruising of the serpents head to the woman, to the Virgin Mary: not to Christ, the principal seed of the woman.” This interpretation “in their vulgar Edition,” remarks Roberts, was “made authentique by their wicked Trent-Council: and in their Mary’s Psalter.” He continues with vehement indignation: “For the better countenancing of this corrupt translation, they have by the perfidiousness of Guy Fabricius corrupted the Hebrew text in the Interlinear Bible printed at Antwerp, putting in **היא** shee: for **היא** it, that is, the seed of the woman.”⁵¹ Accusations against papist forgery of the verse in the Hebrew texts are found also in Ball and in the London Annotations.⁵²

Following Rivetus, Roberts applies the word “woman” “immediatly, and specially to Eve, as then the only woman in the world when this was spoken...but mediately to other women, even the whole sex in some sort.” To further explain the latter, that is the indirect meaning of the word “woman,” Roberts considers it in two respects. Firstly, in respect to the promised seed the word means “such women of whom Christ lineally descended according to the flesh, among whom the Virgin Mary was the most eminent, being the immediate mother of Christ.” In respect of “the enmity with the serpent,” however, it means “not only Eve but her whole sex,” that is, “every woman being presently filled with horreur at the very sight of a serpent.” Going a bit further, Roberts asserts that “not only the woman, but the man also is at enmity with serpents: for it is added, and betwixt thy seed, and her seed.” Then Roberts gives three reasons why the woman is chiefly expressed in the passage.

⁵¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 194, citing Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 3:15. Cf. Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 3:15, in *Operum*, pt. 1, p. 102.

⁵²Cf. Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 38-39, with *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testament...wherein the text is explained, doubts resolved, scriptures parallel’d, and various readings observed; by the labour of certain learned divines [W. Gouge, T. Gataker, J. Downname, J. Ley et al.] thereunto appointed, and therein employed, as is expressed in the preface* (London: Evan Tyler, 1657), Gen. 3:15.

Firstly, as the woman made the first trespass, she most needed this caution against Satan. Secondly, since she had the greatest cause of humiliation, she most needed to be raised up with consolation. Lastly, Satan would be more confounded and shamed, if the woman, the weaker vessel, was the one who would subdue him.⁵³

To clarify the meaning of the two seeds in Gen. 3:15, Roberts first considers the general meaning of the word “seed”: “The word [seed] properly denotes that, of which some like thing is generated. Thus granes of corn, kernels of fruit, etc. are called seed properly.” Yet he gives attention to another meaning of the word: “By a metonymy of the effect, [seed] sometimes signifies that which is generated of seed. So children are called seed: the seed of Abraham, etc.” For interpreting Gen. 3:15 Roberts takes the word in the latter sense. He separates the latter sense into natural and spiritual and divides the natural sense into either “distributively for one alone” or “collectively for many together,” which “is more frequently used.” The meaning of spiritual, or metaphorical seed is derived from “some analogy or resemblance to natural seed or posterity.” As “natural children resemble, imitate and obey their parents,” those who “resemble, imitate and obey God are counted his children, his seed,” and those who “resemble, imitate and obey Satan are called his children, his seed.”⁵⁴

Thus, by the “seed of the serpent” Roberts understands not only the “natural seed or brood of the corporeal serpent” but also the “spiritual or metaphorical seed of the incorporeal serpent, Satan. viz. all reprobates and wicked persons, which he doth as it were beget by his diabolical instilling of evil in to them, whereby he makes them like himself in corruption and destruction.” Yet he remarks that the seed in Gen. 3:15 is

⁵³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 195, citing Rivetus, Gen. 3, Exercitatio 37. Cf. Rivetus, *Exercitationes*, Gen. 3, Exercitatio 37, in *Operum*, 1:146.

⁵⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 195. Brackets his.

principally intended in the spiritual sense, for “Satan, the father of this seed” is “the principal agent in man’s ruine.” Roberts also considers the meaning of the “seed of the woman,” which he thinks is the most difficult question to deal with. He recognizes that this is not simply a matter of controversy between the orthodox and the heterodox but also among the orthodox writers themselves. The question is whether the word “seed” here is to be taken “universally of all the womans posterity whatsoever,” “individually onely of Christ, the principal seed, the seed of the virgin,” or “collectively of Christ and all his spiritual seed according to the election.”⁵⁵

For Roberts, the seed of the woman “cannot be taken universally of all...the posterity of the woman without exception.” He says that “Christ’s flock is but a little flock,” and “most of the natural seed of the woman do in all ages degenerate into the seed of the serpent.” Those who “degenerate into the serpents seed” cannot be here “intended by the womans seed” who “shall bruise the serpents head,” but “these two seeds are set at extream enmity against one another.” Roberts does not think that the seed here can “be taken only individually and singularly of Christ alone, the seed of the virgin, exclusively, so as to exclude all besides himself” either. Referring to Franciscus Gomarus and Joannes Mercerus who hold this view, Roberts says, “Pareus gives some reasons for this opinion, which that learned Rivet answers.” Not arguing against it, he just dismisses it by saying, “Let the reader consult them.”⁵⁶

⁵⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 196. Roberts cites: “quid semen mulieris sit[,] controversia est nobilis” (Franciscus Gomarus, *Appendix* to pt. 2, p. 532). Cf. Gomarus, *Opera theologica omnia* (Amsterdam, 1644), pt. 2, *Appendix*, p. 532.

⁵⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 196, citing Gomarus, *Appendix* to pt. 2, p. 532; Mercerus, *Praelectiones*, Gen. 3:15; Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 3:15; and Rivetus, Gen. 3, *Exercitatio* 37. Cf. Gomarus, *Opera*, pt. 2, *Appendix*, p. 532; Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 3:15, in *Operum*, pt. 1, p. 103; and Rivetus, *Exercitationes*, Gen. 3, *Exercitatio* 37, in *Operum*, 1:146-153.

Roberts interprets the seed of the woman “collectively, as comprehending Christ and all his seed, Christ and all his elect members.” Not thinking the seed to mean Christ and his elect in exactly the same way, however, he quickly adds, “Christ as the head, them as the body; Christ principally, them secondarily; Christ by way of eminency, as the seed blessing, them by way of participation with Christ, as the seed blessed.”⁵⁷ Roberts explains the ground for his view as follows:

1. The antithesis, or opposition of the seeds requires this.... As the seed of the serpent is taken collectively, for all the wicked and reprobate vassals of Satan: so the seed of the woman is to be taken for all the godly elect born of a woman, first Christ and then all his seed in him. Otherwise the opposition will not be fit. Doubtless if seed in the one phrase be taken collectively, then in the opposite phrase it must not be taken individually. It must be understood collectively in both, or singularly in both. 2. By [the woman,] Eve is immediatly to be understood. Consequently by the seed of the woman, all Eve’s posterity that degenerate not into the seed of the serpent. But first, Christ: then they that are Christs. 3. That seed of the woman is intended, against which the serpent and his seed are at enmity; but the serpent and his seed are at enmity not onely against Christ, but against all that belong to Christ. 4. Finally that seed of the woman is here meant, which shall victoriously bruise the serpents head: but that shall be done both by Christ and his elect members. By Christ originally and primitively, through his own power: by them that are Christs derivatively, through power derived and victory communicated from Christ unto them.⁵⁸

In interpreting the seed of the woman as Christ and his elect people, Roberts stands on Reformed footing.

Roberts acknowledges that the promise of man’s recovery in Gen. 3:14-15 was revealed very imperfectly and obscurely. Like in the creation of the world, which was done by degrees “from the most obscure and imperfect state of the creature...to the perfected,” God revealed the mystery “in his promises and covenant, not all at once but

⁵⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 196.

⁵⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 196-197. Brackets his. Cf. Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 38-39, with Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962-1963), Gen. 3:15 (1:10).

by degrees” when he “re-created the lapsed world of mankind.” Roberts also says that the first promise was revealed obscurely owing to the incapacity of the church at that time. God’s church was “in its extream infancy, yea but an embryo,” for this very promise was the first foundation stone whereupon it would be built. Thus, says Roberts, God gives them the “ABC of the gospel: as they were able to receive it. God reveals not what himself is able to reveal; but (such is his indulgence, and condescension) what his people are able to receive from time to time.”⁵⁹

The obscurity of the first promise has something to do with its form. Admitting this, Roberts says that the words of Gen. 3:15 “are formally threatnings, as directed to the serpent; but materially they are promises, as intended for mankind.” Thus he explains how God’s “implicit promises for sinners recovery” are contained in “Gods explicit threatnings against the serpent.” If we at least obscurely read “in the bruising of the serpents head by the womans seed, the full deliverance of the woman and her seed from the serpent and all his mischief,” argues Roberts, then “the explicit threatnings of the serpents ruine for deceiving man, have in them implicit promises of lapsed mans recovery from the serpents deceivings.”⁶⁰ Thus, says Roberts, “in the serpents malediction, is comprised the sinners benediction.”⁶¹

Going a step further, Roberts declares: “This first promise revealed in Christ the seed of the woman, though it had not the name and compleat formality of a covenant; yet had it the nature, substance and reality of a covenant, and that the covenant of faith.” The

⁵⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 207-208. Parentheses his. In the margin of p. 209 Roberts quotes Pareus at length on various causes of the obscurity of the first promise (*Commentarius*, Gen. 3:15). Cf. Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 3:15, in *Operum*, pt. 1, pp. 104-105.

⁶⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 217-218.

⁶¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 201.

author, or efficient cause of this promise is God. The parties to the promise are God on the one hand and the seed of the woman, that is Jesus Christ, the last Adam, with all his elect on the other hand. Unlike the covenant of works, this promise was not put on Adam. For it “was not so much as directed to Adam, but to the serpent; and to the serpent, not under the form of a promise, but of a threatening.” It was instead “settled upon the womans seed: that is, on Christ and on them that are Christs according to the election.” Unlike the antelapsarian covenant that included Adam and all of his posterity, this promise “was founded, not upon the first Adam at all, but immediately only upon Jesus Christ the seed of the woman, as a last Adam: and in him it is medietely extended to all his spiritual posterity.”⁶²

Roberts explains the matter of the first administration of the covenants of promise in terms of Christ’s mediatory office. In Gen. 3:15 “God promised, that Christ should be a priest, in suffering bruises in his heel: and a king, in inflicting bruises on the serpents head.” The matter promised explicitly on God’s part implies obedience on the part of the woman’s seed. On the part of Christ, he should “submit to that low state of incarnation and become the woman’s seed” and should “abase himself to be bruised in his heel, by the serpent” even to death. On the part of Christ’s members, they should “accept Christ, and these promised mercies in him, by faith,” and should “walk worthy of Christ and these promised mercies to all well-pleasing, according to evangelical rule.” Now these reciprocal stipulations on both sides are the essential and inward form of this first

⁶²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 241-242.

administration of the covenants of promise. The accidental and outward form of this administration extended from the time of Adam's fall until Noah.⁶³

2. God's Covenant with Noah

Not many Reformed thinkers considered Noah to be one of the representative figures of postlapsarian covenant administrations. Mentioning the patriarchal lineage of the covenant of grace, Perkins put Abraham directly after Adam and passed over Noah.⁶⁴ In the 1620s Ames and Wollebius commonly divided the administration of the covenant of grace before the coming of Christ into three stages: (1) from Adam to Abraham; (2) from Abraham to Moses; and (3) from Moses to Christ.⁶⁵ Von Rohr identifies Ames' demarcation as "the major pattern of periodization then generally acknowledged" among Puritans.⁶⁶ W. Adams Brown indicates that in this arrangement Ames anticipated the later teaching of his pupil Cocceius.⁶⁷ Ball did not understand the covenant that God made with Noah after the flood as a covenant in the proper sense but merely as "an absolute promise of God, without any stipulation at all."⁶⁸ Still, there are exceptions to this pattern: Bullinger earlier wrote that with Noah "God first renewed the covenant made with Adam." Christ was first "promised unto Adam; afterward was the promise renewed

⁶³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 243-244.

⁶⁴Perkins, *Exposition of Creed*, in *Workes*, 1:164.

⁶⁵William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology: William Ames, 1576-1633*, trans. John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968; reprint, Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1983), I.xxxviii (pp. 202-205); and Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium theologiae christianae* (London, 1760), I.xxi.10-11 (p. 100).

⁶⁶von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 49; cf. Heppe, *RD*, 394-395.

⁶⁷James Hastings, ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), s.v. "Covenant Theology," by W. Adams Brown (p. 221).

⁶⁸Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 3.

with Noe, and now with Abraham.”⁶⁹ For Bullinger, Noah was the first person with whom God entered into a formal covenant as well as one of the focal figures in the postlapsarian covenant periodization: Adam – Noah – Abraham – Moses – Jesus Christ.⁷⁰ Two decades after Roberts wrote *God's Covenants*, Witsius devoted a chapter in his book on God's covenant with man to an explanation of the covenant with Noah.⁷¹ Several other seventeenth-century Puritan exegetes read Gen. 6:18 and 9:9-17 as indicating God's covenant with Noah.⁷²

Roberts strongly disagrees with those who omit God's covenant with Noah (Gen. 6:18) from the covenants of promise or the several administrations of the postlapsarian covenant. He emphasizes that here the word “ברית” is used for the first time in the whole Bible for covenant. So he says, “God revealed this covenant expressly, and formally, stiling it a covenant...so that this covenant was...eminent, excellent and sure, in respect of the publication of it.” He says God established two covenants with Noah, one before the flood and the other after it. He finds the first covenant with Noah in Gen. 6:13-14 and

⁶⁹Heinrich Bullinger, *The Old Faith*, in *Writings and Translations of Myles Coverdale, Bishop of Exeter*, ed. George Pearson (Cambridge: University Press, 1844), 32 and 35.

⁷⁰Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund*, 40-41; and Richard A. Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christology and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1986; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1986), 40-41. Cf. Michael McGiffert, “Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism,” *Harvard Theological Review* 75 (1982): 473. Both Schrenk and Muller cite Heinrich Bullinger, *Compendium christianae religionis decem libris comprehensum* (Zurich, 1556), II.viii (p. 26). Cf. Bullinger, *Common places of Christian Religion* (London: Tho. East and H. Middleton for George Byshop, 1572), 43.

⁷¹Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, IV.ii (2:129-141).

⁷²See John Trapp, *A Commentary on the Old and New Testaments*, 5 vols. (London: Richard D. Dickinson, 1867-1877), Gen. 9:9-17 (1:40-41); Poole, *Commentary*, Gen. 6:18; 9:9-17 (1:19 and 24); *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testament*, Gen. 6:18; 9:9-17; and Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, n.d.), Gen. 6:18; 9:8-17.

17-19 and the second in Gen. 9:8-11.⁷³ Although both covenants are the same in nature, Roberts explains them separately for a better and clearer understanding.

In God's first covenant with Noah God was both the author of the covenant and the party promising Noah to save him from the flood, and Noah was the party "restipulating certain duties to God." The matter of this covenant promised on God's part was the salvation of Noah and his family with a remnant of animals in the ark from the destruction of the flood. And the matter required on Noah's part was "faith, to believe God, warning him of things not seen as yet" and "obedience, to Gods will and warning." The occasion for God's establishing this covenant with Noah was the extreme wickedness of the old world that God determined to destroy, on the one hand, and Noah's eminent godliness in the midst of the wicked world, on the other hand.⁷⁴

Roberts explains the nature of God's covenant with Noah in detail when he treats "Gods second covenant with Noah." He calls it God's "additionall covenant, super-added to the former." He finds four causes in this covenant. First, the "efficient cause, or author of it, was God." Second, the "inward impulsive" cause was divine grace and sympathetic mercy to Noah and the small remnant surviving the flood.⁷⁵ The third was the outward impulsive cause. Roberts thinks it in twofold:

- (1) Less principall and typicall; viz. Noah's altar and burnt-offerings offered thereon to God, in which God smelled a sweet savour, and whereupon he took occasion to resolve and covenant never more to destroy the world with a flood.
- (2) More principall and anti-typicall, or typified: viz. Jesus Christ and his offering himself up a sacrifice for sin to God upon the altar of his Godhead, wherein he was an odour of a sweet smell to God. And this was the outward moving cause, of

⁷³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 249-250 and 256.

⁷⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 250 and 252-253.

⁷⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 256-257. Cf. p. 277.

Gods covenanting both his elect's recovery and the worlds restitution and preservation in reference thereunto.⁷⁶

Fourth, the “finall cause, or end intended in this covenant” was to glorify God's grace by assuring Noah and his posterity of God's mercy in never again destroying the world by a flood despite man's sin and of Christ's restitution and preservation of the creature that was destroyed by sin.⁷⁷

The parties covenanting were “God as appeased, and smelling a savour of rest, upon Noah's sacrifices” on the one hand and “Noah and his sons, and their seed, and all living creatures” on the other hand. Roberts agrees with Calvin and Pareus who distinguish some degrees of confederates with God in this covenant. Calvin distinguishes three levels: (1) Noah and his family, (2) their posterity, and (3) brute animals. Following Pareus, Roberts separates them into four degrees: (1) Noah himself; (2) Noah's sons, Sem, Ham, Japhet and the female family members; (3) the posterity of Noah and his sons; and (4) all living creatures.⁷⁸

Roberts anticipates two doubts about the extent of the parties confederating with God. The first doubt is related to the nature of the covenant of faith. Since God established his covenant not only with Noah but also with his sons and their posterity, God seems to covenant not only with the righteous but also with the wicked, like Ham. Consequently, one might say, “God covenants not onely with Christ and his seed, but also with the seed of the serpent.” To quench such doubt, Roberts splits the meaning of Christ's seed into

⁷⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 257, citing Gen. 8:20-22 for the former part, and Eph. 5:2 for the latter. Cf. p. 277.

⁷⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 257.

⁷⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 257-258, citing Calvin's *Commentarius*, Gen., 9:9[-10]; and Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 9:9, &c. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Gen. 9:10 (1:297-298); and Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 9:8-10, in *Operum*, pt. 1, p. 154.

three: “actually, virtually, professedly.” Being Christ’s seed “actually” is possible “when they are truly implanted into Christ already by their effectually calling, and are really sanctified,” as Noah, Shem, and Japhet were. Being Christ’s seed “virtually and potentially” is the case of those who are “in a capacity or possibility of becoming Christs.” Roberts identifies all the elect as “virtually” Christ’s seed according to election although many of them are not yet born. Being Christ’s seed “professedly” is the case of those who “make a true profession of Christ” either as grownups or as infants of Christian parents, “which by reason of being so born are counted federally holy, and in covenant with their parents.” In this sense God entered into covenant not only with Noah, Shem and Japhet, but also with Ham “at that time professing godliness with his pious father and family” and “not discovering his lewdness till after this covenant was made.”⁷⁹

Moreover, adumbrating the development of a Reformed doctrine of common grace, Roberts further divides God’s covenants between the “outward administration” and its “common benefits” which come short of salvation, and the “inward efficacy” and its “special benefits” which reach to salvation.⁸⁰ Only in the former sense were all the seed of Noah and of his sons included in this covenant and secured against any other floods. But in the latter sense only the elect of their seed are included in this covenant and will be saved by Christ from eternal perdition.⁸¹

⁷⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 258-259.

⁸⁰Cf. Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity*, 2d ed. (London: A. M. for William Lee, 1662), II.xi (p. 211).

⁸¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 259.

Roberts uses the same distinction against those who understand God's second covenant with Noah to extend to all mankind, thus favor the doctrine of universal redemption by Christ. He sees this covenant as revealing "a double salvation," which is "an outward corporal and temporal salvation, and an inward spiritual and eternal salvation." The inward salvation belongs only to the elect of the true Noah, Jesus Christ, and to the new world restored by him spiritually. Only the outward salvation from all such future floods extends to the whole world including even the wicked for the benefit of Christ's elect. Thus Roberts firmly says that in this covenant "there was no footing for the opinion of universal redemption."⁸²

Another doubt Roberts anticipates is that if God established his covenant with brute animals "that can neither understand Gods promises, nor restipulate any performances," then it could not be a covenant but merely an absolute promise without any requirements. Roberts explains: "God covenanted here with these bruit creatures, not properly and directly for themselves, but improperly, indirectly and relatively, with reference and relation to man kinde, that they should not any more be generally destroyed with a flood." As these creatures were made for man's use and were drowned in the flood "not for their own sakes, but for man's sin," God covenanted that they should continue for man's benefit while he remains in this world.⁸³

The matters covenanted in this covenant were twofold: on God's part and on the part of Noah, his sons, and their seed. The matters covenanted on God's part were that he would never again destroy the earth and its living creatures with a universal deluge and

⁸²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 283-284.

⁸³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 259.

he guaranteed that the normal courses of nature would continue until the end of the world. Yet Roberts quickly adds that God's promise of security from a universal deluge precludes neither regional floods nor the destruction of the whole world with fire. Noah, his sons, and their seed on their part implicitly covenanted with God to believe his promise of security, to believe in Christ both as the true sacrifice appeasing divine wrath and as the restorer of stability, and to use the rainbow as a sign or token of this covenant.⁸⁴

To clarify the significance of the rainbow as a sign or token of this covenant, Roberts distinguishes signs or tokens into two: "either natural, or voluntary and instituted." Natural signs in their own nature signify something present or future. For example, smoke is a sign of fire for the present, and a red sunset foretells a fair day tomorrow. Voluntary or instituted signs do not signify what is natural to them but something pertaining to the will of their author or institutor. Thus, "the Passeeover signified Christ: bread his body: wine his blood: and here the rainbow signifies security, that the world shall no more be generally drowned with a flood." While the rainbow "physically and naturally" denotes rain, it "theologically, supernaturally and by institution" signifies fair weather and security from a flood. The rainbow is "not a natural, but an instituted sign," for it confirms and seals the certainty of God's covenant and our assurance of it "not by natural signification, but by supernatural institution."⁸⁵

Roberts elucidates how these two covenants with Noah were "a renewed administration of the covenant of faith, touching sinners recovery and salvation by Jesus

⁸⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 259-260.

⁸⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 261-262.

Christ.” He admits that Christ was revealed in these covenants with Noah “very dimly, obscurely, and but implicitly.” Yet he quickly adds: “in all the several administrations of the covenants of promise before Christs coming in the flesh, Christ was represented very obscurely, especially in the first administrations, when divine grace in him began but to dawn and break forth to the world.” Citing Heb. 11:7, Roberts says that “Noah by his faith, being moved with fear at Gods warning and making his ark, became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.” Roberts understands this righteousness by faith to mean the “perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, which God of his meer Grace imputeth to them that by faith accept and receive the same, having renounced all self-righteousness, and all other wayes of sinners justification whatsoever.” Since no one can inherit Christ’s righteousness except by faith, Roberts says, “This covenant of God with Noah, touching his salvation in the ark by water, principally intended the great salvation by Christ: and so was an administration of the covenant of faith.”⁸⁶

Going further, Roberts says: “Noah, was a singular type of Christ; the ark, a figure of the church; and the temporal saving of his house with himself in the ark by water, a special type of the salvation of Christs elect in the church by Jesus Christ.” Thus he observes that God’s covenant with Noah, which preserved him and his family from the flood, signified “the elects salvation by Christ through faith.” Then, says Roberts, “this covenant was the covenant of faith renewed with Noah touching sinners recovery and salvation by Christ.” In understanding Noah as a singular type of Christ, Roberts has exegetical support from ancient and modern writers. Here he refers to Matt. 24:37-39, Luke 17:26-27, 1 Peter 3:20-22, and some writings of Augustine, Hugh Broughton, and

⁸⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 263-265.

Thomas Taylor.⁸⁷ Roberts even compares Noah to Jesus Christ in terms of the threefold office of Christ:

Noah was a priest, a prophet, and a king. 1. A priest; for he builded an altar unto the LORD; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt-offerings upon the altar. 2. A prophet, for he was a preacher of righteousness to the old world. And 3. A king; for the flood having drowned the whole world except himself, and his family, Noah was the sole monarch of the whole earth: and by his three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth was the whole earth over-spread; and all creatures subdued under them. So Christ was, 1. A priest, yea our great high priest, both making satisfaction to Gods justice for our sins by offering up his manhood once upon the altar of his Godhead; and by making continual intercession in heaven for us. 2. A prophet, revealing unto sinners Gods will touching their salvation: and opening their understandings to discern the same. 3. A king. Conquering and subduing us to himself; applying his benefits to us purchased and revealed; governing, and guarding us; and crushing all his and our enemies under his foot.⁸⁸

Since Noah notably resembles Jesus Christ in this “federall transaction of God with him,” says Roberts, “how can we but conclude, that Gods covenants with Noah were intended for an administration of the covenant of faith, touching sinners recovery by Jesus Christ?”⁸⁹

Roberts finds an equally strong support in Scripture and in the exegetical tradition for interpreting the ark of Noah as a type of the church of Christ. Here again, following Jerome, he refers to the passage of the apostle Peter.⁹⁰ He also refers to Augustine and

⁸⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 265. Roberts cites Augustine: “Christus etiam figuratus est in Noe, & in illa arca orbis terrarum” (*Tractatus in evangelium Ioannis*, Tractate 9 [Basel, 1569], Tom. 9, p. 80), and he refers to Hugh Broughton, *The General View of the Holy Scriptures: or, The Times, Places, and Persons of the Holy Scriptures*, revised by Thomas Hayne (London: I. B. and S. B. for Henry Ockould, 1640), 42; and Thomas Taylor, *Christ Revealed*, chap. 3. Cf. Augustine, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Tractate 9, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 7, p. 67; and Taylor, *Christ Revealed: or the Old Testament Explained* (London: M. F. for R. Dawlman and L. Fawne, 1635; reprint, Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1979), chap. 3, pp. 10-17. Note also Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, IV.vi.21 (2:198-199).

⁸⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 266.

⁸⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 267.

⁹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 267. Roberts refers to 1 Peter 3:20-21 [maybe v. 22, too], and he quotes Jerome: “Arca Noe ecclesiae typus fuit, dicente Petro apostolo: In arca Noe, pauci, id est, octo animae, &c.” (*Altercatio Luciferiani et Orthodoxi* [Basel, 1553], Tom. 2, p. 145). Cf. Jerome, *The Dialogue against the Luciferians*, in *NPNF*, 2d series, vol. 6, p. 331.

Cyprian among ancient writers and Taylor and Broughton with Rivetus among contemporary writers.⁹¹ Among many parallels between Noah's ark and Christ's church, Roberts includes the following. As the "ark had in it all variety of creatures, both clean and unclean: wolf and lamb, sheep and goats...a cursed Cham, as well as an holy Noah and a blessed Shem," so all kinds of people are found in "the visible church, the spiritual ark." Thus, says Roberts, "In this field, also are tares as well as wheate; in this net, bad, as well as good fish; in this house, foolish, as well as wise virgins; in this ark, hypocrites and reprobates, as well as the sincere an elect." Here he quotes Jerome who says, "As in the ark were kinds of all creatures: so in the church are...the righteous and sinners, that is, golden and silver vessels remain with wooden and earthen vessels."⁹²

The third and last parallel that Roberts finds in this covenant is that between the saving of Noah's family in the ark and the salvation of Christ's family in the church. Here again, he quotes 1 Peter 3:20-21. Roberts sees the saving of Noah's family with the living creatures in the ark "from perishing by the flood" as "a remarkable type or figure of the salvation of the household of God in the ark of his Church by Jesus Christ from perishing by the deluge of divine wrath." Roberts calls attention to the fact that Noah and his family "were saved by water, from water: by the flood, from the flood," for "the water lifted up the ark and them therein above the perill of drowning." He quickly adds: "So

⁹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 267, citing Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, XV.26; idem, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, XII.14-20; Cyprian, *Ad Novatianum*, iii-vi; Taylor, *Christ Revealed*, chap. 3; Broughton, *General View of Holy Scriptures*, 50-51; and Rivetus, Gen. 6, Exercitatio 53. Cf. Augustine, *The City of God*, XV.26, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 2, p. 306; idem, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeus*, XII.14-20, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 4, pp. 188-190; *A Treatise against the Heretic Novatian by an Anonymous Bishop*, iii-vi, in *ANF*, vol. 5, pp. 658-659; Taylor, *Christ Revealed*, chap. 3, pp. 11-13; and Rivetus, *Exercitationes*, Gen. 6, Exercitatio 53, in *Operum*, 1:218. Note also Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, IV.vi.22 (2:199). Like his contemporaries, Roberts ascribes *Ad Novatianum* to Cyprian. In 1520 Erasmus first published it among the authentic works of Cyprian (Introductory notice to *Treatise against Novatian*, in *ANF*, vol. 5, p. 655).

the church is saved, 1. Sacramentally by water, viz. by the waters of baptism, which in regard of its signification and end, is salvific...2. Spiritually by the blood of Christ justifying; and by the Spirit of Christ sanctifying; both signified by water.”⁹³

Considering the spiritual meaning of God’s covenants with Noah, Roberts identifies the parties to these covenants as God on the one hand and Christ and his family as well as Noah and his family on the other hand. Here Christ is included in “the party restipulating” as “a true Noah, a true comforter, and author of rest and peace, to cursed and tired sinners.” Thus Roberts thinks that God’s confederates here are “typically Noah and his family” but “antitypically or spiritually Christ and his family, the church, his spiritual seed.” In the spiritual meaning of these two covenants with Noah God on his part promised eternal salvation of the spiritual family of Christ, the true Noah, through the church by virtue of his death and resurrection and all necessary temporal blessings for them in him. Christ and his family on their part had their respective obligations as follows. While Christ should prepare and build a spiritual ark, his church, for both the salvation of his elect and the condemnation of the wicked, Christ’s elect should come into this ark, should enter this church with Jesus Christ, and there abide with him for their salvation.⁹⁴

3. God’s Covenant with Abraham

Roberts thinks that after God established his covenant with Abraham, he renewed it twice. And after calling Abraham, God made promises to him seven times.⁹⁵ The

⁹²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 269, citing Jerome, *Altercatio Luciferiani et Orthodoxi*, p. 145). Cf. Jerome, *Dialogue against Luciferians*, 331.

⁹³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 270-271.

⁹⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 277-280.

⁹⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 292-293.

promises are recorded in Genesis, (1) 12:1-3; (2) 12:7; (3) 13:14-17; (4) 15:1, 4-5, 13-21; (5) 17:1-9, 15-16, 19-21; (6) 18:10, 14, 17-19; and (7) 22:15-18.⁹⁶ Roberts finds God's establishment and renewal of his covenant with Abraham on three occasions of these seven: (1) immediately upon calling Abram out of his country (Gen. 12:1-3); (2) after Abram rescued Lot, and Melchizedek blessed him (Gen. 15:18-21); and (3) when Abram was ninety-nine years old (Gen. 17:1-21).⁹⁷

Roberts shows why God's covenant with Abraham is "the covenant of faith touching sinners recovery by Jesus Christ." He notices that the first revealing of this covenant to Abraham (Gen. 12:3) is called "the preaching of the gospel unto Abram" in Gal. 3:8: "The Scripture foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, in thee shall all nations be blessed." Here the gospel is nothing but "the glad tidings of sinners salvation by Christ," thus it contains the doctrine and substance of the covenant of faith. Regarding this first occasion of God's covenant with Abraham, it is written in Gal. 3:17: "The covenant which was confirmed of God in Christ, [was established] 430 years before the law." Interpreting this passage Roberts quotes Beza: "Gods covenant graciously begun with Abram, was carried to one Christ, in whom alone that seed of Abraham in Christ, both of Jews and gentiles, is gathered together." Thus, for Roberts, this covenant is "clearly the covenant of faith" in Christ.⁹⁸

⁹⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 333-334. Cf. pp. 292-293.

⁹⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 293.

⁹⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 295-296, citing Theodore Beza, *Annotationes*, Gal. 3:17. Cf. Beza, *Annotationes maiores in Novum Dn. Nostri Iesu Christi Testamentum* ([Geneva], 1594), pt. 2, p. 327 [Gal. 3:17].

Roberts gives several more reasons for interpreting the covenant with Abraham as the covenant of faith in Christ. He says the benefits and mercies promised by God in this covenant are peculiar to the covenant of faith. The benefits “directly lead Abram unto Christ, and to salvation by him through faith.” For example, Abraham was a father of many nations not according to the flesh but according to faith. And Abraham’s faith had peculiar reference to the promised seed, especially to Christ the eminent seed, in whom alone all believers become the seed of Abraham. Thus, “Abram’s covenanted fatherhood led him to Christ, and to salvation by him through faith.”⁹⁹

The conditions of God’s covenant with Abraham clearly show that this covenant was the covenant of faith. For these conditions were “faith and worthy walking,” which are the conditions of the covenant of faith. Abraham’s faith “in God touching his seed promised, peculiarly respected his spiritual seed, the faithful: but principally Christ, the blessed seed.” Hence, argues Roberts, “Abraham rejoycing and laughing at the promise and performance of Isaac, a type of Christ, is said to rejoyce to see Christs day, and he saw it, and was glad. How did he see it? Only by faith: expecting Christ to come of Isaac, for the blessing of all nations.” Roberts also asserts that Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection were prefigured in Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac. Christ’s death was prefigured in that Isaac was laid upon the altar, was “slain,” and rose up from the altar alive, “whereupon the apostle saith he was received from the dead in a figure.” Thus, says Roberts, “God led Abraham to Christ, both by his faith and obedience.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 296, citing Rom. 4:18 and Gal. 3:16, 28-29.

¹⁰⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 297-298, citing Gen. 17:17; 22:9-10, John 8:56, Rom. 4:18, Heb. 11:17-19.

According to Roberts, the reward that God bestowed upon Abraham for his accepting God's promises and covenant by faith clearly shows that God's covenant with Abraham was precisely the covenant of faith in Christ. It was an evangelical reward, that is, justification by faith (Gen. 15:6). Roberts is sure that Abraham "was not justified by working, according to the covenant of works, but by believing, according to the covenant of faith."¹⁰¹

For Roberts, God's confirmation of his covenant with Abraham also declared it to be the covenant of faith in Christ. Roberts thinks that the establishment and renewals of God's covenant with Abraham were "all one for substance," and all of them were "established and confirmed in Christ." The original covenant with Abraham "had its accomplishment in the exhibition of Christ," the sacrifices in the covenant renewal after Melchizedek blessed Abraham were "types and figures of Christ the true sacrifice," and the covenant renewal when Abraham was ninety-nine years old "was confirmed by the sacramental token of circumcision." Roberts understands circumcision to mean not only "a seal to Abraham of the righteousness of faith," which is "Christ's righteousness," but also "a type of Christ and his death" by which our sins are destroyed and mortified.¹⁰²

Roberts considers the meaning of Abraham's seed in detail, for God established his covenant with both Abraham and with his seed. God's federal promises were directed not only to Abraham but also to his seed. And God imposed the seal of this covenant, circumcision, upon both Abraham and his seed. Moreover, God mentioned not only Abraham but also his seed as "parties, in every renewing of his covenant with

¹⁰¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 298, citing Gen. 15:5-6 and Rom. 4, the whole chapter.

¹⁰²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 298-299, citing Acts 3:25-26, Gal. 3:17 (accomplishment); Heb. 10:1 (sacrifices); Rom. 3:21-22; 4:11, Col. 2:11 (circumcision).

Abraham.”¹⁰³ Thus Roberts calls all Abraham’s seed “the joynt-party restipulating” with Abraham in the covenant that God established with him.¹⁰⁴

Roberts separates Abraham’s seed into three kinds: only natural, only spiritual, and both natural and spiritual. The merely natural seed of Abraham are, like Ishmael, those who descend from Abraham by propagation but do not follow the steps of his faith by imitation. Conversely, the spiritual seed of Abraham are, like all believing gentiles, those who spiritually follow the steps of Abraham’s faith by imitation although they do not descend from him by propagation. Roberts divides Abraham’s seed both natural and spiritual into two, ordinary and extraordinary. All the believing Jews who naturally descend from Abraham and spiritually follow his faith are Abraham’s natural and spiritual seed ordinarily. But Jesus Christ is the only “extraordinary and superlative seed of Abraham: extraordinarily descending from him according to the flesh, being conceived by the Holy Ghost of a virgin of Abrahams line; and being extraordinarily promised to Abraham, according to the spirit” for the blessing of the whole world. Thus Roberts calls Christ Abraham’s “primary blessed seed.”¹⁰⁵

Assuming this distinction of Abraham’s seed, Roberts considers which kinds of Abraham’s seed were included among God’s confederates when he made the covenant with Abraham. The merely natural seed of Abraham, that is Ishmael or Ishmaelites, are excluded from God’s covenant and promises. Even though Ishmael and gentile strangers received circumcision, the token of the covenant, they were only under the covenant until

¹⁰³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 304-305, citing Gen. 13:14-17; 22:15-18, Luke 1:54-55, Rom. 4:13, Gal. 3:16 (promises); Gen. 17:9-14 (seal); and (1) Gen. 12:1-3, 7, Acts 3:25, Gal. 3:17, (2) Gen. 15:18, (3) Gen. 17:7-8, respectively for those three occasions of God’s covenant with Abraham.

¹⁰⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 312.

¹⁰⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 305-306.

they fell away, broke the covenant, or excluded themselves by unbelief.¹⁰⁶ In terms of Abraham's seed, God first and immediately settled and established this covenant with Isaac. Among Isaac's ordinary natural seed, there were two kinds: merely natural and carnal, which is the wicked Jews, who were not Abraham's seed in terms of salvation but his seed according to the outward dispensation; and both natural and spiritual, which is believing Jews. Jesus Christ was Abraham's extraordinary natural and spiritual seed with whom God established his covenant. Finally, God's covenant was established also with those who were Abraham's merely spiritual seed, that is, the believing gentiles.¹⁰⁷

Regarding Gal. 3:16—"To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds as of many; but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ"—Roberts interprets the word "Christ" as a collective term. He thinks that here under the word "Christ" the apostle includes Abraham's covenant seed, to whom the federal promises were made, that is believing Jews, believing gentiles, and Jesus Christ himself. "All these are but one Christ, and God looked upon them all as one Christ, when he established his covenant with them." Roberts understands "this Christ, the seed of Abraham, with whom God established his covenant and promises" to mean primarily Jesus Christ, the mediator and the head of the church, and secondarily all Jews and gentiles joined to him as his mystical body by believing.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 306-307, citing Calvin's *Commentarius*, Gen., 17:19; and Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 17:19. Cf. "Yet it may seem absurd, that God should command Ishmael, whom he deprives of his grace, to be circumcised. I answer...the Lord...does not entirely exclude Ishmael...until Ishmael cut himself off from his father's house, and his brother's society. Therefore his circumcision was not useless, until he apostatized from the covenant" (Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Gen. 17:19 [1:462]); and Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 17:19, in *Operum*, pt. 1, p. 210.

¹⁰⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 307-308.

¹⁰⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 309-310. Cf. pp. 311 and 313.

Roberts asserts that we may know that we are Abraham's spiritual seed not only by our being Christ's but also by our walking in the steps of Abraham's faith and works. Roberts quotes Gal. 3:29, "And if ye be Christs, then are ye Abrahams seed, and heirs according to the promise," and comments, "Christ is the eminent seed of Abraham above all other; and all become Abrahams seed, by becoming one with Christ spiritually."¹⁰⁹ Abraham was not only "a type of Christ the true father of the faithful" but also "an example to his seed," who should follow the steps of his faith and obedience.¹¹⁰

Roberts considers in detail the substance or matter of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed, which consists of the mercies promised on God's part and the duties required on the part of Abraham and his seed.¹¹¹ As the covenant mercies that God promised to Abraham and his seed, Roberts enumerates the following blessings:

1. What he will do for Abraham and his seed. He will
 - a. Bless them.
 - b. Multiply him and his seed exceedingly.
 - c. Make his name great.
 - d. Make his seed victorious.
 - e. Give them Canaan for an everlasting possession.
 - f. Close up Abraham's days in a good old age in peace.
2. What he will be to Abraham, and his seed. He will be
 - a. His shield.
 - b. His exceeding great reward.
 - c. A God to him, and to his seed after him, by an everlasting covenant.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 323.

¹¹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 313, citing Isa. 9:6 and Rom. 4:12. For Roberts' explanation of Abraham's faith and works, see pp. 323-330.

¹¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 332.

¹¹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 334-335. Diagram his, except the replacement of Arabic numerals with lowercased alphabets. For Roberts' detailed explanation of God's blessings promised to Abraham and his seed, see pp. 335-435.

Roberts ranks as first the “divine benediction,” or God’s blessing of Abraham, because he thinks it is “the cause and foundation of all the rest.”¹¹³

Among all the promises, however, Roberts thinks the last blessing, the promise of being a God to Abraham and his seed, is the greatest and the most glorious. He finds this blessing in Gen. 17:7-8: “I will establish my covenant between me, and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant; to be a God unto thee and to thy seed after thee.” Roberts sees this as “the first place in all the Holy Scripture, wherein this excellent article is inserted in Gods covenant with his people: though afterwards it be frequently repeated, viz. to Israel, David, Jews in Babylon, and to Gods people under the New Testament.” For Roberts, the greatness of this promise lies in the fact that God himself is promised. Thus he says, “The promiser is promised. The author of all divine promises is the matter of this promise. Yea, this promise contains him whom heaven and earth cannot contain.”¹¹⁴ In understanding God’s promise to be a God to Abraham as the grand promise of this covenant, Roberts follows Ball.¹¹⁵

According to Roberts, the covenant duties required on the part of Abraham and his seed are: (1) to walk before God, (2) to be perfect, and (3) to be his people. Roberts sees the biblical ground for these duties in Gen. 17:1-2: “I am the almighty God: Walk before me, and be thou perfect. And I will make my covenant between me and thee, etc.”¹¹⁶

¹¹³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 335.

¹¹⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 405-407. For the repetition of this blessing afterwards, Roberts refers to the following passages: (1) to Israel - Ex. 29:45, Lev. 26:12, Deut. 5:2-3, 6; (2) to David - Ps. 89:26, 33-34; (3) to the Jews in Babylon - Jer. 24:7; 30:22; 32: 38, 40, Ezek. 11:20; 36:28; and (4) to God’s people under the New Testament - Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10. Regarding the greatness of this promise, Roberts cites almost a decade of ancient and modern writers who expressed the same view on this promise (pp. 407-408).

¹¹⁵Cf. Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 53.

¹¹⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 436.

