

URSINUS' DEVELOPMENT OF THE COVENANT OF
CREATION: A DEBT TO MELANCHTHON OR
CALVIN?

PETER ALAN LILLBACK

Introduction

THE fame and importance of Zacharias Ursinus rests chiefly in his coauthorship of the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Another important contribution by Ursinus to the theology of the Reformed Church has frequently been overlooked either due to preoccupation with his *magnum opus* or the general obscurity that surrounds the early origin and development of covenant theology. This second important contribution is the first clearly articulated statement of the covenant of works which Ursinus designated the "covenant of creation" or the "covenant of nature." These terms are encountered for the first time in the *Summa Theologiae*, one of two catechisms published by Ursinus in 1562 one year before the *Heidelberg Catechism*. He wrote,

(10) Quid docet lex divina?

Quale in creatione foedus cum homine Deus iniveriet; quo pacto se homo in eo servando gesserit: et quid ab ipso Deus post initum cum eo novum foedus gratiae, requirat; hoc est, qualis et ad quid conditus sit homo a Deo, in quem statum sit redactus: et quo pacto vitam suam Deo reconciliatus debeat instituere.

This concept is employed again by Ursinus,

(36) Quod est discrimen Legis et Evangelii?

Lex continet foedus naturale, in creatione a Deo cum hominibus initur, hoc est, natura hominibus nota est; et requirit a nobis perfectam obedientiam erga Deum, et praestantibus eam, promittit vitam aeternam, non praestantibus minatur aeternas poenas. . . .¹

¹ August Lang, *Der Heidelberger Katechismus* (Leipzig, 1907), p.153; *ibid.*, p.156.

As Ursinus stated the covenant of nature or of creation in opposition to the covenant of grace, and defined the goal of the covenant as life by means of perfect obedience, he had laid the foundation for later covenant theologians' discussion of this idea.

With such an important breakthrough, the question of what stimulated Ursinus to think along these lines naturally arises. The most popular position among German scholars is to attribute Ursinus' theological development to Melanchthonian influences. Such a connection has considerable presumptive support in that Ursinus was a student of Melanchthon for seven years and enjoyed a close relationship of mutual esteem and friendship.² It is also known that Ursinus used Melanchthon's *Examen Ordinandorum* while he taught at the Elizabether Gymnasium in Wittenburg. When the Crypto-Calvinism controversy in 1559–60 brought reproach for Melanchthon, Ursinus remained faithful to his teacher's eucharistic teaching. Ursinus only left Wittenburg after Melanchthon died in April, 1560, which is perhaps a further evidence of their kindred spirit.

The earlier form of this position was taken by Heinrich Heppe.³ He believed that the heart of German Reformed theology was a rejuvenation of Melanchthonian theology in that it was united in its opposition to the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination. According to this construction, the doctrine of absolute predestination resulted in loss of piety and frigid theological disputes. Thus to combat this and to safeguard the doctrine of assurance, predestination was only mentioned regressively and never absolutely. Thus federalism is seen as an outgrowth of the Melanchthonian desire to protect the human will from the excesses of absolute predestination. Heppe would appeal to the omission of an explicit doctrine of predestination in the *Heidelberg Catechism* as proof of this characteristic of anti-predestinarian covenantal theology.

² For a general biographical introduction to Ursinus' life, see C. C. Porter, "The Authors of the Heidelberg Catechism" in *Tercentenary Monument* (Phila., 1863), pp.207–28. For a detailed study of Ursinus' early life and theological development, see Erdmann K. Sturm, *Der junge Zacharias Ursin* (Neukirchener Verlag, 1972), *passim*.

³ Heinrich Heppe, *Dogmatik des deutschen Protestantismus im 16ten Jahrhundert* (Gotha, 1857), I:139ff., 188ff.

Heppe has received several pointed criticisms of his historical analysis of German Reformed covenant theology that appear to be unassailable. Philip Schaff has argued that this view is one-sided and fails to take into consideration the influence of other key Reformed leaders such as Zwingli and Calvin on the development of the German Reformed theology.⁴ Paul Althaus has pointed out that the covenant idea was being used extensively by Calvin and Bullinger before the emergence of the German Reformed theology. What makes this especially decisive for Althaus is that Calvin and later Bullinger taught a very strong view of predestination and yet were able peacefully to join it with the covenant idea. Further, some of the very theologians classified by Heppe as German Reformed theologians also taught a strict view of predestination. Althaus cites R. Eglin and Matthias Martinius as examples of those who were classified as German Reformed theologians by Heppe, but who nevertheless taught a strong predestination.⁵

Undoubtedly, Melancthon's synergistic tendency of including the human will in the causes of conversion and dismissing the doctrine of predestination as a dangerous vestige of Stoic philosophy might have been able to employ the covenant idea to strengthen its perspective.⁶ Melancthon, however, never used the covenant idea in this manner and as has just been pointed out this cannot be found in the German Reformed theologians either. The propensity to establish a dichotomy between predestination and covenant theology has been manifested by other analysts of Reformed theology. Gottlob Schrenk argues that Bullinger's use of the covenant idea is to establish a universality in the face of the prevailing rigid predestinationism.⁷ J. A. Dorner and apologists for the dispensational hermeneutic such as Fred C. Lincoln and Charles C. Ryrie place this tension of covenant and predestination as first arising with the confrontation of Cocceius with the rigid predestination teaching of the Protestant

⁴ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (Baker, 1977), I:525.