Yet he says that, unlike the first two duties, the last one was not expressly stated. He can merely find God's promise to "be a God to Abraham, and to his seed after him: and this expressly." Consequently, argues Roberts, "God expected that Abraham and his seed should be his covenant-people: To this duty, and reciprocal relation to God, they were obliged implicitly." Even though to be God's people is "the highest and most comprehensive covenant-duty imposed upon Abraham and his seed," says Roberts, "in this covenant-administration to Abraham, it is not expressed, but only implied." He finds the fuller unfolding of being God's covenant people in God's covenant with Israel on Mount Sinai.¹¹⁷ Thus Kevan thinks the Mosaic law to be "an amplification" of the rule given to Abraham and his seed, that is, to be in covenant—in other words, the law, considered according to its "third use," belongs to the covenant of faith, requiring sincere, if imperfect, obedience.¹¹⁸

Roberts understands "to walk before God" to mean "a framing of our course of life with reference and respect unto God and his presence."¹¹⁹ Although many particulars are comprised under walking before God, they may be reduced to two eminent heads, that is, "faith, and love; or faith, and obedience; or faith, and good-works." For "walking in faith and good-works, in faith and love, takes in the sum and substance of the duties of piety and Christianity." For this understanding of walking before God, Roberts finds strong

¹¹⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 513-514, citing Gen. 17:7-8. Cf. pp. 846-862.

¹¹⁸Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 198, citing Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 71; and Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 436; on the perpetuity of the Decalogue as a norm for life in covenant, see Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, IV.iv.14, 34-37 (2:170, 177-178).

¹¹⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 437.

support in contemporaneous writers.¹²⁰ Regarding the relationship between faith and good works, Roberts says that if there is “a walking in faith: then there must be, yea there will be, a walking in love, obedience, and good-works before God. For faith works by love, and love is the fulfilling of the law: faith makes obedient: and faith abounds in good-works.”¹²¹ It is clearer where Roberts explains:

Here God plainly imposed conditions upon Abraham and his seed, in reference to that federal administration: walking before God, viz. by faith and obedience; and being perfect. Faith, to lead them out of themselves, to Christ and his righteousness, for justification: obedience, to evidence the truth of that justifying faith; and to testify their abundant thankfulness to God for Jesus Christ, and his love in him: and integrity, as the acceptable evangelical qualification of both their faith and obedience in Christ, though they want legal exactness.¹²²

The “mutual and reciprocal obligation” of the parties to one another in God’s covenant with Abraham and his seed, that is, his promise of mercy to them on the one hand and their duties to him on the other hand, makes up the “inward form” of this covenant. Having explained this “more essential and constitutive” form of this covenant in terms of its substance or matter, now Roberts attends to its “outward and more accidental form.” According to Roberts, the outward form of this covenant consists in the manner of its administration to Abraham and his seed and in its manifold confirmation to them.¹²³ As explained previously, God had related to Abraham in a

¹²⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 439-440, citing Mercerus, *Praelectiones*, Gen. 17:1; Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 17:1; Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations*, Gen. 17:1; and Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 74. Cf. Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gen. 17:1, in *Operum*, pt. 1, pp. 204-205; and Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the Five Bookes of Moses, the Booke of the Psalmes, and the Song of Songs, or, Canticles* (London: John Bellamie, 1627), Gen. 17:1 (p. 65).

¹²¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 444, citing Rom. 13:8, Gal. 5:6, Heb. 11:7-8, 17, and James 2:14-26.

¹²²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 465.

¹²³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 514 and 516.

covenantal way by means of promise not once but seven times.¹²⁴ On the fourth occasion, after Abram's return from the wars against the kings to rescue his nephew Lot, Roberts sees "the first express mention of justification by faith in all Scripture."¹²⁵ God deals also with Abraham's seed after him in covenant, that is, with Isaac, Jacob, and Jacob's posterity until the Sinai covenant.¹²⁶

Among the many ways that God used for confirming his covenant to Abraham and his seed, Roberts includes Melchizedek's blessing of Abraham when he returned from slaughtering the kings. Roberts thinks the "spiritual mysterie intended in this story of Melchizedek" is "the typical representation of the Person, and office of Jesus Christ to Abraham." He asserts that the "Person of Christ was notably figured out in Melchizedek, in that his birth, death and pedigree are passed over in silence by Moses, as if he had neither genealogy, nor beginning, nor end, and as being wholly unknown to Abraham in these respects." For Christ was in his person without "father according to his Manhood, being conceived and born of a virgin," without "mother according to his Godhead, being eternally begotten of the Father alone," and without "pedigree" and "beginning of days and end of life, according to his divinity."¹²⁷

Roberts sees two of the offices of Christ typified in Melchizedek, the kingly office and the priestly office. He finds the figure of Christ's kingship in the meaning of Melchizedek's

¹²⁴Cf. Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 292-293, 333-334, and 517-523.

¹²⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 518-519. Cf. Gen. 15:6.

¹²⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 523-532. For God's federal dealings with Isaac, see Gen. 25:20-26, 29-34; 26:1-5, 23-25; with Jacob, Gen. 28:10-22; 32:24-30; 35:9-15; 46:1-4; and, with Jacob's posterity until the Sinai covenant, Gen. 48:3-22; 49:8-12, 22-26, Ex. 2:23-25; 3:1-22 (esp. 6, 15-16); 4:5; 6:3, 8; 12:1-51.

¹²⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 537-538. For all the ways of God's confirming his covenant to Abraham and his seed, see pp. 533-562.

name: “Melchizedek, king of Salem: first being by interpretation, king of righteousness; and after that also, king of Salem, which is, king of peace.” Referring to Rom. 5:1-2, Roberts says, Christ “is first a king of righteousness: then a king of peace. He first justifies us by faith in his blood: and then purifies our hearts and consciences towards God.” Christ is “king of righteousness, the true Melchizedek,” for he “communicates his righteousness royally and plentifully to all his true subjects by faith.” Christ is also “king of peace, prince of peace, the true king of Salem,” for he “gives to all his subjects peace above them, with God...reconciling them to God” and “peace within them his peace in their hearts and consciences passing all understanding.” Roberts finds the type of Christ’s priestly office in “Melchizedek’s other office, as he was priest of the most high God.” Like Melchizedek who was “made like unto the Son of God” and “abideth a priest continually,” Christ, “as a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, hath an everlasting and unchangeable priesthood; his satisfaction and intercession ever living for us.” Melchizedek in his priesthood was greater than Abraham and the Levitical priests of Abraham’s race by both “blessing Abraham” and “receiving tithes of Abraham.” Thus, says Roberts, “Christ our great high-priest blesseth us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things,” and he, “the true eternal priest of Melchizedek’s order, receives tithes in his ministers and preachers of the gospel, having ordained that they who preach the gospel should live of the gospel.”¹²⁸

Roberts says that God confirmed his covenant to Abraham and his seed also by two ordinary sacraments: circumcision and the Passover. Roberts’ understanding of the Passover as a sacrament under this covenant seems to be unique. Ball understands circumcision as a seal of God’s promise to Abraham, but he ascribes the Passover to the

¹²⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 538-539, citing Gen. 14:18, Jer. 23:6, John 14:27, Rom. 5:1, 2 Cor. 5:21, Phil. 4:7, Heb. 7:1-2 (kingship); and Ps. 110:4, 1 Cor. 9:13-14, Eph. 1:3, Heb. 7:1, 3-10, 17 (priesthood).

Mosaic covenant.¹²⁹ While circumcision was established in Abraham's days, the Passover was instituted in Moses' days.¹³⁰ Thus Roberts explains why he puts the sacrament of the Passover in the dispensation of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed:

This sacrament was instituted before the giving of the law on Mount Sinai, a little before Israel's departure out of Egypt, and was first celebrated on that very night when they went out of Egypt, at the end of 430 years to a day from God's first covenant and promise to Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees. Therefore, though this sacrament was ordained in the days of Moses, yet being ordained before the Sinai-covenant was made about three months, it cannot belong to the Sinai-covenant which was not then in being, but must needs be most properly annexed to God's last federal dispensation foregoing, which was God's covenant with Abraham and his seed. So then the Passover was added for confirming of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed. Not that Abraham, or his more immediate seed Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, etc. had any benefit at all by this ordinance; they being dead and gone before its institution: But his more remote and mediate seed the children of Israel in Egypt, and all succeeding generations till Christ, had advantage thereby. For the Passover continued in use and force in the Jewish church from the very night wherein the Israelites went out of Egypt, till the night in which Jesus Christ was betrayed by Judas to be crucified, when Jesus Christ did eat his last Passover, and abrogated it immediately by instituting the Lord's Supper to succeed in its stead, as he had instituted baptism to succeed in stead of circumcision.¹³¹

The Passover confirmed God's covenant with Abraham to his seed by instructing them that "now the time of their Egyptian servitude was expired," thus "they should go towards Canaan to enjoy it for an everlasting possession." Both of these ordinary sacraments belong to God's covenant with Abraham for distinguishing between Abraham's blessed seed to be preserved and the Egyptians' cursed seed to be destroyed.¹³²

¹²⁹See Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 89-90 (circumcision); and 142-143 (Passover).

¹³⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 542-543 and 546. Cf. Gen. 17:9-14, Ex. 12:3-43.

¹³¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 546, citing Ex. 12:3-43; 19:1 and Matt. 26:17-29.

¹³²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 550, citing Gen. 12:1-3; 15:13-14, 16, Ex. 12:12-13, 23, 40-42.

Roberts includes four extraordinary sacraments among those that confirm God's covenant to Abraham and his seed. They are (1) the cloudy and fiery pillars, (2) the splitting of the Red Sea, (3) manna from heaven, and (4) water out of the rock. Roberts calls them "extraordinary, and itinerant, or journey-sacraments," because they were not ordinary but miraculous provisions during that extraordinary condition of Israel in the wilderness when they traveled on their journey toward the land of promise. Roberts includes all these under the dispensation of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed because, like the Passover, they were established before the Sinai covenant and the giving of the law. Regarding their spiritual meaning, Roberts remarks, "The two first answered notably both to circumcision under the Old Testament, and to baptism under the New: The two last answered to their Passover, and to our Lords-Supper."¹³³

Roberts separates the end of God's covenant with Abraham and his seed into two, the ultimate end and the subordinate end. The ultimate end or principal scope of God was the exhibition of God's own glory in (1) his free grace, (2) his bounteous goodness, (3) his wise providence, (4) his great power, and (5) his constant faithfulness. The subordinate end or less principal scope of God was the furtherance of the true happiness of Abraham and his seed. Roberts enumerates seven constituents that tend to complete the happiness of Abraham and his seed. They are "redemption, by Christ the seed of Abraham," "participation of the promised Spirit of God," "conversion from sin" unto God, "justification through faith," "adoption into God's family," "covenant-relation" to God, and "glorification" for evermore.¹³⁴ This is certainly a reflection of the *ordo*

¹³³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 550-551, citing 1 Cor. 10:1-4. Cf. Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, IV.x (2:282-316).

¹³⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 570-571 and 574-575.

salutis—and, indeed, Roberts concentrates here on Abraham’s faith and develops the doctrine of grace and justification at great length.¹³⁵

4. The Sinai Covenant

Locating the Mosaic covenant, or the Sinai covenant, within God’s saving purposes for mankind aroused a heated controversy among Puritans. Despite its outward resemblance to the covenant of works, the majority of Puritans viewed the Mosaic covenant as a genuine part of the covenant of grace. This view was embodied in the Westminster Confession of Faith.¹³⁶

Roberts thinks that the Sinai covenant, the fourth administration of the covenants of promise, began when Moses received the law from God on Mount Sinai and continued until the death of Jesus Christ, which “antiquated, abrogated and finished the Old-Testament-administration, instituting and authorizing the New-Testament-dispensation.” Even though he acknowledges between the giving of the law and the death of Christ two other “covenant-discoveries,” one with David and the other with the Israelites in the Babylonian captivity, Roberts does not think that they interrupted the course and force of this administration at Sinai until Christ’s death. For, adds Roberts, “Jesus Christ was made under the law, and submitted himself under this Sinai-covenant-administration, till his death: And then, antiquating this old-covenant, he brought in his New-Covenant or Testament in its stead.”¹³⁷ The two covenants after Sinai were revealed and added “not to

¹³⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 575-635. The length, detail and polemical nature of the topic prevent its discussion here: the literature on the topic both modern and the seventeenth century is vast.

¹³⁶Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 113-117; von Rohr, *Covenant of Grace*, 50-51; and Westminster Confession of Faith, VII.v-vi (*Creeds*, 3:617-618).

¹³⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 649-650, citing Matt. 26:18-19, Luke 2:21-24, John 5:1, 7, 10, Gal. 4:4, Phil. 2:7-8.

annul or abrogate this Old-Testament-administration at all, but rather to enlarge, amplify and expound the same in some particulars, especially with reference to the sacred line of Jesus Christ.”¹³⁸

God, having brought his people Israel into the wilderness, gave them his law through Moses on Mount Sinai. God was its author, the lawgiver, and Moses was the “instrumental” means that God used to give Israel the law. Since Moses twice carried the two tables of the law written by God to the people, and he penned the ceremonial and judicial laws for Israel at the command of God, however, it is said, “the law was given by Moses.”¹³⁹

Roberts defines the word “law” as the “law of God given by Moses, or to Moses, for Israel on Mount Sinai.” The word may have various meanings when it is used for the law of God, “תורה” in the Hebrew and “νόμος” in the Greek. It is generally used for “any, or all divine doctrine or instruction, revealed and made known by God.” For example, the whole word of God is frequently called the law of God, and the doctrine of justification by faith is called the law of faith. More particularly, the law of God may denote the “law of nature,” or the “records of Gods written law”—any book of the Old Testament, or the Pentateuch—, or “Gods law given to Moses for Israel on Mount Sinai.”¹⁴⁰

Roberts distinguishes three meanings of the word “law” used for God’s law given to Moses for Israel on Mount Sinai: (1) more largely, (2) more strictly, and (3) most strictly. Firstly, “more largely and generally” it means “the whole dispensation of all sorts of

¹³⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 989.

¹³⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 655, citing Ex. 24:12, Deut. 33:2-4, John 1:17.

¹⁴⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 658-659, citing Ps. 1:2; 119:70, 72, 77, Rom. 3:27 (general meaning); Deut. 33:2, 4, Ps. 82:6, Luke 24:44, John 10:34, Rom. 2:14 (particular meaning).

commandments, moral, ceremonial, and judicial” given and promulgated on Mount Sinai. Here Roberts quotes Deut. 4:44-45: “And this is the law, which Moses set before the sons of Israel. These are the testimonies, and the statutes, and the judgements which Moses spake unto the sons of Israel after they came forth out of Egypt.” He interprets this passage to mean that three kinds of commandments are comprised under that one word, “law”: “testimonies, viz. the moral law, testified by God to Israel: statutes, viz. the ceremonial law: and judgements, viz. the judicial law.”¹⁴¹

Secondly, “more strictly,” law means “the moral law, or ten commandments” taken complexly with the preface and the promises attached, as God spoke them on Mount Sinai to Israel and afterwards wrote them and gave them to Moses. In this sense God said to Moses, “I will give thee table of stone, and a law, and commandments, which I have written” (Ex. 24:12). For God wrote only the Ten Commandments or moral law. Also in this sense, the word “law” is used for the moral law in Mal. 4:4, as distinct from statutes and judgments. Nevertheless, Roberts thinks that the ceremonial laws may all be referred to the first table and the judicial laws to the second table of the moral law, as its explication to the people of Israel. Roberts asserts that God’s law was given to Israel as a covenant only in these two senses.¹⁴²

Thirdly, “most strictly” the word “law” is taken for

the law abstracted from Moses administration of it, and precisely considered as an abstracted rule of righteousness, holding forth life meerly upon terms of perfect and perpetual personal obedience, and denouncing death and the curse upon every one and that without mercy, in case of the least contrary failing.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 659.

¹⁴²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 659-660, citing Ex. 20:1-18, and Deut. 5:2-22.

¹⁴³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 660.

In this sense, Roberts says, the apostle Paul uses the word “law” in his argument on justification by faith and not by the works of the law, opposing law to gospel and to grace, works, to faith, and justification by works to justification by faith. In this sense, the law is “materially and for substance the same with the covenant of works written in Adam’s heart” before the fall. Roberts judges that Luther also understood the law in this sense, putting it in opposition to the gospel, and disparaging it in terms of justification. Roberts points out that the antinomians in his days and the legalists in the days of the apostle Paul had something in common in “looking too much at the law of Moses in this last notion.” The difference is that while the legalists overestimated the law and mistakenly sought to be justified by the works of the law, the antinomians underestimated it and did not duly consider other senses of the law. Thus Roberts thinks that when his distinction of the word “law” is applied to the law of Moses, not only the foundation of the antinomian errors will be overthrown, but also some uncertainties or difficulties with what Paul says about the law will be cleared up.¹⁴⁴

Like other Puritans as well as the continental Reformed, Roberts divides God’s law given to Moses for Israel on Mount Sinai into three kinds: “moral, ceremonial, and judicial.” While the moral law contained in the Ten Commandments is perpetual, the ceremonial law concerning the worship and service of God and the judicial law concerning the civil state and polity of the Jews were temporary in terms of their obligatory force and power. The scriptural foundation of this distinction Roberts finds in Deut. 4:13-14: “He declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to

¹⁴⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 660. Roberts refers to Deut. 27:26, Hab. 2:4, Lev. 18:5, Rom. 3:27; 6:14-15, Gal. 3:8-14 (law opposed to gospel); Rom. 8:3 (identity of law and covenant of works), and Martin Luther, *Commentarius in epistolam ad Galatas*; and idem, *Loci communes*, Secundae Classis, Loci 10-13, 15-16, 18-19.

perform, even Ten Commandments...and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes, and judgements, that ye might do them.” Here Roberts understands by the Ten Commandments the moral law summarily comprised in them, by statutes the ceremonial law, and by judgments the judicial or political law.¹⁴⁵

Roberts thinks the moral law has remarkable superiority to both the ceremonial and judicial laws. For it alone was uttered by the voice of God to all Israel from Mount Sinai and written twice in tables of stone. It is also the foundation of the other two, which are reductively referred to the moral law as its explanations or particular additions to it for the Jewish church and commonwealth. Roberts indicates agreement with Johann Gerhard’s definition: “The ceremonial and iudicial law are nothing else but special appendixes to the moral law.” The moral law also excels the other two in that it alone has perpetual force and power for all the churches of God both under the Old and New Testaments. Another excellence lies in its being conformable and answerable to the law of nature written in Adam’s heart at his creation. It reaches the whole of mankind, whereas the obligatory force of the ceremonial law and the judicial law were confined to the Jewish worship and commonwealth, respectively.¹⁴⁶

Roberts enumerates several ends in God’s giving the law to Israel at this time. Yet they may be reduced to three. Firstly, by this law God wanted Israel to discover and keep themselves from all kinds of sins in Egypt and in Canaan. Secondly, God made the law a

¹⁴⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 661. Cf. Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 43 and 109, for Puritans’ distinction of law, and note Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, IV.iv.8, 10 (2:166-169).

¹⁴⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 662-663, citing Johann Gerhard, in *De Legibus ceremonialibus & forensibus*, I. Cf. Gerhard, *De Legibus ceremonialibus et forensibus*, I, in *Locorum theologicorum*, 10 vols. (Geneva, 1639), 3:156.

schoolmaster that might lead the people of Israel to Jesus Christ. Thirdly, the law was intended as a rule of life and obedience to all Israel so that they might express their sincere love and thankfulness to God for all his mercies, especially for their redemption from Egyptian slavery.¹⁴⁷ These ends are exactly consistent with the Reformed teaching on the three uses of the law—*usus politicus*, *usus pedagogus*, and *usus normativus*.¹⁴⁸

According to Roberts, the knowledge of the moral law was not completely extinguished from Adam to Moses. For the believers before Moses had the moral law, that is, the substance of the Ten Commandments, although they did not have it in its written form as given on Mount Sinai. God's law was engraved upon man's heart at creation, thus connatural to him. And the special commandment given to Adam forbidding the fruit of the tree of knowledge was, as Tertullian calls it, a "mother-commandment" that virtually had in its womb all the commandments of the moral law. Moreover, Roberts thinks that from Adam till Moses people had the substance of the moral law in God's church. It was not yet written, but they had it in substance. It remained partially in the hearts of men, not having been totally defaced by the fall. It was also partially revealed to the patriarchs from God and by them taught to their posterity.¹⁴⁹

Roberts makes a comparison between the law of nature written in Adam's heart and the law given on Mount Sinai. Regarding its "general sum and substance," Roberts identifies the moral law with the law of nature written in Adam's heart in his innocence.

¹⁴⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 679-683.

¹⁴⁸Cf. Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 38.

¹⁴⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 684 and 686, citing Gen. 1:26-27, Rom. 2:14-15, and Tertullian's *Adversus Judaeos*, cap. 2. Cf. Tertullian, "An Answer to the Jews," chap. 2, in *ANF*, vol. 3, p. 152. See Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 70-71, for the moral perception not completely extinguished in the fall.

The law written in men's hearts is shown in the gentiles' doing by nature the things contained in the law, although they do not have the written moral law. Roberts considers the fact that God created man upright in his own image, and he thinks that image, especially and summarily consisting in holiness and righteousness, to be the sum of the moral law. Holiness is the sum of the first table; righteousness the sum of the second. He also thinks that the law of nature required the "general sum and substance of the moral law": to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and might; and to love our neighbors as ourselves.¹⁵⁰ To show the identity of the law of nature with the moral law, Roberts says:

The same law for substance which the first Adam brake, to the ruine of all his natural posterity: did Christ the last Adam perfectly keep and fulfil, enduring the curse and penalty thereof, to the recovery of his elected supernatural posterity: otherwise the remedy had not been full, proper, and pertinent to the malady. But the first Adam brake the law of nature, in violating that positive law about the forbidden fruit: and Christ the last Adam kept the charge, and endured the curse of the moral law, death: therefore the moral law, and law of nature were the same, for sum and substance.¹⁵¹

Here Roberts seems to put the law of nature in the place of the covenant of works. At least in terms of substance Roberts identifies the moral law not only with the law of nature, but also with the covenant of works. In this he echoes much of the Reformed theology of his day.¹⁵²

Regarding its particulars and circumstances, however, Roberts thinks that the moral law is considerably different from the law of nature. Firstly, Roberts understands the

¹⁵⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 686-687, citing Rom. 2:14-15 (law of nature); Gen. 1:26-27, Eccles. 7:29, Eph. 4:24 (man in God's image); Matt. 22:36-40; 7:12 (substance of moral law).

¹⁵¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 687, citing Gal. 3:13; 4:4-5. Cf. Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 117, for the conformity of the Mosaic law to the law of nature.

¹⁵²Cf. Heppe, *RD*, 291-292.

moral law as “a covenant of faith in Christ the Mediator,” whereas he sees the law of nature as “a covenant of works” given to Adam. The covenant of works promised Adam justification and happiness by his own works and perfect fulfillment of the law, but the covenant of faith promised believers justification and happiness by faith in Christ. Thus “in their end and scope” they thoroughly differ from each other.¹⁵³

Secondly, the moral law given on Sinai binds only the Jews under the Old Testament and Christians under the New Testament, whereas the law of nature is of universal obligation, binding all mankind. Roberts thinks that the law of nature was engraved in Adam’s heart, and its imperfect relics still remain in all mankind. Since he understands the law of nature to be the covenant of works, he says that the penalty of the broken covenant of works lies fully upon all mankind until they embrace the covenant of faith and Christ as the only all sufficient remedy.¹⁵⁴

Thirdly, the moral law is more comprehensive, having in it more particulars required and forbidden than the law of nature. For example, whereas the first commandment requires us to have the Lord alone for our God in Christ by faith and to walk before him in all evangelical obedience, the law of nature does not require these things of us in reference to Christ as mediator. While the second commandment comprises in it the whole instituted worship of God under both the Old and New Testaments and the fourth commandment requires the sanctification of the Sabbath, the law of nature requires neither of them.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 687-688.

¹⁵⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 688.

¹⁵⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 687.

Fourthly, the moral law given on Mount Sinai imposes more upon all who receive it than does the law of nature. Although the law of nature binds people to obedience, the moral law, comprising in it the law of nature, binds more strongly, like a double bond. For the law of nature binds persons to obey God the creator, yet the moral law binds them to obey God not only as creator, but also as redeemer.¹⁵⁶

Roberts emphasizes that at Mount Sinai God gave the law through Moses to Israel as a covenant of faith. According to Roberts, the clarification of the nature of the Sinai covenant is very important and essential for a proper understanding of the whole of Scripture, both the Old and New Testaments, as well as God's whole covenant proceedings. It was an issue hotly debated in Roberts' lifetime, and he regards it as "the hardest Gordian-knot to untie, both in this and all other covenant-administrations."¹⁵⁷

The Sinai covenant as a covenant of faith not only revealed Christ, but also manifested more than the foregoing covenants. Above all, Christ was manifested in his more particular descent "not only as the seed of the woman, nor only as the seed of Abraham, but as the seed of Israel." Christ was manifested also in his person because he should be "God-man, God manifested in the flesh; God dwelling in the tabernacle of flesh." Thus the tabernacle in the midst of Israel was "a type of Christ's tabernacle and temple of the flesh or humane nature" in which the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily. In the preceding covenants, in Roberts' judgment, there was no such revelation of Christ's personality.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 688.

¹⁵⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 734, 738 and 779. This issue is separately discussed in the present work, pp. 224-267.

¹⁵⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 781-782, citing Deut. 18:15, Acts 3:22; 7:37 (seed of Israel); Ex. 25:8, 21-22, John 1:14; 2:19, 21, Col. 2:9, Heb. 8:2; 9:11-12 (perfect tabernacle).

According to Roberts, Christ's mediatory office was described also in the Sinai covenant, for in his "mediatory office Moses typified Christ the true Mediator."¹⁵⁹ Roberts says, "Nor did this covenant set out Christ only as a Mediator, more generally; but it also delineated his mediatory office in the chief branches of it, particularly, viz. prophecy, and priesthood and king-ship." Firstly, Christ's prophetic office is found in Deut. 18:15 where he is promised to be a prophet, like Moses, in whose mouth God would put his words so that he would speak all that God would command him. For, as a prophet, Christ would reveal the whole will of God for salvation. Secondly, Christ's priesthood is described in his being a great high priest, typified by the Levitical priesthood, especially by the high priest. Christ's expiation was typified in all the bloody sacrifices offered by the priests in the time of the law. His ascension was foreshadowed by the high priests' entering the holy of holies once a year through the veil with the blood of sacrifices. Christ's intercession was prefigured by the high priests' burning incense morning and evening upon the golden altar before the veil in front of the ark of the testimony with the mercy seat. Christ's benediction of his people was typified in the priests' blessing the people in the name of the LORD. Lastly, Christ's kingship was also made known in this Sinai covenant partly under the type of Moses, who delivered the Israelites from the Egyptian bondage by God's power and governed them in the wilderness. It was also partly shown under the type of Joshua, who subdued the kings and nations that were enemies of the Israelites and settled them in Canaan. And it was partly revealed under the type of king David, who completed the victories over the Jebusites and other enemies of Israel. Roberts also explains Christ's mediatory office in relation to the three kinds of law in the Sinai covenant. "As prophet he was revealed and

¹⁵⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 782, citing Deut. 18:15-20 and Gal. 3:19.

promised presently upon the promulgation of the law moral: as priest he was revealed and foreshadowed out in the law ceremonial: and as king he governed the commonwealth of Israel by the law judicial.”¹⁶⁰

Roberts also says that the Sinai covenant set forth Christ in his two distinct states of humiliation and exaltation in which he executed his mediatory office. In his humiliation Christ should become man and descend from the Jews according to the flesh, for God promised to raise up unto Israel a prophet from the midst of them. And he should suffer death and shed his blood for the sins of his people, which was signified by the death and blood of all the Levitical sacrifices under the law. In his exaltation, Christ should rise from the dead, which was signified by the scapegoat. When the high priest went into the most holy place, he had to take two goats, one to be killed for a sin offering and the other to be presented alive before God to make an atonement and to be let go as a scapegoat into the wilderness. Roberts explains: “By the former goat was prefigured Christs death and blood purging away our sins, by which he entred into heaven itself: by the latter, Christs reviving and resurrection from the dead, bearing our sins far away from us.” Regarding Christ’s exaltation, Roberts also says that he should ascend into heaven, which was typified by the high priests’ entering once a year the most holy place, a type of heaven.¹⁶¹

Roberts says that the federal parties to the Sinai covenant are God on the one hand and Israel and their posterity on the other. Yet God was the first and chief party to this

¹⁶⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 782-783, citing Deut. 18:18 (prophet); Ex. 30:1-10, Num. 6:23-27, Deut. 10:8; 21:5, Acts 3:26, Gal. 3:13-14, Heb. 4:14-15; 8:1-3; 9:6-10:20, 1 John 2:1 (priest); and Ex. 3:10, Deut. 33:4-5, Josh. 12:7, 2 Sam. 5:6-12, Ps. 77:20, Hos. 3:5 (king).

¹⁶¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 783-784, citing Luke 24:26, Eph. 4:9 (humiliation and exaltation); Deut. 18:15, 18, Acts 3:22; 7:37 (prophet); Lev. 16:3, 7-29 (scapegoat); Heb. 9:24 (high priest).

Sinai covenant: (1) as Jehovah, (2) as Israel's covenant God, (3) as Israel's redeemer, (4) as Israel's lawgiver, and (5) as Israel's husband. As Jehovah, God would now quickly fulfill all his ancient promises made to Israel, and greatly strengthen Israel's faith and hope in God's covenant and promises. And God did not make this Sinai covenant with Israel as if he had no covenant relationship with them before but as already being their covenant God by reason of his covenant made long ago with Abraham and his seed. God was Israel's redeemer—literally by rescuing them from their bondage and misery in Egypt and spiritually and mystically by delivering them from their bondage and misery under sin and Satan. When God entered into covenant with Israel as their lawgiver, he incorporated his laws into this evangelical covenant. And the Sinai covenant was God's marriage covenant with Israel: God was the husband, Israel the wife.¹⁶²

Israel with their posterity was the secondary party to this Sinai covenant in four ways: (1) as Abraham's seed in covenant with God, (2) as Jehovah's redeemed, (3) as God's espoused people, and (4) as heirs of the promised inheritance. In the Sinai covenant God looks upon the people of Israel as the seed of Abraham who are already in covenant with him. Thus in the preparatory introduction to this covenant he calls them "the house of Jacob, and the children of Israel" (Ex. 19:3). When God covenants with them as their redeemer, they covenant with him as his redeemed both from temporal and spiritual misery. Since God covenants with them as their husband, they respond to God as his spouse. Israel was in her infant condition, put under the Sinai covenant until the exhibition of the Messiah in the flesh and the establishment of the New Testament in his blood. By entering into covenant with God as heirs of his promises, however, the Israelites would soon possess the promised Canaan as a foretaste of the complete covenant inheritances. Yet Roberts asserts

¹⁶²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 790 and 792-796.

that Christ should be implied as a joint federate party with Israel while God was the other federate party. For all these four ways, in which Israel entered into covenant, have their foundation and accomplishment only in Christ in whom the Israelites are the covenant people, redeemed, spouse of God and heirs.¹⁶³

Roberts divides the matter of the Sinai covenant into two: covenant mercies promised on God's part and covenant duties required on Israel's part. The covenant mercies that God promised in this covenant are: (1) to be a God to them, (2) to raise up for them Christ as mediator and savior, (3) to give them the Spirit of God and of Christ, (4) to heap upon them temporal blessings, (5) to confer upon them spiritual blessings, and (6) to crown them at last with eternal blessings. To be a God to them and their posterity is "incomparably the greatest covenant-blessing" that can be promised by God to Israel. As it is "the fountain-blessing," all the other blessings are originally in it, and all their streams flow derivatively from it. Since God will not be a covenant God to any sinner but by means of a mediator, he promised to raise up for Israel Christ as a prophet or a mediator among them. The Holy Spirit was not so eminently and abundantly given until Christ was glorified, but in the Sinai covenant he was truly given both in ordinary and extraordinary endowments. By ordinary gifts Roberts means regenerating, renewing, sanctifying, and so forth; by extraordinary gifts he intends doing miracles, speaking in tongues, and so forth. God promised to bestow upon Israel many temporal blessings not only for their present life in this world, but also for leading them to spiritual and eternal blessings. Spiritual blessings promised to Israel in this covenant are such things as God's special acceptance of Israel as his people, his sanctification and justification of them in Christ, his equipping them with ability to observe his covenant, and his gracious presence

¹⁶³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 796-799, citing Ex. 10:1-17; 19:3-6, Jer. 31:31-32 and Ezek. 16:8.

among them. The final blessing that God promised in the Sinai covenant was to crown Israel with eternal happiness, that is, eternal life and happiness in the world to come.¹⁶⁴

The covenant duties required on Israel's part are: (1) to be a people unto God in covenant, (2) to keep this covenant of God both by true faith and by sincere and constant obedience, and (3) to repent in case of any failings. To be a covenant people unto God was "the first, and greatest duty" that Israel did, or could promise to God. It was the foundation of all their duties. More particularly, however, to be God's covenant people has various implications. Firstly, Israel is to be his covenant people solely by federal appropriation, that is, to be separated from all other peoples that might stand against God or might come in competition with God to rule over them. Secondly, Israel is to be his covenant people by federal profession by openly avowing themselves to be God's covenant people and being called by God's name. Thirdly, Israel is to be his covenant people in Christ, the "right covenant-foundation." Fourthly, Israel is to be his covenant people in all covenant relations, for a covenant state with God entails certain covenant relations to God in Christ. Those relations between God or Christ and Israel are father and children, husband and wife, head and body, and so forth. Lastly, to be a covenant people to God implies being his people wholly and entirely in all they have, in all they can do, and in all they can endure.¹⁶⁵

The second covenant duty required of Israel in the Sinai covenant is to keep God's covenant entirely both by true faith in Jesus Christ and by sincere, complete, and constant obedience. Roberts describes true faith in Jesus Christ as "a saving grace" wrought in the

¹⁶⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 800, 805, 811, 814, 816 and 842, citing Deut. 18:18 (raising a prophet).

¹⁶⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 846, 848 and 850-852, citing Deut. 26:17-18, Ps. 100:3, Jer. 14:9, and Dan. 9:19.

hearts of God's people at their regeneration by God's Spirit and word, whereby they not only apply to themselves his promises and the works of Jesus Christ in their justification and salvation, but also they walk as justified people. It can be proved that God required of Israel true faith in Christ for the keeping and performance of this covenant in many ways. Firstly, as true faith in Jesus Christ was required, at least implicitly, in the three foregoing administrations of the covenant of faith, which were less perfect than this Sinai covenant, it was required more clearly in this covenant. Secondly, it was required of Israel, for in this covenant Jesus Christ is frequently presented to Israel in a variety of ways: the sacrifices of all sorts, the tabernacle, the veil, the ark, the mercy seat over the ark, the high priest with his consecration, and so forth. Thirdly, true faith in Christ was required of Israel because it was "shadowed forth" in this Sinai covenant, particularly in the bunch of hyssop and in the serpent-bitten Israelites looking up to the brazen serpent for a cure.¹⁶⁶ Fourthly, as Christ is the great end of the law, that is, the very essence of this Sinai covenant, true faith in Christ is required here. Without it neither Christ nor justification by him could possibly be received or applied. Fifthly, true faith in Christ is required in the Sinai covenant as this covenant demands sincere and entire love for God. For love presupposes faith, and it is enlivened and actuated by faith. Sixthly, in the first and great commandment of this Sinai covenant true faith in God through Jesus Christ is implied and required. For God was not the covenant God of Israel except in and through Jesus Christ the Mediator. Lastly, requiring entire, impartial obedience to his law and covenant, God presupposes and implicitly requires faith, the necessary fountain and root

¹⁶⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 862-865, citing Ex. 24:5-8, Heb. 9:19-20, and Augustine, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum*, IV.33 [de Numeris], for hyssop; and Num. 21:6-9, John 3:14-16, for the brazen serpent. Cf. Augustine, *Quaestionum in Heptateuchum libri VII*, IV.33, in *CSEL*, vol. 28, pt. 2, p. 344.

of all sincere and acceptable obedience. For all true love arises from, and is actuated by, true faith.¹⁶⁷ Hence, true faith in Christ was required of Israel for keeping the Sinai covenant.

Roberts understands “sincere, entire and constant obedience,” the other constituent for keeping God’s covenant, as “sincere and perfect walking before God in all good works unto all well-pleasing in Jesus Christ.” He argues that “entire constant obedience is not required in this Sinai-covenant in a legal, but in an evangelical sense; not as an exact condition of the covenant of works, but as an upright condition of the covenant of faith.” As Kevan says, the best that believers can do is imperfect. Roberts explains that sincere, entire, and constant obedience is required in this Sinai covenant not as “an antecedent condition” of the covenant, moving God to enter into covenant with Israel, but as “a consequent condition” of the covenant. True obedience is required not as something opposed to faith and grace, like in the covenant of works, but as a response to faith and grace, for it is “a consequent fruit or effect of faith, and faith is a fruit of divine grace.” Thus, true obedience is not required in this covenant as a concomitant cause or joint cause with faith in justification but as a proper fruit and effect of true, justifying faith. Roberts explains that “faith justifies our persons before God, applying Christ’s righteousness to that end: obedience sincere entire and constant justifies our faith before God, ourselves and men.” But Roberts acknowledges that obedience in the Sinai covenant is not required so clearly, spiritually, and filially “as in the New Testament,

¹⁶⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 866-867, citing Rom. 10:4, Gal. 3:24, and 1 Tim. 1:5 (true faith); Deut. 6:4-6; 10:12; 30:6 (sincere love); Ex. 20:2-3 (faith in Mediator); and Calvin, *Commentarius*, Deut. 10:12. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Deut. 10:12 (3:191).

wherein all obedience is urged with greatest clearness, spiritualness and liberty.”¹⁶⁸ In understanding the obedience required in this Sinai covenant not as an antecedent but as a consequent condition annexed to the promise, Roberts follows Ball.¹⁶⁹

Roberts asserts that in the Sinai covenant God not only required Israel’s obedience in general, but also accurately describes that obedience in particular, which he had never set forth in any previous covenants. God described the required obedience generally in his moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws, which were incorporated into one covenant, and spiritually and most eminently in the Ten Commandments by comprehending in them not only moral obedience but also reductively ceremonial and judicial obedience. Thus, the Ten Commandments are called, by way of eminence, God’s covenant, which the Israelites were commanded to perform as the rule for their obedience as well as for their faith.¹⁷⁰

The third and last covenant duty required on Israel’s part in the Sinai covenant is to repent and return to God in case of any failings in the two previous covenant duties, that is, in being God’s covenant people and in keeping his covenant by true faith and obedience. According to Roberts, sinners’ repentance toward God is of two kinds: more general and common which applies both to elect and reprobate persons, and more special and peculiar which applies only to God’s elect. The former is repentance arising from knowledge of God the creator’s omnipotence and from fear of his punishment; the latter

¹⁶⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 872 and 874-876; and Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 213.

¹⁶⁹Cf. Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 132-133.

¹⁷⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 876, citing Deut. 4:13.

is repentance arising from true faith in Jesus Christ the savior.¹⁷¹ When God requires repentance of Israel, says Roberts, he primarily intends it in the latter sense. The former repentance was only preparatory to the latter. Thus, Roberts describes true repentance as “a grace of God, whereby a sinner, after true sense of sin, and godly sorrow for sin, is changed and converted in heart and life, from sin to God.” Roberts says that from the Sinai covenant until Christ’s death, God gave Israel both ordinary and extraordinary means of repentance. The ordinary means was the ministry of the priests; the extraordinary means was the ministry of the prophets, John Baptist, and Jesus Christ himself. Roberts emphasizes that the Sinai covenant was “a gospel administration,” for in case Israel failed in it, God called for their repentance. He explains: “Repentance is a pure evangelical condition and duty, pressed often in the gospel-doctrine of Old and New Testament,” whereas the covenant of works “admits of no repentance at all, no not in the least case of failing in covenant-duties but denounces death without mercy for the smallest transgression.”¹⁷²

Roberts divides the form of the Sinai covenant into the more inward and essential form and the more outward and accidental form. The more inward and essential form consists in the reciprocal agreement and obligation of the parties federating together, that is the promise of covenant mercies on God’s part and the requirement of covenant duties on Israel’s part. The more outward and accidental form of this covenant consists in the manner of its first manifestation and establishment and its ensuing administration. The Sinai

¹⁷¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 896-897, citing 1 Kings 21:27, 29, Jonah 3:5-10, Matt. 11:20-21; 27:3-5 (repentance out of fear); and Acts 11:17-18 and 2 Cor. 7:10 (repentance out of faith)..

¹⁷²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 897 and 899-900, citing Joel 2:17, Mal. 2:7, Neh. 9:29-30, Matt. 3:1-3, 8; 4:17, Luke 13:3-5 (ministry of prophets).

covenant was revealed to Israel not only by word of mouth, as all foregoing covenants were, but also in writing. It was also disclosed to Israel not in a private family capacity—like all the former covenants with the families of Adam, Noah, and Abraham—but in a national capacity as a political body both ecclesiastical and civil. And this Sinai covenant extended to the death of Jesus Christ, for by Christ's death the Old Testament administration was abrogated and the New Testament administration inaugurated.¹⁷³

Roberts divides the end or scope of the Sinai covenant into two, the more immediate, and the more mediate and remote. The more immediate end of this covenant is God's fuller revealing of Jesus Christ the promised savior of sinners. Yet Roberts separates the more mediate and remote end into the less principal and subordinate end, that is, the great furtherance of Israel's present and future happiness, and the principal and ultimate end, that is, a fuller advancement of God's own glory than by any or all former covenant administrations.¹⁷⁴

5. God's Covenant with David

Regarding the postlapsarian covenant, Ball kept the major pattern of periodization generally acknowledged by Puritans. He divided it under four heads: (1) Adam, (2) Abraham, (3) Moses, and (4) the new covenant. But he saw two distinct developmental periods within the Mosaic administration. Then he distinguished God's covenant under Moses till the return of Israel from the Babylonian captivity into three periods corresponding to three subheads: Moses, David, and Israel in the Babylonian captivity.

¹⁷³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 902-904, citing Ex. 19, 20, 24, Deut. 5 (chaps.), Matt. 26:17-31, Luke 23:45-46, John 19:20, and Heb. 10:1-23.

¹⁷⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 938 and 940-941.

Thus Ball actually divided the postlapsarian covenant into six administrations. They were covenants with Adam, Abraham, Moses, David, Israel in the Babylonian captivity, and the new covenant.¹⁷⁵

Roberts follows Ball in his division of the Mosaic administration into three subheads and asserts that the Sinai covenant encompasses the two subsequent covenants of promise, one with David and the other with the Israelites in the Babylonian captivity. For he thinks that the Sinai covenant or Old Testament continued from the giving of the law on Mount Sinai till the death of Jesus Christ. Not only David and the Jews in the Babylonian captivity, but also Jesus Christ himself lived in obedience to and in subjection to God according to this covenant. The two subsequent covenants did not interrupt the administration of the Sinai covenant but enlarged, amplified, and expounded it in some particulars, “especially with reference to the sacred line of Jesus Christ, both by law, and by nature.” In his covenant with David God assured David that Christ would descend from him according to flesh and would succeed him in ruling God’s church, typified by David’s kingdom, forever. In his covenant with the Israelites in Babylon, God assured them of the near approach of the desire of all nations, the King of kings, and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. Thus Roberts describes the relation between the Sinai covenant and two subsequent covenants as follows: “a covenant in the middle of a covenant, yea these two covenants in the bosome of the Sinai-covenant; or, the Sinai-covenant big with child, having these twin-covenants in its womb.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 27-350.

¹⁷⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 989 and 991-992, citing 2 Sam. 7:4-17, Hag. 2:7, Acts 13:22-23, Rev. 19:16.

Roberts sees God's covenant with David and his seed expressed in Scripture mainly in three ways. Firstly, the covenant is seen in the vision that the prophet Nathan received from God and imparted to David when David cherished in his heart the pious resolution to build God a house at the point when the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies. Secondly, the covenant is reiterated in the express testimony of God himself in the recital, exposition, and enlargement of his covenant with David and his seed. Lastly, the covenant is mentioned in David's own acknowledgement in express terms when in his last words he comforted himself in God's faithful promises.¹⁷⁷

Based on these particular occasions, Roberts thinks it is clear that God was the sole efficient cause and author of this covenant, and that God on the one hand and David and his seed on the other were federate parties to this covenant. God was the chief federate party to and author of this covenant as the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, the rock of Israel, a father to David and his seed, a God to David, and the rock of David's salvation. David and his seed constituted the other confederate to this covenant. David was a confederate as one who was mighty, as God's elect or chosen one, as God's servant, as God's anointed king, and as God's firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. David was joined by his seed as God's son and as God's king forever.¹⁷⁸

In all these particular roles of David as the confederate, Roberts finds Jesus Christ as "primarily intended and shadowed out." For Christ is a mighty one, indeed, on whom our help and salvation is laid, God's chosen and beloved one above all, God's most eminent and

¹⁷⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1000, citing 2 Sam. 7:1-17 and 1 Chron. 17:3-15 (Nathan's vision); Ps. 89:3-4, 28-29, 34; 132:11-12 (God's testimony); and 2 Sam. 23:5 (David's acknowledgment).

¹⁷⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1000 and 1004-1008, citing 2 Sam. 7:8; 23:3-5, 1 Chron. 17:7, Ps. 89:20, 26 (God); and 2 Sam. 7:12-14, 1 Chron. 17:11-14, Ps. 89: 3-4, 19-20, 27, 34-36; 132:11-12 (David and his seed).

faithful servant in the great work and service of sinners' redemption, God's anointed king, and God's firstborn higher than the kings of the earth.¹⁷⁹ According to Roberts, in this covenant David and his seed, especially David and his son Solomon, were "eminent types of Christ, the true David most entirely beloved of God, and the true Solomon and prince of peace to his church and people."¹⁸⁰ David and Solomon are the types; Christ, the anti-type. And they are "the shadows" of Christ, "the substance." For all the ways under which David and his seed were federate parties with God in this covenant had a more special tendency to and accomplishment in Jesus Christ than either in David or in Solomon.¹⁸¹

Roberts divides the impulsive cause inclining God to make this covenant with David and his seed into two: inward and outward. The inward moving cause in this covenant is solely God's own rich grace and mercy. The outward moving cause is solely Jesus Christ the messiah and his merit, in whom alone God so accepted David as to make this excellent covenant with him.¹⁸²

The substance or subject matter of God's covenant with David and his seed consisted of many eminent mercies and blessings promised on God's part and of many covenant duties conditioned and required on the part of David and his seed. Roberts divides God's covenant mercies promised to David and his seed into three kinds, those concerning David, his seed, and the subjects of king David and his seed. Roberts begins by

¹⁷⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1007, citing Ps. 45:3, Isa. 9:6, Matt. 28:18, Heb. 7:25 (a mighty one); Isa. 42:1, Matt. 12:18 (God's chosen and beloved one); Isa. 42:1; 49:3, 5-6 (God's servant); Ps. 2:6; 45:1, 3-4, 6-8 (God's anointed king); and Col. 1:15, 18, Rev. 1:5; 19:16 (God's firstborn higher than the earthly kings).

¹⁸⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1009, citing Jer. 30:9, Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25, Hos. 3:5, John 3:16, Col. 1:13 (the true David); and Ps. 72:1-19, Isa. 9:6 (the true Solomon).

¹⁸¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1009.

¹⁸²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1010-1011.

enumerating the covenant mercies concerning David himself. Firstly, God would subdue all his enemies. This promise was performed and accomplished in two ways, immediately to David himself and spiritually to Jesus Christ, the true David. For God literally subdued David's enemies, and Christ not only already conquered his and his members' enemies, but also will completely subdue them all at his second coming.¹⁸³ Secondly, God would establish and strengthen David in his kingdom in the face of his enemies. This blessing was accomplished in David as God established him king over Israel and exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake. It was also accomplished in Jesus Christ as God established and strengthened him and his mediatory kingdom so that he rules in the midst of his enemies.¹⁸⁴ Thirdly, God would increase and enlarge David's glory, prosperity, power, and dominion. This promise was accomplished in David and Solomon, but most eminently in Jesus Christ. God preserved David wherever he went, and God was with Solomon and strengthened and magnified him exceedingly; but in a greater way God brought all nations into subjection to Jesus Christ "by the scepter of his Spirit and gospel" and made him "Lord of lords, and King of kings" forever.¹⁸⁵ Fourthly, God would maintain sweet covenant relations with David, as David's father, David's God, and David's Rock of Salvation. Roberts says that even though God really became a father to David himself, this promise was "primarily intended, and had its fullest

¹⁸³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1015-1017, citing 1 Chron. 17:10, Ps. 89:20, 22-23; 132:18 (God's mercies for David); 1 Sam. 25:28, 2 Sam. 5:10; 7:9; 22:1-51, 1 Chron. 17:8, Ps. 18:1-50 (David); and Ps. 110:1, John 16:11, 33, Rom. 8:3, 1 Cor. 15:24-26, Eph. 4:8, Col. 2:13-15, 2 Thess. 2:8, Heb. 2:14-15 (Jesus Christ).

¹⁸⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1017-1018, citing 2 Sam. 5:7, 9-12, 17-25; 8:1, 11-13 (David); and Ps. 2:1-12; 110:1-2, Isa. 49:7-13 (Jesus Christ).

¹⁸⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1018-1020, citing 2 Sam. 8:2, 5, 13-14 (David); 2 Chron. 1:1 (Solomon); and Ps. 2:8-9, Matt. 28:18-19, Acts 1:8, Col. 1:5-6, Rev. 11:15; 19:16 (Jesus Christ).

accomplishment in the anti-type Jesus Christ, who was indeed Gods first-born higher than all kings of the earth.” Fifthly, God would fulfill David’s days. Roberts says that this has in it an implicit promise of long life to David. It was literally accomplished.¹⁸⁶ Sixthly, God would build David a house, making it powerful and prosperous, especially by raising up his seed to sit upon his throne forever. This blessing was accomplished more immediately and less principally in David’s ordinary natural seed as his natural posterity sat upon his kingly throne till the Babylonian captivity. It was, however, more mediately and principally fulfilled in David’s extraordinary natural seed according to the flesh, Jesus Christ. It was accomplished in Jesus Christ partly by his birth according to the flesh from David’s loins and partly by his royal succession to David’s throne as he reigns over the house of David, the church of God, forever.¹⁸⁷ The last covenant mercy God promised to David was the perpetuity and stability of his covenant and mercy to David. This blessing was fulfilled partly in David’s posterity, who were successively raised up to sit upon his throne for a long time, but principally in Jesus Christ, his primary seed, to whom God gave the throne of his father, David.¹⁸⁸

Roberts then enumerates God’s covenant mercies concerning David’s seed. Firstly, God would be a father to the seed of David. Roberts says that this promise of “parental relation” was accomplished more immediately and less principally upon David’s ordinary seed, especially Solomon. It was more mediately and principally fulfilled in David’s

¹⁸⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1020-1025, citing 2 Sam. 7:12, 1 Chron. 29:27-28, Ps. 89:26-27.

¹⁸⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1025-1026, citing 2 Sam. 7:11, 1 Chron. 17:10, Dan. 2:34-35, 44, Matt. 1:1, Luke 1:31-33, Acts 2:30, Rom. 1:3.

¹⁸⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1030-1031, citing Ps. 89:28-29, 33-35, Luke 1:31-33.

extraordinary seed, Jesus Christ.¹⁸⁹ Secondly, David's seed would build God a house. This promise was fulfilled literally and typically in David's immediate seed Solomon, and spiritually and antitypically in David's mediate seed, Jesus Christ, who is greater than Solomon. The temple that king Solomon built was a type of the church and people of God. Thus in building this material temple, Solomon was a special type of Jesus Christ, the only builder of the spiritual temple, his church.¹⁹⁰ Thirdly, God would establish David's seed after him in his kingdom and on his throne forever. This was accomplished more immediately and literally by the seed of David in the succession of kings from David's line from Solomon till the Babylonian captivity, but more mediately and spiritually in Jesus Christ, the seed of David, whose spiritual kingdom swallowed up David's earthly kingdom.¹⁹¹ Lastly, God would not utterly take away his covenant faithfulness and loving kindness from David's seed even when they sinned, but he would chastise them with a rod for their failure. This promise had its fulfillment in David's ordinary seed when God chastised David's posterity for their iniquities and mitigated the chastisement according to his mercy. It was also fulfilled in David's extraordinary seed, Jesus Christ. The chastisement threatened to David's seed was inflicted upon Jesus Christ. Yet, God did not take away his mercy in Christ's deepest sufferings and humiliation.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1031-1032, citing 2 Sam. 7:12-14, 1 Chron. 17:11, 13; 28:6, Luke 1:30-33, Heb. 1:4-5.

¹⁹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1032-1035, citing 2 Sam. 7:13, 1 Chron. 17:12; 28:2-3, 6, Acts 7:45-47, Eph. 2:20-22, Heb. 3:2-6, 1 Peter 2:4-5.

¹⁹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1035-1037, citing 2 Sam. 7:12-16, 1 Chron. 3:1, 5, 10-17, 17:11-14, Matt. 1:6-12, Luke 1:31-33, Rom. 1:3.

¹⁹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1037-1043, citing 2 Sam. 7:14-15, Ps. 89:30-37, Isa. 53:4-6, Matt. 27:45-46, 51-54, Luke 23:39-43, 46, Acts 2:25-36, 2 Cor. 5:21, 1 Peter 2:24.

The last covenant mercies that God promised to David and his seed concerned Israel, the subjects of king David and his royal seed. Firstly, God would inhabit Sion forever. By Sion, or Zion, Roberts understands not only Jerusalem literally but also mystically and spiritually God's church, typified and foreshadowed by Mount Sion and the temple there.¹⁹³ Secondly, God would peacefully and securely establish Israel, the subjects of king David and of his royal seed, in the land of Canaan. Roberts says that this blessing results from the former, for Israel could never have a better foundation for peaceful and secure settlement in Canaan than God's rest and residence in the midst of them.¹⁹⁴ Lastly, God would prosper them both in temporal and spiritual things. Roberts sees Israel's prosperity in temporal things promised in Ps. 132:15: "I will abundantly bless her provision: I will satisfy her poor with bread." By provision and bread he understands a combination of all necessary temporal goods for Sion. He sees Israel's prosperity in spiritual things promised in Ps. 132:16: "I will also cloth her priests with salvation: and her saints shall shout aloud for joy."¹⁹⁵ By salvation in this passage Calvin understands God's protection of his priests. Simeon de Muis interprets clothing priests with salvation to mean God's salvation of the priests.¹⁹⁶ Ludwig Lavater thinks that "here is an allusion to the priests garments which shadowed out many virtues, that they should be evidently cloathed and adorned with true

¹⁹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1043-1044, citing 2 Chron. 3:1, Ps. 2:6; 48:2; 132:11-14, Heb. 12:22-23, and Rev. 14:1.

¹⁹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1048, citing 2 Sam. 7:10-11, 1 Chron. 17:9-10, and Ps. 46:5.

¹⁹⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1050, citing 2 Chron. 6:41.

¹⁹⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1051, citing Calvin, *Commentarius*, Ps. 132:9, 16; and Simeon de Muis, *Commentarius*, Ps. 132:9, 16. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Ps. 132:9 and 16 (5:152 and 159).

virtues and holiness of life.”¹⁹⁷ Roberts finds none of these interpretations satisfactory. He takes clothing Sion’s priests with salvation to mean three things: the safe conservation of the public ministry of the priests in Sion, the eminent adorning of Sion’s priests with the spiritual ornaments of righteousness and salvation visible in their functions, and the efficacy and prevalent success of the ministry of Sion’s priests upon the people for salvation and righteousness. In this interpretation, especially in the first and third meanings, Roberts follows Ball.¹⁹⁸

Roberts expresses the covenant duties required on the part of David and his seed under two heads: their keeping God’s covenant and testimony, walking in his commandments, statutes and judgements; and their being just in their kingdom, ruling in the fear of God. Roberts adds that while the former duty was common to kings and rulers in all of Israel’s history, the latter duty was peculiar to the house of David in Israel. According to Roberts, taken “more generally,” the common duties of all Israel in this Davidic covenant, that is, their keeping God’s covenant by walking in his law, are the same as those imposed upon Israel and their posterity in the Sinai covenant. For this covenant with David did not annul the Sinai covenant or its duties, but God, in imposing these conditions upon David and his seed, plainly has reference to the duties of the Sinai covenant. Thus, this covenant with David did not destroy, but added to that with Israel on Mount Sinai.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁷Ludwig Lavater, *Commentarius*, 2 Chron. 6:41; quoted in Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1051. Cf. Lavater, *In libros Paralipomenon siue Chronicorum...commentarius* (Zurich, 1573), 2 Chron. 6:41 (p. 116).

¹⁹⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1051. In the margin Roberts quotes Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 148.

¹⁹⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1052-1053, citing 1 Chron. 28:7, Ps. 89:30-31; 132:11-12.

Taken “more particularly,” the covenant duties imposed upon all Israel as well as David and his posterity are as follows. Firstly, they were to be God’s people by covenant. Secondly, they were to truly know God and his covenant and to seek to obey all his commandments. Thirdly, they were to keep covenant by true faith in Jesus Christ and the mercy promised in this covenant and the Sinai covenant. Fourthly, they were to keep covenant by willing, perfect, entire, and constant obedience. And lastly, they were to repent and return to God in case of any covenant failings.²⁰⁰ These covenant duties correspond to those required in the Sinai covenant: firstly, to be God’s people in covenant; secondly, to keep covenant both by true faith, and by sincere, entire and constant obedience; and lastly, to repent in case of any covenant failings.²⁰¹ For, the second, third, and fourth covenant duties imposed in God’s covenant with David and his seed can be reduced to the second covenant duty of the Sinai covenant.

Roberts understands the covenant duties more peculiar and appropriate to David and his house to involve being just in their dominion and royal government, ruling piously and religiously.²⁰² Roberts says that this covenant duty was performed not only by David, Solomon, and other godly kings of Judah, but also by Jesus Christ. Especially by Jesus Christ the duties of this covenant had their fullest and exact accomplishment. For David and his seed, even the most religious and righteous of them, had their failings, but

²⁰⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1053-1054, citing 2 Sam. 7:24, 1 Kings 8:33-53; 9:3, 1 Chron. 17:13; 28:6-9, 2 Chron. 6:26-39; 7:12-14, Ps. 89:26-27, 30-31; 132:11-12, Luke 1:31-33, Acts 2:29-31, Heb. 1:5.

²⁰¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 846.

²⁰²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1055, citing 2 Sam. 23:3.

Jesus Christ, the primary seed of David, fully kept God's covenant and walked most religiously and righteously in his spiritual kingdom over the house of Israel.²⁰³

Roberts divides the form of God's covenant with David and his seed into two: inward and essential, and outward and accidental. The more inward and essential form of this covenant consists in the reciprocal covenant obligation between the federates, that is between God on the one hand by his promises of various federal mercies, and David and his seed on the other hand by their promising various covenant duties. The more outward and accidental form of this covenant consists in its (1) manifestation, (2) confirmation, and (3) administration. Firstly, the manifestation of this covenant to David from God was not immediate, but mediate, for God revealed it to the prophet Nathan by vision, and Nathan declared it to David.²⁰⁴ Secondly, God confirmed this covenant to David and his seed in various ways: by ratifying promises, by God's sacred oath, by explanatory repetitions of the covenant, and by its actual accomplishments in part.²⁰⁵ Lastly, the administration of this covenant with David and his seed was in effect the same as that of the Sinai covenant, which remained in force till the death of Jesus Christ. Although in this covenant the promises touched more the kingship of David's seed, and the worship was more settled than in the Sinai covenant, yet the ministry and ceremonies of the Sinai covenant and its tokens, that is, circumcision and the Passover, were still kept.²⁰⁶

²⁰³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1061.

²⁰⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1065, citing 2 Sam. 7:1-17, 1 Chron. 17:1-15, and Ps. 89:19.

²⁰⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1066, citing Ps. 89:28-29, 33-35 (ratifying); Ps. 89:3, 35; 132:11 (oath); and 2 Sam. 7:1-17; 23:1-7, 1 Kings 5:5; 8:15-26, 1 Chron. 17:1-15; 28:2-10, Ps. 89:1-52; 132:11-18, Jer. 33:19-26, Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25, Hos. 3:5, Luke 1:30-33, Acts 2:29-31 (repetition).

²⁰⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1067.

Roberts divides the end of God's covenant with David and his seed into immediate and mediate. The mediate end of this covenant is twofold, subordinate and ultimate. The subordinate end is to further the happiness of David, of his seed, and of his subjects in Christ. The ultimate end is to significantly advance the glory of God.²⁰⁷

Roberts understands the immediate end of God's covenant with David and his seed as a more distinctive revelation of Jesus Christ. He compares the revelation of Jesus Christ in this covenant with that in the foregoing covenants in two respects: in regard to his descent and in regard to his office. In regard to his descent, in the foregoing covenants Christ was promised as the "seed of the woman," the "seed of Noah," the "seed of Abraham," and the "seed of Israel." But in this covenant with David, Christ's descent was more clearly identified with one family of Israel, "the house of David." Roberts also finds Christ's office more specially displayed in this covenant than in the previous covenants. Christ's office was described as "a bruiser of the serpents head" under the Adamic covenant, as "a saviour of an elect seed and remnant" in Noah's covenant, and as "a blessing of all the kindreds of the earth" in Abraham's covenant. While regarding his priesthood Christ was foreshadowed by Melchizedek in Abraham's covenant, his prophetic office and priestly office were typified in Moses and Aaron respectively in the Sinai covenant. Now in this covenant with David, Christ was promised as an "everlasting king" who would sit upon the throne of his father David and rule the house of Israel, the church, forever. Although Christ's kingly office was briefly typified in Melchizedek, king of Salem, Roberts regards "the everlasting kingdom of

²⁰⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1069-1070.

Dauids seed, Christ” as “the very burden and main business of this covenant with David, which is insisted upon again and again.”²⁰⁸

Roberts considers David and Solomon to be eminent types of Jesus Christ. According to Roberts, David typified Christ in regard to person, office, condition, and works. Especially in his office David was a prophet, priest, and king typifying Christ. Firstly, David was a prophet, for he wrote the greatest part of the Psalms by the inspiration of God’s Spirit, thus he was called “the sweet Psalmist of Israel.” Christ was “the great prophet,” and the Scripture is called the word of Christ, for “David did but pen the Scripture: but Christ indited it by his Spirit.” Secondly, David was an extraordinary priest in his building an altar in the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite and in his offering a sacrifice there to stop the plague of pestilence, and God accepted that offering. Christ was the “great and most extraordinary high-priest, who upon the altar of his God-head offered himself a sacrifice at Jerusalem for the sins of Jews and gentiles that Gods wrath might be stayed; which sacrifice was most acceptable as an odour of a sweet smell to God.” Lastly, David’s primary and ordinary office was that of a king, in which he was a most remarkable “type of Christ, the King of kings.” Both of them were kings, especially kings of Israel. Both of them were messiahs, that is, anointed. And both of them were anointed of God unto their kingly office. Upon their anointing both were furnished with the Spirit of God for their royal government.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1069-1070, citing 2 Sam. 7:12-14, Ps. 89:36-37; 132:11, Luke 1:31-33, Acts 2:30-32, Heb. 7:1-3.

²⁰⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1073-1074, citing 1 Sam. 16:13, 2 Sam. 6:20; 23:1-2; 24:18-25, Ps. 78:70-71, Matt. 1:6, Acts 2:30 (David); and Ps. 45:7, Matt. 3:16, Luke 9:31; 24:19, John 1:49; 12:13; 18:37, Acts 7:37; 10:38, Eph. 5:2, Col. 3:16, 2 Tim. 3:16, Heb. 8:1; 9:11-14, 26, 28; 10:5-18, 2 Peter 1:21 (Jesus Christ).

According to Roberts, Solomon was also a type of Jesus Christ with regard to person, office, condition, and works. In his office, especially, Solomon was a prophet and a king typifying Christ. Solomon was a prophet, for he was “a preacher” in Jerusalem and “an holy penman of those three eminent books of Scripture, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.” But Christ was “a greater prophet,” for the “spirit of prophecy is from him” and “he indited all the Holy Scriptures.” Both Solomon and Christ were kings of Israel and kings in Jerusalem. Both of them were “kings of peace” and “kings of incomparable wisdom.”²¹⁰

6. God’s Covenant with Israel in the Babylonian Captivity

Roberts understands God’s covenant with Israel in the Babylonian captivity as extending from the Babylonian captivity until the death of Jesus Christ. According to Roberts, since this covenant with captive Jews and the Davidic covenant together enlarged the Sinai covenant, “this covenant ran parallel with the Sinai-covenant, from the captivity till the death of Christ.”²¹¹

Although the Davidic covenant and this covenant were “additional explanations and enlargements of the Sinai-covenant,” they were administered differently. For example, while the Davidic covenant was directed to David’s family in prosperity, this covenant in the captivity was directed to the Israelites in great adversity. Yet the greatest difference is this: by the Davidic covenant God promised to raise up Christ of the seed of David to sit upon his throne, but by the covenant in captivity God not only promised but also

²¹⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1076-1077, citing 1 Kings 3:9, 12; 4:25, 1 Chron. 22:9, Prov. 1:1, Eccles. 1:1, 12, Song 1:1 (Solomon); and Isa. 9:6, Matt. 21:5, 9, Luke 1:79; 19:37-38, John 1:49; 6:14; 12:13; 14:27; 16:33, Acts 3:23, Rom. 5:1; 14:17, 1 Cor. 1:30, Eph. 2:14; 4:11; 6:15, Phil. 4:7, Col. 2:2-3; 3:16, 2 Peter 1:20-21, Rev. 19:10 (Jesus Christ).

performed and exhibited Jesus Christ, the chief seed of David, sitting upon his throne forever.²¹²

According to Roberts, the LORD God was the sole author and efficient cause of this covenant with the captive Jews. The prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah were “the instrumental revealers and publishers” of the covenant to those in the captivity.²¹³ For this covenant was first and especially revealed to three holy prophets from God and by them to the Jews. It was revealed to the prophet Isaiah long before the captivity of the Jews in Babylon came to pass yet with reference to that captivity. It was revealed to the prophet Ezekiel in the twelfth year of the captivity in order to support and comfort the captive Jews. And it was revealed to the prophet Jeremiah about the eighteenth year of the captivity when the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem, and Jeremiah was shut up in the court of the prison, in the house of the king of Judah. Thus, this covenant was revealed first to Isaiah, then to Ezekiel, then to Jeremiah, and to all before and under the Babylonian captivity, so that it was “a covenant to the captivity, or, the uncaptivating covenant.”²¹⁴

God was the chief federate party to this covenant, as the Lord Jehovah, as the God of Israel, and as their redeemer.²¹⁵ The Jews held captive under the power of the king of Babylon were, in Christ, the other party to this covenant. They were confederates with God

²¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1086-1087.

²¹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1087-1088.

²¹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1090.

²¹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1086-1087, citing Isa. 42:6; 49:8; 54:9-10; 55:3-4; 56:3-8; 59:21; 61:8, Ezek. 33:21; 34:22-31; 37:21-28, Jer. 32:1-3, 36-44.

²¹⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1096, citing Ezek. 34:20, 24-25; 37:19, 26 (Jehovah); Jer. 32:36-40 (God of Israel); and Jer. 32:37, 40, Ezek. 37:11-26 (Redeemer).

as his people in captivity in heathen countries and would be redeemed from there by God.

Here Roberts makes a comparison between the Sinai covenant and this covenant. While the Sinai covenant was made with Israel after they were redeemed from Egyptian bondage, this covenant was made with the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and promised that they would be redeemed from Babylonian bondage in the future.²¹⁶

Roberts says that the impulsive or moving cause of this covenant with the captive Jews was solely God's grace in Jesus Christ. Its inward impulsive cause was God's mere grace to them in reference to his own holy name, and its outward impulsive cause was Jesus Christ.²¹⁷ All the impulsive causes were from God's side in making this covenant. His people contributed nothing.²¹⁸ Contrariwise, the people's many and great sins provoked God to dreadful indignation so much so that he left them captive in Babylon for seventy years. Yet the final cause or end that God announced in sending his people into Chaldea was their good, that is, that "they might be purged from their idols and other abominations, be reduced to true repentance and reformation, for their salvation."²¹⁹

Roberts divides the subject matter or substance of this covenant into the many covenant mercies promised on God's part and the diverse covenant duties required of the captive Jews in Babylon. Since the covenant mercies that God promised in this covenant are exceedingly abundant, Roberts confines his discussion to the promised blessings laid down in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Firstly, God promised the captive Jews to raise up

²¹⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1097, citing Jer. 32:36-37, 40, Ezek. 37:21-28.

²¹⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1096, citing Ezek. 36:21-22 (God's grace); and Jer. 23:5-8; 30:9; 33:15-16, Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-25, Hos. 3:5 (Jesus Christ).

²¹⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1096.

²¹⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1092, citing Jer. 24:5, 7; 33:8; 50:5, Ezek. 36:23; 37:23.

for them the messiah, Jesus Christ. This was not only a primary and fundamental mercy but also the “fountain-mercy” from which the rest spring.²²⁰ God promised to raise up the messiah as the captive Jews’ covenant redeemer; as the sure mercies of David upon which God’s everlasting covenant is founded and built; as a branch of righteousness growing up to David; and as a true David, their shepherd, prince and king forever.²²¹ Secondly, God promised to redeem the Jews from the Babylonian captivity and to return them to their own land of Canaan.²²² Thirdly, God would clean the Jews redeemed out of Babylon from all kinds of spiritual defilement, from their idolatry, from their abominable things, and from their transgressions.²²³ Fourthly, God promised to put his Spirit within his people to produce newness of heart and spirit after cleansing them from their spiritual defilement.²²⁴ Fifthly, God promised his eternal presence in his sanctuary and tabernacle among his people by his Spirit and word. Sixthly, God promised the greatest covenant relation between himself and the captive Jews, that is, his being their God and their being his people. Lastly, God promised mutual covenant constancy between himself and his people in this everlasting covenant. He would not turn from them and they would not

²²⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1104-1105.

²²¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1105-1110, citing Isa. 49:8-18 (redeemer); Isa. 55:1-4 (sure mercies); Jer. 33:15-17, Ezek. 34:25, 29 (branch of righteousness); and Jer. 33:17, 20-22, 25-26, Ezek. 34:23-25; 37:24-26 (true David).

²²²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1110-1112, citing Isa. 49:8-24, Jer. 6:1, 22; 16:14-15; 23:7-8; 24:5-7; 32:36-37, 40, 43-44; 33:5-15, Ezek. 34:11-19, 23-25; 36:24; 37:21, 25-26.

²²³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1125, citing Ezek. 37:22-23, 26, with Jer. 33:7-8, Ezek. 11:17-18; 36:25, 29, 33.

²²⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1129 and 1131, citing Ezek. 36:25-27, with Isa. 59:20-21, Jer. 24:7; 32:37-40, Ezek. 11:17-20.

depart from him.²²⁵ Here Kevan emphasizes that the Holy Spirit effects the renewing of the believers' spiritual powers.²²⁶

According to Roberts, God required diverse covenant duties from his people in the Babylonian captivity. Their duties were to believe in the promised messiah, to repent of all their former sins and iniquities, to obey God truly, to become God's covenant-people, and to ask God to fulfill all his covenant mercies promised to them.²²⁷

Roberts divides the form of God's covenant with the Israelites in the Babylonian captivity into the more inward and essential form, and the more outward and accidental form. The essential form of this covenant consisted in the mutual obligation of the confederates one to another, that is, the promise of mercies on God's part and the stipulation of duties on the captive Jews' part. Its accidental form was embodied in its manifestation, confirmation, and administration to the captive Jews. God's manifestation of this covenant to the captive Jews was not immediate, unlike his covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Israel at Mount Sinai, but mediate by the ministry of his prophets, especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, like in his covenant with David initially revealed through Nathan. God's confirmation of this covenant to his people captive in Babylon was done by exegetical repetitions of it, by diverse illustrating symbols and parables, by various ratifying promises, and by his sacred and inviolable oath.²²⁸ Roberts thinks

²²⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1194 and 1198-1199, citing Isa. 54:10; 59:20-21, Jer. 24:5-7; 32:37-40; 33:17-22, Ezek. 34:25, 30-31; 36:28; 37:26-28.

²²⁶Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 237, citing Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1129.

²²⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1201-1206, citing Isa. 53:1-4, 11; 55:1-4 (faith); Jer. 24:5-7, Ezek. 36:23-32 (repentance); Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:27; 37:24, 26 (obedience); Ezek. 11:20; 36:28; 37:23, 26-27 (being God's people); and Ezek. 36:37 (asking).

²²⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1212-1214, citing Jer. 24:1-10, Ezek. 37:1-28 (symbols); Isa. 54:10, Ezek. 37:25-26 (ratifying); and Isa. 54:5-10 (oath).

God's administration of this covenant, like that of God's covenant with David, was "for substance the same with that of the Sinai-covenant." Yet he acknowledges that "this covenants administration was greatly raised and heightned by some perfective alterations and additional, above all fore-going covenant-administrations."²²⁹

Roberts divides the end of God's covenant with the captive Jews in Babylon into the more immediate end and the more mediate end. Again, he divides the more mediate end into the subordinate end and the ultimate end. The subordinate end was not only the present consolation of God's captive people in Babylon but also the future salvation of them and their posterity. The ultimate end was the advancement of God's own glory.²³⁰ Roberts thinks the more immediate end of this covenant to be a further revelation of the promised messiah, Jesus Christ, in regard to his person, office, and actual appearance in human flesh. Especially in regard to Christ's office, this covenant revealed that Christ would not only redeem his people from Babylonian bondage, but would also save all his elect from sinful and hellish slavery by the blood of the covenant.²³¹ More particularly, this covenant revealed that Jesus Christ would be a prophet, priest, and king—a prophet as a "witness to the people" and the "messenger" of the covenant; a priest in "becoming an offering for sin, and making intercession for the transgressors"; and a king as "a true David," their shepherd, and "prince and king for ever." Thus, says Roberts, "though the Sinai-covenant discovered Christ as a prophet and priest, under the types of Moses and Aaron; and the covenant with David reveal[ed] Christ as an everlasting king: Yet this

²²⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1214-1215.

²³⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1217 and 1219-1220, citing Isa. 54:6-8 (consolation); Isa. 49:8-18, Ezek. 36:1-38; 37:15-28, Zech. 9:11 (salvation); and Ezek. 36:21-24, 32 (God's glory).

²³¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1217, citing Isa. 49:8-18 and Zech. 9:11.

covenant doth as much as both, and sets him forth as prophet, priest and king for ever.”²³²

In this respect Roberts thinks that Christ was revealed more fully in this covenant than in either of those earlier covenants.

The distinctiveness of Roberts’ covenant theology is apparent from his understanding of the six administrations of the covenants of promise. It is true that Roberts follows Ball in distinguishing the administrations of the postlapsarian covenant. He especially follows Ball in placing two other distinct discoveries—the Davidic covenant and the covenant with Israel in the Babylonian captivity—within the administration of the Sinai covenant. Roberts also depends on Ball in his judgment about some important issues. But Roberts does not merely follow his predecessor but distinguishes himself by establishing his covenant theology more firmly on a scriptural basis. In terms of structure Roberts makes room for the Noachian covenant in the periodization of the postlapsarian covenant. In addition, Roberts uses many other Reformed authors for his sources. He elaborates and develops his explanations of the six covenants of promise by using Calvin’s teaching of the *munus triplex*. Ball scarcely discusses the threefold office of Christ. With the concept of types and antitype, the doctrine of the threefold office of Christ is the most recurrent theme in Roberts’ explanation of the six covenants of promise. Thus it is proper to say that Roberts’ covenant theology is Christocentric or Christ-centered covenant theology.

²³²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1217-1218, citing Isa. 55:4, Mal. 3:1 (prophet); Isa. 53:10, 12; 55:3, Zech. 9:11 (priest); and Isa. 55:4, Ezek. 34:23-24; 37:24-26 (king).

CHAPTER V

THE MOSAIC LAW AS A COVENANT OF FAITH

A. The Obligation of the Moral Law under the New Testament

Roberts deals at length with the important question of “the abrogation or obligation of the law of Moses as to us Christians under the New Testament.” He adds a secondary question about “the use of the law”: if the Mosaic law was not abrogated under the New Testament, how do we determine “how far it concerns or obligeth us”? Roberts calls this “double question...a knotty and difficult question” in his day. For “learned men have rendered it the more intricate, by their cross disputes about it: papists opposing papists, and Protestants opposing Protestants therein.”¹

The importance of this question for covenant theology becomes obvious from the debates of the seventeenth century. The precise identification of the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to law and grace and, specifically, to the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, is one of the highly significant issues in the development of covenant theology. There were some alternatives at the beginning of the seventeenth century: the theory of one covenant of grace, beginning either immediately after the fall or with Abraham, given historically under several administrations; the view of the Mosaic

¹Francis Roberts, *The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man* (London: R. W. for George Calvert, 1657), 689. Ernest F. Kevan quotes Roberts' double question as a succinct expression of the issue of the moral law among the Puritans (*The Grace of Law* [London: Carey Kingsgate Press, 1964; reprint, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1965; reprint, Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1993], 146).

covenant as primarily the restatement of the law of the covenant of works or, even more pointedly, as the covenant of works delivered at Sinai; or some mediating model that placed the covenant of works before the fall but that also made a strong separation between the Old and New Testament. The first of these alternatives blends the idea of the covenant of works with Calvin's definitions of the similarity and distinction of the two testaments and of one covenant of grace under several administrations or dispensations. The second alternative, as Michael McGiffert points out, can be identified as latent in Perkins' primary sense of the "covenant of works" as the Mosaic covenant.² The third approach is evident in Cameron's understanding of two covenants, works and grace, but also of the old covenant as "subservient" to the covenant of grace—a distinction between the covenant of grace as "promised" and the covenant of grace as "promulgated" or "exhibited" fully.³ The issue is how subservient and how disconnected the Old Testament is to the New Testament, not enough of course to fracture the one covenant of grace and remove salvation from the Old Testament, but enough to move toward a three-covenant as distinct from a two-covenant scheme.⁴

On the continent Cocceius' theory of covenant abrogations rendered the positive relationship of the Old Testament law to Christian conduct more difficult to sustain,

²Michael McGiffert, "From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19/2 (1988): 131-155.

³John Cameron's *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses*, Theses 7, 8 and 20, in *TA EZZOMENA sive Opera* (Geneva, 1659), 544 and 546.

⁴On Cameron's covenant theology, see Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 47-56. Armstrong indicates the importance of Cameron's three covenant scheme for the development of the seventeenth-century federal thought, but does not recognize either the continental background to Cameron's bilateral or conditional language, or the reason why the three covenant model was superseded by a two covenant scheme with multiple dispensations during the time of the Old Testament.

particularly given his relaxed understanding of the Sabbath commandment.⁵ Cocceius' approach draws on the already extant effort of Reformed theologians to offer a truly historical or salvation-historical understanding of the covenantal relationship between God and man in the Old Testament. Most notably, Ames had distinguished between the Old Testament as promise and the New as the fully effected covenant of grace and had also divided the Old Testament into three dispensations: from Adam to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, and from Moses to Christ.⁶ Johannes Cloppenburg also had distinguished between the dispensation from Adam to Moses and from Moses to Christ.⁷ Similar questions were raised in Britain concerning the abrogation of the Jewish Sabbath and the necessity of worship on a particular day out of seven. The historical dispensations of the Old Testament portion of the covenant of grace were even more elaborately detailed in Britain by Fenner and Ball.

Reformed theologians both in Britain and on the continent faced the issue of the relationship of the moral law of Moses to both the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. Depending on the balance achieved in their answers, they tended toward either an

⁵On Cocceius, see W. J. van Asselt, *Amicitia Dei: een onderzoek naar de structuur van de theologie van Johannes Coccejus (1603-1669)* (Ede: Grafische Vormgeving ADC, [1988]), 12; and Charles S. McCoy, "The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1956), 31-32. On the English scene, see the survey of the debate in Edward Leigh, *A Systeme or Body of Divinity*, 2d ed. (London: A. M. for William Lee, 1662), IX.v (pp. 1095-1108).

⁶William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology: William Ames, 1576-1633*, trans. John D. Eusden (Boston: Pilgrim Press, 1968; reprint, Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1983), I.xxxviii.5, 13, 29 (pp. 202-204).

⁷Johannes Cloppenburg, *Exercitationes super locos communes theologicos* (1653), locus 8; and see the discussion of Cloppenburg in David N. J. Poole, *The History of the Covenant Concept from the Bible to Johannes Cloppenburg: De foedere Dei* (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), 211-252.

antinomian or a highly nomistic or legalistic conclusion.⁸ Roberts' discussion of the moral law under the covenant of faith places him in the midst of this debate, and his citations show and identify him as a careful scholar of both the British and the continental materials.

Roberts begins his discussion by observing that virtually all writers seemed to easily agree that among three constituent parts of the law given by Moses on Mount Sinai to Israel, the judicial laws and ceremonial laws were abrogated under the New Testament. Roberts says that the judicial laws were peculiarly given to Israel as a body politic or commonwealth constituted by God himself and expired at the dissolution of the Jewish polity. Thus they oblige no other state or commonwealth besides that of the Jews. The ceremonial laws were intended peculiarly for the "infant church" at that time and for no other. Thus the ceremonial laws obliged that church only until the death of Jesus Christ when the Old Testament administration expired.⁹

According to Roberts, the difficulty and disputes were about the moral law. He thinks that the various opinions may be reduced to three. The first group holds that the moral law given by Moses is abrogated and does not now oblige Christians under the New Testament. Roberts finds two categories of argument in this group. One argument is that the moral law given by Moses is totally and absolutely abrogated and of no use at all to Christians. This is the opinion of the antinomians. Following Burgess, Roberts calls Johann Agricola "the first antinomian, and father of them," and he describes the

⁸See Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 109-134; and Richard A. Muller, "Covenant and Conscience in English Reformed Theology: Three Variations on a 17th Century Theme," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42 (1980): 308-334.

⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 689-690.

position of Agricola's followers as follows: "As soon as thou once beginnest to think how men should live godly and modestly, presently thou hast wandered from the gospel. And again; The law and works only belong to the court of Rome."¹⁰ Quoting Thomas Gataker, Roberts explains the position of John Randall and John Simpson as follows: "The moral law is of no use at all to a believer; no rule for him to walk by, nor to examine his life by."¹¹ The second category of argument in the first group directly opposes and condemns the "loose antinomian tenets." Yet it maintains that the moral law as given by Moses does not belong to Christians except where it agrees with the law of nature and is confirmed by Christ. According to Roberts, this opinion is held not only by some Roman Catholic writers, such as Dominicus à Soto, Franciscus Suárez, and Bartolomeo Medina, but also by "divers learned and sound Protestants" such as Zanchi and Musculus.¹²

The opinion of the second group is as follows. The moral law "as given by Moses doth oblige Christians" (*quatenus à Mose data est, Christianos obligare*) in regard to "the

¹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 690, citing Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, Lecture 4, pp. 39-40. Cf. Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis: or A Vindication of the Morall Law and the Covenants, from the Errours of Papists, Arminians, Socinians, and more especially, Antinomians* (London: James Young for Thomas Underhill, 1647), Lecture 4, pp. 39-40. On Agricola's antinomianism, see Kevan, *Grace of Law*, 23; and Timothy J. Wengert, *Law and Gospel: Philip Melancthon's Debate with John Agricola of Eisleben over Poenitentia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 170, 173-174, 185-206.

¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 690, citing Thomas Gataker, *Gods Eye on His Israel: or, A Passage of Balaam, out of Numb. 23.21* (London: E. G. for Foulke Clifton, 1645), To the Reader, pp. 17-18 [actually no pagination].

¹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 690, citing Dominicus à Soto, *De Iustitia & Iure*, lib. 2, Q. 5, Art. 4; Jerome Zanchi, *De Decalogo*, Thesis 1; and Wolfgang Musculus, *Loci communes*, De Abrogatione Legis Mosaicae. Cf. Soto, *Libri decem de iustitia & iure* (Antwerp, 1567), liber 2, quaestio 5, articulus 4 (pp. 56-59); Zanchi, *Operum theologicorum*, 8 vols. (Geneva, 1605), vol. 4, liber 1, caput 11 [De Decalogo], Thesis 1 (pp. 222-226); and Musculus, *Loci communes sacrae theologiae* (Basel, 1563), De Abrogatione Legis Mosaicae (pp. 226-230).

preceptive authority and command” which God put upon it on Mount Sinai.¹³ In this group Roberts includes Bellarmine and Burgess. He thinks Pareus favors this view to some extent.¹⁴

The third group takes a middle way between the other two opinions and holds that “the moral law given on Mount Sinai in some sense may be said to be abrogated and in some sense to be still obligatory, even to Christians under the New Testament.” According to Roberts, the writers in this group partly consent to the opinions of the other two groups but fully to neither. Roberts puts Rivetus, Pareus, Perkins, and Calvin in this group. He thinks the Westminster Confession of Faith also presents this position.¹⁵ Roberts himself also holds this opinion.

To clarify this position, Roberts begins by giving concrete shape to the question. He says that the moral law is neither purely “declarative” nor purely “preceptive” but both. The

¹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 690. For explaining this second opinion, Roberts refers to Andreas Rivetus, *Explicatio Decalogi*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? Cf. Rivetus, *Explicatio Decalogi*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? in *Operum theologicorum*, 3 vols. (Rotterdam, 1651-1660), 1:1231-1233.

¹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 691. Roberts cites Robert Bellarmine in the margin: “Ceterum nos verius putamus, legem moralem, etiam ut est data per Mosem et per prophetas, atq[ue] ut est in libris veteris Testamenti scripta, vere obligare Christianos. Nam quod Dominus ait, Matth. 5. Non veni legem solvere, sed adimplere, intelligitur de lege morali, &c.” (*De iustificatione*, IV.vi). And he refers to Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, Lecture 17; and David Pareus, *Commentarius*, Rom. 13, De Magistratu Civili, Aphorism 26. Regarding Pareus’ favorable disposition toward this second opinion, Roberts refers to Rivetus, *Explicatio*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? Cf. Bellarmine, *De justificatione*, IV.vi, in *Opera omnia, ex editione Veneta, pluribus tum additis tum correctis, iterum edidit Justinus Fèvre*, 12 vols. (Paris, 1870; reprint, Frankfurt: Minerva, 1965), 6:312; Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, Lecture 17, pp. 164-174 [actually pp. 166-176; irregular pagination]; Pareus, *Commentarius*, Rom. 13, De Magistratu Civili, Aphorism 26, in *Operum theologicorum exegeticorum*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1647), pt. 3, sec. 2, p. 266; and Rivetus, *Explicatio*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? in *Operum*, 1:1233.

¹⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 691, citing Rivetus, *Explicatio*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat?; Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gal. 3:25; William Perkins, *Commentarie*, Gal. 3:23-25; John Calvin, *Institutio*, II.vii.6-15, especially 14-15; and *Articles of Christian Religion* (approved by Parliament in June, 1648), chap. XIX. Cf. Rivetus, *Explicatio*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? in *Operum*, 1:1231-1233; Pareus, *Commentarius*, Gal. 3:25, in *Operum*, pt. 4, p. 281; Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: John Legatt, 1616-1618), 2:249-252; Calvin, *Institutes*, II.vii.6-15 (1:354-364); and The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), XIX, in Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds*, 3:640-643.

moral law promulgated on Mount Sinai was partly declarative as it declared what the law of nature was, which was at first engraved on man's heart but miserably obliterated by the fall. Yet the moral law was partly preceptive by reason of the "outward precept in the promulgation, inducing a new and further obligation upon the conscience" in addition to what was imposed on man's heart by the natural inscription of the law.¹⁶ Roberts divides the way of obligation of the moral law as preceptive into two, "more generally" and "more specially and peculiarly." More generally, in regard to "the matter and substance of it" (*ratione materiae*), the moral law is the same as the law of nature; therefore it obliges as generally and largely as the law of nature. More specially and peculiarly, in regard to Moses' administration (*ratione ministerii*), the moral law was peculiar to the Jews, and it peculiarly obliged the Jews only. Regarding the passage, "the moral law, *quatenus*, or *ut*, as given by Moses...doth oblige even us Christians," Roberts says that the word "as" (*quatenus* or *ut*) may be taken "reduplicatively" (*reduplicativè*) or "relatively" (*relativè*). If the word were taken "reduplicatively," the passage would mean that the moral law binds Christians "because it is of Moses." In this sense, says Roberts, "every thing of Moses should oblige; ceremonials and judicials, as well as morals," yet "this is most false." If the word were taken "relatively," however, the passage would mean that the moral law, "which is of Moses," obliges Christians. Roberts sees a great difference between "because it is of Moses" and "which is of Moses."¹⁷ Assuming these distinctions, Roberts says:

The state of the question is not whether the moral law oblige us Christians, as, or because given by Moses (as Rivet speaks) reduplicatively? For then all Moses laws ceremonial, judicial, etc. should bind also: but, whether that moral law doth oblige

¹⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 691. Cf. p. 714, for the promulgation of the law of nature obliterated by the fall.

¹⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 691-692, citing Rivetus, *Explicatio*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? Cf. Rivetus, *Explicatio*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? in *Operum*, 1:1232.

us, which was given by Moses, relatively? Again; the question is not, whether the moral law given by Moses doth bind us Christians, as it is purely declarative of the law of nature? For, this is so clear that none can rationally deny it; the meer declaration of the law of nature being rather doctrine, then precept: and divine doctrine always obligeth, being still the same. But the question is, whether the moral law given by Moses, binds us Christians now under the New Testament, as it is constitutive and preceptive? This seems to be the very point in question: and the true state of the controversie.¹⁸

This explanation of the state of the controversy is an indication of Roberts' use of the scholastic method of the day, as it shows his careful identification of the writers participating in the debate.¹⁹

After clarifying the question, Roberts explains in what respects the moral law given by Moses on Mount Sinai is abrogated under the New Testament. Firstly, the moral law, as part of the "servile" upbringing under which God educated and trained his infant church of the Jews, is abrogated for Christians under the New Testament. From Moses till Christ the church of the Jews was in her infancy. During this time God dealt with the church as a child, bringing her up under the moral and ceremonial law, as under tutors and governors, rather darkly, imperfectly, and "servilely." Secondly, the moral law, as a "prison" keeping the Jews to the doctrine of faith that should be revealed more fully at the coming of Christ, was abolished at Christ's death. Thirdly, the moral law, with the ceremonial law, was a schoolmaster to the infant church of the Jews to bring them to Christ to be justified by faith. Thus it is antiquated "after that faith is come." Lastly, the moral law, as part of the Old Testament administration merely Mosaic, peculiar and

¹⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 692. Parentheses his. Here Roberts cites Rivetus, *Explicatio*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? Cf. Rivetus, *Explicatio*, Ex. 20:2, An lex Decalogi ad nos pertineat? in *Operum*, 1:1232.

¹⁹For a refined use of the method, see, e.g., Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1992-1997), II.ii and II.v (1:57-59 and 70-85) et passim.

appropriate to the church of the Jews at that time, spoke of the promised Christ. When the promise was fulfilled under the New Testament, the moral law was abrogated in that respect.²⁰

Roberts next explains in what respects the moral law given by Moses on Mount Sinai is not abrogated under the New Testament. Firstly, the moral law is not abrogated insomuch as it declares the law of nature. Roberts remarks that Zanchi “contends for the utter abrogation of the moral law as given by Moses, yet grants it is still of force so far as it agrees with the law of nature.” Since the moral law fully agrees with “the law of nature for sum and substance,” it binds not only all Christian Jews and gentiles, but also all pagans who will come to know it.²¹ Secondly, the moral law is not abrogated as it is preceptive in regard to its matter and substance. Even under the New Testament it still remains in force as a rule for directing and testing a pious and righteous life. Lastly, the moral law is “not absolutely and utterly abrogated” in regard to Moses’ administration (*ratione ministerii*). Roberts says “not absolutely and utterly abrogated” because he acknowledges that in Moses’ ministry of the moral law there was something peculiar to the Old Testament dispensation and appropriate specifically to the Jews. For example, a part of the preface to the moral law (“which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage”: Ex. 20:2) is utterly abrogated to Christians under the New Testament dispensation. Yet Roberts asserts that something in Moses’ administration of the moral law corresponds to the New Testament “in mystical signification, or in analogy.” For example, in the same part of the preface the bondage under Egypt

²⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 692-693, citing Gal. 3:23-25; 4:1-5, Heb. 8:13.

²¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 695-696, citing Zanchi, *De Decalogo*, Thesis 1. Cf. Zanchi, *Operum*, vol. 4, bk. 1, chap. 11, Thesis 1 (pp. 222-226).

mystically signifies and typifies man's natural bondage under sin and Satan, and the deliverance out of Egypt by Moses and Aaron symbolizes man's redemption from sin by Jesus Christ as "prophet, priest, and king."²² In addition, something in Moses' ministry of the moral law is so generally evangelical that it extends both to the Old and New Testament because both of them are evangelical despite their different administrations. For example, a part of the preface, "I am the LORD, thy God," was not in the law of nature but is in Moses' administration of the moral law. It equally concerns both the Jews before Christ and all converted gentiles after Christ.²³

The moral law given by God on Mount Sinai is not abrogated, for it has manifold use under the New Testament. Roberts separates the use of the moral law into two categories: more general, and more special and peculiar. He further divides the more general use of the moral law into negative and affirmative uses. Negatively, under the New Testament the moral law is not of use to any person "as a covenant of works tendering justification, life or happiness by mans own working or doing." For it was not given on Mount Sinai to the Jews themselves under the Old Testament as a covenant of works but as a covenant of faith. "Much less can it be a covenant of works to Christians or gentiles under the New Testament." Although "it had the matter of the covenant of works," adds Roberts, "it had the form of the covenant of faith."²⁴

Affirmatively, explains Roberts, the moral law is of general and common use to all who come to know it, "whether they be carnal or spiritual, unregenerate or regenerate," in

²²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 696.

²³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 697.

²⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 701-702.

several ways. Firstly, the moral law was given to represent its own excellence and perfection to all people. Secondly, it was given to show clearly God's existence and "what manner of God he is that was the giver of this law." Thirdly, it was given to demonstrate that the obligation imposed upon men by it is exceedingly great and utterly transcends their ability to keep it. Fourthly, it was given to show clearly men's sinfulness and the greatness of their misery as a result of their sin. Fifthly, it was given to compel and force men, upon the discovery of sin and misery, to turn to Christ for righteousness and happiness. Sixthly, it was given to display the complete and matchless perfection of Jesus Christ who could exactly fulfill the whole law by doing its duty and by enduring its curse to the uttermost for his elect. Lastly, it was given to indicate how perfect man once was in the earthly paradise when he was fully able to keep this law and how complete man shall be in the heavenly paradise when he shall be fully conformed to the will and law of God for all eternity.²⁵

Roberts explains the more special and peculiar use of the moral law according to its two different objects: to "carnal and unregenerate persons", and to "spiritual and regenerate persons." For carnal and unregenerate persons remaining yet in their natural lapsed condition in the first Adam, the use of the moral law is mainly to make them aware of their sins. Firstly, it was given to convince them clearly of the sinfulness of their present natural condition. Secondly, it was given to terrify, curse, and condemn them for their sinfulness. They have not accepted Christ by faith as a remedy not only for sin, but also for the terror, curse, and condemnation of the law resulting from their sin. In addition

²⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 702-705, citing Ps. 19:7-8; 119:96, Rom. 7:12, 14 (excellence); Rom. 7:15-16, Gal. 3:10, James 2:8, 10-11 (obligation exceeding ability); Rom. 3:19-20; 4:15; 7:7, 9-11, Gal. 3:10, 19 (sinfulness); Rom. 7:14-16, 22-24; 10:4, Gal. 3:21-22 (leading to Christ); Matt. 5:17, John 8:46; 17:4, Rom. 5:19, Gal. 3:13; 4:4, Phil. 2:8 (Christ's fulfillment).

to such a condemnatory function, Roberts finds a pedagogical function in the use of the moral law. And thirdly, the moral law was given to drive them out of self-confidence to Christ for righteousness and happiness. Fourthly, it was given to restrain them from outward acts of sin and wickedness and to constrain them to do outward acts of obedience to God for the benefit of the church and the rest of human society. The last use of the moral law for the unregenerate seems to combine those two functions. Thus, it was given to leave them utterly inexcusable before God and their own consciences if they did not accept Jesus Christ by faith. Faith in Christ is the only remedy for sin. It is also the only remedy for death, curse, and condemnation resulting from sin.²⁶

For spiritual and regenerate persons connected to Jesus Christ, the moral law is of special use in several ways. Firstly, it was given to inform them more and more fully of the most holy and righteous nature of God and what holiness and righteousness he expects in and from them in conformity to himself. Secondly, it was given to help them discover their daily sin so that they may more highly esteem Jesus Christ, their savior from sin, and be more perfectly rooted and built up in him. Thirdly, it was given to show them how much they are indebted to Jesus Christ, their mediator, for his obeying the commandments and enduring the curse of the law for their sakes.²⁷ Fourthly, it was given to incite them to thankful obedience to God for giving them Jesus Christ. Fifthly, it was given to direct their hearts with delight to a fervent and sincere love of God and man. Sixthly, it was given to

²⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 705-708, citing Rom. 3:12, 20; 5:20, Gal. 3:22 (convincing sinfulness); 1 Cor. 15:56, Gal. 3:10, 19, 1 Tim. 1:9-11 (condemning unbelief); Gal. 3:22, 24-25 (leading to Christ); Rom. 2:14-15, 1 Tim. 1:8-9, Calvin, *Institutio*, II.vii.10 (restraining sin); Rom. 1:20; 2:15-16 (judgment). Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.vii.10 (1:358-359).

²⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 708-709, citing Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, Ps. 119:97-100, 1 Peter 1:15-16 (God's expectation); Rom. 3:20; 7:22-25; 8:1-2 (overcoming sin daily); Rom. 5:19; 7:23-25; 8:3-4, Gal. 3:13-14 (indebtedness).

manifest to the regenerate themselves the truth of their holiness and righteousness. The inward law of holiness and righteousness in the regenerate is “answerable to this moral law of God written in tables of stone.” Lastly, the moral law was given to be “a constant rule of life and obedience” for the regenerate.²⁸ This is the normative function of the moral law for Christians.

Since the moral law offers the rule for Christian life, Roberts gives some “gospel-directions for Christians right observing” of the moral law. Roberts suggests that Christians should observe the moral law “from true gospel-principles,” that is, from sincere love in and through Christ, “without which it can never be done rightly and acceptably.” Believers should keep the moral law as “an evangelical rule of life,” letting it guide their thoughts, words, and actions in all their duties of holiness and righteousness under the New Testament as well as under the Old Testament. For the moral law was promulgated on Mount Sinai as “a gospel-rule of life,” that is, “not as a covenant of works, but as a covenant of faith.”²⁹ Roberts also proposes that Christians should observe the moral law spiritually. Finally, Roberts suggests that Christians should keep the moral law as evidence of their thankfulness to God for Jesus Christ who is the end of the law, for their redemption by him, and for the effectual application of this redemption to them.³⁰

Roberts also answers objections to the continuing force of the moral law under the New Testament dispensation. The first objection is that, instead of the moral law, Christ

²⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 710-711, citing Luke 1:68-69; 74-75, Col. 1:11-14 (thankfulness); 1 Thess. 3:12, 2 Thess. 3:5, 1 Tim. 1:5 (love); Jer. 31:31-33, Eph. 2:10, Heb. 8:10 (holiness); Ps. 119:1, 24, Matt. 5:1-48, Rom. 12:2; 13:8-10, Gal. 5:6, Titus 2:11-12, James 2:8, 10-12 (rule of life).

²⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 716-718, citing Ps. 40:8, Matt. 22:37-40, Mark 12:30, John 15:5, Rom. 13:8-10, Eph. 2:10, Phil. 4:13, 1 Tim. 1:5, Heb. 8:10, 1 John 5:3 (gospel principles).

³⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 719-720, citing Prov. 4:23, Matt. 5:21-22, Rom. 7:14, 22 (spirituality); Deut. 8:1-11:10, Luke 1:68-76 (thankfulness).

has given new commands, appointing his apostles and ministers to baptize with water, to administer the Lord's Supper, and so forth.³¹ Roberts answers that Christ has appointed no new moral commandments or duties, although he has appointed "a new way of outward and positive worship" under the New Testament, which was not present under the Old Testament. For "sacraments are not completely moral duties, but positive worship." The second objection is that Christ has imposed new moral duties like faith, repentance and love, which were not commanded in the moral law. Christ himself calls love a new commandment.³² Roberts answers that all these and similar spiritual duties were already required in the moral law. For example, love for our neighbor or brother was as strongly commanded under the Old Testament as under the New Testament: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thy self" (Lev. 19:18). Moreover, Roberts gives some possible reasons why Christ calls his command of brotherly love a new commandment. This command is new either in regard to Christ's "renewing" the old commandment or in regard to his "new manner" of urging it upon his followers based on his own example: "Love ye one another, as I have loved you" (John 13:34). It is also new in regard to its excellence. Things "excellent" are called new things. And finally, it is new because of its "perpetuity." It should always be fresh and new, never waxing old.³³ For these reasons Christ calls his commandment new, not because it makes the moral law antiquated.

³¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 723. This objection is based on Matt. 26:26-28; 28:19, 1 Cor. 11:23-26.

³²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 723. This objection is based on John 13:34-35.

³³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 723.

The most serious objections to the moral law under the New Testament, however, came from the antinomians. Roberts divides the antinomians into two sorts, antinomians “in judgement,” and antinomians “in practice.” While the former maintain sinful errors of opinion regarding the moral law, the latter walk in sinful ways contrary to the moral law. Roberts deals mainly with the antinomians who err in judgment or opinion. He thinks that these antinomians usually become antinomian in practice “through a just judgement of God.”³⁴

In defending the moral law against the antinomians, Roberts considers the biblical passages chiefly urged by them. Firstly, the antinomians understand the preface of the moral law in Ex. 20:2 to mean that God intended his moral law only for his people redeemed out of Egypt. Yet Christians under the New Testament were neither in bondage in Egypt nor delivered by God from there. Roberts answers that God’s nature, that is, “I am the LORD,” and his covenant relation to his people, that is, “thy God,” both concern all believers under the New Testament as well as Israel under the Old Testament. The mystery of God’s act of redeeming Israel, that is bringing them “out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of servants,” extends as fully to believers today as it did to the Jews then. For the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt was “a type of our redemption by Jesus Christ from that spiritual bondage and misery.” Roberts concludes, “this redemption by Christ, far surpassed that from Egypt: and therefore more strongly binds to observe the moral law.”³⁵

³⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 726 and 733.

³⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 726-727.

Secondly, as the “law and the prophets were until John” (Luke 16:16), insist the antinomians, “the law and prophets ceased at John’s ministry, and oblige not believers after him.” Yet Roberts takes the word “law” in a large sense, as comprising the whole administration of the law given by Moses, and not restrictively for the moral law only. Concerning the law largely taken, both the ceremonial and judicial laws vanished after John the Baptist, yet the moral law still continues. For Christ immediately adds, “And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, then one tittle of the law to fail.” Moreover, Roberts points out that after John’s ministry Christ himself and his apostles urged the observance of the moral law.³⁶

Thirdly, based on Rom. 6:14: “Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace,” the antinomians with great confidence insist that “to the regenerate the law is of no use, but abrogated.” Roberts understands the context of this passage as Paul’s comforting and encouraging the believing Romans to continue in “mortifying of sin” and living righteously to God despite the relics of sin in them. Although sin still remained in them, it should not have dominion over them, but they should at last conquer it. Thus, Rom. 6:14 does not mean that Christians are “not under the guidance of the moral law, as a rule of life and obedience.” It rather means that unlike carnal, unregenerate men, they are not under the irritation, rigor, terror, curse, and condemnation of the moral law but under grace in a sanctified, adopted, justified state through Christ who was made under the law to redeem them who were under the law. Those who are under grace are delivered from the reign and dominion of sin—though not

³⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 727-728, citing Luke 16:17. Regarding Christ and his apostles’ command of the observance of the moral law, see p. 721.

from the indwelling of sin—and consequently from the irritation, rigor, terror, curse, and condemnation of the law. In this sense, “the law is the strength of sin.”³⁷

Fourthly, the antinomians appeal to Rom. 7:4 and 6: “Wherefore my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ, — But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead, wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in oldness of the letter.” They insist that “by Christ the regenerate are freed from the law.” As Paul here tries to explain more the subject of regenerate persons’ freedom from sin’s dominion and from the law’s rigor and malediction, Roberts thinks that his answer to the antinomians’ third objection is also applicable to this one. Yet Roberts extends his explanation by treating the context. In Rom. 7:2 “the woman is by the law bound to her husband while he liveth, but he being dead she is free.” So, explains Roberts, the unregenerate, while their husband (sin) is alive and not mortified, are under the law, that is, they experience irritating sin as cursing and condemning for sin. But when they are regenerated, and their husband, sin, is dead, they are delivered from the law as irritating and condemning and are married to Christ, a better husband, to bring forth better fruit to God. Thus, this deliverance from the law in reference to its rigor, irritation, and condemnation does not free the regenerate from obedience to the law as a rule of life but rather leads them to a true and spiritual observance of it.³⁸

Fifthly, based on Rom. 10:4: “Christ is the end of the law, for righteousness to every one that believeth,” the antinomians contend that the law is now abrogated for believers. Yet Roberts points out that the apostle Paul here declares in what respect Christ is the end

³⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 728-730, citing Rom. 6:12-14, 1 Cor. 15:56, Gal. 4:4-5.

³⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 730-731.

of the law, that is, for righteousness or justification. Roberts explains that Christ is the perfect end of the law, having fulfilled it to the uttermost so that every believer applying Christ's obedience by faith shall be justified and needs to seek no further than Christ's obedience for his justification. But he quickly adds, "Christ is not the destructive end of the law in reference to holiness and obedience, which justified persons are still to perform to the law evangelically in testimony of thankfulness for their justification."³⁹

Sixthly, as the "law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless" (1 Tim. 1:9-11), insist the antinomians, "the righteous are not under it." Roberts answers that while the righteous are not under the rigor, irritation, curse, and condemnation of the moral law as the unrighteous are, they are still under its guidance and probation. As it is said of the fruits of the Spirit, "against such there is no law," explains Roberts, there is "no law condemning them: but commending and commanding them."⁴⁰

Seventhly, quoting Gal. 3:24-25: "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster," the antinomians contend that believers are no more under the law since Christ has come. Yet Roberts takes the word "law" used in this epistle more generally for the whole administration of Moses, comprising the whole law given by him, especially the moral and ceremonial laws. Before Christ came, explains Roberts, both the moral and ceremonial laws were a schoolmaster to bring believers to him, partly by correcting them for their faults and partly by directing them to the right remedy. After Christ's coming, however, they are no longer under the law as a schoolmaster to Christ

³⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 731, citing Luke 1:75.

⁴⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 731, citing Gal. 5:23.

who was to come. Neither under the ceremonial law, for the antitype, Christ, has come, nor under the moral law as part of Moses' servile administration, for the church now as an heir come of age in Christ is capable of filial liberty. Referring to Paul's later urging to use liberty for the sake of love that fulfills the law (Gal. 5:13-14), however, Roberts says that believers are still under the guidance of the moral law as "a rule of holy and righteous life."⁴¹

Finally, based on Gal. 5:18: "But if ye be led by the Spirit, ye are not under the law," the antinomians insist that the regenerate are not under the law. Roberts understands Paul's purpose in this context to be to exhort believers to walk in the Spirit, that is, according to the guidance of God's regenerating, sanctifying, and adopting Spirit. Thus, "not under the law" means that you are not under the rigor, curse, and condemnation of the law, although you have many failings and infirmities in your obedience. For "God covers the frailties and imperfections of his regenerate people, and accepts their upright desires and endeavours of inchoate obedience, as perfect in Christ." But Roberts emphasizes that "the guidance of the Spirit shuts them not from the guidance of the moral law," for Paul explains that there is no law—no rigorous, cursing, and condemning law of God—against the fruits of the Spirit, in which they were to walk.⁴²

B. The Sinai Covenant as a Covenant of Faith

According to Roberts, it is evident that at Mount Sinai the law was given to Israel "as a covenant; in a covenant-way, in the notion of a covenant." For, the name "covenant" is

⁴¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 731-732, citing Gal. 4:1-4.

⁴²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 732, citing Gal. 5:16, 23.

frequently attributed to the law given on Mount Sinai in both Old Testament and New Testament. Not merely God himself but also Moses, the prophets, and the apostle Paul style it a covenant.⁴³ This is also shown in that the “nature and properties of a covenant evidently agree to, and are found in the law, as published on Mount Sinai to Israel.”

Firstly, in the law are federal articles agreed upon, containing the matter and substance of the covenant. Secondly, the mutual consent of confederates to these articles and matters of the covenant are in the law according to the custom of covenanting. Thirdly, in the law are the federal sanction, dedication, and solemn ratification of the covenant between God and Israel. Lastly, in the law are the divine recording and keeping of the covenant for a perpetual memorial to future generations.⁴⁴

Even though it may have been easily agreed that the law at Mount Sinai was given as a covenant, it has been hotly debated what kind of covenant this law was. Roberts finds four principal opinions about “the nature of this Sinai-covenant.” The first opinion holds that the law at Mount Sinai was given as a covenant of works. The second holds that it was a mixed covenant of works and grace. The third holds that it was a covenant subservient to the covenant of grace. And the fourth holds that it was a covenant of grace, or faith, in substance.⁴⁵

The first opinion is that the law given on Mount Sinai was given as “a covenant of works, not as a covenant of grace.” According to Roberts, the advocates of this opinion

⁴³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 735-736, citing Ex. 19:5, Deut. 4:13, 23; 5:2-22; 17:2; 29:1, 1 Kings 8:9, 2 Chron. 6:11, Jer. 11:3-5; 31:31-32, Rom. 9:4-5, Eph. 2:12, Heb. 8:9.

⁴⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 736-737, citing Ex. 19:3-6; 20:1-18; 24:3-4, 7, Deut. 5:2-33 (articles); Ex. 19:3-8; 20:1, 19; 24:3, 7, Deut. 5:2-6, 22, 27 (mutual consent); Ex. 24:5-8, Heb. 9:18-21 (ratification); Ex. 25:21, Num. 10:33; 14:44, Deut. 4:13; 9:9, 11, 15, Heb. 9:4 (recording).

⁴⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 738-739.

understand “the Old and New Testament, as the covenant of works and grace, not only differing gradually in some degree of manifestation and ministration, but also opposite specifically in substance and in kind.” Some of them expound that “God conferred grace to the fathers before Moses, not by covenant, but only by promise: accounting all that Moses comprehends under covenant, to be the covenant of works and Old Testament.” Roberts does not acknowledge their explanation because in Scripture before the Sinai covenant God’s contracts with Noah and Abraham were styled as covenants. And he sees that for God’s covenant with Abraham the words “covenants and promises” were indiscriminately used as synonyms to denote one and the same thing. Moreover, God’s covenant with Noah as well as God’s covenant with Abraham was “a covenant of grace, and faith.” Thus Roberts asserts, “After the covenant of works was broken by Adam’s fall, it cannot be proved that God did at any time after set on foot a covenant of works in the church of God.”⁴⁶

Even though Roberts honors “the learned authors” of *Synopsis purioris theologiae* very much, he disapproves of their understanding of the Mosaic law as a covenant of works opposed to the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ.⁴⁷ For, they insist,

This phrase, the Old Testament, is taken largely, and strictly. Largely, so, not only the law of Moses, but also the promise to Adam, and after to Abraham, are comprized under the Old Testament, Gal. 3.17. Eph. 2.12. and in this notion the Old Testament differs not from the New in substance, but only in manner of administration.—Strictly and properly; so, under the name of (the Old Testament) was signified the law, as given by Moses to the Jews, promising life under the condition of the curse to transgressors, together with an intolerable burden of legal rites, and yoke of strictest politie: which therefore is called, a killing letter, a ministration of death and condemnation gendring to bondage, like Hagar, 2 Cor. 3.6,7. Gal. 4.23,24. To this the

⁴⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 739, citing Rom. 4:13, Gal. 3:16-19, Eph. 2:12 (promises as covenants); Gen. 6:18; 15:5-6, 18, Rom. 4:11-18, Heb. 11:7 (covenant of faith). Cf. Gen. 6:18; 9:9, 11, 15; 17:2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 19, 21 (covenants with Noah and Abraham).

⁴⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 740.

New Testament in proper signification is opposed, viz. a doctrine of spiritual grace and salvation fully revealed by the Son of God from the bosom of the Father, and divulged by the apostles preaching, wherein is promised free righteousness and eternal life, through and for the merit of Christ the testator, to all that should believe in him, by the grace that he would give them. In this signification, the Old and New Testament do not differ only in some circumstances and accidents, but essentially, (and that we may use Pauls words,) they are two testaments. Gal. 4.[24]. For in them both is instituted an altogether diverse way of salvation: seeing, that promiseth life under the condition of works; but this remission of sin and eternal life to him that leans on Christ by faith. Therefore they are said to be fallen from grace, that would be justified by the law, Gal. 5.4. And the law is so opposed to the promise, that if the inheritance be by that, it cannot be by this, Gal. 3.18. There's the same opposition of the law of works, and the law of faith, Rom. 3.27. The first whereof is understood to be a doctrine promising salvation, upon condition, if thou shalt do all things: the other a doctrine propounding the same salvation, upon condition if thou shalt believe: which very condition God gives all that are justified ability to perform.⁴⁸

Here Roberts points out that their distinction of the Old Testament contradicts itself. For, they say that if the Old Testament is taken largely, it is not different from the New Testament in substance, but if it is taken strictly, it substantially differs from the New Testament. Roberts asks: How can the same law of Moses “both agree and differ in substance from the New Testament?”⁴⁹

Moreover, Roberts thinks that their description of the Old Testament is not based on Scripture. For, those two passages, Gal. 3:17 and Eph. 2:12, alleged to approve the distinction between the Old and New Testaments, include “covenant” and “covenants of promise” but not “old covenant” at all, therefore they prove nothing. Instead, he finds the term “the Old Testament” used in the following two senses. Firstly, it is used “properly” for the covenant that God made with Israel on Mount Sinai, which is called old covenant

⁴⁸*Synopsis purioris theologiae*, Disputatio 23, Theses 5-6, 10, 15; quoted in Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 739-740. Roberts sees that Johann Gerhard also insists on the substantial difference between the Old and New Testament in his *De Evangelio*, XVII.123 (Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 740). Cf. Johann Poliander et al., *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, ed. Herman Bavinck (Leiden, 1881), XXIII.v-vi, x, xv (pp. 211-214); and Gerhard, *Locorum theologicorum*, 10 vols. (Geneva, 1639), 3:291-292.

⁴⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 741.

or testament because God had antiquated it by instituting the new, as in Heb. 8:9 and 13. Secondly, it is used “improperly and metonymically” for the books of Moses and the prophets containing this Old Testament in them, as in 2 Cor. 3:14, “for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the Old Testament.”⁵⁰ Even though the Old Testament is taken for the Sinai covenant, it is not identified with the covenant of works.

Roberts examines the passages, 2 Cor. 3:6-7 and Gal. 4:23-24, where “the Old Testament is called, a killing letter, a ministration of death and condemnation, gendering to bondage, as Hagar.” He asserts that Paul’s expression in the Corinthians passage dealing with Moses’ ministration of the law should not be taken “absolutely” as if it had been absolutely and in itself the ministration of death and condemnation. For Scripture elsewhere styles it “lively oracles...a lively word, or living word: that is, an enlivening word, giving life.” But it should be understood “respectively and accidentally” in respect of the error of those who abstracted and separated Moses’ ministration from Christ, faith, and the gospel, resting in the works of the law and seeking to be justified by it contrary to God’s intention and scope in that ministration.⁵¹ They perverted the true end and scope of Moses’ ministration of the law, for his lively oracles became to them a ministration of death and condemnation because of their being unable to fully perform them. Roberts does not think this to be odd, since even the New Testament, which is called “the ministration of the spirit” and “the ministration of righteousness” because it is such absolutely and in itself, becomes “the savour of death unto death” accidentally on

⁵⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 741.

⁵¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 741-742, citing Lev. 18:5, Neh. 9:29, Ezek. 20:11, 13, 21, Acts 7:38, Rom. 10:2-4, 2 Cor. 3:6-7.

occasion of man's abuse and corruption.⁵² The expression of a ministration of death and condemnation was applicable to the ceremonial law as well as to the moral law, for both of them belonged to Moses' ministration. But the ceremonial law was not a ministration of death in itself directly but accidentally and indirectly through the Jews' error and abuse, for "as is confessed by all," it in itself spoke about life and righteousness in Christ. In the same way, Roberts does not understand Gal. 4:23-24 "absolutely and wholly" as if the Old Testament at Sinai engendered bondage and nothing else, having no liberty at all. For even Israel under this ministration experienced adoption as God's children, which has in it filial liberty. Instead, Roberts understands the passage "comparatively," for under this ministration the church was kept in a far more servile condition under tutors and governors till Christ came, when the church came of age under the New Testament. Hence, Roberts says that 2 Cor. 3:6-7 and Gal. 4:23-24 prove neither that the Old Testament given by Moses was essentially different from the New Testament nor that it was a covenant of works.⁵³

Roberts then examines the four learned Leiden professors' further proofs from Scripture. They insist that "the Old and New Testament are two distinct testaments," for Gal. 4:24 holds forth "two altogether divers waies of salvation: that, under condition of works: this, of faith." Roberts responds that although Paul styles the two covenants or testaments "the old and new," one from Sinai the other from Sion, he does not make them opposite and contrary to each other as the covenant of works and the covenant of faith are. But in the allegory of Hagar and Sarah Paul gives priority to the new covenant over

⁵²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 742, citing Rom. 8:3, 2 Cor. 2:16; 3:6, 8-9, Gal. 3:10.

⁵³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 741-742, citing Rom. 9:4, Gal. 4:1-6.

the old covenant, for “this being more servile, that more free, in the manner of administration.” In the Sinai covenant or the Old Testament, not works but faith was required of the Israelites as the condition for justification. This is partly because the law was their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ for justification by faith, partly because the law shut them up unto the faith so that they might not wander away into any erroneous way from the true way of justification by faith, and partly because Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes. Therefore, says Roberts, the law “intended not justification by works at all; but only by Christ, and faith.”⁵⁴

Now Roberts considers that those who would be justified by the law are fallen from grace (Gal. 5:4). He does not think that the law, which comprehends the whole administration by Moses, intends a justification by works, repugnant to the gospel’s justification of free grace by faith. But those were fallen from grace, even from the gracious way of justification by faith revealed both in the Sinai covenant and in the New Testament, who erroneously mistook the law and its end and sought for justification by doing the law. Roberts interprets Gal. 3:18 (“if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise”) and Rom. 3:27, regarding the opposition of the law of works and law of faith, with a common key. Roberts asserts that in Gal. 3:18 the law should not be understood as it was given on Mount Sinai, that is, as a covenant of faith, but as “abstracted from Christ and from faith, and indeed from Moses dispensation of it, as merely requiring works under penalty of the curse.” Likewise, in Rom. 3:27 the law of works should be considered separately and abstractedly from Moses’ ministration, not as

⁵⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 743, citing Rom. 10:4, Gal. 3:23-24; 4:1-7, 21-27; cf. Poliander et al., *Synopsis purioris theologiae*, XXIII.v-vi, x, xv (pp. 211-214).

it is concretely joined with and comprised in Moses' ministration.⁵⁵ In these passages the law, or the law of works, does not have any relation with the Mosaic administration of the covenant of faith but with man's pursuit of justification by his works.

According to Roberts, the Mosaic law cannot be interpreted as a covenant of works for several reasons. Firstly, because in Scripture there is no evidence of God's renewing the broken covenant of works with lapsed man. Instead, by way of remedy to that irreparable covenant of works, God reveals the covenant of faith in Christ, enlarging it from age to age until its perfection in the new covenant. Secondly, because if the Sinai covenant had been given as a covenant of works, then it would have antiquated and abrogated the covenant of faith that God formerly revealed in Christ to Adam, Abraham, and Noah. Yet the Sinai covenant was far from abolishing God's covenant of faith with the fathers; rather it confirms it and is in substance the same with it. Thirdly, because the law, as given on Mount Sinai, is not against the promises or covenant of faith. Fourthly, because in Eph. 2:12 the Sinai covenant is intended as the covenants of promise. Fifthly, because circumcision and the Passover, the "ordinary fixed sacraments" annexed to the covenant of faith administered from Abraham till this Sinai covenant, were also annexed to the Sinai covenant until the coming of Christ. Being confirmed with the seals of the covenant of faith, the Sinai covenant could not be a covenant of works. Lastly, because while the covenant of works neither has nor needs any mediator, this Sinai covenant was ordained in the hand of a mediator, Moses, as "a type of Christ the true mediator."⁵⁶

⁵⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 743.

⁵⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 744-745, citing Luke 2:21; 22: 13-15 (circumcision); Rom. 4:11 (seal); Ex. 20:19, Deut. 5:27; 18:15-17, Gal. 3:19-20 (mediator). Cf. Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending A Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (London: R. Baynes, 1822), IV.iv.38 (2:178-179).

The second opinion is that the law given on Mount Sinai was “a mixt covenant, partly of works, partly of grace.” Although this point can be explained in terms of Roberts’ British predecessors, it may contain an oblique reference to Cocceius’ theory of abrogations. Summarizing Ball’s explanation of the point, Roberts indicates that those who hold this opinion assert that the law was propounded in two ways.⁵⁷ According to them, Moses’ breaking of the two tables of stone prepared by God (Ex. 32:19) was the diverging point between the two ways of propounding the law. For the breaking of the two tables in the sight of the Israelites signifies their breach of covenant with God. The first way of propounding the law is explained in chapters 19 through 31 of Exodus. At first, after the people were ceremonially cleansed, the moral law alone was promulgated immediately by God to them in a most terrible manner. Afterwards it was to some extent softened by Moses’ writing it along with some ceremonial and judicial laws in a book, by his reading them to the people, and by their covenanting with an offering of sacrifices. After that God called Moses again up to the mountain, wrote the Ten Commandments with his own finger in two tables of stone of his own preparing, and sent Moses down with them to the people. Yet in Moses’ absence the people broke the covenant by idolatry with Aaron’s calf. When Moses saw it, he broke the two tables. The advocates of this opinion regard this first way of propounding of the law as “most rigid, being a perfect and exact draught of the law of prime nature, wherein the law breaths nothing but wrath to fallen nature.” Not having either grace or mercy, this presentation of the law exacted perfect obedience for eternal life, threatening the curse to all who do not continue obedience to everything written in the book of the law. They insist that this first way of

⁵⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 745-746, citing John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, published by Simeon Ash (London: G. Miller for Edward Brewster, 1645), 95-102.

propounding the law contained “a perfect covenant of works: and stood in full opposition to the covenant of grace.”⁵⁸

Those who hold the second opinion find the second way of propounding the law in and after chapter 34 of Exodus. According to them, the “whole frame and economy” of Moses’ law was secondly given by him to the people in a gentleness or moderate way with promises of pardon to the penitent and of blessings to the obedient. The two tables of stone were renewed differently from the former in five ways. Firstly, there was no more terribleness and thundering nor strictness of preparation. Secondly, now the mediator, Moses, would prepare the tables and bring them up to God who would write on them the same words that were in the former. Thirdly, now Moses would prepare an ark not only for safekeeping of the tables, but also for covering the curse of the law from the people. Neither people nor priest should read the law out of stone but as it was mollified by Moses’ transcription in his books. Fourthly, now the Lord proclaims all his goodness before Moses in Ex. 34 for the support and encouragement of penitent sinners. Lastly, on his coming down from the mountain, Moses’ face shined so gloriously that he put on a veil to hide the curse of the law from the people, and the peoples’ hearts and consciences were not quieted until the law was put in the ark and veiled. Thus they regard this second propounded law as “a covenant of grace, or subordinate to the covenant of grace.”⁵⁹

Roberts has already refused the works/grace distinction, replacing it with works/faith. He therefore indicates the impropriety of this opinion in supposing, in its twofold

⁵⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 745-746. This assertion is based on John 1:17 and Deut. 27:26. Note that a fairly standard exegete of the day like Matthew Poole supports the doctrinal points. See his *A Commentary on the Holy Bible*, 3 vols. (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1962-1963), in loc. (1:389; and 3:280).

⁵⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 746. Cf. the discussion in Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, IV.iv.25 (2:173-174).

proposal of the law, two distinct and opposite kinds of covenant propounded, that is, a covenant of works in the first propounding and a covenant of grace in the second. He raises two objections. Firstly, there were not two covenants but only one covenant in Moses' administration. Moses never speaks of any more covenants made with Israel at Horeb than one, and he calls it covenant, not covenants.⁶⁰ In addition, both the prophet Jeremiah and the apostle Paul in referring this Sinai administration speak of it as a single covenant only. Secondly, the covenant of works and the covenant of faith, or of grace, are so essentially different from each other in their requirements that they cannot be comprised in one and the same Sinai administration. Roberts thinks that Paul's reasoning in the case of God's election may be applied to this case of God's covenant administration: "If by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace; otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6).⁶¹ Thus, the Sinai covenant is not a mixed covenant: its promulgation of the law in no way returns to the covenant of works but rather clarifies the norms of life under the covenant of faith.

Roberts finds a great mistake of the advocates of this second opinion in their observation of the series and order of God's proceeding in this Sinai dispensation of the law. They err especially when they describe, in their words, "the first proposal of the law and inscription thereof in the first tables." For without scriptural support, they regard the first proposal of the law as "a most rigid and exact draught of the law of prime nature,

⁶⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 746, citing Ex. 19:5, Deut. 5:2-3; 4:13, 23; 17:2; 29:1.

⁶¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 746, citing Jer. 11:3-5; 31:31-32, Heb. 8:9.

wherein the law breathed nothing but wrath to fallen nature, without grace and mercy: containing a perfect covenant of works, opposite to the covenant of grace.”⁶²

Roberts sees rather several acts of God’s grace and mercy in the Sinai covenant, especially before Moses’ breaking of the first two tables (Ex. 32:19). Firstly, in God’s preface before the giving of the law, he gives the Israelites an abstract of his covenant, which he intended to be a sweet foretaste of the diverse, excellent gospel graces and mercies promised to covenant keepers (Ex. 19:4-6). By this contract God espoused Israel to himself and became a husband to them (Jer. 31:31-32). Secondly, in the preface to the Decalogue, God represents himself to the people as their covenant God and redeemer, and in the second and fifth commandments, he promises to those who love and obey him mercy and the land of Canaan, a type of the eternal rest in heaven (Ex. 20:1-2, 6, 12). Thirdly, when the people were terrified by God’s immediate voice and sued for a mediator between God and them, he gave them Moses, a typical mediator, and promised to them Christ, the true mediator (Ex. 20:18-21, Deut. 5:23-33; 18:15-20). Fourthly, to the moral law God annexed many ceremonial laws typifying gospel grace and mercy by Jesus Christ, besides the body of judicial laws, all of which Moses rehearsed to the people and recorded in a book (Ex. 20:24-26; 24:3-4, and chaps. 21-23). Fifthly, Moses brought all Israelites into covenant with God by sacrifices slain. After Moses read the book of the covenant and the people expressed their consent, the blood of the sacrifices was sprinkled as the blood of the covenant, which is a type of Christ’s true covenant confirming blood (Ex. 24:4-8). Sixthly, after this Moses, Aaron, and his sons with seventy elders of Israel went up to the mountain and had a most gracious vision of God showing grace and favor as their covenant God (Ex. 24:9-11). Lastly, Moses was called

⁶²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 746-747.

up higher into the mountain and was there with God forty days and forty nights during which time God communed with him and gave him commandments dealing with the tabernacle and other ceremonial laws, clear types of Christ and gospel mercies (Ex. 24:12-31:18). All these acts of grace and gospel mercy were manifested before Moses came down with the first tables (Ex. 32:1-35). Therefore, says Roberts, “this part of the proposal of the law, as it had much terribleness, so also it had much comfortableness and evangelical sweetness evidently imprinted thereon.”⁶³

Now Roberts objects to the particular contention of those who hold this second opinion, that is, that “the veil was put upon Moses face to hide the curse” of the law from the people. He thinks his objection is justifiable because the apostle Paul in 2 Cor. 3:6-7 explains the mystery otherwise; he wrote that the shining of Moses’ face signified the outward glory of the Mosaic ministration of the Old Testament. Referring to Paul, Roberts says that the veil put upon Moses’ face declared two things. First, it proclaimed the darkness of that ministration in terms of its primary and proper end, that is, Christ, “the very soul and life of the law.” Second, it symbolized the blindness of the minds of the Jews who could not see into the depth of the law and into the end and scope of that which was to be abolished, but generally rested in the outward letter and carnal apprehension of the law. Here, asserts Roberts, the apostle Paul “speaks not a word of veyling the curse of the law from them, which would have been a mercy; but of veyling the end and scope of the law from them, which was a great judgement upon them.”⁶⁴

⁶³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 747.

⁶⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 747-748, citing 2 Cor. 3:7-9, 13-16, and John Calvin, *Commentarius*, Ex. 34:29. For the relevant passages, see Ex. 34:29-35. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Ex. 34:29 (3:392-394). The point is similar to Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, IV.iv.25 (2:173-174).

According to Roberts, many learned and judicious writers also understand that the apostle Paul did not interpret Moses' veil as hiding the curse at all.⁶⁵ Roberts quotes

Calvin:

After Paul hath taught the genuine use of this shining, viz. that the law might be glorious; he proceeds further, that this was a presage of the future blinding of the Jews. He adds what was accidental, that the veil was upon Moses face: because it should come to pass, that the Jews could not behold the chief thing in the law, nor attend to the true end thereof: as after Christs coming their senses were blinded, and the veil on them, till Moses should be turned of them to Christ, who is the soul of the law.⁶⁶

Roberts says that Moses' veil is interpreted the same way by Augustine, Henry Ainsworth, Rivetus, and London Annotations.⁶⁷

The third opinion is that the Sinai covenant, or old covenant, was "a covenant subservient to the covenant of grace" and prepared the way for it. God made this covenant with the Israelites "to prepare them unto the faith" by inciting in them the desire for the promise and evangelical covenant and by restraining them from sin as with a bridle until he sent the spirit of adoption to them and governed them by the law of liberty. Roberts' explanation of this third opinion is based explicitly on Cameron. According to this opinion, God's covenant is distinguished into three: (1) that of nature, with man in innocence; (2) that

⁶⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 748.

⁶⁶Calvin, *Commentarius*, Ex. 34:29; quoted in Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 748. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Ex. 34:29 (3:393-394).

⁶⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 748, citing Augustine, *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*, II.vii; Henry Ainsworth, *Annotations*, Ex. 34:29, &c.; Rivetus, *Commentarius*, Ex. 34:29; and London Annotations, 2 Cor. 3:13, &c. Cf. Augustine, *Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum*, II.vii.26, in CCSL, vol. 49, p. 111; Ainsworth, *Annotations upon the Five Bookes of Moses, the Booke of the Psalmes, and the Song of Songs, or, Canticles* (London: John Bellamie, 1627), Ex. 34:29 (p. 144); Rivetus, *Commentarius*, Ex. 34:29-35, in *Operum*, 1:1205; and *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testament... wherein the text is explained, doubts resolved, scriptures parallel'd, and various readings observed; by the labour of certain learned divines [W. Gouge, T. Gataker, J. Downname, J. Ley et al.] thereunto appointed, and therein employed, as is expressed in the preface* (London: Evan Tyler, 1657), 2 Cor. 3:13.

of grace, with man lapsed; and (3) that which is subservient to the covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae subserviens*), which is called the old covenant in Heb. 8:13.⁶⁸ The nature and condition of the subservient covenant can be explained by comparing it with other two covenants. Following Cameron, Roberts begins by comparing the subservient covenant, or old covenant, with the covenant of nature. They are common in the following respects: (1) in both the contracting parties are God and man; (2) both have an annexed stipulation that is the same in respect to the moral law; (3) the promise is the same in general; and (4) both lead to Christ.⁶⁹

Cameron enumerates many differences between the covenant of nature and the subservient covenant. The following are some important differences between them. Firstly, while the covenant of nature was contracted with all men, the subservient covenant was made with Israelites alone. Secondly, while the covenant of nature obliged mankind only to obedience due by the law of nature, the old covenant bound Israel also to ceremonies. Thirdly, in the covenant of nature life is promised in the full context of paradise; in the subservient covenant life is enjoyed in Canaan. Fourthly, while the covenant of nature leads to Christ not by itself but by accident, the old covenant does this by itself, for that is its proper scope. Cameron thinks that God did not make the covenant of nature with men to make them desire Christ; rather its chief and ultimate end was that “man might give to God what was his.” By contrast in the subservient covenant God intends that men convinced of their weakness should fly to Christ. Fifthly, while the covenant of nature was made to lead

⁶⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 748, citing John Cameron's *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere theses* (Geneva, 1642), Theses 7 and 42-44. Cf. Cameron, *TA ΣΟΖΟΜΕΝΑ sive Opera* (Geneva, 1659), 544 and 548. For Roberts' criticism on Cameron's distinction of God's covenants, see the present work, pp. 41-42.

⁶⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 748-749.

men sweetly for it was written in their hearts, the subservient covenant compelled men and tended to bondage (Gal. 4:24). Lastly, while the covenant of nature had no mediator, the subservient covenant had a mediator, Moses.⁷⁰

Cameron also compares the subservient covenant with the covenant of grace. They are common in the following respects: (1) God is the author of both, (2) both were contracted with man as sinner, (3) both show sin, (4) both restrain from sin, (5) both lead to Christ, (6) both are a symbol of the church of God, (7) both are a covenant through a mediator, and (8) life is promised in both.⁷¹

There are many differences between the subservient covenant and the covenant of grace. Some important differences between them are as follows. Firstly, they differ in terms of the customary character of the author. In the subservient covenant God is considered as “reproving sin, and approving righteousness alone,” but in the covenant of grace God presents himself as “pardoning sin, and renewing in man a new righteousness.” Secondly, they differ in the stipulation. The stipulation of the old covenant is “do this, and thou shalt live” (Gal. 3:12), but the covenant of grace requires “believe, and thou shalt not come into condemnation” (John 3:18). Thirdly, the subservient covenant was added to the promises of grace that went before (Gal. 3:16-17, 19). Fourthly, the covenant of grace led to Christ directly, whereas the subservient covenant did so indirectly. Fifthly, while the mediator of the old covenant is Moses, the mediator of the covenant of grace is the God-man, Christ. Sixthly, in the old covenant the spirit of bondage was given (Gal. 4:24-25), but in the covenant of grace the spirit of adoption is conferred (Rom. 8:15). Seventhly, the old

⁷⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 749.

⁷¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 749-750.

covenant terrified the consciences, but the new comforts. Eighthly, the old covenant was a handwriting against us (Col. 2:14), but the new is a refreshing and easy yoke (Matt. 11:28-29). Lastly, some add this difference: in the old covenant life is promised in the land of Canaan, but in the covenant of grace life is ensured in heaven.⁷²

As the result of such comparisons, Cameron gives a description of the old covenant. It consists of three parts: (1) what was required of the Israelites, (2) God's promises and threats, and (3) its end or purpose. Firstly, in the old covenant God requires of Israelites obedience to the moral, ceremonial, and political laws. Secondly, God promises to the performers all kinds of blessings in the possession of the land of Canaan, but contrariwise to the violaters he severely threatens curses and death. Lastly, the end, or purpose, of this old covenant is to lead Israel to the Messiah who was to come.⁷³

Against this third opinion, however, Roberts raises many objections. He divides his objections into two, "more general exceptions" and "more particular exceptions." He begins with the more general exceptions. Firstly, Roberts says that Cameron's partition of God's covenant into three kinds—that is, the covenant of nature, the covenant of grace, and the subservient covenant or old covenant—is "neither logical nor theological." For according to this opinion both the covenant of nature and the subservient covenant are made "a covenant of works, having one and the same stipulation in respect of the moral law, do this and live." Roberts points out that the division of a genus into its species must be into members specifically distinct and opposite, but these are coincident. If Cameron's reasoning is followed, then the division between the covenant of nature and

⁷²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 749-750.

⁷³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 750.

the subservient covenant is self-contradictory. Moreover, the subservient or old covenant, that is, the Sinai covenant, is not a covenant of works, nor is its stipulation, “do this and live,” opposite to the stipulation of the covenant of grace, “believe and live.” Rather, the old covenant, or the Sinai covenant, is “one distinct dispensation of the covenant of grace” or the covenant of faith. So the subservient covenant and the covenant of grace are in their own nature coincident.⁷⁴ In terms of nature, the division between the subservient covenant and the covenant of grace is inappropriate.

Secondly, Roberts calls it “a paradox” for Cameron to say that all “these three distinct kinds of covenants” lead to Christ. The covenant of nature, or the covenant of works, exacts perfect and perpetual personal obedience from man in a perfect state. It knows no mediator, needs no mediator, and, in case of nonperformance, pronounces death without mercy and has no place for repentance. The covenant of works assures of life upon man’s perfect and perpetual personal obedience, whereas the covenant of faith assures of life upon Christ’s obedience and man’s faith in him. Roberts thinks this is the primary and most essential difference between the covenant of works and the covenant of faith.⁷⁵ The covenant of nature, that is, the covenant of works, has no mediator, so it does not lead to Christ.

Now Roberts expresses more particular objections to this third opinion. Firstly, this third opinion obscures the order of God’s covenant administrations. For, in this opinion the covenant of grace and the new covenant are spoken of as one and the same, thus the covenant of grace or new covenant is said to be more ancient than the subservient or old

⁷⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 751.

⁷⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 751-752.

covenant. On the one hand, however, the covenant of grace differs from the new covenant, as the species from the individual (*individuum*), that is, as the kind of covenant from one individual administration of that kind. On the other hand, if the covenant of grace and the new covenant are taken as equivalent and convertible terms, then the covenant of grace is not more ancient than the subservient or old covenant, for the new covenant succeeds the old.⁷⁶ This results in a confusion of the historical course of the covenant of grace, or faith (*historia revelationis*).⁷⁷

Secondly, this third opinion goes astray when it considers God in the old subservient covenant only as reproofing sin and approving righteousness but not as pardoning sin or renewing righteousness in man. Yet Roberts sees that God is also considered and represented in this old covenant as pardoning sin and renewing righteousness in man. God's pardoning sin is seen in his name proclaimed at the reinscription of the tables of the law; the promise of the forgiveness of iniquity, transgression, and sin; and in the blood of sacrifices ordained under this covenant administration, which led that people to the true blood of Jesus Christ, which cleanses from all sin. God's renewing righteousness in man is seen in his promise in the preface to this covenant, "ye shall be unto me a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests and an holy nation" and in the many ceremonial washings and purifications, which prefigure the spiritual washing by the Holy Ghost.⁷⁸

Thirdly, this third opinion is wrong as it makes man the only party contracting with God in the old covenant. For the party contracting with God in every dispensation of the

⁷⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 752.

⁷⁷Cf. Richard A. Muller, *DLGTT*, s.v. "historia revelationis."

⁷⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 752, citing Ex. 19:5-6; 34:6-7, Heb. 9:12-14, 1 John 1:7.

covenant of faith, of which this old covenant is one, is Jesus Christ and his spiritual seed.

Fourthly, this opinion does not fully grasp the life promised in the old covenant. For according to this opinion, life in paradise was the only life promised in the covenant of nature, so life in the possession of Canaan was all the life promised in the subservient or old covenant. Roberts objects to this view of life in paradise, and he explains that life in Canaan prefigured eternal life in heaven, Canaan being a type of heaven. Fathers, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to whom God gave the inheritance of Canaan by promise, lived as pilgrims and strangers in the land of promise, declaring plainly that they sought a better country that is heavenly. Roberts thinks that this third opinion encroaches “too near the borders of Socinianism” by believing that “under Moses the fathers had only earthly and temporal blessings.”⁷⁹

Fifthly, this opinion incorrectly makes Moses alone the mediator of the Old Testament. For, says Roberts, “Moses was only the typical mediator: Christ the true typified mediator,” as Moses plainly announces in Deut. 18:15-20. Roberts adds that Christ’s blood, typified in the blood of sacrifices, was the principal blood that made the Old Testament a testament. Sixthly, this opinion incorrectly asserts that the old covenant led to Christ “indirectly.” Yet every dispensation of the covenant of faith, among which this old covenant is one, led to Christ directly, though darkly. Roberts explains that the “further from Christ, the darker: the nearer to Christ, still the clearer,” for Christ is the primary scope, end, and intention of them all. The old covenant was the Jews’ schoolmaster to bring them to Christ, partly by detecting sin and misery and partly by typifying the remedy.⁸⁰

⁷⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 752-753, citing Heb. 11:9, 14-16.

⁸⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 753, citing Rom. 10:4, Gal. 3:24.

Lastly, this third opinion incorrectly makes it characteristic of the old covenant to terrify the conscience, and characteristic of the new covenant to comfort it. Roberts says that although the old covenant has much more servitude and terror in it than the new, it is not only and wholly terror. For comforts are also found in the old covenant, for example, in the promises prefixed to the promulgation, in both the preface to and promises in the moral law itself, and in the mystery of Christ prefigured in the ceremonial law. Moreover, although the new covenant more abundantly comforts the conscience than the old, there are fearful things as well as gracious things in it. For in the new covenant there is God's anger in severe threats against impenitent unbelievers as well as sweet promises and consolations to penitent believers.⁸¹

The fourth opinion takes the Sinai covenant as "for substance indeed and in truth a covenant of grace, or a covenant of faith." This opinion acknowledges that "for circumstance and manner of administration" it was published and dispensed to the Israelites in a completely unusual way of majesty, glory, terror, rigor, servitude, and bondage. But that way was "most necessary, suitable, and accommodate" to that time, people, and condition of the infant church.⁸²

Since Roberts himself holds this opinion, he explains it in detail. He begins by making clear that this Sinai covenant was dispensed in an entirely unusual way in comparison to all other covenantal administrations before or after it. Firstly, the preparation of the people for it was done with entirely unusual strictness, caution, and rigor (Ex. 19:1-25). Secondly, the promulgation of it was wholly unusual, for it was announced with such terror and

⁸¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 753.

⁸²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 753-754.

amazement that all Israelites trembled for fear and stood far off, and Moses himself feared and quaked exceedingly (Ex. 19:16, 18-19; 20:18-21, Deut. 5:22-26, Heb. 12:18-21).

Thirdly, the condition required of the people was imposed altogether unusually, for faith in Christ was imposed very obscurely but obedience, resulting from that faith, was urged most exactly and particularly in moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws. Fourthly, the solemn ratification of the covenant by killing sacrificial animals and sprinkling their blood as the blood of the covenant, half on the altar and half on the people, was wholly unusual (Ex. 24:4-8). Roberts explains that some such thing was done darkly and more imperfectly when God made his covenant with Abraham, but the Sinai covenant was ratified more completely and clearly (Gen. 15:9-11, 17-18). Fifthly, the recording of the content of the covenant was entirely unusual, for God himself wrote the Ten Commandments in two tables of stone twice, and Moses recorded moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws in a book (Ex. 24:3-4, 7; 31:18; 34:1, 28). Sixthly, the ordaining or disposing of this covenant by the hand of a typical mediator, Moses, was entirely unusual, for no other covenant mentioned “a typical mediator” (Gal. 3:19). Seventhly, the renewing of this covenant, after the people had broken it by idolatry, was entirely unusual, for God renewed it with a proclamation of all his goodness and with a manifestation of his outward glory, signified by the shining of Moses’ countenance (Ex. 34:1-35). Lastly, keeping this covenant in the ark, under the mercyseat, was entirely unusual, for no other covenant was kept in the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:16; 40:20).⁸³

Roberts then explains why this unusual administration of the Sinai covenant was most suitable for the Israelites at that time. Firstly, it was given in that way for their true knowledge of God. Many generations of Israelites had been born and brought up in Egypt,

⁸³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 754-755.

a pagan and idolatrous land, without the knowledge, worship, and fear of the true God, so the Israelites must have been very ignorant of the true God and of his ways. In his majesty, glory, and power God made himself more clearly known to the Israelites. In that unusual way God also made them know his law as “a rule of religion and life” so that they as his covenant people might be directed how to walk before God acceptably in holiness and righteousness in order to inherit God’s gracious promises in Christ.⁸⁴

Secondly, the Sinai covenant was given in that way for the Israelites’ proper knowledge of their own sinfulness. For since man’s fall the world had lost a thorough conviction of the sinfulness of sin in which it was involved, including the Israelites who had only lived in that sinful Egyptian land. As the apostle Paul says, “before the law sin was in the world: but sin was not imputed, when there was no law” (Rom. 5:13). God gave the Sinai covenant in that way to let them see their sins clearly in the moral law, the damnable nature of sin in the curse of the law and in the blood of slain sacrifices, and the terror of the Lord against sinners without a mediator.⁸⁵

Thirdly, giving the Sinai covenant in this unusual way, God made the Israelites, who were now a mighty people, quake and tremble and promise all obedience to God. For at that time Israel became a mighty people whose population was more than six hundred thousand excluding children under twenty and women, so it was no small matter to subdue so great a people and make them yield. Fourthly, God imposed the Sinai covenant upon the Israelites as a heavy and intolerable yoke till Christ to humble and bow them under its burden, rigor, and bondage. For the Israelites were naturally a stubborn, stiff-necked and rebellious people

⁸⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 755.

⁸⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 755-756, citing Rom. 3:20; 5:20, Gal. 3:19, 22.

against God from the day that he knew them. Fifthly, in that way God stripped the Israelites of all their imaginary self-righteousness, and he exposed their sin, shame, nakedness, and wretchedness so that they might not have any confidence in themselves but only in Christ, the end of the law for righteousness to every one who believes. For they were ignorant of God's righteousness in Christ and sought to establish their own righteousness by works.⁸⁶

Sixthly, in that way God put the Israelites under the rudiments and carnal ordinances of the ceremonial law, in which they might learn Christ's salvation of sinners until they would come of age in the fullness of time, when Christ himself was actually revealed. For, at that time they were a people very weak, childish, carnal, and dull in their apprehension of spiritual things, especially of the mystery of Christ.⁸⁷

Lastly, in that way God constituted the Israelites a national body politic both ecclesiastical and civil, thus a church, called "the church in the wilderness," and a commonwealth of Israel. Israel had now grown from a private family or domestic church to a national church. Roberts explains that God combined a church and a commonwealth together "as inseparable twins" by including his moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws, which were constitutive of their church and commonwealth, in a covenant.⁸⁸

Roberts says that this Sinai covenant was dispensed and given as a covenant of faith and grace in Jesus Christ despite its unusual administration. To prove this he gives the following reasons. Firstly, the Sinai covenant is in substance one and the same with the covenant made with the fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Roberts cites two examples. One is seen

⁸⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 756, citing Deut. 9:6-25, Rom. 10:2-4.

⁸⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 756-757, citing Gal. 4:1-5, Heb. 9:10.

⁸⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 757, citing Acts 7:38, Eph. 2:12.

in God's promise to keep the covenant and mercy with them, which he had sworn to their forefathers if they would keep his commandments, statutes, and judgments. If the Israelites keep this Sinai covenant, God will perform for them the same mercy that he swore to their forefathers. In terms of the mercy that God promises, the Sinai covenant is the same in substance with the covenant that God made with the forefathers of the Israelites. The other example is seen in the covenant made with Israel in the land of Moab, which Roberts regards as the same as the Sinai covenant, being a part of it renewed.⁸⁹ It expresses more clearly that by this covenant God would be their God and they should be his people as he had sworn to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that is, according to the tenor of his covenant with Abraham and his seed. Since the Sinai covenant confirms God's covenant with Abraham and his seed, they are "one and the same for substance." Consequently, asserts Roberts, this "Sinai-covenant was a covenant of faith: for Gods covenant with the fathers, Abraham, etc. was a covenant of faith."⁹⁰

Secondly, the covenant relation between God and Israel established by this Sinai covenant is "substantially one and the same with that of the covenant of faith." Roberts sees the essence of the covenant relation established between God and men by the covenant of faith in this expression: "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."⁹¹ As stated above in the first reason, the same relation is established between God and Israel by this Sinai covenant, especially when part of it was repeated in the land of Moab. The prophet Jeremiah also confirms that this covenant relation was established between God and

⁸⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 757, citing Deut. 7:11-12; 29:1-29.

⁹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 758, citing Deut. 29:12-13.

⁹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 758-759, citing Jer. 31:33, Ezek. 36:28, Heb. 8:10.

Israel by the Sinai covenant. Since such a covenant relation is possible “only in Christ by faith,” says Roberts, “this evangelical covenant relation betwixt God and Israel, stablished by this Sinai-covenant, proves this covenant to be a covenant of faith.”⁹²

Thirdly, the preparatory abstract, or summary abridgement of the Sinai covenant—premised by God for the better preparing of Israel for the promulgation of the law and covenant at Sinai—entails the “pure gospel-blessings in Christ.” Roberts points to Ex. 19:5-6: “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep covenant, ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.” God’s promise of accepting the Israelites “as his peculiar treasure; a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation,” is possible only when “God looks upon them in Christ,” and Christ has made them “kings and priests unto God and his Father.” Thus Roberts says that God’s promise of “such pure evangelical mercies” in the Sinai covenant shows that it is “a pure gospel-covenant.”⁹³

Fourthly, the Sinai covenant is a covenant of faith because the preface to the Decalogue and the first commandment contain in them in a summary fashion the covenant of faith. Roberts thinks that the preface to the Decalogue, that is “I am the LORD, thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of servants,” contains three great arguments or reasons for obedience.”⁹⁴ The first reason is that “he is Jehovah.” Referring to Ex. 6:2-8, Roberts says that although Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God by his name, Jehovah, in a doctrinal way, they did not know him by that name experientially.

⁹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 759, citing Deut. 29:12-13 (repetition in Moab); Lev. 26:3, 12, Jer. 11:3-4 (confirmation through Jeremiah).

⁹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 758, citing 1 Peter 2:9-10, Rev. 1:5-6.

⁹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 759, citing Ex. 20:1-2.

Roberts adds that now God has come to make himself known “experimentally to Israel to be Jehovah” in fulfilling his covenant promise to Abraham in his seed. The second reason is that “he is Israel’s God, thy God.” Roberts explains: “Not by common creation or providential conservation only, as he is even to the wicked: but by special covenant, made formerly with their fathers.” Roberts says the third reason is that God is the Israelites’ “Redeemer, typically from Egypt’s thralldom; spiritually from sin’s and Satan’s thralldom shadowed out thereby: as is clear from the Passover; a means of their deliverance from Egypt, and a clear type of Christ.”⁹⁵ Roberts says, “these three arguments prefixed to the law notably proclaim the law[,] this Sinai-covenant[,] to be a covenant of faith in Christ.” For God’s performing of his covenant as Jehovah and his being Israel’s covenant God and Israel’s redeemer, are only possible in Christ. Regarding the first commandment, that is “thou shalt have me the Lord to be thy God only, and worship me as thy God,” Roberts points out that since Adam’s fall no one can worship the Lord as their God without faith in Jesus Christ. Thus, he asserts that since the covenant necessarily requires faith in Christ, it must be a covenant of faith in Christ.⁹⁶

Fifthly, the unusual administration of the Sinai covenant shows that “God fully intended it, and peculiarly gave it, as a covenant of faith in Jesus Christ.” To demonstrate God’s intention in the covenant, Roberts enumerates several important points in its administration as follows:

1. The promulgation is exact and terrible, forcing them to cry out for a mediator: 2. Their request for a mediator is commended by God highly, and granted presently; Moses being given as a typical mediator, Christ being promised as the true mediator: 3. The ceremonial law is added to, and inserted in the covenant, to instruct them familiarly in the deep mystery of Jesus Christ the mediator. 4. The solemn sanction

⁹⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 759-760, citing Ex. 12:11-13, 21-23, 1 Cor. 5:7.

⁹⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 760, citing Ex. 20:3, Heb. 11:6.

of the covenant was by the death and blood of sacrifices shadowing out Christs covenant-confirming death and blood: 5. They had a sweet vision of God as serene and favourable, presently upon the solemnity of the covenant, they approaching nearer to God with Moses their mediator: 6. God reduced them to humiliation and repentance for their breach of covenant: 7. And God renewed the tables and covenant again with them, upon their repenting.⁹⁷

Roberts states that these things were brought to pass purposely by God not to be bare outward transactions but to contain inward mysteries. Since the chief mystery in the administration of this covenant is Jesus Christ, “the soul of the law and covenant,” asserts Roberts, “these steps of Gods proceedings in this covenant-administration” shows that this Sinai covenant was a covenant of faith.⁹⁸

Sixthly, the Sinai covenant is a covenant of faith because the stipulation between the parties is the same in substance as that of the covenant of faith. Roberts expresses the common mutual stipulation as “on Gods part, gracious promises of gospel-mercies: on Israels part, restipulation of gospel-duties.” In the Sinai covenant, God’s promises are to be the Israelites’ God in and through the promised Jesus Christ, to grant them his presence, to accept them as a peculiar treasure for himself, to give them Canaan, and to add all outward blessings. The Israelites’ duties in this covenant are to be God’s people, to believe in God and in Jesus Christ, to love God and their neighbor, and to obey him sincerely in all things that he commanded them. As all these stipulations between God and Israel are “purely evangelical,” says Roberts, the Sinai covenant obviously is a covenant of faith.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 762, citing Ex. 19:16, 19; 20:1-26; 24:3-11; 25:1-31:18; 33:1-6; 34:1-7 (pp. 760-762).

⁹⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 762.

⁹⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 762-763, citing Ex. 19:5-6; 20:2, 12, Lev. 26:3-12, Deut. 7:12-25; 8:7-9; 18:15-20, Jer. 11:4-5 (God’s promises); and Ex. 19:5; 24:3, 7, Lev. 19:18; 26:12, Deut. 6:4-5; 18:15-20, Jer. 11:4 (Israel’s duties).

Lastly, the Sinai covenant is a covenant of faith because the same sacraments and seals that were part of God's covenant with Abraham, which is a covenant of faith, continued under this Sinai covenant, until the death of Jesus Christ. According to Roberts, both circumcision and the Passover were attached to God's covenant with Abraham, and both sacraments were types of the promised Jesus Christ. Even after the Sinai covenant was established, "these two sacraments of the covenant of faith were not abrogated and antiquated: but still continued of use and force in the church of God, so long as this covenant-administration continued." Roberts says that this Sinai covenant must be a covenant of faith because these seals and tokens of the covenant of faith confirmed and ratified it.¹⁰⁰

Roberts refutes some objections against this fourth opinion that takes the Sinai covenant as a covenant of grace or a covenant of faith. The first objection is that Jesus Christ does not seem to be promised and revealed in this covenant, so it cannot be a covenant of faith whose "peculiar object of faith" is Christ. In response Roberts says that Jesus Christ is certainly revealed in this covenant because Christ and his apostles frequently testify in the New Testament that Moses revealed Christ by speaking and writing about him.¹⁰¹ Roberts says that Jesus Christ is implicitly revealed in this covenant. For instance, "the preparatory gospel-promises, of Israel's being to God a peculiar treasure, a kingdom of priests, an holy nation" can only be made with Christ in view since no sinners can be given these evangelical privileges without him. Furthermore the preface to the Decalogue could call

¹⁰⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 763-764, citing Gen. 17:9-14, Ex. 12:1-51, Lev. 23:4-8, Deut. 16:1-8, John 7:22-23.

¹⁰¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 764, citing Luke 24:27, 44, John 1:45; 5:45-47, Acts 3:22-23; 26:22-23.

God a covenant God and a redeemer of the Israelites only in and by Jesus Christ.¹⁰² Also the first commandment shows this for God cannot be worshipped as our covenant God except through Jesus Christ.¹⁰³ Roberts understands Luther's words to this effect: "In the first praecept thou shalt find Christ, life, victory of death, and the resurrection of the dead to life eternal: and to conclude the whole Old, and New Testament."¹⁰⁴ Certainly the blood of slain sacrifices foreshadows the blood of Christ, the true sacrifice, as do the types and shadows of the ceremonial law. Roberts also says that "Christ was explicitly revealed and promised, as a prophet like unto Moses to be raised up by God unto Israel."¹⁰⁵ And Roberts thinks Jesus Christ is "the very principal scope and soul of the law, or Sinai-covenant in all the doctrines, commands and promises thereof." Since Jesus Christ is more clearly revealed in the Sinai covenant than in anything before, Roberts thinks it is a colossal mistake to say that Jesus Christ was not revealed in the law or Sinai covenant.¹⁰⁶

The second objection is that "faith in Jesus Christ, and justification by faith in Christ, are not revealed in the Sinai-covenant," whereas faith in Christ is "the peculiar condition restipulated," and justification by faith is "the peculiar benefit promised in the covenant of faith." Based on the apostle Paul's words, "the law is not of faith" (Gal. 3:12) and "faith was revealed afterwards, after the law" (Gal. 3:23), it holds that the Sinai covenant is not a covenant of faith in Jesus Christ. Roberts begins his answer by referring to his previous answer to the first objection. For, he thinks, "Christ and saving faith; Christ and justification

¹⁰²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 764, citing Ex. 19:5-6; 20:2, 1 Peter 2:9-10.

¹⁰³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 764-765, citing Ex. 20:3, John 14:6; 15:5.

¹⁰⁴Martin Luther, *Commentarius*, Gen. 22 (p. 195); quoted in Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 765.

¹⁰⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 765, citing Ex. 24:4-8, Deut. 18:15-20, John 1:45, Acts 7:37, Heb. 10:1.

¹⁰⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 765, citing Rom. 10:4, Gal. 3:19, 24.

by faith; have inseparable connexion and dependance one upon the other, as the act and object, as the cause and effect.” Thus, he asserts, “where Christ is revealed for life and justification, there faith in him is implicitly required: and where Christ is received by faith, there justification by faith must infallibly ensue.” Roberts finds an implicit command of saving faith in Christ in the first commandment in which the Lord commands exclusive and appropriate worship. For “God cannot be had or worshipped acceptably, without faith in Christ.” Roberts asserts that the Sinai covenant led Israel away from any idea of justification by works and directed God’s people to justification by faith in Christ alone.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Roberts attributes Paul’s description of the righteousness of faith in Rom. 10:6-10 to Moses’ description of the law or Sinai covenant in Deut. 30:11-14. Thus, Roberts argues that Paul’s saying that the “law is not of faith” in Gal. 3:12 does not mean the law “absolutely” but the law “in some limited and restrictive sense.” If the term law is understood more strictly and is abstracted from the administration of Moses, as “the carnal Jews and legal justitaries” usually do, explains Roberts, then the law is not of faith nor does it hold forth the righteousness of faith in Christ.¹⁰⁸ Roberts takes Paul’s saying in Gal. 3:23, “before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed,” not “simply and absolutely” but “only comparatively and respectively.” For the covenants with Abraham and with Noah show that faith was revealed before the law. Yet, explains Roberts, the “revelation of faith before and under the law was so small, imperfect, dim and obscure, in comparison of the clear, full and glorious

¹⁰⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 765-766, citing Deut. 27:26, Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:20; 8:3; 10:2-4, Gal. 3:10, 21-22, 24.

¹⁰⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 767-768.

manifestation of faith afterwards under the New Testament, that till then it seemed as it were not to be revealed at all.”¹⁰⁹

The third objection is that the Sinai covenant is not a covenant of faith, which is everlasting, but a covenant of works, which is temporary, for it “is opposed, by the prophet Jeremiah and by the apostle, to the new-covenant, and is said to be broken by the people of Israel.” Roberts begins by considering the alleged opposition between the Sinai covenant and the new covenant. He points out that the Sinai covenant is said to be unlike the new covenant, but neither the prophet nor the apostle says that it is unlike the covenant of faith. And the difference cited by the apostle between the Sinai covenant and the new covenant is not a disparity of content, for in both the Lord says “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” but only in the manner of administration and degree. For God promised in his new covenant a greater and clearer measure of grace for his people than under the Sinai covenant particularly in three ways. With reference to the inscription of the law, it was written on the two tables of stone in the Sinai covenant, but it is written on the hearts in the new covenant. In the revelation of God and his ways, that is “more clear, full and universal under the New-Covenant, then under the Sinai covenant.” Grace is seen more fully in the remission and obliteration of sin, for in the Sinai covenant sacrifices for sin had to be offered continually, but in the new covenant Christ offered one sacrifice for sins forever, so no further offering is necessary.¹¹⁰ Hence, Roberts says that the Sinai covenant does not differ from the new covenant “specifically” but “gradually,” and they are both covenants of faith. The new covenant, however, is more excellent, complete, and perfect in every way. And

¹⁰⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 768, citing Gen. 15:6, Deut. 30:11-14, Rom. 10:6-10, Heb. 11:7.

¹¹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 769-770, citing Lev. 26:12, Jer. 31:31-34, Heb. 8:8-10; 10:1-4, 10-19.

Roberts does not accept the Israelites' breach of the Sinai covenant as proof that it was a covenant of works instead of a covenant of faith. Though the Israelites "brake the Sinai-covenant by their idolatry, yet they brake it not utterly and irreparably, as Adam brake the covenant of works by his first transgression," explains Roberts, "for God admitted them to repentance; upon their repenting pardons them; and renews the Sinai-covenant again with them."¹¹¹

The fourth objection is that John and Paul oppose the law or Sinai covenant to grace, and therefore the Sinai covenant seems not to be a covenant of faith, or a covenant of grace. This challenge is based on John 1:17, "the law was given by Moses: but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" and Rom. 6:14, "sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." To answer this objection Roberts distinguishes the use of the word "grace" into three: (1) "for Gods free favour" (Rom. 3:24, Eph. 1:6-7), (2) "for effects and fruits of Gods free favour to us, and upon us" (2 Peter 3:18, 2 Cor. 12:9, Eph. 3:8), and (3) "for the doctrine of grace set forth in the gospel, especially in the New Testament" (Titus 2:10-11). Regarding John 1:17, Roberts acknowledges that the apostle prefers the ministry of Jesus Christ to that of Moses and the New Testament dispensation to that of the Old. On the one hand, the passage may mean that "Christ brings the doctrine of grace more clearly and fully now, then Moses did; and the true substance and accomplishment of the legal types and shadows now under the New Testament."¹¹²

According to this interpretation the law is not intrinsically opposed to grace but has grace in

¹¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 770, citing Ex. 33:1-34:35.

¹¹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 770.

it.¹¹³ Thus, says Roberts, the “opposition is not in regard of different kinds, but of different degrees; both Old and New Testament, both Moses and Christ teach grace, but Christ more clearly, fully, illustriously.” On the other hand, the word “grace” may be taken as the results of divine grace; the passage would then mean that the covering and pardoning of our transgressions against the law and the enabling of us to obey the law of Moses came by Jesus Christ.¹¹⁴ Moses gave the law “that taught and commanded what was to be done, and that prefigured Christ and sinners life, redemption and salvation by him,” but he “gave not the grace whereby men should be enabled to perform what was commanded, or should have their failings pardoned.” But Jesus Christ gives the grace to do what is commanded, covers all of our failings and imperfections, and is the fulfillment of all the types and shadows that pointed to him. Roberts prefers this interpretation to the former because it suits better the expressions in John 1:14-16, which immediately precede the verse in question.¹¹⁵

Thus, says Roberts, “Christ and grace are not wholly excluded from the law,” for by directing the Jews to Christ and showing them how to walk before him faithfully and obediently, the law to some extent revealed Christ and faith in him. The revelation of Christ and faith in him is characteristic of the covenant of faith. In interpreting John 1:17 this way Roberts joins Augustine, Calvin, Ball, and John Diodati.¹¹⁶ Roberts understands Paul’s

¹¹³Note that this set of distinctions in grace also serves to illuminate Roberts’ sense of grace before the fall—grace as benevolence or free favor, apart from the issue of redemption—and to allow for clear lines of distinction between the two covenants as well as between the two primary divisions of the covenant of faith.

¹¹⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 770-771.

¹¹⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 771.

¹¹⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 771. Regarding the revelation of Christ and faith in him to some extent in the law, Roberts cites Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, XXII.vi; Calvin, *Commentarius*, John 1:17; Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 119; and John Diodati, *Annotations*, John 1:17. Cf. Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaeon*, XXII.vi, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 4, p. 274; Calvin, *Commentaries*

purpose in Rom. 6:14-15 as comforting and encouraging the regenerate in the process of sanctification, while they struggle against the remnants of sin in them. For, unlike carnal men they are no more “under the irritation, rigour, curse, and condemnation of the law,” but “under the power and force of saving grace that is stronger then sin.” Thus Roberts says that the antithesis of law and grace stated in Rom. 6:14 does not exclude the law from being a covenant of faith and grace.¹¹⁷

For Roberts, the law folds into the covenant of grace (or, in his language, covenant of faith) by way of the Mosaic covenant. But Roberts, unlike Cameron, does not want a simple promise/fulfillment or subservience/promulgation distinction because salvation is genuinely imparted under the promise. Thus Roberts has recourse to the third use of the law in the Mosaic covenant. It reiterates the law of the covenant of works, but in a new use, now enabled by grace. Thus, Roberts refuses the Salmurian option of a threefold covenant but still draws on Cameron’s language of subservience to develop a still more elaborate two-covenant, multiple administration model, in part by drawing on Ball’s enumeration of the “dispensations,” in part by drawing on the third use of the law. Or, again, in contrast to Cameron, the Mosaic covenant is not only a means to the end of the covenant of grace, nor is it the only earlier administration.¹¹⁸ Cocceius addresses the very same problem with his theory of abrogations—the problem of the “promise” status and legal content of the Old Testament. But Roberts manages to explain the differences between the administration of

[CTS], John 1:17 (1:52-53); and Diodati, *Pious and Learned Annotations upon the Holy Bible* (London: Miles Flesher for Nicholas Fussell, 1648), pt. 2, p. 81.

¹¹⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 771.

¹¹⁸Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, III.iii.20-23 (1:317-320), and Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XII.vii.7 (2:218-219) against the threefold in favor of a twofold division.

the Old and New Testament while at the same time arguing the unity of the covenant of grace (or, in his language, covenant of faith).

The last objection is that the law or Sinai covenant requires doing for life and therefore cannot be a covenant of faith but must be a covenant of works, for “doing and believing, works and faith, are two contrary conditions of life.” This position maintains that the condition necessary for life and happiness in the law or Sinai covenant is perfect obedience, while that in the covenant of faith is believing in Christ. This understanding of the Sinai covenant is based on Lev. 18:5, Deut. 27:26, Rom. 10:5, and Gal. 3:10, 12; and this interpretation of the covenant of faith centers on Rom. 10:6-12. Roberts thinks that it is very difficult to answer this objection because “it is most obvious to every one that reads the Epistles of Paul to the Romanes, and to the Galatians.”¹¹⁹ But since it is very important and necessary for showing that the Sinai covenant is a covenant of faith, Roberts begins by considering some answers of others to this question.

Some say that “the condition of doing whereunto the promises are made in the law, is not an antecedent, but a consequent condition,” and that the perfect doing required in the law should not be interpreted legally, but evangelically.¹²⁰ Roberts cites the explanation of Ball as illustrative of this opinion:

True it is, the promises run upon this condition; if ye obey my voice, and do my commandments. But conditions are of two sorts: antecedent, or consequent. Antecedent, when the condition is the cause of the thing promised or given, as in all civil contracts of justice, where one thing is given for another. Consequent, when the condition is annexed to the promise, as a qualification of the subject, or an adjunct that must attend the thing promised. And in this latter sense, obedience to the commandments was a condition of the promise. Not a cause why the thing promised was vouchsafed: but a qualification of the subject capable, or a consequence of such great mercy freely conferred.... These words, do this and live, must not be

¹¹⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 772.

¹²⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 772.

interpreted, as if they did promise life upon a condition of perfect obedience, and for works done in such exactness as is required: but they must be expounded evangelically, describing the subject capable of life eternal, not the cause why life and salvation is conferred. And by doing; sincere uniform impartial obedience, not exact fulfilling of the law in every title, is to be understood.... And in like manner, [the passage] of the apostle, the doers of the law are justified, may be expounded evangelically: not of them that fulfil the law, which should be justified by their works; but of them that soundly obey, who are justified of grace by faith, not for their works.¹²¹

Acknowledgment of an antecedent condition prior to the divine willing would make this view Arminian by placing the reason for divine willing in the conduct of individual human beings. Ball, accordingly, argues that there can be no antecedent condition.

Still, Roberts does not regard this interpretation as a satisfactory answer to this last objection. For he thinks that although the passage, “do this and live,” may be interpreted evangelically, it can hardly be interpreted that way in the passages cited in the objection. Doing is directly opposed to believing in Rom. 10:5 and Gal. 3:12, where Paul carefully compares the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith so that he can show that they are hostile to each other. Furthermore “the curse is denounced upon the least failing” in Deut. 27:26 and Gal. 3:10, but “failings in evangelical obedience are covered, not cursed.” In short, says Roberts, this explanation does not do justice to the mystery and intent of the Sinai covenant when it requires both perfect doing and believing.¹²²

Others answer by dividing the meaning of the law into two: “more largely” and “more restrictively.”¹²³ If the law is taken more largely, it comprehends all the doctrine and

¹²¹Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, 132-133 and 136-137; quoted in Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 772-773.

¹²²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 773, citing Calvin, *Commentarius*, Rom. 10:5-6. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Rom. 10:5-6 (pp. 385-390).

¹²³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 773-774. According to Roberts, all the following authors speak to this effect. Peter Martyr Vermigli, *Loci communes*, II.xvi.8; Calvin, *Commentarius*, Rom. 10:5; Pareus, *Commentarius*, Rom. 10; Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, pt. 1, chap. 7 (pp. 92-122); and Burgess,

administration of the Sinai covenant given by Moses. If the law is taken more restrictively, however, it means “an abstracted rule of righteousness consisting in precepts, threats and promises; holding forth life upon a condition absolutely impossible to lapsed man” and pronouncing a curse and death upon any failing. Paul understands the law in the latter sense in Rom. 10:5 and Gal. 3:12. Roberts says, “the law, thus taken, is a covenant of works.” Yet Paul understands the law in the former sense in Rom. 10:4 and Gal. 3:23-24. According to Roberts, “the law thus taken is a covenant of faith in Christ Jesus, holding out life and happiness only upon condition of believing in Christ, in the sight of God.” He acknowledges that this answer may give a strong answer to the objection by separating the interpretation of law into “the law largely taken” that promises “life on condition of believing in Christ” and “the law strictly taken” that “requires perfect doing.” For, in the former sense the law was given in the Sinai covenant, which therefore is a covenant of faith, but in the latter sense—it is not a covenant of faith but of works—Moses did not give it to the Israelites. But Roberts does not think this answer satisfactory because “it doth not so fully clear the mysterie of the Sinai-covenant in holding forth life both upon doing, and believing, which the apostle in that 10th to the Romans, and in the Epistle to the Galatians, intimateth evidently.”¹²⁴

Thus, for a better answer to the last objection, Roberts adds some considerations about the condition of life and happiness revealed in the law or Sinai covenant. Roberts says that the “Sinai-covenant was purposely so dispensed as to tender life and happiness upon two

Vindiciae Legis, Lecture 24. Cf. Vermigli, *Loci communes* (London, 1583), II.xvi.8 (p. 400); Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Rom. 10:5 (pp. 385-387); Pareus, *Commentarius*, Rom. 10, in *Operum*, pt. 3, sec. 2, pp. 199-211, especially p. 208; and Burgess, *Vindiciae Legis*, Lecture 24, pp. 229-237 [actually pp. 231-239; irregular pagination].

¹²⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 773-775.

opposite and contrary conditions, viz. works, and faith; perfect doing, and believing.”

Roberts enumerates many passages as a proof of this: on perfect doing all in the law, Rom. 10:5 and Gal. 3:12 with Lev. 18:5; on the curse denounced against the least failing, Gal. 3:10 with Deut. 27:26; and on believing in Jesus Christ promised, Rom. 3:21-22; 10:4, 6-12, and Gal. 3:22-24 with Deut. 30:11-15. Roberts acknowledges that in this Sinai covenant belief in Christ is revealed very sparingly and obscurely, whereas perfect obedience is stated very frequently and plainly. He explains that this is because the peculiar function of the Mosaic law was to instruct God’s people what the true righteousness of works was and what rewards or punishments would come to those who observe or break the law. In this respect, says Roberts, “Moses is compared with Christ; the law was given by Moses: but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.”¹²⁵

But Roberts emphasizes that believing in Christ for life and righteousness was the chief and ultimate intent of the Sinai covenant, and perfect obedience was pressed upon Israel as a result of that believing. The subordination of the perfect doing to believing in the Sinai covenant is evident where God brought the Israelites to see their need of a mediator by demanding from them perfect obedience under threat of a curse. Both “the moral law, the impossible rule of perfect doing,” and “the ceremonial law, revealing Christ, the object of believing,” were a schoolmaster to bring the Jews to Christ so that they might be justified by faith in him.¹²⁶

Going further, Roberts says that in the Sinai covenant both believing and perfect doing were required for the sinner’s happiness or the sinner’s surety. Perfect doing was required

¹²⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 775, citing John 1:17; and Calvin, *Commentarius*, Rom. 10:5. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Rom. 10:5 (pp. 385-387).

¹²⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 775-776, citing Gal. 3:24.

for the sinner's happiness because "Gods covenant of works at first made with Adam and with all his posterity in him, but broken by them, cannot be eluded or evaded," thus they "must do it, or dy." Since doing it is impossible because of the weakness of flesh, they lie under the curse and death. Here this covenant reveals to sinners Jesus Christ, who alone could satisfactorily bear this curse and obey the law to the uttermost in order to gain redemption and righteousness for them. Roberts adds: "Believing in Christ is also necessary to the sinners happiness: because without faith his sureties perfect doing and enduring cannot become his by imputation."¹²⁷

Thus Roberts asserts that perfect doing and believing in Jesus Christ are required in this Sinai covenant to show that the penalty and duty of the covenant of works have their complete fulfillment in the covenant of faith through Jesus Christ alone. According to the intent of the Sinai covenant, the covenant of works has its "perfect accomplishment in Christ, by doing and enduring, all which becomes ours, by believing." Roberts describes it as follows: "the covenant of works is digested into, incorporated with, and wholly swallowed up by the covenant of faith"; thus "perfect doing is attained, by believing."¹²⁸

By understanding that perfect doing is attained by believing, thinks Roberts, many difficult knots are untied and the secret of many mysteries unveiled. He begins by applying this to interpreting Ps. 85:10: "How mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." He says that this passage had immediate reference to Israel's deliverance from the Babylonian captivity, but mediate connection to Christ and our redemption through him. Roberts explains that in Christ the divine attributes of mercy and

¹²⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 776, citing Rom. 8:3.

¹²⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 776-777.

truth find sweet agreement and accomplishment for sinners. For mercy is expressed to the sinner under the penalty of the law of works by Christ being given as the sinner's surety; truth is fulfilled, which threatened death to those who transgressed the law, as Christ dies for sinners. Roberts says that justice or righteousness was satisfied as Christ became a sweet sacrifice by perfectly fulfilling the requirement of the law and enduring the infliction of the law, and peace is obtained by Christ's blood between God and those who were by sin at war against him. In this interpretation Roberts has the support of Nicholas of Lyra and Richard Field.¹²⁹

With the conditions of doing and believing in the Sinai covenant, Roberts explains how sin can be condemned and yet sinners saved. Roberts says that "sin was condemned in the flesh of Christ, sent in the similitude of sinful flesh, and for sin," but "the sinner is saved, viz. by Christs condemnation." Thus, the Sinai covenant, by spelling out sin and the curse, condemns sin, and by directing the sinner to Christ, the true sacrifice and fulfillment of all the legal shadows, saves the sinner.¹³⁰

Roberts also explains how sinners are justified by perfect doing and by believing at the same time. Sinners are justified by "perfect doing, in Christs person, to whom the law drives them, by exacting impossibilities of them: by believing, in their own persons; whereunto the law allures them, by representing Christ as the scope and end of the law to

¹²⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 777, citing Calvin, *Commentarius*, Ps. 85:10; Nicholas of Lyra, on Ps. 85:10; and Richard Field, *Of the Church*, bk. 5, chap. 11. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Ps. 85:10 (3:375-377); Nicholas of Lyra, *Postilla super totam Bibliam*, 5 vols. (Rome, 1471-1472), vol. 2; and Field, *Of the Church, five bookes* (Oxford: William Turner, 1628), 423-429, especially 426.

¹³⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 777, citing Rom. 8:3.

them.” Thus, asserts Roberts, there is no paradox in sinners’ being justified in the sight of God by both works and faith—by Christ’s works and by their own faith.¹³¹

In the same way, this solves how sinners can do nothing and yet can do all the things that the law requires. In themselves, says Roberts, the weakness of the flesh keeps sinners from doing what the law requires, but “in Christ, the perfect performer of the law, embraced by faith, they can do all things perfectly; Christ’s perfect obedience being imputed to thee by faith.” This Sinai covenant requires perfect doing from sinners under the curse so that it may make them understand their inability and requires believing in Christ so that it can draw them to Christ, who has done all things so that “the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled” in them.¹³²

Now Roberts explains how “sweetly the law and gospel do agree in one” in the Sinai covenant:

They are both digested and incorporated together in this one Sinai-covenant. They joyntly conduct the sinner out of himself unto Jesus Christ that he may be justified by faith, not by works. They joyntly require faith in Jesus Christ unto justification. They joyntly tender eternal life and happiness, upon believing. They joyntly direct believers, how to walk towards God and man after justification, in order to the promised happiness. How admirable is this consent and harmony! In this Sinai-covenant, the law was not administred without the gospel, nor the gospel without the law: they were indivisibly conjoyned, and inseparably marryed together: becoming a legal gospel, and an evangelical law; a gospel, full of doing, and a law full of believing. Hereby God will have us know, that neither God nor man shall lose by substituting the covenant of faith in stead of the covenant of works, but rather both shall gain: God shall gain a better observance of his law in the second Adam, then he had in the first; and man shall gain a better righteousness in Christ by faith, then ever they had in themselves before the fall. Thus the gospel doth not overthrow, but establish the law, by setting forth Christ the perfectest performer, of the law: And the law is not against the gospel and promise, but contributory to it, in that it concludes all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that

¹³¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 777-778.

¹³²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 778, citing Rom. 8:4.

believe. So that we may, as the apostle in another case; be astonished and cry out; O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!¹³³

Unlike the second opinion, which defines the law or the Sinai covenant as a mixed covenant of works and grace, Roberts sees in the Sinai covenant a combination of the law and the gospel. The law and the gospel together lead sinners to Jesus Christ for justification by faith in him not by their works. Thus the Sinai covenant, as a covenant of faith, replaces the covenant of works through Christ's perfect doing and believers' faith in him. Unlike the third opinion that holds the law, the old covenant, to have God's reproving sin and approving righteousness but neither pardoning sin nor renewing righteousness, Roberts sees in the Sinai covenant, the old covenant, both God's pardoning sin and renewing righteousness in Jesus Christ. Thus in the Sinai covenant Roberts finds a perfect harmony of the law and gospel.

Regarding the Sinai covenant, Roberts' disagreement with Cameron lies mainly in their different distinctions of God's covenants. Roberts' criticism of the inconsistency in Cameron's comparison of three kinds of covenants may reduce to the objection against separating the Sinai covenant from the covenant of grace or faith. Roberts accepts Ball's interpretation of man's obedience to the commandments as a consequent condition, not as an antecedent condition, in the Sinai covenant. But Roberts points out that Ball's evangelical interpretation of doing is vulnerable to criticisms based on the apostle Paul's comparison between the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith. Moreover, such an interpretation cannot fully reveal God's purpose in requiring the stipulation of both perfect doing and believing in this covenant. Roberts also goes beyond his predecessors

¹³³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 778, citing Rom. 3:31; 11:33, Gal. 3:21-22.

who saw believing as the condition of the Sinai covenant and thus understood it as a covenant of faith. According to them, the law, more largely taken, is identified with the Sinai covenant, and it requires believing in Christ as its condition; thus it is a covenant of grace or faith. If the law is taken more restrictively, it means an abstracted rule of righteousness, and it requires perfect doing; thus it is a covenant of works. Yet Roberts does not think their explanation is satisfactory because it does not fully clarify the relationship between doing and believing, the two conditions of the Sinai covenant. Instead, Roberts shows that in the Sinai covenant God purposely put two opposing conditions together, that is, works and faith or perfect doing and believing. But it is not a mixture of the covenant of works and the covenant of faith but a covenant of faith in which the law and gospel harmoniously combine through Jesus Christ's perfect doing and believers' faith in him.

CHAPTER VI

THE NEW COVENANT AS THE COVENANT OF PERFORMANCE

A. The Nature of the New Covenant

Roberts calls the seventh and last administration of the covenant of faith “the covenant of performance.” He calls it “the covenant of performance” in comparison to the foregoing six administrations that he styles “the covenants of promise.” In the covenants of promise Christ was promised to come to work out our redemption, but in the covenant of performance Christ is set forth as having performed our redemption by his death.¹

Roberts enumerates six different names of the covenant of performance. They are (1) a new covenant, (2) a New Testament, (3) the second covenant, (4) a better covenant, (5) the everlasting covenant, and (6) the ministration far surpassing the ministration of the Old Testament. As the “fitly given” names “singularly denote and signifie to us the very natures of things” like “the shell, which being opened discovers to us the kernel therein comprized,” Roberts pays some attention to these names.² Among these names Roberts prefers the first designation, a new covenant, so for him it is a synonym of the covenant of performance.

¹Francis Roberts, *The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man* (London: R. W. for George Calvert, 1657), 16, 18 and 1229.

²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1253-1254.

According to Roberts, the new covenant began from the death of Jesus Christ and continues until the end of this world. Yet he thinks that the beginning of the new covenant comprises in it the following three things: its “preparation” by the ministry of John the Baptist and Jesus Christ himself, its “dedication or sanction” by Christ’s death and blood, and its “solemn publication” on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit enabled Jesus’ disciples to preach the doctrine of the new covenant in all languages.³ Roberts bases his description of the new covenant on the parallel passages in Jer. 31:31-34 and Heb. 8:6-13. Although the new covenant is often mentioned in Scripture, Roberts thinks it is purposely revealed by God through the prophet Jeremiah prophetically promising it and by the apostle Paul exegetically explaining it. Roberts finds the first four designations of the covenant of performance in these two parallel passages of Jeremiah and Paul.⁴

Jeremiah calls this covenant ברית חדשה in Jer. 31:31, and Paul describes it as a διαθήκη καινή in Heb. 8:8. According to Roberts, the English translators in both places render the term as “a new-covenant.”⁵ As Roberts points out, however, ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη is sometimes rendered as “the New Testament,” especially in reciting the

³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1232-1234, citing Acts 2:1-6.

⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1230-1231 and 1253.

⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1254. In the King James Version both of them are rendered into “a new covenant.” Yet in the Geneva Bible, while Jeremiah’s words are rendered into “a new covenant,” Paul’s words are rendered into “a new testament.” At least here, Roberts seems to use the King James Version rather than the Geneva Bible. Cf. *The Holy Bible: 1611 Edition*, King James Version (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, [1982]), Jer. 31:31 (“a newe couenant”) and Heb. 8:8 (“a new couenant”), with *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), Jer. 31:31 (“a newe couenant”) and Heb. 8:8 (“a new Testament”).

institution of the Lord's Supper.⁶ Roberts ascribes the term "a testament" to the "testamental nature" of the new covenant, "having such analogy, resemblance to, and agreement with a mans last will or testament." For Jesus Christ is the testator of this New Testament, by which he is fully endowed with the possession of all things and has given all good things to his spiritual spouse, the church, and his spiritual members. This New Testament was made through the good will of Jesus Christ the testator, and he has certified his last will in the holy books of the New Testament by his Spirit. This New Testament was made by and after the death of Jesus Christ. After his death, the Holy Spirit gave formal approval to it and began to administer it on the day of Pentecost.⁷ Here too, as his citations of sources indicate, Roberts deals with a central issue confronting Reformed covenant theology, namely, the unity of the covenant of faith (or covenant of grace) despite the distinction of the testaments.⁸ His promise/performance distinction reflects both the consistent description of the Old Testament as type and shadow and the traditional hermeneutic of promise and fulfillment. It also recognizes the distinction between covenant and testament, specifically with reference to Christ's role as testator.

This covenant is called the new covenant for various reasons. In terms of time and order, it is not only the latest one established, but it also will continue new without

⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1260, citing Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24, Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25, Heb. 9:15. The Geneva Bible and the King James Version are common to render "ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη" (Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25), "διαθήκης" (Matt. 26:28, Mark 14:24), and "διαθήκης καινῆς" (Heb. 9:15) into "the New Testament" (cf. *Geneva Bible: 1560 Edition* and *Holy Bible: 1611 Edition*, for each verse).

⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1260-1262, citing Matt. 26:28, Luke 22:20, Heb. 9:15-16; 7:22 (Testator); Matt. 28:18, John 3:35, Eph. 1:20-23, Heb. 1:2 (possession); Rom. 8:16-17, 2 Peter 1:3-4 (disposal); John 10:18, Heb. 9:15-17 (his own will); Matt. 26:26-29; 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16, Rom. 8:15-16, Eph. 1:13-14 (signifying); Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25-26, Heb. 9:15-18 (effect); and Acts 2:1-47 (approbation).

⁸Cf. the basic statement of the problem in John Calvin, *Institutes*, II.x-xi (1:428-464).

wearing away until the end of this world. In terms of excellence, the new covenant is a mystery not made known in past ages but revealed now and far surpassing all previous covenants. In terms of effect, it renews God's church and Christ's members.⁹

Yet this covenant is called the new covenant primarily in comparison to the old covenant, or the Sinai covenant, which began with Moses' receiving the law from God on Mount Sinai and continued until the death of Jesus Christ.¹⁰ Indeed, it supersedes and makes old the Sinai covenant. Moreover, it is very different from the Sinai covenant that it supplants and makes old. It is established upon new promises that are spiritual and heavenly, and so it is better than the more carnal and temporal promises of the old covenant. It is dedicated with a new sacrifice, even with the most precious blood and death of Jesus Christ. It is written upon new tables—the mind and heart.¹¹ It is offered “to a new people, to the house of Israel, and to the house of Judah.” By these two houses Roberts understands “both the people of the Jews and the people of the gentiles, which should be reduced into one body, and coalesce into one church, under this new-covenant.”¹² This covenant is also taught to this new people in a new way, that is, clearly, plainly, and familiarly. It is applied and confirmed to this people's heart in new

⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1254 and 1257-1258, citing Isa. 65:17; 66:22, Heb. 8:13, 2 Peter 3:13, Rev. 21:1 (continuance); Eph. 3:3-6 (revealed mystery); and Eph. 4:22-24, Heb. 10:1-18 (renewing).

¹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 649 and 1254-1257.

¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1254-1255, citing Heb. 8:13 (succeeding old covenant); Heb. 8:6 (new promises); Heb. 9:12, 14-17, 26, 28; 10:10 (new sacrifice); and Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10 (new tables).

¹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1255-1256, citing Jer. 31:31, Heb. 8:8; John Calvin, *Commentarius*, Heb. 8:8 and Jer. 31:31; David Pareus, *Commentarius*, Heb. 8:8, in *Operum theologicorum exegeticorum*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1647), pt. 4, p. 480; and London Annotations, Jer. 31:31 and Heb. 8:8. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Heb. 8:8 (p. 188) and Jer. 31:31 (4:126); and *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testament... wherein the text is explained, doubts resolved, scriptures parallel'd, and various readings observed; by the labour of certain learned divines [W. Gouge, T. Gataker, J. Downname, J. Ley et al.] thereunto appointed, and therein employed, as is expressed in the preface* (London: Evan Tyler, 1657), Jer. 31:31 and Heb. 8:8.

degrees and with new effects by the Spirit of God. Under this new covenant the Spirit is poured forth abundantly and in a great variety of graces and gifts.¹³ It is ratified by new tokens, that is baptism and the Lord's Supper, not by circumcision and the Passover.¹⁴ Yet Roberts insists that this covenant is called a new covenant because it is different "both from the old covenant and from all that went before; not in substance, but in circumstance; not in essence, but in accidents: not in inward constitution, but in outward administration."¹⁵

Roberts also explains the other five designations of the new covenant mainly in comparison to the Sinai covenant. It is called a New Testament, says Roberts, in opposition to the Old Testament, which was made at Mount Sinai. Roberts asserts that among all God's covenants, only the Sinai covenant and the new covenant have "the nature of a testament," thus these two are "federal testaments, or testamental-covenants." These two testaments are the same in substance, for they have the same mediator and testator, that is, Jesus Christ. Yet, while Jesus Christ was the mediator and testator of the Old Testament "typically and obscurely," he is the mediator and testator of this new covenant "truly and clearly, without types or adumbrations."¹⁶

¹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1256, citing Ex. 34:29-35, 2 Cor. 3:6-18 (new way of teaching); and Isa. 44:3, Joel 2:28, John 7:38-39, Acts 2:1-47, Rom. 8:15-16, 1 Cor. 12:7-11, Gal. 4:5-6, Eph. 1:13-14 (new effects).

¹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1257, citing Matt. 26:26-29; 28:18-20, 1 Cor. 11:20, 23-34; 12:13, Col. 2:10-12; Augustine, *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, XIX.xiii; and idem, *De Doctrina Christiana*, III.ix. Cf. Augustine, *Reply to Faustus the Manichaean*, XIX.xiii, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 4, p. 244; and idem, *On Christian Doctrine*, III.ix.13, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 2, p. 560.

¹⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1255.

¹⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1262, citing Heb. 7:18-22; 9:11-28; 10:1. Cf. Heinrich Heppe, *RD*, 405-406.

This covenant is called the second covenant in contrast to the first covenant, that is, the Sinai covenant. Roberts takes the Sinai covenant and the new covenant to be the first and second covenants because they are “the first and second most illustrious covenants,” although in regard to chronology, the old covenant was not the first, nor this new covenant, the second. These two covenants were not only made with the greatest solemnity and offered to the greatest number of people, they also are remarkably distinct and opposite to each other. And Roberts pays attention to the fact that the Greek word διαθήκη, translated as “covenant” in Heb. 8:6-13, may also be rendered “testament.” So since those two covenants are “the only testamental-covenants,” the “old covenant was the first testament, and the new covenant, the second testament.”¹⁷

This covenant is called a better covenant and a better testament in opposition to the old covenant and testament. Yet Roberts quickly adds that the difference is not in essence and substance, but in accidents and circumstances.¹⁸ In Heb. 13:20-21 it is called “the everlasting covenant” or “the everlasting testament.” Roberts takes the everlastingness in a double sense. It is absolutely everlasting in regard to its primary essence and substance, for it shall never know any end. It is respectively everlasting in respect to its circumstances and administration, for it will last for a long time—until the end of this world. In the latter sense this everlasting covenant contrasts with the old covenant, “which is done away.” Lastly, Roberts calls this covenant “the ministration far surpassing the ministration of the Old Testament.” He sees the apostle Paul in various places draw a parallel between the old covenant given at Mount Sinai and this new

¹⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1263-1264, citing Heb. 8:7-10.

¹⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1264, citing Heb. 8:6.

covenant from Mount Sion. Paul clearly prefers this ministration of the new covenant or testament to that ministration of the old.¹⁹ Here again, the designation of this covenant signals its opposition to the Sinai covenant.

Regarding the general nature of the new covenant, Roberts refers to the particulars suggested by Pareus and after him by Ball. According to Pareus and Ball, the nature of the new covenant, or the New Testament, consists principally in three things: (1) the new kind of doctrine, which is more open, plain, full, and evangelical; (2) the freedom from the curse of the law and the legal rites; and (3) the growth and expansion of God's church throughout all nations of the world. But Roberts is not satisfied with these particulars. He thinks they are too limited to show the abundant excellence of the new covenant.²⁰

For the general nature of the new covenant, Roberts adopts the three particulars suggested by Pareus and Ball, the first and the last points directly but the second point with some extension. Roberts regards the excellence of constitution and administration as one of the key characteristics of the new covenant. In constitution the new covenant is not only a better covenant established upon better promises but also a new and better testament antiquating and annulling the old in regard to its legal rigor, rites, and burdensome ceremonies—which is nothing but the second point suggested by Pareus and Ball. Yet Roberts adds that in administration the new covenant is beyond all other

¹⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1265, citing Heb. 8:10-12 (absolute everlastingness); 2 Cor. 3:11 (respective everlastingness); and 2 Cor. 3:6-18, Gal. 4:21-31, Heb. 12:18-29 (superiority).

²⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1269, citing Pareus, *Commentarium Epistolae ad Romanos*, Prolegomena Generalia, in *Operum*, pt. 3, sec. 2, p. 42; and John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace*, published by Simeon Ash (London: G. Miller for Edward Brewster, 1645), 198.

administrations, especially in clearness, spirituality, liberty, perfection, extension, efficacy, comfort, duration, and glory.²¹

In addition to these three points, Roberts enumerates some more particulars of the general nature of the new covenant. In the order and time of manifestation, the new covenant is the last covenant. In the peculiar eminence of covenant blessings promised, this covenant excels in complete sanctification of the confederates' minds, eminent knowledge of God, perfect justification, the highest covenant relation with God, and the eternal inheritance. Better things are seen in the new ratification of this covenant: outwardly by baptism and the Lord's Supper, inwardly by the new operations of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, the peculiar duration of this new covenant administration, that is, from Christ's death till the end of the world, speaks volumes about its uniqueness.²² Roberts does not mention the Holy Trinity as the author of any previous covenants. But he says, the "LORD God, viz. God the Father, in the Son Jesus Christ, by the Holy Ghost is sole efficient cause or author of the new covenant." This is made evident in diverse ways, yet most clearly by the express testimony of the Holy Scriptures. God is the author of the new covenant in that he promised to make it and undertook it as his project. Jesus Christ, the mediator, is the author of this New Testament, as he is its testator, putting it into force by death. And the Holy Spirit is the author of the new covenant by making it known to the church.²³

²¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1267-1268, citing Heb. 8:6 (better covenant); and Heb. 7:19-22; 8:13; 9:15-17 (better testament).

²²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1267-1269, citing Jer. 31:33-34, Heb. 8:10-12; 9:14-15; 10:1-20 (covenant blessings).

²³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1270-1271, citing Jer. 31:31, 33, Heb. 8:8-9 (Father); Heb. 9:15-17 (Son); and Heb. 10:14-17 (Holy Spirit).

The formula used at baptism, the first token of this covenant, makes Roberts certain that the Holy Trinity is the author of the new covenant. Christ ordered his disciples to baptize believers in the name of the Holy Trinity not only because baptism is dispensed by authority of all three persons, but also because all benefits of baptism are from all three and all duties of the baptized should be performed for all three persons. Roberts is convinced that the Holy Trinity is the author of the new covenant by the joint undertaking of the three sacred persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in this covenant especially by their joint undertaking to perform all new covenant blessings to the confederates. Yet he quickly adds that the three persons jointly work “in their own peculiar order and proper way of working, which is according to the order of their subsisting.”²⁴ Here Roberts understands the execution of the covenant blessings of the Holy Trinity, that is, one of the external works of God (*opera Dei ad extra*), as based on the internal activity of God (*opera Dei ad intra*), especially on the personal relations between the three persons in the Holy Trinity (*opera Dei personalia*).²⁵ Roberts explains:

The Father eternally subsisteth first in order, of himself, Mat. 28.19. 1 John 5.7, not begotten, nor proceeding: the Son eternally subsisteth from the Father, second in order, being eternally and ineffably begotten of the Father, Heb. 1.5,6. John 1.18 and 3.16 and 17.5. The Holy Ghost eternally subsisteth from the Father and the Son, the third in order, proceeding eternally and unconceivably from the Father and the Son, John 15.26 and 14.26. According to this order of their subsisting, is their order of working: as the apostle intimateth;—To us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in (or, for) him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and we through him; and proportionably, one Holy Ghost by whom are all things, and we by him. And elsewhere he shews that our access to God is answerable

²⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1271, citing Matt. 28:18-20 (baptismal formula); and John Forbes, *A Treatise Tending to Clear the Doctrine of Iustification* (Middelburg: Richard Schilders, 1616), chap. 10 (pp. 28-33).

²⁵Cf. Richard A. Muller, *DLGTT*, s.v. “opera Dei ad extra,” “opera Dei ad intra,” “opera Dei essentialia,” “opera Dei personalia,” “Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa,” and “modus agendi.”

to this order;—For through him (viz. the Son Jesus Christ) we both have an access by one spirit unto the Father.²⁶

In Roberts' understanding, the immanent relation of the three persons themselves (*opera immanentia per se*) is reflected in the order of the external working of God the Trinity (*opera Dei ad extra*).

Roberts enumerates the blessings of the new covenant in terms of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit to show that the Holy Trinity is the author of this covenant. In this new covenant God the Father undertakes to be “a covenant-God and Father in Jesus Christ” to believers, to bestow Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit upon them, and to justify them and bless them with all spiritual blessings.²⁷ God the Son undertakes to redeem his elect from sin and to rescue them from the power of Satan, to be “the material mean of their righteousness,” to give them eternal life, and to be their way to the Father.²⁸ The Holy Spirit undertakes to sanctify the redeemed of Jesus Christ, to lead and guide them into God's ways, to strengthen them, to assure them of their being God's children, and to abide in them as their comforter.²⁹ By enumerating the covenant benefits of the new covenant in terms of three persons, Roberts puts himself among the Protestant scholastics who typically explain the external works of God (*opera Dei ad*

²⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1271-1272, citing 1 Cor. 8:6, Rom. 11:36, Eph. 2:18 (in the order of appearance).

²⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1272, citing Acts 8:35-38, 2 Cor. 6:16-18, Eph. 1:5, Heb. 8:10 (being covenant-God); John 6:44, Rom. 8:32, 1 Cor. 1:30, Eph. 3:14-17 (bestowing Jesus Christ); Luke 11:13, Eph. 3:14-16 (bestowing Holy Spirit); Rom. 3:24-26 (justifying); and Eph. 1:3, Titus 3:4-7 (blessing).

²⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1272, citing John 8:36; 10:11, 18, Acts 20:28, Eph. 5:2, Titus 2:13-14, Heb. 10:5-9; 9:14-15, 1 Peter 1:18-20 (redeeming); Acts 26:17-18, Rom. 5:1-2, 10-11, 2 Cor. 5:20-21 (rescuing from Satan); Jer. 23:5-6; 33:15-16, Rom. 5:9, 1 Cor. 1:30, 2 Cor. 5:21, Rev. 1:5 (mean of righteousness); John 10:27-29 (giving eternal life); and John 14:6, Eph. 2:18, Heb. 10:19-20, 1 Peter 2:5.

²⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1272-1273, citing John 3:3, 5, 1 Cor. 6:11, Gal. 5:22-25, Titus 3:5 (sanctifying); John 16:13, Rom. 8:1, 14, Gal. 5:25 (guiding); Rom. 8:15, 26-27, Eph. 3:16 (strengthening); Rom. 8:16, Eph. 1:13-14 (assuring); and John 14:16-18; 17:24 (abiding).

extra) as the works of one or another of the persons of the Trinity after a certain manner (*opera certo modo personalia*).

Roberts convinces himself that the Holy Trinity is the author of the new covenant also by “the joynt influence and concurrence of the whole Trinity unto all works *ad extra*, that are without the Trinity.” He says that the “works of the Trinity within themselves [*ad intra*], as to beget, to be begotten, to proceed, are so proper and peculiar to one person, as they are not, nor can be belonging to another.” Here he speaks of the internal works of God (*opera Dei ad intra*), especially the personal works of God (*opera Dei personalia*). Citing the maxim “the works of the Trinity without [*ad extra*] are individed,” however, Roberts asserts that “the works of the Trinity without themselves, as decree, creation, providence, etc. (among which also covenant-making is one) are common to all the persons.”³⁰ It is proper for him to understand covenanting among the *opera Dei ad extra*. Yet he adds that although all three persons work as one in the *opera ad extra*, they work “in their peculiar way of working proper to each person.” For the “Father acts of himself through the Son by the Spirit,” the “Son from the Father by the Spirit,” and the “Holy Ghost from the Father and the Son.”³¹ Here Roberts speaks of a manner of working that corresponds to the interpersonal relationships of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*modus agendi*) in the works of God performed by the Godhead in its oneness (*opera communia* or *opera Dei essentialia*), which ground all *opera Dei ad extra*. If “God the Father, or Son, etc. be author of this new covenant,” says Roberts, “then all the three persons

³⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1273. Parentheses his; brackets mine. In the margin Roberts puts the maxim in Latin: “Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa.”

³¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1273, citing John 5:19-20.

consequently must needs be authors of it,” that is, “God the Father, in and through his son Jesus Christ, by the Holy Ghost.”³²

Roberts says that the “LORD God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost do act unto the effecting of this new covenant” especially in three ways: promising it, establishing it, and applying it to his people. He applies the concept of *opera Dei ad extra* here again as he says, “All the three persons do joyntly concur in every of these three acts.” Yet he quickly adds that “the Fathers influence and activity doth chiefly appear, in promising this covenant of old; the Sons in establishing it in fulness of time; the Holy Ghosts, in applying it efficaciously to Gods called in due time.” Centuries ago God the Father promised this new covenant by the prophet Jeremiah. As mediator, surety, and testator of this new testamental covenant, or federal testament, God the Son, Jesus Christ, established this new covenant in fullness of time by his death and blood. And God the Holy Spirit in due time effectually applies to the called of God this new covenant with all its benefits.³³ Thus, in describing God’s action in authorizing or effecting the new covenant, Roberts again explains the *opera Dei ad extra* as the works of one or another of the persons of the Trinity (*opera certo modo personalia*).

According to Roberts, the occasion that the trinitarian God took of promising, establishing, and applying this new covenant was threefold. The first occasion was the afflicted condition of God’s own people, the Jews, who were in captivity when God first revealed his promise to Jeremiah. The second occasion was the insufficiency, weakness,

³²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1273.

³³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1273-1274, citing Jer. 31:31 (God); Ex. 24:8, Matt. 26:28, Heb. 7:22; 9:15-21 (Jesus Christ); and Acts 2:1, 38-39, Heb. 9:15 (Holy Ghost).

unprofitableness, and imperfection of the Old Testament or old covenant. The last occasion was the greatness of man's misery under sin, death, and the wrath of God.³⁴

In Jews or gentiles Roberts finds nothing at all that moved or inclined God by way of causality, to promise, establish, or apply this new covenant to them. Instead, Roberts understands God's own grace and the meritorious mediation of Jesus Christ as the impulsive causes moving and inclining him to promise, establish, and apply this new covenant to his called, both of Jews and gentiles. While the mere grace and good pleasure of God's will was the inward impulsive cause of God's making this new covenant, the meritorious mediation of Jesus Christ was its sole outward, impulsive cause.³⁵

In Jer. 31:31-33 and Heb. 8:8-10 Roberts finds two covenanting parties to this new covenant: the principal party, God, as Jehovah; and the secondary party, the "house of Israel and the house of Judah" (Jer. 31:31 and Heb. 8:8) or the "house of Israel" (Jer. 31:33 and Heb. 8:10). He understands two different expressions of the secondary party to be the same in substance. While in the former passages, the house of Israel, is distinctly opposite to the house of Judah, in the latter passages, the house of Israel is used collectively as comprising within it the house of Judah also. Roberts thinks the primary party to the old covenant, that is, God as Jehovah, is substantially the same as the

³⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1275-1277, citing 2 Kings 17:1-23; 18:9-12, Jer. 29:1-33:26, and Ezek. 37:1-28 (afflictions of people); Heb. 7:18-19; 8:6-13; 9:8-12; 10:1, 14-22 (imperfection of old covenant); and Matt. 26:28, Acts 4:11-12, Rom. 8:3, 2 Cor. 5:21, Gal. 3:13-14, Heb. 9:14-17; 10:1-22 (Christ's redemption).

³⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1278-1279 and 1281, citing Jer. 31:32, Ezek. 36:21-38, Heb. 8:9 (Jews); Eph. 2:1, 5, 10, 17, 1 Peter 2:9-10 (Gentiles); Heb. 8:8, 10, 12; 10:16-17 (God's grace); and 2 Cor. 1:20, Gal. 3:13-14, 26, Heb. 10:10-18 (Christ's merit).

principal party to this new covenant. He does not explain the primary party any further; instead he devotes his discussion to the secondary party to this covenant.³⁶

According to Roberts, the house of Israel and house of Judah immediately denote the whole body of the Jews or Jewish church united in Christ.³⁷ The gentiles, whom afterwards God would call and incorporate into one church body with the Jews by Christ, were intended to be joint confederates with the Jews in this new covenant with God.³⁸ In addition, the posterity, seed, or children of both believing Jews and called gentiles are with their parents, confederates in this new covenant.³⁹

Roberts thinks it very significant to include the posterity of believing Jews and gentiles among the confederates with God in this new covenant, for this teaching is opposed by “Catabaptistical and Anabaptistical spirits.”⁴⁰ The children of believing Jews and called gentiles are necessarily among the “house of Israel, and the house of Judah,” for “house or family most properly consists of parents and their seed, posterity or children.”⁴¹ Roberts asserts that those whom God admitted and has never excluded from the foregoing administrations of the covenant of faith are intended by God to be confederates with him in this new covenant. Thus, the children of believing parents, both Jewish and Gentile, are

³⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1291-1292.

³⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1294, citing 2 Sam. 12:8, Jer. 31:27, Ezek. 9:9, Zech. 8:13.

³⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1298-1299, citing Rom. 11:17, 29, Eph. 3:4-6; Calvin, *Commentarius*, Heb. 8:8; Pareus, *Commentarius*, Heb. 8:8, in *Operum*, pt. 4, p. 480; London Annotations, Jer. 31:31, 33; and David Dickson, *Explanation*, Heb. 8:8. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Heb. 8:8 (p. 188); *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testament*, Jer. 31:31, 33; and Dickson, *A Short Explanation of the Epistle of Paul to the Hebrewes* (Dublin: Society of Stationers, 1637), chap. 8, verse 8.

³⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1303.

⁴⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1320.

⁴¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1303, citing Gen. 7:1, 7 and 2 Sam. 23:3-5.

admitted as confederates with God in this new covenant.⁴² And God has never excluded the children of believing parents, whether Jews or gentiles, from this new covenant. The children of believing Jews and called gentiles are also declared by God to be federally holy under the new covenant.⁴³ Moreover, the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their seed are applied to the children of believing Jews and called gentiles in the time of the new covenant.⁴⁴

Roberts finds the matter of the new covenant primarily in the body of this covenant promised by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:31-34) and reiterated by Paul (Heb. 8:8-12), and secondarily in other explanations of the nature of this covenant, especially those in the New Testament.⁴⁵ In the description of the new covenant by Jeremiah and Paul, thinks Roberts, the matter of this covenant is set forth very succinctly in words, but most comprehensively in sense. Here the whole matter of the new covenant is represented only in promises, especially in the spiritual promises. These new covenant promises harmonize well with the priesthood, prophecy, and kingship of Christ's mediatory office, and in the fulfillment of

⁴²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1304-1307, citing Gen. 17:7-8, 19, 21; 21:12, Deut. 5:2-3, 6, Ps. 89:3-4, 28-37; 132:11-12, Isa. 59:20-21, Ezek. 37:25-27; William Lyford, *Apologie for our Publike Ministry and Infant-Baptism*, Quest. 2, pp. 32-33; and London Annotations, Gen. 17:13. Cf. Lyford, *An Apologie for our Publick Ministerie, and Infant-Baptism* (London: William Du Gard, 1652), Quest. 2, pp. 32-33; and *Annotations upon all the books of the Old and New Testament*, Gen. 17:13.

⁴³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1306-1313, citing Rom. 11:16, 1 Cor. 7:14; Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis*, chaps. 38-39; and Robert Baillie, *Anabaptism Unsealed*, chap. 5, p. 138. Cf. Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis; or, A Treatise of the Covenant of God entered with man-kinde* (London: Abel Roper, 1653), 275-345; and Baillie, *Anabaptism, the True Fountaine of Independency, Antinomy, Brownisme, Familisme, and the most of the other Errours, which for the time doe trouble the Church of England, Unsealed* (London: M. F. for Samuel Gellibrand, 1647), chap. 5, p. 138.

⁴⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1313-1317, citing Gen. 12:2-3, 17:7-8, 22:16-17; 26:3-4; 28:12-14, Acts 2:9-11, 38-39.

⁴⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1339.

those promises to us, we are also made to God priests, prophets, and kings by Jesus Christ.⁴⁶

When these promises are understood this way, the matter of the new covenant can sufficiently remove all the principal doubts, discouragements and objections made against the salvation of God's people. These new covenant promises contain in them both the agreement and difference between the old covenant and new covenant. Finally, all these new covenant promises are grounded upon the mere grace and good pleasure of God's will in Jesus Christ alone.⁴⁷

Roberts understands the matter of the new covenant on God's part to consist in the four covenant mercies promised by him to his confederates. They are (1) writing his laws on their minds and hearts, (2) giving them more excellent and more universal knowledge of him than before, (3) remitting their sins forever, and (4) his being their God and their being his people. In the first blessing Roberts understands minds and hearts to mean "all the faculties, powers and affections of the soul."⁴⁸ By law (Jer. 31:33) or laws (Heb. 8:10) promised to be written on the hearts of God's confederates, Roberts understands primarily "Gods moral law," but he does not exclude "Gods whole doctrine and instruction revealed in his written word, which is a large commentary upon Gods moral law."⁴⁹ God's writing of

⁴⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1345-1353. The mediatory office of Christ is discussed in detail in the latter part of this chapter.

⁴⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1353-1367.

⁴⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1368-1370, citing Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10; cf. Heppe, *RD*, 405, citing Cocceius' somewhat different list of the benefits of the New Testament; and note Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants between God and Man: Comprehending A Complete Body of Divinity*, trans. William Crookshank, 2 vols. (London: R. Baynes, 1822), IV.xv.2 (2:405).

⁴⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1371, citing Calvin, *Commentarius*, Jer. 31:33. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Jer. 31:33 (4:131-132).

his laws on his people's minds and hearts includes three things: preparing their minds and hearts for this writing, writing his laws on them, and making this writing effective.⁵⁰

The second covenant mercy promised in the new covenant is God's covenant people's more excellent and more universal knowledge of God than under the old covenant. The nature of this new covenant knowledge consists in its excelling the knowledge offered under the old covenant and in its extensiveness and universality. God furnishes his new covenant people with the knowledge of himself in Jesus Christ by his Spirit and new covenant ministry gradually from their gracious conversion till their glorification. Though in the visible church there remains much gross ignorance in many now under the new covenant, so that they do not attain to this promised knowledge of God, asserts Roberts, yet this promise that "all shall know the Lord" has its due and intended fulfillment. Here Roberts uses the distinction between visible church and invisible church. The confederates, to whom this knowledge of God under the new covenant is specially and peculiarly promised, are not the confederates outwardly by mere visible profession but the confederates inwardly by invisible power of faith and other grace as well as by outward profession. Roberts also distinguishes between the public administration of God's new covenant and the private condition and constitution of some particular persons in the visible church under the new covenant.⁵¹ Regarding this promise of knowledge he does not consider the latter, but the former alone, that is, the public economy and administration of the new covenant. For the private condition of many individual persons may be still very dark and ignorant, having little knowledge of God under the new

⁵⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1374-1383.

⁵¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1400-1418, citing Jer. 31:34 and Heb. 8:11.

covenant. Yet Roberts adds that although the public administration of the new covenant aims for a universal knowledge of God, this is in comparison to the knowledge under the Old Testament. For the universal knowledge of God ought still to be understood comparatively.⁵² Thus, Roberts is sure that by this promise God did not intend to do away with all human teaching as altogether useless under the new covenant. Regarding the promise of the universal knowledge of God under the new covenant, Roberts follows Calvin in attacking fanatic persons like some of the anabaptists, who rejected all doctrine and pleased themselves in their ignorance while proudly boasting of being endowed with the Spirit. Instead, thinks Roberts, under the new covenant God's confederates have at best an imperfect knowledge of God, but their knowledge is growing.⁵³ Thus, God often commands "private teaching one of another," and Jesus Christ ordered establishing the public ministry and teaching of his church in all the nations of the world.⁵⁴

The third new covenant blessing is God's mercy to his confederates in his complete remission and oblivion of their sins by forgiving and forgetting them forever. Roberts thinks this promise consists of two elements: the remission of all sins of God's confederates and the bestowal of all other promised benefits of the new covenant upon them. The first element is that under the new covenant God will freely, fully, and utterly remit all sins of his true confederates in and through Jesus Christ.⁵⁵ Roberts describes sin as "any evil habit or

⁵²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1418, citing Calvin, *Commentarius*, Jer. 31:34. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Jer. 31:34 (4:134-135).

⁵³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1420, citing 1 Cor. 13:9, 12, Phil. 3:10, 12-13, 2 Peter 3:18; and Calvin, *Commentarius*, Jer. 31:34. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Jer. 31:34 (4:135).

⁵⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1421, citing 1 Cor. 14:35, Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:16, 1 Thess. 5:11, 2 Thess. 3:15 (God's command); and Matt. 28:18-20 (Jesus Christ's command).

⁵⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1440-1442, citing Jer. 31:34, Heb. 8:12.

act, against the law of God, and offensive to him, drawing away from God, depriving of righteousness and innocency, defiling the person and action, deserving death, and making guilty of the curse of God.”⁵⁶ Strictly taken, remission of sins consists in “the removal of the offence done to God, and in the acquittal or absolution of the sinner from the guilt of sin, that is, from his obligation, or being bound over, to endure the punishment of death, due for such offence.” Thus, strictly taken, remission of sins is only a part of our justification before God, but, taken more largely it comprehends in it also the imputation of righteousness.⁵⁷ God pardons sin freely of his own mere grace without any merit of the pardoned sinner but only upon the satisfaction for sin accomplished by the obedience and death of Jesus Christ. Yet God actually remits sin only to all truly believing and repenting sinners.⁵⁸ Roberts asserts that God’s remission of sins under the new covenant does not substantially differ from the remission of sins under the old covenant. For all the elect of God before and under the old covenant as well as under the new had their sins expiated, satisfaction made to the justice of God for them, and remission of sins by the same sacrifice of Jesus Christ.⁵⁹ Yet he

⁵⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1445, citing Ps. 51:5, Rom. 7:17 (evil habit); 2 Sam. 12:13; 24:10, Rom. 7:7 (evil act); 1 John 3:4 (transgression of God’s law); 2 Sam. 11:27, Hab. 1:13, Rom. 5:15-18, 20 (offence to God); James 1:14 (drawing away from God); Eccles. 7:29, Rom. 3:23 (depriving of righteousness and innocence); Ps. 51:2, Hag. 2:14, Titus 1:15, James 1:21 (defilement); Rom. 6:23 (deserving death); and Ex. 34:7, Rom. 3:19, Gal. 3:10, Eph. 2:2-3 (guiltiness).

⁵⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1458-1460, citing 2 Sam. 12:13, Ps. 32:1; 51:9; 103:9-12, Isa. 38:17; 43:25, Jer. 31:34, Mic. 7:18, Heb. 8:12 (remission of sins); 2 Sam. 12:13, Isa. 53:4-6, Matt. 6:12, Luke 11:4, Rom. 5:17-18, 2 Cor. 5:21, Eph. 1:7 (absolution); and Ps. 32:1-2 with Rom. 4:6 (justification).

⁵⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1463-1466, citing Isa. 43:25, Rom. 3:24-25, Eph. 1:7, Col. 3:13 (free pardoning); Acts 20:28, Rom. 6:23, Eph. 1:7; 5:2, Col. 1:14, 1 Tim. 2:5-6, Heb. 7:22; 9:12-15, 26; 10:5-20, 1 Peter 1:18-19 (satisfaction of Jesus Christ); and Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38; 5:31; 8:22; 10:43; 13:38-39; 26:18 (remission to believers).

⁵⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1481-1482, citing John 8:56, Acts 15:11, Rom. 3:25-26, Heb. 9:15; 13:8, Rev. 13:8; Theodore Beza, *Annotaciones*, Rom. 3:25-26, Heb. 9:15; Ludovicus de Dieu, *Animadversiones*, Rom. 3:25-26; Calvin, *Commentarius*, Rom. 3:25; and William Sclater, *Exposition*, Rom. 3:25-26 (pp. 326-331). Cf. Beza, *Annotaciones maiores in Novum Dn. Nostri Iesu Christi Testamentum* ([Geneva], 1594), pt. 2, pp. 40-43, 524; Ludovicus de Dieu, *Critica sacra, sive animadversiones in loca quaedam difficiliora Veteris et Novi Testamenti* (Amsterdam, 1693), 636-638; Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Rom. 3:25 (p. 144);

adds that remission of sins under the new covenant accidentally differs from, and excels the remission of sins under the Old Testament and before, especially in spiritualness, clearness, perfection, and extensiveness.⁶⁰

The second element of the remission of sins is God's bestowal of all other promised benefits of the new covenant upon his sincere confederates. Roberts explains that this element flows from the causal conjunction "for" expressed both by Jeremiah (Jer. 31:34: "For I will forgive their iniquity") and Paul (Heb. 8:12: "For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness"). In these passages, asserts Roberts, God gives a reason why he will do all the former things to them, that is, writing his law on their minds and hearts, being their God, and making all of them to know him. It is because he will remit all their sins freely, fully, and utterly. Roberts says, "God freely giving Jesus Christ for the effecting of remission of sins for us, will with Christ thus given, freely give us all things." Remission of sins also enables us to enjoy all saving blessings of the new covenant. Moreover, as remission of sins is interwoven with all saving blessings of the new covenant in Christ, where remission of sins is bestowed, all other blessings are likewise bestowed.⁶¹

The last blessing God promises in the new covenant is God's being to his confederates a God and their being his people. In thinking that this promise is "the general sum of the covenant, comprehending in it all the rest," Roberts follows Calvin. Regarding this promise in Heb. 8:10, Calvin says, "This is the fruit of the covenant; that God takes us for his people,

and Sclater, *A Key to the Key of Scripture: or An Exposition with Notes, upon the Epistle to the Romanes; the three first chapters* (London: T. C. for Nicholas Fussell and Humphrey Mosley, 1629), 326-327.

⁶⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1483, citing Lev. 16:1-34, Heb. 9:9-14 (spiritualness); John 1:29, Acts 10:43; 13:38-39; 26:18, Rom. 3:23-26, 1 John 1:7, Rev. 1:5 (clearness); Acts 13:38-39, Rom. 3:23-26; 8:3-4, Heb. 9:15; 10:5-19 (perfection); and Matt. 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 2:38-39 (extensiveness).

⁶¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1485-1488, citing Rom. 5:8-10; 8:29-30, 32.

and asserts himself president of our salvation.” Regarding Jer. 31:33, Calvin writes, “Generally here God comprehends the summ of his covenant...this promise contains under it all the parts of our salvation.”⁶²

Since Roberts thinks that he sufficiently explains this promise in dealing with the previous covenants of faith, he does not explain it any more except to consider its application.⁶³ According to Roberts, the promise that the Lord will be to his confederates a God and they will be to him a people informs us of the goodness and bountifulness of God to his confederates and of the happiness of all God’s sincere confederates. It also informs us of the fewness of God’s true and sincere confederates even under this new covenant and of the wretchedness of all nonconfederates.⁶⁴

By this promise, asserts Roberts, we can know whether we are among the number of God’s true and sincere confederates in the new covenant or not. He divides this promise into two for the sake of probation: “if the Lord be our covenant-God” and “if we be Gods covenant-people.” He begins by explaining three ways to discover that the Lord is our covenant God.⁶⁵ Firstly, we discern this by his federal impressions and operations upon us as our covenant God. For as our covenant God, he puts his own Spirit within us, writes his law on our hearts, and gives us a heart to know him as the covenant keeping God. God takes away our stony heart, giving us a tender heart and dwelling in and walking with us.

⁶²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1368 and 1492-1493, citing Calvin, *Commentarius*, Jer. 31:33 and Heb. 8:10. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Jer. 31:33 (4:133) and Heb. 8:10 (p. 190).

⁶³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1493. See his summary of the explication of this promise in pp. 1493-1495.

⁶⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1495-1497, citing Gen. 15:1, Ps. 3:3; 18:2; 46:1; 84:11 (God’s goodness to confederates); and Ps. 144:12-15 (happiness of God’s confederates).

⁶⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1497-1498.

God also converts us from sin to himself and makes us steadfast in our covenant commitment to him.⁶⁶ Secondly, we can know whether the Lord is our covenant God by our covenant relation to him. For God's new covenant people are effectually called and made a holy, select, and separated people. They are a self-denying people and a willing people. They are not only God's temple but also a holy and royal priesthood. They are God's children and Christ's.⁶⁷ Lastly, by our conduct toward God we can discern that he is our covenant God and that we have accepted him as such. Roberts enumerates the following as the proper conduct of the new covenant people toward God: to esteem the Lord, to love him, to trust in him, to fear him, and to serve him as their God.⁶⁸ According to Roberts, another element of this promise that we are God's true and sincere covenant people can be known by our due conduct toward God, that is, esteeming the Lord as our God, loving him as our God, and so forth. It also can be discovered by the nature of being God's people and by properties peculiarly belonging to God's true covenant people, described in the foregoing covenants of faith.⁶⁹

In this promise that the Lord is God to his confederates and they are his people, Roberts finds "a spacious sea of consolation" to all God's true covenant people. This

⁶⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1498-1500, citing Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-28, John 7:37-39, Acts 2:4, 16-33 (giving his Spirit); Ps. 40:8, Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10 (writing his law); Jer. 24:7, 1 John 2:20 (giving heart to know God); Ezek. 11:19-20; 36:26-28 (giving tender heart); Lev. 26:11-12, Ezek. 37:26-27, 2 Cor. 6:16 (walking together); Jer. 24:7, Acts 26:18 (converting); and Jer. 32:38, 40 (making steadfast).

⁶⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1500-1504, citing Rom. 9:23-25, 1 Peter 2:9-10 (effectually called); 2 Cor. 6:16-17, 1 Peter 2:9-10 (separated people); Matt. 10:37-39; 16:24, Luke 9:23, Titus 2:11-12 (self-denying); Ps. 110:2-3 (willing); 2 Cor. 6:16-18 (temple); 1 Peter 2:5, 9-10, Rev. 1:6; 3:21 (royal priesthood); Rom. 9:26 (God's children); and 1 Cor. 3:22-23, Gal. 3:29 (Christ's).

⁶⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1504-1508, citing Ps. 115:3-9; 135:5, 15-18, John 17:3, 1 Cor. 8:4-6 (esteem); Deut. 6:5, Matt. 22:37-38, Luke 10:27 (love); Ps. 62:8, Prov. 3:5 (trust); Gen. 31:42, 53, Ps. 76:11 (fear); and 2 Chron. 12:8, Ps. 2:11, Rev. 22:3 (serve).

⁶⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1510-1511.

promise is a great comfort that combats the grounds of discomfort that can afflict and sadden the hearts of God's people.⁷⁰ God's grand promise becomes a solid comfort to his true covenant people when they face the following seven sources of discomfort: (1) relics of inherent sin and corruption remaining in them, (2) fears or dangers of apostasy, (3) outward or inward wants, (4) strong and violent temptations, (5) deep and dismaying desertions, (6) sharp afflictions and persecutions, and (7) terrors and pangs of death itself.⁷¹

According to Roberts, God sometimes disciplines his people with desertions. By divine desertion Roberts does not mean God's withdrawing his essence from his creature—which is immense, infinite, and omnipresent and cannot be excluded from any creature—but God's withholding or withdrawing in some measure his Spirit, grace, favor, comforts, assistance, and so forth, from his creature. He separates divine desertion into two: absolute desertion and limited desertion. God, as a supreme Lord and righteous judge, absolutely deserts all reprobate men, and there is “no comfort against this absolute desertion, whereby God forsakes all reprobates, and none but reprobates.”⁷² God's limited desertion is peculiar to his elect. God as a faithful and loving father sometimes deserts and leaves his own people in temptation, in sin and infirmity, or in trouble and distress. Yet he does not desert them absolutely, totally, and forever but only in some respects, in some degrees, and for a little while. Moreover, God's promise of being a God

⁷⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1516.

⁷¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1516-1555.

⁷²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1527-1528, citing Ps. 17:14, Titus 1:15.

to his confederates and their being his people is a great consolation to them during this limited desertion.⁷³

In the new covenant, unlike the covenant blessings explicitly promised by God, the covenant duties are implicitly required from and fulfilled by his confederates. While the body of this new covenant explicitly contains only promised mercies, asserts Roberts, implicitly it also includes required duties. He finds five covenant duties implied in the blessings promised: (1) knowledge, (2) faith, (3) repentance, (4) conformity to God's law in heart and life, and (5) entire self-denial before God. As these duties are implied in the blessings that Roberts has already largely explained, he thinks it is sufficient to briefly delineate them.⁷⁴

Firstly, as God explicitly promises his confederates a more excellent and more universal knowledge of himself than under the old covenant, he implicitly requires of them not only all possible endeavors after such knowledge but also all proper exercise of such knowledge.⁷⁵ Secondly, as this new covenant is laid down wholly in promises, God implicitly requires and expects faith from his confederates to accept, embrace, and apply those promises, for "God's promises and our faith are relatives." Yet more particularly, says Roberts, when in this new covenant God promises remission of sins and consequently justification in Christ, he implicitly requires and expects from all his confederates true saving and justifying faith in Jesus Christ.⁷⁶ Thirdly, when God promises his confederates remission of sins, he also implicitly requires them to exercise repentance. Fourthly, as God

⁷³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1527-1528.

⁷⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1555, citing Jer. 31:33-34, Heb. 8:10-12.

⁷⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1555-1556, citing Jer. 31:34, 1 Cor. 14:14-21, Heb. 8:11.

⁷⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1557, citing Rom. 4:6-9, Heb. 8:12; 10:16-18.

explicitly promises his confederates inscription of his laws on their mind and heart, he implicitly expects and requires from them a universal conformity and agreeableness of heart and life to his laws.⁷⁷ Lastly, when in this new covenant God promises his confederates their being his people, he implicitly requires from them that they will be his people, that is, they will yield up their souls and bodies in an entire self-denying, self-resignation to God. This is a very comprehensive duty, and it consists of self-denial for God in Christ and self-resignation of all we are, have, can do, or endure for the sake of God.⁷⁸

From the relation between God's explicit promises and his confederates' implicit duties in this new covenant, Roberts confirms the precedence of the divine grace over our duties.

The new covenant-duties are so required from us, as is most consistent with Gods free-grace unto us. For he first expressly promiseth ability; and then implicitly requires answerable duty. First he enables us to do, what he will require: then requires us to do, what we are able. We must know him, but first he will teach us: we must believe and repent, and be conform to his laws in heart and life, but first he will write his law in our minds and hearts: we must be his people, but first he will make us his people. Well said Augustine, Lord give me to do what thou commandest, and then command what thou pleasest.⁷⁹

In that those duties are required of us, this new covenant is conditional. With precedent grace, however, God always enables us to fulfill the conditions.

Roberts divides the form of the new covenant into two: inward and outward. The inward and more essential form of this covenant consists in the mutual and reciprocal obligation of God and his confederates in Jesus Christ one to another. On the one hand, the

⁷⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1559-1560, citing Heb. 8:12; 10:16-18 (repentance): and Jer. 31:33, Heb. 8:10; 10:16-17 (conformity to law).

⁷⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1561-1562, citing Jer. 31:33 and Heb. 8:10 (being God's people); Luke 9:23-24 (self-denial); and Rom. 12:1, 1 Cor. 6:19-20 (self-resignation).

⁷⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1562. In the margin Roberts cites Augustine: "Domine da quod jubes, & jube quod vis" (*Confessionum*, X.xxix). Cf. Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustin*, X.xxix.40, in *NPNF*, 1st series, vol. 1, p. 153.

LORD God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—on his part expressly obligates himself to his confederates by promising most excellent new covenant blessings. On the other hand, the house of Israel and Judah—even all the new covenant confederates with God in Christ in all nations, Jewish and gentile—on their part implicitly bind themselves to God by promising to fulfill the new covenant duties that correspond to those new covenant blessings.⁸⁰

The outward and more accidental form of the new covenant consists in the way and manner of this covenant: manifestation, confirmation, and administration. The manifestation of this covenant consists of two things: (1) God's promissory revelation of it, immediately to Jeremiah, and mediately by him to God's people in the Babylonian captivity; and (2) God's preparatory work of this covenant by the ministries of John the Baptist and of Jesus Christ himself. This covenant is eminently confirmed by God's excellent promises, by his inviolable oath, by the irrevocable death and blood of Jesus Christ, and by the best sacramental tokens, baptism and the Lord's Supper.⁸¹ The administration or actual execution of the new covenant is distinguished for various reasons. It is administered with universal reference to all nations of the world, Jewish and gentile, and to the general church to be gathered out of them all.⁸² It is administered by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, by diverse ordinances of new covenant worship, by a new covenant government of the church, and by a visible and successive new covenant ministry and

⁸⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1671-1672.

⁸¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1672-1686, citing Heb. 8:6 (promises); Ps. 110:4, Heb. 7:20-25 (oath); Matt. 26:27-28, Mark 14:23-24, Luke 22:20, 1 Cor. 11:25, Heb. 9:12, 14-17, 23 (death and blood of Jesus Christ); Matt. 28:19-20, Mark 16:15-16, Acts 2:39-41; 10:44, 47-48; 16:14-15, 31-33 (baptism); and Matt. 26:28, 1 Cor. 10:16-17; 11:25 (Lord's Supper).

⁸²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1686, citing Matt. 28:18-19, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:46-47, Acts 13:46-47; 26:19-20.

officers.⁸³ It is also administered with more plenary effusions of the Spirit, with more perfect liberty from the bondage of sin and Satan, and with far more glory than under any previous covenant administrations.⁸⁴

Roberts divides the intended scope or end of the new covenant into two: the more immediate and the more mediate. The more immediate end of this covenant is the most full and ultimate representation of the person, office, and benefits of Jesus Christ, to Israel and to all nations. Roberts says that all other administrations of the covenant of faith intend to disclose and describe Jesus Christ, but this new covenant does this more than they all. Roberts understands the more mediate end of this new covenant to be twofold: subordinate and ultimate. The subordinate mediate end is to extend, spread, propagate, and plant the church of God far and near among all the nations of the world and to advance the condition and enjoyment of God's enlarged new covenant church to a far higher perfection in keeping with salvation. The ultimate mediate end of this covenant is to highly exalt the glory of God.⁸⁵

Roberts thinks the new covenant agrees with the old covenant in many ways. Both of them are covenants of faith in Jesus Christ, and "testamental covenants, or federal testaments." Both of them have the same author, God, and the same impulsive cause, divine grace. They share a considerable part of the matters agreed on between God and his

⁸³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1686-1688, citing Matt. 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16, Luke 24:47 (preaching the Gospel); Matt. 18:19-20; 28:18-20, Acts 6:4; 20:7, 1 Cor. 11:23-30; 14:14-16; 16:2, Eph. 5:18-19, Col. 3:16, 1 Tim. 2:1-2, Rev. 1:10 (worship); Matt. 18:15-18, Acts 14:21, 23; 15:15, 24, 28; 16:4, 1 Cor. 5:1-13, 2 Cor. 2:6-9, 1 Thess. 5:14, 1 Tim. 4:14; 5:20, Titus 3:10 (government); and Matt. 28:18-20, Acts 6:1-7, Rom. 12:8, 1 Cor. 12:28, Eph. 4:8, 11-13, 1 Tim. 5:17 (ministry).

⁸⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1688-1689, citing John 7:37-39, Acts 2:1-47; 10:44-46, 1 Cor. 1:5-7, 12:4-12 (effusion of the Spirit); Luke 1:74-75, John 8:36, Gal. 3:13-14; 4:4-6, Col. 2:14, Titus 2:14, Heb. 2:14-15 (liberty); and 2 Cor. 3:7-18 (glory).

⁸⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1690-1693.

confederates, that is, promises on his part and duties on their part. Both of them have for substance the same mediator, Jesus Christ, though typically in the old covenant and actually in the new covenant. They also have the same way of sanction, that is, by the blood and death of sacrifices. They have the same end, that is, more immediately the revealing of Jesus Christ and more mediately the happiness of God's confederates by Christ and God's glory.⁸⁶ For substance, the new covenant agrees with the old covenant.

Yet Roberts also sees many differences between the old covenant and the new covenant. While the old covenant is one of the covenants of promise, the new covenant is the covenant of performance. They are different in terms of occasion, duration, extensiveness in God's confederates, excellence of promises and duties, manner of manifestation, confirmation, and administration. They are especially different in representation of the mediator. While in the old covenant Jesus Christ was represented as mediator only faintly, in the new covenant he is exhibited clearly as the mediator. Thus, they are different particularly in ends. For, while the old covenant intended a fuller revealing of Christ as the promised savior than formerly, the new covenant intends the fullest revealing of Jesus Christ as the exhibited and successful savior.⁸⁷

Now Roberts explains the new covenant in comparison to all the covenants of promise.

The three first covenants with Adam, Noah and Abraham, were suitable to the churches extreme infancy: the old covenant, as also those with David, and the captives in Babylon, were answerable to the churches non-age and minority: But this new covenant is most agreeable to the churches full-age and maturity. Under the three first, the church was only domestical, in private families: in the three next, the church was come to be national, in that one nation of the Jews: in this last the new covenant, the church becomes ecumenical, being generally extended to all

⁸⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1703-1706, citing Heb. 9:15-22.

⁸⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1708-1712.

nations of the world. In those Christ was only promised: in this Christ is actually performed and exhibited. In those redemption, reconciliation and salvation of sinners was fore-shadowed: in this all these glorious things are actually fulfilled.⁸⁸

Thus, it is proper for him to say that the new covenant is “the covenant of covenants.”

For, this new covenant is “the last and best of all Gods covenants.”⁸⁹

In explaining the nature of the new covenant, Roberts often compares it with the preceding administrations of the covenant of faith, especially with the Sinai covenant or the old covenant. It is called the new covenant primarily in comparison to the old covenant. Among the many characteristics of the new covenant, however, Roberts’ understanding of its trinitarian authorship stands out. By explaining the new covenant blessings as the works of one or another of the persons of the Trinity, Roberts puts himself among the Protestant scholastics who typically explain the *opera Dei ad extra* as the *opera certo modo personalia*.

B. Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Covenant between God and Man

Jesus Christ is the center of Roberts’ covenant theology. Roberts describes Jesus Christ as “the marrow of all the Scriptures,” “the kernel of the new covenant, and of all the covenants of promise,” “the center of all Gods promises,” “the mysterie of Christianity,” “the head, hope, and life of the church and all true Christians,” and “the only foundation of all true peace, happiness and consolation.”⁹⁰ Roberts especially emphasizes the mediatorship of Jesus Christ in the covenant of faith. When treating the

⁸⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1721.

⁸⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1696.

⁹⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1564.

covenants of promise, he explains the mediatorship of Jesus Christ, especially Christ's mediatory office, rather sporadically here and there. When he treats the new covenant, however, he devotes a separate chapter to explaining Christ's mediatorship.⁹¹ Roberts says that all God's covenants of faith intend more immediately to the revelation and description of Jesus Christ, yet this new covenant does this more than they all. Thus, Roberts thinks the more immediate end of the new covenant to be the most full and ultimate representation of the person, office, and benefits of Jesus Christ to Israel and to all nations.⁹²

Roberts thinks that a mediator of the new covenant was most necessary between God and man. He refers to the schoolmen in explaining how and in what sense a mediator was necessary between God and man.⁹³ Thus, Roberts distinguishes necessity into three kinds: absolute, natural, and hypothetical. The first is a "most perfect and absolute necessity," and it belongs only to the divine nature that is most perfect and cannot be eliminated or changed by any agent. The second is a "natural necessity" that characterizes anything so that by reason of a natural agent it cannot be or behave itself otherwise. For example, fire is necessarily hot and tends upward, but no creature can take these properties from fire. The third is an "hypothetical necessity," which is also called "a necessity of consequence" when any thing is necessary (*aliquo supposito*) upon supposition of some

⁹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1563-1671.

⁹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1691.

⁹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1565, citing Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, pt. 1, Q. 19, art. 3; and Guilielmus Estius, *Sententiarum commentaria*, lib. 1, Distinctio 38, sec. 7. Cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, tr. Fathers of English Dominican Province, 5 vols. (New York, NY: Benziger Brothers, 1948; reprint, Westminster, MD: 1981), 1:104-105; and Guilielmus Estius, *In quatuor libros Sententiarum commentaria: quibus pariter S. Thomae Summae theologicae partes omnes mirifice illustrantur, cum triplici indice*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1680), 1:111.

other thing. The necessity of this kind originates in connection with other things. For example, supposing that God's covenant is true and just, the man who sins must necessarily die if satisfaction is not made to God's justice, and supposing God's decree, they that will be glorified must necessarily be called and justified. In this last sense, says Roberts, "a mediator betwixt God and man was necessary."⁹⁴

A mediator between God and man was necessary, particularly if one holds to the following things. God decreed to create mankind to glorify his mercy and justice, "preparing some as vessels of mercy unto glory, and passing by others as vessels of wrath fitted to destruction." Those whom God intended as vessels of mercy, he elected in Jesus Christ. God decreed to create man upright under a covenant of works but to leave man to himself so as to allow him to fall, that thereby God might take occasion to express the riches of his free grace and mercy in saving his elect by Jesus Christ. Man, being left to himself, fell from God through the enticement of Satan, and in Adam all mankind, including the elect, became enemies of God and guilty of eternal death. Now the elect could not be restored and saved according to God's decree unless his justice was satisfied by the sinners' punishment or by a sufficient mediator who would fully pay their debt by undergoing death for them. Yet, the elect according to God's decree must be eternally saved. Thus a mediator between God and man was necessary, says Roberts, "by an hypothetical necessity."⁹⁵

In addition, a "true, fit and sufficient mediator was necessary under the new covenant." Roberts understands "true" as more than typical, "fit" as properly representing God and

⁹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1565, citing 1 Tim. 1:17, James 1:17 (divine nature).

⁹⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1565-1566, citing Rom. 9:22-23 (decree); Eph. 1:4-5 (election in Christ); Gen. 1:26-28; 2:16-17, Eccles. 7:29 (covenant with upright creature); Gen. 3:1-24, Rom. 5:12; 6:23; 8:7-8 (fall); Gen. 2:16-17, Deut. 32:4, Rom. 2:5-6, 11 (justice); Heb. 7:22; 9:22-28; 10:7-19, 1 Peter 2:23-24 (satisfaction); Rom. 5:8-11, 2 Cor. 5:18-21 (reconciliation); and Rom. 8:29-30 (saving the elect).

man, and “sufficient” as being in every way able to reconcile God and man. Under the old covenant Moses was mediator. Yet, as mediator he was neither true, fit, nor sufficient, but typical—very unfit and very insufficient. As the new covenant was ordained purposely for reformation of the imperfections of the old covenant, asserts Roberts, the mediator of the new covenant must be true, fit, and fully sufficient to bring God and man into unity and peace.⁹⁶

Roberts enumerates diverse reasons why a true, fit, and sufficient mediator of the new covenant between God and man was “hypothetically most necessary.” Without such a mediator God’s eternal decree concerning man’s true, spiritual, and everlasting happiness would never have been executed, for all man’s spiritual and eternal happiness is eternally decreed in and through a mediator. Without such a mediator the prophecies, promises, and types laid down in Holy Scripture could never have been fulfilled and accomplished, especially those regarding the mediator. Without a true, fit, and sufficient mediator the new covenant would have been as weak and imperfect as the old, which lacked such a mediator. Without such a mediator the intense enmity between God and lapsed mankind on account of sin could never have been removed nor God and man reconciled. Without such a mediator lapsed man could never have been effectually called, sanctified, justified, and saved.⁹⁷

Roberts explains the person of Jesus Christ, especially the foundation of his mediatory office. Jesus Christ, the only Son of God and the son of the Virgin Mary, is God and man in one person. Jesus Christ is the only Son of God neither by creation nor by adoption, but by generation. The divinity of Jesus Christ is evident from clear testimonies of Scripture, from

⁹⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1566, citing Gal. 3:19 with Deut. 5:23-33 (mediator); Num. 20:12-13, 23-24, Deut. 32:49-52, Ps. 106:32-33 (insufficiency); and Heb. 7:18-19; 9:10 (true mediator).

⁹⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1566-1569.

the exact resemblance between Jesus and God the Father, and from the precise enumeration of the persons of the Blessed Trinity.⁹⁸ This Jesus became the son of the Virgin Mary “extraordinarily,” because he was conceived in the womb of a sinner without sin, not by ordinary human generation, but by the Holy Spirit’s extraordinary and miraculous operation, and was born of a virgin.⁹⁹ Jesus became the son of the Virgin Mary “truly and really” by partaking of the true human nature of the virgin. And Jesus became the son of the Virgin Mary “completely and perfectly” by taking to himself the whole human nature in both the essential parts of man, soul and body.¹⁰⁰ This Jesus, son of God and of the Virgin Mary, is God and man in one person. Roberts understands the nature of the union between the Godhead and manhood of Jesus Christ as “personal” and “indivisible” but “remaining still distinct one from another.” The union of the Godhead and manhood of Jesus Christ is “not a natural, but a personal conjunction of two natures, not of two persons.” And this conjunction is made indivisible and inseparable forever from the first moment of his conception, so that the Son of God will never lay aside the manhood that he assumed and cease to be man nor shall the human nature be severed from his person.¹⁰¹ Although this union of divine and human nature in Christ is personal, intimate, and indivisible, these two natures in Christ are preserved and remain distinct one from another, thus “preserved from confusion and commutation.” Roberts explains that they are preserved from confusion (so

⁹⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1571-1573, citing Matt. 16:15-16, John 1:14, 18; 3:16, 18, 1 John 4:9 (testimonies); Heb. 1:1-3 (resemblance); and Matt. 28:19, 1 John 5:7 (enumeration).

⁹⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1574-1576, citing Luke 1:34-35 (by the Holy Ghost); Isa. 7:14, Matt. 1:23-25, Luke 1:34-35 (of a virgin); and Isa. 53:9, Luke 1:35, Heb. 4:15; 7:26 (without sin).

¹⁰⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1576, citing Luke 1:31, 35; 2:6-7, 21-22 (true human nature); and Matt. 26:26, Mark 14:8, Luke 2:46; 24:39, John 2:21 (whole human nature).

¹⁰¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1577-1578, citing Gal. 4:4, Col. 2:9, and 1 Tim. 3:16 (personal conjunction); and 1 Cor. 8:6, Eph. 4:5, and 1 Tim. 2:5 (indivisible conjunction).

that these two natures are not made one) and from commutation (so that the one is not changed into the other). Thus, the properties and actions of each nature, divine and human, are attributed to “one and the same Christ, who as God and man, is, eternal, yet born in time: infinite, and finite; a creator, and a creature: invisible, and visible: was dead, and yet immortal.”¹⁰²

Roberts thinks that the effects or consequences resulting from this personal union of the human nature with the person of the Son of God are of three kinds. The first is the “communication of properties,” which occurs when the properties of either nature are attributed to and truly agree with the whole person, whether they have their denomination from either nature, or from his office, in the concrete.¹⁰³ In understanding the interchange of attributes as happening at the level of the person and not between the natures, Roberts holds the view of *communicatio idiomatum in concreto*, which was typical of the Reformed Christology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.¹⁰⁴ The second effect is “endowments.” For the human nature by reason of its union with the divine was adorned and fitted to the utmost with most excellent and admirable gifts. The last effect is “operations accomplished.” For the person of our mediator by reason of this personal union performs his mediatory acts according to both natures. Thus, this “personal union is the base and foundation of all these three” effects.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1578-1579.

¹⁰³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1581-1582, citing Richard Field, *Of the Church*, bk. 5, chaps. 13-15; and Marcus Friedrich Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae*, I.xvi. Cf. Field, *Of the Church, five bookes* (Oxford: William Turner, 1628), 432-441; and Wendelin, *Christianae theologiae libri duo* (Amsterdam, 1657), 1:253-280.

¹⁰⁴See Heppe, *RD*, 439-447, and Muller, *DLGTT*, s.v. “communicatio idiomatum/ communicatio proprietatum.”

¹⁰⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1582, citing John 3:34, Col. 1:19; 2:9-10 (endowments).

This Jesus or God-man is the Christ, the promised Messiah, and he alone. Both the Hebrew word, Messiah מָשִׁיחַ, and the Greek word, Christ Χριστός, signify “anointed,” and they are attributed to Jesus, the God-man, our mediator, in reference to his mediatory office, which as prophet, priest, and king he was to execute, and actually did execute, for us. Roberts thinks these two words denote Jesus’ qualification and designation to his office. Under the Old Testament, God ordained a holy anointing oil with which three types of officers were anointed, prophets, priests, and kings. Yet God did not anoint Jesus with material oil but with the Holy Spirit and with power for his mediatory office.¹⁰⁶

Jesus Christ, the God-man, is the only true, fit, and sufficient mediator, testator, and surety of the new covenant between God and man. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the new covenant, for he is the only “middle person” between God and man, being in one person God and man. As this new covenant is a federal testament or a testamental covenant, says Roberts, Jesus Christ as mediator of this new covenant is “a mediatory testator, or a testatory mediator.”¹⁰⁷ And Jesus Christ is surety of this new covenant, for “by so much was Jesus made surety (ἑγγυος) of a better covenant.”¹⁰⁸ Jesus Christ is the only true, fit, and sufficient mediator, especially in redemption and intercession. For he alone redeems us by his death and reconciles us to God by his blood. And Christ alone is our advocate with the Father and continual intercessor, appearing in the presence of God for us and presenting his death and merits before God. Christ’s intercession is also by way of petition or supplication by which believers pray for one another in this world.

¹⁰⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1582-1583, citing 1 Kings 19:16 (prophets); Ex. 40:12 (priests); and 1 Sam. 10:1; 16:13, 1 Kings 19:16 (kings); and Acts 10:38 (anointing with Holy Ghost).

¹⁰⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1589-1590, citing 1 Tim. 3:16 (God-man); and Heb. 9:15-16 (testator).

¹⁰⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1591, citing Heb. 7:22. Parentheses his.

Thus Roberts thoroughly denies the mediatorship of “the blessed virgin,” “any saint,” or “any or all the prophets, apostles, martyrs, or glorious angels,” as the Roman Catholics fondly speak of.¹⁰⁹

Jesus Christ is mediator neither as God only nor as man only but as the God-man in one person. A conjunction and union of the divine and human natures in one person of the mediator is so necessary to the office of mediator that without it Christ could not have been a fit mediator. In addition, there is a cooperation and concurrence of these two natures in the person of the mediator in the acts or works of mediation as is appropriate to each nature. Jesus Christ performs the mediatory works, divine as God and human as man, “individed” as mediator, while the real difference of the two natures is preserved distinct and entire. According to Roberts, Roman Catholic writers grant the conjunction of the two natures in the person of the mediator, but they deny the cooperation of those natures in the acts of mediation. For “they hold that Christ performs the acts of mediatorship, not as God, but only as man: from his humanity, not from his deity.”¹¹⁰

Roberts explains:

Bellarmino speaks plainly, thus distinguishing; the *principium quod*, the principle or beginning which did the works of mediatorship, was not God alone, nor man alone, but both together, viz. God-man; but the *principium quo*, the principle or beginning whereby these works were done of the mediator, was his humane nature, not his divine. But the orthodox resolve better, that Jesus Christ acts as mediator from both his natures, his humanity doing what is properly humane, his divinity what is properly divine, both of them concurring unto one work of mediatorship. The worker is one person, the work is one mediation, but the formal principles or

¹⁰⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1592.

¹¹⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1593. Roberts refers to *Rhemes New Testament*, annotations on Matt. 9:6, 2 Cor. 5:18, Heb. 5:6; and Robert Bellarmine, *De Christo*, V.i. Cf. *The New Testament of Iesus Christ, translated faithfully into English, out of the authentical Latin...: with Arguments of bookes and chapters, Annotations, and other necessarie helpes...: in the English College of Rhemes* (Rheims, 1582; reprint, Ilkley: Scolar Press, 1975), 24, 480, 610; and Bellarmine, *Opera omnia, ex editione Veneta, pluribus tum additis tum correctis, iterum edidit Justinus Fèvre*, 12 vols. (Paris, 1870; reprint, Frankfurt: Minerva, 1965), 1:436.

beginnings of this work are the two distinct natures in that one person of the mediator. As the divine and humane nature concur to make one person of Christ the mediator: so the distinct acts of these two natures in Christ concur to make up one and the same compleat work of mediation. Christ did his *opera authoritatis* or *magisterii*, his works of authority from his God-head: but his *opera ministerii*, his works of ministry, from his man-hood: but as his natures are united in one person: so his acts and operations from his two principles, are conjoined in one mediation.¹¹¹

According to Roberts, Jesus Christ's execution of the threefold office can be proved in many ways. Above all, it can be shown from the condition of fallen man and his need of restoration by Christ. Roberts sees lapsed man miserably involved in a threefold problem: (1) gross ignorance of God, salvation, and his wretched condition; (2) utter alienation from and extreme enmity to God; and (3) total inability of turning from sin to God for salvation. Through the mediatory office of Christ, God has provided a remedy fully suitable to the malady of lapsed man. For his ignorance is cured by Christ's prophecy, his alienation from and enmity against God by Christ's priesthood, and his inability by Christ's kingship.¹¹²

This threefold remedy for lapsed man through Jesus Christ's mediatory office corresponds to the order of God's conferring salvation upon us. For (1) the mystery of salvation must be revealed to us who are ignorant, (2) it must be acquired for us who are aliens and enemies, and (3) it must be effectually applied to us who are without strength. Now Jesus Christ reveals the whole way and mystery of salvation as a prophet, acquires and purchases salvation revealed as a priest, and efficaciously applies salvation revealed and purchased as a king.¹¹³

¹¹¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1594.

¹¹²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1599-1600.

¹¹³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1601.

This order of God's conferring salvation upon us corresponds again to Christ's benefits and his way of obtaining them for us. For Christ's benefits toward us are three: (1) making known to us God's will concerning sinners' salvation; (2) satisfying, redeeming, reconciling, remitting, and interceding for his elect; and (3) effectual applying to us all the benefits of his mediation. To obtain such benefits for us Jesus Christ first teaches as a prophet, then he offers himself as a priest, and at last he enters into his kingdom most powerfully and gloriously administering the same as a king.¹¹⁴

Jesus Christ's discharge of the threefold office can be proved also from the personal types in the previous covenants, which prefigured these three functions of Christ. Moses, the great prophet, was a special type of Jesus Christ, God's greatest prophet of all. The Levitical priests, especially the high priest and Melchizedek the priest of the most high God, were special types of our great high priest, Jesus Christ. And the excellent kings, such as Melchizedek the king of Salem, David, and Solomon, were special types of Jesus Christ, our true king. Christ's threefold office is directly related with his unction. For in ancient times men were anointed with the holy anointing oil, denoting their designation and vocation to and their endowments and qualifications for those three eminent offices of prophet, priest, and king. So Jesus Christ was anointed with the true spiritual immaterial oil by which he was most completely and supremely qualified for and most authentically called to his threefold office of prophet, priest, and king to his church, and became the true Christ, the Messiah or anointed of the living God.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1601-1602.

¹¹⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1600-1601, citing Ex. 30:23-24 (anointing oil); Ps. 45:7, Acts 10:38 (spiritual anointing).

In addition, Roberts thinks that Christ's execution of the threefold office is evident from many names and descriptions given to him in the Scriptures, which can easily be reduced to these three functions. Though in *God's Covenants* Roberts includes a long list of specific designations given to Christ, it is sufficient to give only a sample of them here. He understands a counselor (Isa. 9:6) and "a teacher come from God" (John 3:2) to be "a prophet like Moses" (Deut. 18:15-20), pointing out Christ's prophetic office. He takes "a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28 and 1 Tim. 2:5-6), "our advocate with the Father" (1 John 2:1-2), and "our high-priest" (Heb. 3:1) as referring to Christ's priestly office. And he interprets "a leader and commander to the people" (Isa. 55:4) and "the head of the church" (Eph. 5:23) with "king of kings" (Rev. 19:16), denoting Christ's kingly office.¹¹⁶

Roberts defines Christ's prophetic office as a branch of his mediatorship by which he fully reveals to and in his elect, his church, both before and under the new covenant, the whole counsel and will of God concerning their restoration and salvation. Thus, the nature of Christ's prophetic office consists in his primary and plenary teaching of his church by revelation or promulgation of his doctrine and by illumination of his people's minds to receive the same.¹¹⁷

Jesus Christ reveals his doctrine both immediately and mediately. As is typical of the Reformed orthodox, Roberts argues that under and before the old covenant, according to his divinity, Jesus Christ more immediately made known God's will concerning sinners' salvation to the patriarchs and prophets by "visions, dreams, Urim and Thummim,

¹¹⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1602.

¹¹⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1603.

inspirations, vocal oracles” and so forth.¹¹⁸ More mediately, Christ taught his church the mystery of salvation sometimes extraordinarily by the ministry of fathers, patriarchs, and prophets and sometimes ordinarily by the continuing ministry of the priests and Levites. Under the new covenant, more immediately, Jesus Christ, according to both his natures as God and man, has finally, clearly, and completely revealed the last, fullest, and perfect counsel and will of God related to sinners’ life and salvation. More mediately, Christ taught his church at first by extraordinary ministers like apostles, prophets, and evangelists, for a founding ministry, and afterwards by ordinary ministers like pastors and teachers, for a settled and standing ministry.¹¹⁹

Jesus Christ also illuminates the minds and inclines the wills of his elect efficaciously so that they can understand and receive his revealed doctrine. Roberts calls Christ’s revelation of his doctrine “outward” and his illumination “inward” teaching. While the former is Christ’s revealing his doctrine to his people, the latter is his revealing his doctrine in them. Roberts regards this illumination as the chief and perfect effect of Christ’s prophetic office and one of the eminent blessings promised in the new covenant, both to Christ’s ministers and members.¹²⁰

Roberts understands Christ’s priestly office to be executed chiefly in his satisfaction and his intercession.¹²¹ Thus Christ is the great high priest who completely fulfilled the law of God and suffered death for his elect, making a proper and plenary satisfaction to

¹¹⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1603. Cf. Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), 200-201.

¹¹⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1603-1605.

¹²⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1605.

¹²¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1607.

God's justice for them, and presenting himself and his merit before God as he undertakes for them and makes continual intercession for them.¹²²

Roberts divides Christ's satisfaction into active obedience and passive obedience. Christ's active obedience is his exact, perfect, and constant fulfilling of the law for us to accomplish our redemption, justification, and salvation. His passive obedience is his voluntarily suffering the punishment, penalty, or curse of the law in death upon the cross as the surety for our transgressions. Roberts thinks both are necessary for our righteousness and salvation—Christ's passive obedience for our iniquity by which we had broken God's law in the past and his active obedience for our inability to keep the law in the future.¹²³

According to Roberts, the fruits or effects of Christ's death and satisfaction are various. Among them are sanction, dedication, and establishment of the new covenant and all its promises; pacification or appeasing of God; reconciliation to God; and redeeming and purchasing from all manner of bondage his elect for God and himself. They also include giving the promised Spirit; adoption into God's own family; remission of sins and justification; sanctification; and entrance into the holiest of all, heaven itself, not only in the future, but also now by faith.¹²⁴ These are none other than the *ordo salutis*.

In terms of the extent of Christ's satisfaction, Roberts holds fast to the view of limited atonement. He says, "Jesus Christ did not by an universal grace and favour suffer and die intentionally and savingly for all and singular, as well reprobates that are damned, as the

¹²²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1605.

¹²³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1614-1615.

¹²⁴Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1615-1616.

elect that are saved.” But “by special grace and favour, Christ did peculiarly, intentionally, savingly die for the elect of God, and in their stead, who shall be eternally saved.” Roberts explains that the Scriptures limit and appropriate Christ’s death to his elect only, declaring that Christ suffered and died for “his church, his sheep, his people, his brethren, his children, the people and children of God, and for those that are given to him of the father.” Regarding limited atonement, he refers to Gomarus and Ball.¹²⁵

Roberts thinks that the nature of Christ’s intercession consists in his gracious will continually desiring that on account of the plenary merit and satisfaction of his obedience and death, his elect members might be forever acceptable to the Father. Roberts adds that the Father fully and continually assents to Christ’s gracious and fervent will. Christ carries out his priestly intercession partially on earth in his state of humiliation by prayers for all and particularly his elect people, but perfectly and consummately in heaven in his state of highest exaltation. In his state of exaltation Christ intercedes in the presence of God for us not only by appearing as the God-man, our mediator and surety, but also by presenting his obedience and death together with his infinite satisfaction and merit.¹²⁶ Roberts says that while Christ’s satisfaction obtained our redemption and reconciliation, his intercession tends especially to apply those benefits obtained to us.¹²⁷

Although both Christ and the Holy Spirit are called our “advocate,” Roberts sees a great difference between their intercession. While Christ intercedes “without us, with the

¹²⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1616-1618, citing Franciscus Gomarus, *Explicatio Epistolae ad Galatas*, chap. 1; idem, *Disputatio 18: De Morte Iesu Christi*; and Ball, *Treatise of Covenant of Grace*, pt. 2, chap. 2 (pp. 203-264). Cf. Gomarus, *Opera theologica omnia* (Amsterdam, 1644), pt. 2, pp. 90-111; and *ibid.*, pt. 3, pp. 63-70.

¹²⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1618-1619.

¹²⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1621.

Father,” the Holy Spirit intercedes “within us, to the Father.” While Christ intercedes for us as “our high-priest” by presenting his death, satisfaction, and merit and undertaking our cause with the Father, the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as “an assistant” by enabling us to intercede for ourselves and plead our own cause with God in Christ.¹²⁸

By his kingly office Jesus Christ our mediator powerfully calls, governs, defends, and rewards all who are given him as subjects by the Father, sufficiently restraining and at last utterly conquering all his and their enemies for his people’s exceeding benefit and his own eternal glory. Christ’s kingdom is not a carnal, earthly, temporal kingdom but a spiritual, heavenly, and eternal kingdom. Roberts thinks that the kingdom of the Son of God is twofold, essential and personal. While the essential kingdom belongs to him in regard of his divine essence and nature as well as to the Father and Holy Spirit, the personal kingdom peculiarly belongs to the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man, as our mediator.¹²⁹ Regarding Christ’s kingly office, Roberts does not speak of the essential kingdom but the personal kingdom. This personal kingdom is again twofold, general and special. In terms of the general kingdom Jesus Christ is constituted and ordained of God as head, Lord, king, and judge over all creatures in heaven and earth for the sake of his church. The special kingdom has relation to Christ’s supreme and glorious power and authority for calling, governing, defending, and saving, or rewarding his church gathered out of all nations.¹³⁰

¹²⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1621, citing 1 John 2:1 (Jesus Christ); and John 14:16-17, 26; 16:7 (Holy Spirit).

¹²⁹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1623-1624.

¹³⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1624-1626.

Roberts separates Christ's actual administration of his kingly office into two: his general mediatory kingdom over all things for his church and his special mediatory kingdom over his church. Roberts begins by explaining how Christ executes his general kingship over all things for his church. He sustains all things by his power until all his elect are gathered and perfected. He permits Satan and wicked men to afflict his church according to the counsel of his will. Yet he restrains Satan and wicked men from doing what they desire against his church. Thus he protects his church from destruction by Satan and his instruments. Instead, he orders all things in the world, even the worst afflictions, for the good of his church. At last, he fully avenges his church of all their enemies, and completely sets his church free from all evils and enemies forever.¹³¹

Now Roberts explains how Christ executes his special kingship over his church and people in this present world, at the end of this world, and in the world to come. In this present world Christ pours forth his Spirit more plentifully and efficaciously upon all flesh than in former times for the effectual application of all the benefits of Christ to his elect. He gives gifts to his church by conserving the new covenant ministry extraordinarily by apostles, prophets, and evangelists for the foundation of the New Testament church and ordinarily by pastors and teachers till the end of the world. He also institutes the new covenant ordinances to be administered by these ministers. After gathering and constituting his New Testament church out of all nations of the world by the ministry of the word and sacraments, Christ builds up, confirms, and perfects the church gathered by all his ordinances and ministers until they all come to be one complete man in Christ. At the end of this world Christ descends from heaven, raises the dead, and changes the living. He catches up all the elect to meet him in the air and

¹³¹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1631-1632.

gathers together all nations before his tribunal. He pronounces his final sentence of salvation upon the sheep and of damnation upon the goats forever. By purifying the whole creation, he makes a new heaven and a new earth. In the world to come Christ distributes everlasting rewards to all according to their works, taking his elect to himself and casting all reprobates from his presence. He reigns immediately “as God-man, head and king of his elect, in and over his church triumphant in glory,” and they also reign with him forever. Roberts asserts that although Jesus Christ will give up his mediatory kingdom to the Father at last, this is to be understood only in regard to the accidents or manner of his mediatory kingdom’s administration. For “in regard of the substance and essence of his kingdom, that shall still remain; he shall be head and king of his church for ever and ever, even then when God shall be all in all.”¹³²

Jesus Christ executed his mediatory office between God and man in the states of his humiliation and exaltation. Roberts understands Christ’s state of humiliation as his exceedingly abased condition in which he for a time emptied himself of his glory and took upon him the form of a servant for his elect. Christ greatly humbled himself especially in his conception, birth, life, death, burial, and continuance under the dominion of death for three days.¹³³ And Roberts understands Christ’s state of exaltation to consist in his resurrection from the dead, ascension into heaven, sitting down at God’s right hand, and his coming again to judge the world at the last day.¹³⁴

¹³²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1632-1633.

¹³³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1634, citing Phil. 2:6-8.

¹³⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1638.

Regarding Christ's humiliation Roberts does not take "he descended into hell," the words in the Apostles' Creed, literally. Although this formulation of Christ's descent into hell is not found in the ancient versions of the Apostles' Creed, says Roberts, it is "very generally received in after times, and found in the recitals and expositions of the Apostles Creed, both with Protestants and papists."¹³⁵ About the sense of this expression, however, there was much discord among writers. Beza takes the "hell" in the phrase to mean the "grave," thus Christ's descent into hell is his burial.¹³⁶ But Roberts rejects this interpretation "because it brings in a needless tautology into the compendious creed." Roman Catholic writers take this article as meaning that "his soul descended into the places of the damned, to deliver the fathers from the skirts of hell, *limbo patrum*."¹³⁷ Yet Roberts thinks this interpretation unsound because *limbo* has no solid ground in Scripture, and in Christ's "dying, and satisfying for our sins, his soul went that day into paradise."¹³⁸ Calvin, Ursinus, Pareus, and Bartholomaeus Keckermann interpret this formulation as "he endured hellish torments of loss" in his soul.¹³⁹ But Roberts thinks

¹³⁵Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1636-1637.

¹³⁶Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1637, citing, Beza, *Annotationes*, Acts 2:27. Cf. Beza, *Annotationes*, pt. 1, pp. 458-460.

¹³⁷Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1637, citing Bellarmine, *De Christo*, IV.x-xvi. Cf. Bellarmine, *Opera*, 1:416-433.

¹³⁸Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1637, citing John Calvin, *Institutio*, II.xvi.9 (regarding limbo); and William Perkins, *An Exposition of the Symbole or Creed of the Apostles*, in *Workes* (London, 1626), vol. 1, p. 232 (regarding going on that day into paradise). Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.9 (1:514); and Perkins, *The Workes of That Famous and Worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London: John Legatt, 1616-1618), 1:232.

¹³⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1637, citing Calvin, *Institutio*, II.xvi.10-12; Zacharias Ursinus, *Catecheticarum explicationum*, Q. 44; and Bartholomaeus Keckermann, *Systema sacrosanctae theologiae*, III.iv. Cf. Calvin, *Institutes*, II.xvi.10-12 (1:515-520); Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G. W. Williard (Columbus, OH, 1852; reproduction, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., [1985]), 228-232; and Keckermann, *Systema sacrosanctae theologiae, tribus libris adornatum* (Hanover, 1602), 347.

this interpretation unsuitable because “those hellish sufferings in Christs soul” were already implied in the previous expressions, thus “the phrase of his descending into hell seems to point out some degree of his humiliation betwixt his buriall and resurrection, not expressed nor implied before.”¹⁴⁰ Perkins and the divines of the Westminster Assembly interpreted this phrase to mean “when he was dead and buried, he was held captive in the grave, and lay in bondage under death for the space of three dayes.”¹⁴¹ Roberts prefers this interpretation to the others for the following reasons. It sets forth a degree of Christ’s humiliation after his burial and before his resurrection that is nowhere else expressed or necessarily implied in the creed, and this degree is also expressed in Acts 2:24, that is, “his bondage under death, and grave three dayes.” Additionally, this excellently agrees with the series and order of the creed, setting last in order the last and lowest degree of humiliation of Jesus Christ. Hence, Roberts understands Christ’s descent into hell as “his continuance in the state of the dead, and under the dominion of death for three dayes.”¹⁴²

Jesus Christ as mediator, surety, and testator has established the new covenant forever. Having established this new covenant, Jesus Christ brings his people into this covenant with God in him by calling them. Roberts describes Christ’s establishment of the new covenant as “his dedication of it, to make it of force in it self” and his bringing of his people into this covenant with himself as “his application of it, to make it of force and

¹⁴⁰Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1638.

¹⁴¹Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1638, citing Perkins, *Exposition of Creed*, in *Workes*, vol. 1, p. 233; and the Westminster Confession of Faith, [VIII.iv]. Cf. Perkins, *Workes*, 1:233; and Philip Schaff, ed., *Creeds*, 3:621.

¹⁴²Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1636 and 1638.

efficacy unto us.” He says, “Without that, there had been no new covenant: without this, we have no benefit by the new covenant.”¹⁴³

By vocation or calling Jesus Christ brings his people into this new covenant with God to make them partake of its benefits and perform its duties. The author or efficient cause of calling is the Blessed Trinity, that is, “the Father by the Son, through the Holy-Ghost.” The instrumental means of calling is ordinarily the new covenant gospel preached, but sometimes reading the Scriptures and scriptural doctrine in good books and even talking with private Christians accomplish the same. The parties called are wretched, lost, undone sinners of all nations, Jewish or Gentile, of all sexes, ages, conditions, even all sorts of sinners. In terms of state they are called from sin, Satan, and the world to Jesus Christ, his grace, fellowship, glory, and in him to God. The manner of this calling consists in the tender or offering of Christ and of all saving happiness in him to sinners and sinners’ accepting, embracing, or closing with this tender. Roberts divides this tender of Christ to sinners into ineffectual and effectual. While ineffectual tender is not fully efficacious to conversion and salvation, effectual tender redemptively illuminates the mind to understand and effectually opens the heart to assent to the offer and trustfully to apply it. The distinction of ineffectual calling and effectual calling arises from this different tender of Christ, ineffectual and effectual. While hypocrites and reprobates may be ineffectually called, effectual calling is peculiar to the elect. This tender of Christ and of all saving happiness in him is accepted, entertained, and embraced by sinners so that Christ becomes theirs, and they Christ’s. Roberts understands this reception of Christ tendered as twofold, passive and active. Passive reception happens when God apprehends the sinner and infuses into his soul habits, principles, seeds of faith, repentance, and grace by which the dark mind

¹⁴³Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1641-1643.

is enlightened, the dead heart is made alive, and the unwilling will is made willing. Active reception happens when the mind, will, and heart of a sinner thus apprehended and qualified by God “through his assistant and co-operating grace,” accept Jesus Christ by faith, trustfully resting and relying upon Christ alone and upon God in him for life and salvation. The end of calling sinners to Christ is more immediately and subordinately the spiritual and eternal happiness of the called, but more mediately and ultimately the glory of God calling and converting them.¹⁴⁴

Roberts explains the assurance of salvation with reference to effectual calling. He says, “Let all such as long to know that they are within this new covenant savingly, examine with all diligence whether they be brought into it by being called to Christ, and made Christs effectually.” For Christ brings his elect into this new covenant by effectual vocation, and those whom he effectually calls, he calls to himself that he may be theirs, and they Christ’s. If we “discover whether we be Christs, or no,” then we may know “whether we be in new covenant with God or no.”¹⁴⁵

Roberts enumerates five questions that we may ask ourselves for assurance of our salvation. They are directly related to Christ. Firstly, “Have we Christs Spirit dwelling in us?” For “ye are not in the flesh, but in the spirit, if so be the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9). Here the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ are counted as one and the same.¹⁴⁶ If Christ’s Spirit dwells in us, we can assure ourselves of our salvation. Secondly, “Are we new-creatures?”

¹⁴⁴Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1643-1647.

¹⁴⁵Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1653.

¹⁴⁶Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1653.

Referring to 2 Cor. 5:17-18, Roberts says, “All that are in Christ, that are Christs; are new-creatures.” They who are in Christ are new creatures in three respects. One, in respect of their condition, they were enemies of God by their sins under the power of Satan, but now, being reconciled to God by Christ’s sufferings, they are under the dominion of God. Two, in respect of their frame and inward constitution, they are new creatures. For not only their faculties, which includes their minds, consciences, and wills, but also their affections, their senses, and bodily members are newly created. Three, in respect of their life and conversation, they are new creatures. By nature they were hostile to every good work, without strength to do any spiritual acts, and walked according to the course of Satan, but now by the grace of this new creation, they walk worthy of God and of his kingdom to which they are called.¹⁴⁷ Thirdly, “Are we one with Christ, by faith and love?” By faith we come to Christ, receive him, put him on, eat his flesh, drink his blood, and have Christ living in us. By love we bear a most benevolent affection toward Christ, have strong desires and longings for more complete union with him, and have delightful security and heart-satisfying quietness in him. Thus Roberts says that those who are Christ’s are mystically one with him.¹⁴⁸ Fourthly, “Have we crucified and mortified our corruptions?” For those who are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with passions and lusts. Following Calvin, Roberts understands the “flesh with the passions and lusts” as the depravity of corrupt nature from which all evils proceed. By crucifying, Roberts understands the mortifying, deadening, and destroying of original and actual sin by the efficacious virtue stemming from Christ’s death and by imitating Christ’s death. As Christ our head was crucified for the sins of his

¹⁴⁷Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1654-1656.

¹⁴⁸Roberts, *God’s Covenants*, 1656-1657.

members, therefore all that are Christ's true members must conform to their head by being crucified and dead to their own sins.¹⁴⁹ Fifthly, "Do we walk after the Spirit, not after the flesh?" For "they that are in Christ, walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." Roberts explains that they do not habitually follow the lusts, motions, and guidance of the flesh as they previously did, but the motions, stirrings, and guidance of God's Spirit lead them according to his word. "They may sometimes step awry after the flesh, but that's not their walk, their course which they delight in, but their error and infirmity which they strive against." Roberts says that by all these things "we may know whether we be Christs," and "they that thus are Christs effectually, are within his new covenant actually and savingly."¹⁵⁰ Roberts' answer to those who strive for assurance of their salvation may serve to counter Kendall's rash generalization of Puritan covenant theology. Contrary to Kendall's characterization of Puritan theology, Roberts does not point those who are not assured of their salvation to their sanctification but clearly to Christ alone.¹⁵¹

While Roberts clearly points for those who strive for the assurance of salvation to Christ, he exhorts those who already have assurance of salvation to walk worthy of Jesus Christ. He declares, "Let all who are convinced they are Christless and covenantless persons, and yet thirst after a new covenant-state, sincerely accept Christ tendered: and let all that find they are in new covenant with God, through Christ, walk worthy of Christ accepted."¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1657, citing Gal. 5:24; and Calvin, *Commentarius*, Gal. 5:24. Cf. Calvin, *Commentaries* [CTS], Gal. 5:24 (p. 169).

¹⁵⁰Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1658, citing Rom. 8:1.

¹⁵¹Cf. R. T. Kendall, "The Puritan Modification of Calvin's Theology," in *John Calvin: His Influence in the Western World*, ed. W. Stanford Reid (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1982), 199-214.

¹⁵²Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1658-1659.

Jesus Christ, the mediator of the new covenant between God and man, is the center of Roberts' covenant theology. Roberts says, "As Gods covenants are the marrow of Holy Scriptures; and the new covenant the flower and spirits of the covenants: so Jesus Christ our mediator, is the life and soul of the new covenant." None other than Jesus Christ was promised in the covenants of promise, and the promise was performed in the covenant of performance, the new covenant. Thus "all Gods performances of promises meet in Christ." "The new covenant far excels the old covenant and all foregoing covenants, in having Iesus Christ actually exhibited, to be mediator, surety and testator thereof," Roberts explains. "Therefore wouldst thou compendiously be possest of all covenant treasures at once," exclaims Roberts, "possess thy self of this one treasure of treasures, Jesus Christ, and thou hast all."¹⁵³

Although the threefold office of Christ is the most recurrent and abundant theme in Roberts' explanation of the six covenants of promise, he intensively elaborates and fully develops the doctrine of the *munus triplex* in his discussion about the covenant of performance, the new covenant. Throughout his covenant theology Roberts assumes the doctrine of predestination and often relates it to the theme of covenant. He clearly speaks of the elect as the only beneficiaries of any kind of covenant blessings and the reprobates as without any covenant promises and blessings. Though Roberts assumes predestination as the premise of his covenant theology, yet it is not in the least its central dogma. Instead, the center of his covenant theology is Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man. This result makes those assertions untenable that try to show a discontinuity between Calvin and Puritan covenant theology. Contrary to the assertions of Hall, Kendall, Rolston, and Torrance, Roberts' covenant theology neither distorts, nor deviates

¹⁵³Roberts, *God's Covenants*, 1650.

from, nor conflicts with Calvin's theology. Roberts' elaboration of the doctrine of the *munus triplex* throughout the covenant of faith, especially in the new covenant, shows that his covenant theology is clearly in continuity with Calvin's basic Christological structures.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Roberts' covenant theology belongs to the mainline of the developing Reformed tradition. On the one hand, he establishes his covenant theology on the foundation of the Reformed tradition by inheriting and sharing the covenant doctrine of his Reformed forerunners. On the other hand, he remarkably develops it not only by solidifying its scriptural foundation, but also by elaborating its structure, centering on Christ and his mediatorship between God and man. He develops it also by offering a revision of some of the basic terminology, as seen in his use of the terms "covenant of faith," "covenant of promise," and "covenant of performance." He also evidences the late-seventeenth-century interest in a more historical or salvation-historical model for covenant theology.

Roberts emphasizes God's grace in his covenants with man by distinguishing them into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith instead of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. He shares a double covenant scheme with many of the Puritan thinkers. With nearly all the orthodox Puritans, he ascribes both the antelapsarian and postlapsarian covenants totally to divine grace. Through his distinction of God's covenants into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith, however, Roberts lays much more stress on divine grace, out of which stem the covenant of works as well as the covenant of faith. Since the covenant of works is also out of divine grace, its opposite denomination cannot be the covenant of grace. Instead, in Rom. 3:27 Roberts understands the law of works and the law of faith to amount to the covenant of works and

the covenant of faith respectively. This distinction is not in terms of their source or origin but in terms of man's respective obligations in them, that is, works and faith. With this distinction Roberts firmly confesses God's grace in his covenants with man, thus the Reformers' principle of *sola gratia*. Moreover, his distinction of God's covenants into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith makes it easier to show that the law and the gospel both are the instruments of God's grace. It is important to recognize the precise character of Roberts' insistence on the graciousness of both covenants as well as their distinction. In the several places in this dissertation where the issue has arisen, Roberts distinguishes between the "grace" belonging to the covenant of works and the grace of the covenant of faith. There is, in short, no collapsing of the covenant of works into the dispensation of grace in redemption, nor is there any extension of the possibility of fellowship with God through legal obedience into the covenant of faith.

In summary, the grace belonging to the covenant of works consists in the unilateral establishment of the covenant by God; it is, strictly, a "divine benevolence" and not a "divine mercy" (as in the covenant of faith). Further, the divine favor and support under the covenant of works, unlike that under the covenant of faith, is resistible, and the covenant of works has no mediator. The grace present in Roberts' version of the antelapsarian covenant is, therefore, as one of my readers suggested, hardly a "Barthianism *avant la lettre*." Roberts assumes the historical order of law before gospel and inserts no gospel into the covenant of works—as his reading of the tree of life indicates. The covenants thus remain distinct, while the claim of Torrance, Rolston, and others of a resident legalism in Reformed and Puritan covenant theology is seen to be false with regard to both covenants. The twofold covenant (*duplex foedus*) scheme stands

firm. Both covenants rest on divine initiative and are unilateral in origin—and both have bilateral elements—but the graciousness of the covenant of works is the benevolence and goodness of the Creator, that of the covenant of faith, the self-giving mercy of God the Redeemer.

Thus Roberts' distinction of God's covenants into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith is not merely a characteristic of his covenant theology, but also a significant mark showing his development of the Reformed doctrine of covenant. In dividing the covenant of faith into the covenants of promise and the covenant of performance, or the new covenant, Roberts uses titles based on Scripture. Moreover, Jesus Christ is the original ground of this distinction, for he was the principal matter of those promises and their performance. Since both the covenants of promise and the new covenant have Jesus Christ as their principal matter, they are essentially one and the same covenant of faith. Thus Roberts builds his covenant theology on the basis of Scripture and around Jesus Christ.

Roberts thinks conditionality belongs to the nature of God's covenants. Let alone the covenant of works, the covenant of faith is conditional in its stipulations while remaining unconditional in its foundation and establishment. While Roberts firmly confesses the precedence of divine grace, he sees unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ as the requirement of man in the covenant of faith. Although the covenant of faith is performed by God's grace, faith is required of man as his obligation. Here Roberts does not see any contradiction between grace and faith, for both of them are from God. Owing to his grace God even works in us faith in Christ and accepts our sincere obedience despite its imperfection. For Roberts, the conditionality of the covenant of faith does not mitigate

divine grace but rather aims for its glory. Thus, though more than any other thinkers Roberts emphasizes God's grace in his covenants with man, yet he does not go to the extreme view of antinomians who completely deny any conditions in God's covenants with man. Roberts takes conditions for granted, and he sees their perfect harmony with divine grace.

Like other Reformed thinkers in the second half of the seventeenth century, Roberts endeavors to prove the existence of the covenant of works, that is, the covenant before Adam's fall. He acknowledges that in Scripture this covenant is not positively and plainly said. Its characters and footsteps are not so expressly discovered in Scripture, either. Yet he finds evidences for its existence in the moral law in Adam's heart before the fall, God's positive law regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the intended use of two trees in paradise, and the sad result of Adam's fall in all his ordinary posterity.

The covenant of works is conditional in the strict sense, and it requires of Adam and his posterity perfect and perpetual personal obedience. As Adam had complete ability to keep the covenant of works before the fall, he did not have or need either a mediator or faith in him. After Adam broke the covenant of works by disobedience, however, this covenant breach was absolutely irreparable by the first Adam or by any of his ordinary posterity. In spite of its extremely miserable consequences, Roberts understands Adam's breach of the covenant of works in terms of the divine decree, for the breach of the covenant of works by the first Adam's disobedience made way for the establishment of the covenant of faith by the second Adam's obedience. In his explanation of the divine decree, Roberts uses the doctrine of predestination. In affirming the concept of the divine

permissio for explaining the origin of sin, Roberts does not follow Calvin but the majority of the Reformed tradition including the Westminster standards. Also in terms of mediatorship, Adam's fall was included in the divine decree. Before the fall Adam needed neither a mediator nor the covenant of faith, but after his fall, he needed both. Without them he could not avoid eternal death. Understanding Adam's breach of the covenant of works within divine permission, Roberts sets his position firmly in the Reformed tradition.

For Roberts, the gradual development of the covenants of promise means the gradual revelation of Jesus Christ, the Mediator, who is the center of God's promise in his covenants with man. Roberts affirms the pretemporal covenant made between God the Father and Jesus Christ in heaven. Yet he explains the matters of this pretemporal covenant in terms of a mediatory office. God the Father promised Jesus Christ the threefold office of priest, prophet, and king. Jesus Christ, on his part, responded by promising to undertake the threefold office imposed on him by the Father in order to recover his seed, the elect. Christ meritoriously purchased recovery for his seed as a priest, revealed this recovery as a prophet, and effectually applied it to his seed as a king. In the first three covenants of promise, Christ was promised as follows: as a bruiser of the serpent's head under the Adamic covenant, as a savior of the elect seed and remnant in the Noachian covenant, and as the one who would bless the kindred of the earth in Abraham's covenant. And Melchizedek typified Christ's priesthood and kingship in Abraham's covenant. Yet, Christ's threefold office was more clearly typified in the fourth and fifth covenants: his prophetic role, under the type of Moses, his priesthood under the type of Aaron, and his kingship under the type of David. In the sixth covenant of promise, with

the captives in Babylon, some notable efficacy of Christ's office is set forth, that is, redeeming, cleansing and sanctifying his guilty and polluted people. Since Calvin introduced the concept of Christ's threefold office, the doctrine of the *munus triplex* has been a characteristic of the Reformed doctrine of the work of Christ. Roberts' understanding of the covenants of promise in terms of the threefold office of Christ clearly puts his covenant theology in the line of the Reformed tradition, especially that of Calvin.

In relation to justification by faith Roberts deals with the assurance of faith. Using the *sylogismus practicus* for the assurance of faith, he appeals to both Scripture and conscience as the foundation of this assurance. By formulating his practical syllogism on both Scripture and conscience, Roberts holds his covenant theology firmly on the orthodox Reformed ground. Moreover, in the imputation of faith for justification, Roberts understands faith as an instrument that apprehends and receives Christ's righteousness and obedience offered in the gospel by the help of the Holy Spirit. Understanding of faith as an instrumental cause of justification is the view of the mainline Reformed tradition and accords with the Reformers' principle of *sola fide*. In addition, taking Jesus Christ's perfect righteousness and obedience as both meritorious and material causes of justification, Roberts exalts Christ and brings glory to him alone (*solī Deo gloria*).¹

While Roberts opposes Roman Catholics, Socinians, and Arminians in respect to justification by faith, he turns against antinomians in terms of the Mosaic law. Like

¹Francis Roberts, *The Myserie and Marrow of the Bible: viz. God's Covenants with Man* (London: R. W. for George Calvert, 1657), 575-635. The length, detail and polemical nature of the topic prevent its full discussion in the present work; the literature on the topic both modern and the seventeenth century is vast.

many other Reformed thinkers, including Calvin, Perkins, and the Westminster divines, Roberts holds that the moral law given on Mount Sinai is in some sense abrogated, but in other sense still obligatory under the New Testament. The moral law, as part of the Old Testament administration peculiar to those times, which offered Christ only as promised but not yet performed, was abolished by the new covenant established by Jesus Christ at his death. Yet, the moral law is not abrogated but obligatory under the new covenant, as it is either declarative of the law of nature or preceptive in regard to its matter and substance. Thus, Roberts confronts antinomians who insist on the total abrogation of the moral law given on Mount Sinai for the Christians under the New Testament. Moreover, he puts himself among mainline Reformed thinkers who understand the moral law given on Mount Sinai still to be obligatory under the New Testament as the guide for Christian life.

Roberts understands the Mosaic law, that is, the Sinai covenant, as an administration of the covenant of faith. In the Sinai covenant he finds a perfect harmony of the law and gospel. In this respect, he goes beyond his predecessors who saw believing as the condition of the Sinai covenant and thus understood it as a covenant of faith. According to them, the law taken more largely is identified with the Sinai covenant, and it requires believing in Christ as its condition, so it is a covenant of faith. If the law is taken more restrictively, it becomes an abstracted rule of righteousness, and requires perfect doing. It then becomes a covenant of works. Yet Roberts thinks their explanation is unsatisfactory in clarifying the relation between doing and believing, the two conditions of the Sinai covenant. Instead, Roberts shows that in the Sinai covenant God purposely put two opposite conditions together, that is, works and faith or perfect doing and believing. But it is not a

mixture of the covenant of works and the covenant of faith, but a covenant of faith in which the law and gospel harmoniously combine through Jesus Christ's perfect doing and believers' faith in him. Here Roberts does not merely follow in the steps of his predecessors but further develops the Reformed doctrine of covenant by placing it on firmer scriptural foundation. He explicitly moves beyond Ball and Cameron's formulations and states his Reformed view against the Socinians.

According to Roberts, the Holy Trinity is the author of the new covenant. He understands the performance of the covenant blessings of the Holy Trinity, that is, one of the external works of God (*opera Dei ad extra*), as based on the internal activity of God (*opera Dei ad intra*), especially on the personal relationship between the three persons in the Holy Trinity (*opera Dei personalia*). In his understanding, the immanent relation of the three persons themselves (*opera immanentia per se*) is reflected in the order of the external working of God the Trinity (*opera Dei ad extra*). He also speaks of a manner of working that corresponds to the interpersonal relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit (*modus agendi*) in the works of God performed by the Godhead in its oneness (*opera communia* or *opera Dei essentialia*), which ground all *opera Dei ad extra*. In enumerating the new covenant benefits and in describing God's action for the effecting or authorizing of this covenant, Roberts explains the external works of God as the works of one or another of the persons of the Trinity after a certain manner (*opera certo modo personalia*). By this, he puts himself among the Protestant scholastics who typically explain the *opera Dei ad extra* as the *opera certo modo personalia*.

Treating the new covenant, Roberts fully elaborates his view of Christ and his mediatorship as the center of God's covenants with man, especially that of the covenant

of faith. In the new covenant Christ is represented in his person, his offices, and the efficacy of his offices, both toward Jews and gentiles more clearly, fully, and gloriously than in all the previous covenants. Among many differences between the covenants of promise and the new covenant, Roberts thinks the most important is that in the old covenant Jesus Christ was represented as mediator only as promised, yet in the new covenant he is clearly set forth as the mediator revealed and efficacious. Elaborating the doctrine of the *munus triplex* to the fullest in the new covenant, Roberts emphasizes the mediatorship of Jesus Christ in the covenant of faith.

Roberts' version of covenant theology, resting as it does, on a tradition of Reformed thought and debate extending back to Calvin and building on such later thinkers as Ball and Cameron, represents a mature form of covenant thought that parallels developments on the continent—although, as we have seen, without explicit reference to Cocceius and the debate over his theology. The similarity to Cocceius' project is significant, however, and goes beyond Roberts' occasional reference to the *amicitia Dei* as covenantal. Cocceius, according to Willem J. van Asselt, proposed his own synthesis of *Heilsgeschichte* (*heilshistorie*) and *ordo salutis* (*heilsorde*)—as distinct from the more strictly *ordo salutis* approach of Gisbert Voetius.² But, of course, Cocceius' approach would require much further modification (given the problem of his theory of covenant abrogations) for his synthesis to become normative. Without citing either Voetius or Cocceius, perhaps because of his roots in the English tradition of Perkins, Ball and others, Roberts offers both a salvation-historical and an *ordo salutis* approach, fusing the two together—without

²W. J. van Asselt, "Voetius en Cocceius over de rechtvaardiging," in *De onbekende Voetius: Voordrachten wetenschappelijk symposium Utrecht 3 maart 1989*, eds. J. van Oort et al. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1989), 32-47.

the drawbacks of Cocceius' abrogation schema. In other words, Roberts offers a synthesis of issues that divided the continental Reformed, in the controversy between Cocceius and Voetius, and which would only approach resolution in later development among followers of Cocceius (like Franz Burmann) and of Voetius (like Witsius and Petrus van Mastricht).

Roberts' place in the Reformed tradition is marked not only by his doctrinal formulations but also by his consistent citation of the works of his predecessors and contemporaries. Besides many early church fathers he cites Reformers like Luther, Calvin, Musculus, and Vermigli. Among the continental Reformed thinkers he cites Beza, Zanchi, Ursinus, Pareus, Gomarus, Keckermann, four Leiden professors (especially Rivetus), Wendelin, and many others. He has also cited, frequently with appreciation, the great Lutheran scholastic, Johann Gerhard. And among the British thinkers he cites Perkins, Ainsworth, Cameron, Ball, and many others. Among those numerous authors Roberts cites Calvin and Augustine much more often than any other writers, but he does not mention the names of Zwingli, Bullinger, or Tyndale to whom McCoy and Baker ascribe the so-called bilateral covenant tradition. In fact, his numerous citations and analysis of the Protestant and Reformed tradition serve to illustrate a series of points made in the introduction to this thesis. The massive citation and analysis of Protestant theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, both British and continental, demonstrate the international scope of Roberts' Reformed theology, his conscious identification with the broader Reformed tradition, and his continuity on many points with the thought of Reformers like Luther, Calvin, Musculus, and Vermigli. In this respect Roberts' covenant theology serves as a counter to the somewhat rash

generalization of Hall, Kendall, Rolston, and Torrance, who try to see a discontinuity between the Reformers' teaching, especially that of Calvin, and Puritan covenant theology.

Of course, this is a continuity within a developing tradition. Neither Calvin nor Bullinger, for example, argued a covenant of works. Yet they both assumed a unity of the covenant of grace through several dispensations or administrations, a point developed in the later tradition and by Roberts. We have also seen other points of continuity in the sacramental understanding of the trees and the lack of a covenant-mediator in the Garden of Eden. There is, moreover, a continuity of a theology of grace, with salvation grounded in faith.

Moreover, Roberts not only acknowledges but also elaborates the conditionality of the postlapsarian covenant within the limit of divine grace that is the framework of God's covenants. Like the mainstream of ancient and modern Christian writers, he firmly confesses the precedence of divine grace and sees unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ as the requirement of man. It is important that Roberts holds the conditionality of the covenant of faith with the doctrine of double predestination premised in the whole scheme of his covenant theology. In Roberts' view, the covenant is unilaterally given but, once given, is defined by its conditions and by its demands for human responsibility. At least in Roberts' covenant theology, therefore, there cannot be found the so-called divergence between the Calvinist line of unilateral covenant tradition and the Zwingli-Bullinger-Tyndale line of bilateral tradition, which McCoy and Baker assert. Instead, Roberts' covenant theology shows a clear continuity to Calvin's theology with his emphasis on the

conditionality of the covenant of faith—and this continuity is demonstrated by Roberts' citations of Calvin's commentaries.³

Jesus Christ is the center of Roberts' covenant theology. In terms of the extent of Christ's satisfaction, like Gomarus and Ball, Roberts holds fast to the view of limited atonement. Moreover, throughout his covenant theology Roberts takes the doctrine of predestination for granted, and often relates it to his view of covenants. He clearly speaks of the elect as the only beneficiaries of any kind of covenant blessings and the reprobates as without any covenant promises and blessings. Though Roberts assumes predestination as the premise of his covenant theology, yet it is not in the least its central dogma. Instead, the center of his covenant theology is Christ, the Mediator between God and man. His elaboration of the doctrine of the *munus triplex* throughout the covenant of faith, especially in the new covenant, shows his covenant theology is in clear continuity with Calvin's basic Christological structures. Even in explaining the assurance of salvation with reference to effectual calling, Roberts relates the believers' assurance of salvation to their relationship with Christ. He clearly points to Christ for those who strive for assurance of salvation, although he exhorts those who already have assurance of salvation to walk worthy of Jesus Christ.

In Roberts' covenant theology, the basic Christological structures of the Reformed tradition harmoniously combine with the covenantal emphasis on historical continuity. Although his immediate predecessors in covenant theology are Ball and the Westminster divines, Roberts cites Calvin and Augustine much more often. In many important points Roberts follows Ball and the Westminster divines, but Roberts develops the inherited

³Note that this remains the point of contention with Baker, who consistently fails to cite Calvin's commentaries with their clear sense of bilateral covenant.

Reformed covenant doctrine by elaborating on it with a clearer understanding of Christ and his mediatorship. Not only by inheriting the covenant doctrine of his Reformed forerunners but also by developing it with the Christological emphasis and the firmer scriptural foundation, Roberts establishes his covenant theology in the mainline of the Reformed tradition.

Roberts' achievement, moreover, was massive. In detail of argument, in grasp of the preceding tradition, and in development of the historical dimension of covenant theology, his work stands as comparable to the great continental covenant treatises of Cocceius and Witsius. Like them, Roberts presents the covenantal model as fundamental to the Reformed understanding of the whole of theology, and more like Cocceius than Witsius, he focuses on the salvation-historical march of the covenant through its various dispensations. He clearly sums up the English covenant tradition in what is certainly its most doctrinally and exegetically developed essay. He is clearly a thinker whose work merits greater recognition.

APPENDIX

THESES

1. By distinguishing God's covenants into the covenant of works and the covenant of faith (instead of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace) Francis Roberts argues the necessity of grace prior to the fall much more clearly than his predecessors.

2. Francis Roberts finds the evidences of the covenant of works in (1) the moral law in Adam's heart before the fall, (2) God's positive law regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, (3) the sacramental use of two trees in paradise, and (4) the sad result of the first Adam's fall in all his ordinary posterity.

3. A characteristic of Francis Roberts' covenant theology is his distinction of the covenants of promise into six periods: (1) from Adam (after the fall) till Noah, (2) from Noah till Abraham, (3) from Abraham till Moses, (4) from Moses till David, (5) from David till the Babylonian captivity, and (6) from the Babylonian captivity till the death of Jesus Christ.

4. Despite two opposing conditions (works and faith or perfect doing and believing) in the Sinai covenant, Francis Roberts does not think it a mixture of the covenant of works and the covenant of faith but a covenant of faith in which the law and gospel harmoniously combine through Jesus Christ's perfect doing and the believers' faith in him.

5. Francis Roberts' elaboration of the doctrine of the *munus triplex* throughout the covenant of faith, especially in the new covenant, shows the clear continuity between his covenant theology and John Calvin's basic Christological structures.

6. According to Irenaeus, since the first man's "infancy" is understood as a lack of perfection in need of completion and elevation in the recapitulative of the second Adam, God's work through the covenantal history is the answer to both the imperfection of the created things and the Gnostic attack on the long history of human misery between the original sin and Christ's salvation.

7. Attributing both the beginning and keeping of faith solely to God's grace, Augustine emphasizes the divine mercy in election, but he does not provide believers with firm assurance of salvation because he insists that perseverance in faith depends on God's will which is totally unsearchable for men.

8. By denying the absolute necessity of Christ's passion and attributing its hypothetical necessity to God's foreordination, Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the atonement exalts the divine sovereignty in Christ's passion.

9. According to John Calvin, the Reformers, separated from the Roman Catholic Church, are not schismatics but representatives of the true Church based on God's word and supported by the ancient church whereas the Roman Catholic Church is not the church because she has neither God's word, nor Christ in total.

10. By relating predestination to the acceptance of the gospel, Philip Melancthon wants to show that God's predestination is the comfort for those people who accept the gospel.

11. God's forgiveness goes beyond our grasp of time, for he forgave us our sins in the death of Jesus Christ before we confess them.

12. As God leads our way step by step, he does not show our ultimate end of our lives all at once but only the immediate goal for our growth.

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