⁵ Paul Althaus, *Die Prinzipien der deutschen reformierten Dogmatik* (Leipzig, 1914), pp. 148-52.

⁶ Cf. *Corpus Reformatorum* XXI:567, 659 and IX:766 for Melancthon's statements to this effect.

⁷ Gottlob Schrenk, *Gottesreich und Bund im älteren Protestantismus* (Darmstadt, 1967), p. 44.

scholastics.⁸ This theological polarization is first seen to be a development by the New England Puritans according to Perry Miller.⁹ It is therefore apparent that Heppé's thesis that covenant theology was developed to blunt a strict predestinationism has won many converts in spite of the fact that none have followed him in placing the entire origin of covenant theology at Melancthon's feet.

While it is beyond the scope of the present study to critique this cacophony of claims in regard to the origin of covenant theology as a neutralizer of rigid predestinationism, a few remarks seem necessary. With respect to Schrenk's conception, it should be reiterated that Bullinger eventually agreed with Calvin's doctrine of predestination as Althaus pointed out above. Further, Zwingli developed the idea of the covenant in his confrontation with the Anabaptists. By stressing the covenant unity of both the Testaments, he was able to defend his appeal to circumcision as a type of baptism. Zwingli's first published expression of this covenantal idea was on November 5, 1525 in his "Antwort über Balthasar Hubmaiers Taufbüchlein."¹⁰ Thus Zwingli's work with the covenant idea antedates Bullinger's *De Testamento seu Foedere Dei Unico et Eterno* by nine years, since it was published first in 1534. In point of fact, Bullinger himself freely acknowledged his dependence on Zwingli at this very point.¹¹ Since there can be no doubting of Zwingli's determined convictions in favor of predestination,¹² the bifurcation of covenant and predestination cannot be used as the paradigm for the ex-

⁸ J. A. Dorner, *History of Protestant Theology*, 1871, II:31ff.; Fred C. Lincoln, "The Development of the Covenant Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100 (1943), 134-63; Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1965), pp. 178-83. Althaus also seems to imply an acceptance of this view, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁹ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1939), p. 55.

¹⁰ Cf. Kenneth Hagen, "From Testament to Covenant in the Early Sixteenth Century," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 3 (1972), 18-19.

¹¹ Cf. Jack W. Cottrell, *Covenant and Baptism in the Theology of Huldreich Zwingli*, unpublished Ph.D. dissertation for Princeton Theological Seminary in 1971, pp. 336-48.

¹² Cf. Ulrich Zwingli, "Of the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God," *Zwingli and Bullinger* (trans. and ed. by G. W. Bromiley; Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953), pp. 79ff.

planation of the inception of covenant theology. If these facts are accurate, they obviously rule out the other options which designate a much later date. There are, however, other serious difficulties with these suggested alternatives. In contrast to Dörner, Lincoln and Ryrie, Cocceius did hold to predestination in terms of the divine decrees, which included infralapsarianism and reprobation.¹³ If their analysis was correct, one also would not expect Cocceius' opponents to be using the covenant concept since he would be developing this idea in opposition to the rigid predestinationism of the Protestant scholastics. In contradiction to this, one finds Voetius — Cocceius' chief opponent — employing a threefold covenant scheme.¹⁴

¹³ Johannes Cocceius, *Summa Theologiae ex Scriptura repetita* (Amsterdam, 1648), Loc. V, XXXVII, XXXIX. An English translation of these passages can be found in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978), pp. 135, 152, 157.

¹⁴ Gijsbert Voetius, *Disputationes* (ed. Abraham Kuyper; Amsterdam, 1887). The citations are as follows: the covenant of works, pp. 27, 35, 40; the covenant of grace, pp. 264, 288; the work in which Voetius handled the covenant of redemption is not included in Kuyper's edition, but is found in the unabridged original edition, II:266 and is cited in Herman Witsius, *The Economy of the Covenants* (trans. W. Crookshank; London, 1837), I, 148. That Witsius quotes Cocceius' opponent Voetius on the covenant of redemption is not without importance. This is so because it exposes the fallacy of the dispensational school's explanation for the presence of covenant theology in the later Reformed creeds that are simultaneously explicitly predestinarian. In a view that appears to be unique to them, Lincoln (*op. cit.*, p. 162) and Ryrie (*op. cit.*, p. 182) assert that the synthesis of the two "opposing" doctrines of covenant and predestination was a result of Herman Witsius' theology. By his alleged development of a pre-temporal covenant of redemption, he was able to thwart Cocceius' efforts at softening Reformed predestinarianism. By his merger of covenant theology with the eternal decrees of God, a way was thus opened for Reformed theology to accept the covenantal scheme. In stark contrast to this historical construction, one not only finds Witsius citing the covenant of redemption in Voetius, but this very concept is articulated by Cocceius as well! In his *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei*, the fifth chapter is entitled "*De Pacto Dei Patris et Filii*" and develops the covenant of redemption in terms of the limited extent of the atonement (Amsterdam, 1648, cap. V, § 88-90). Thus Witsius had no need to synthesize the two views by developing the pre-temporal covenant, since Voetius and Cocceius were already in agreement on this very point. The issue in their debate had to do with theological method (scholasticism vs. biblical theology) and its implications for such

With respect to Miller's perspective, a definite rebuttal is discovered not only in the fact that Calvin had already developed a covenant theology long before the Puritans,¹⁵ but also in Calvin's use of the very ideas that Miller alleges the Puritans devised to tame the excesses of Calvinian dogma. For example, Miller portrays Calvin's doctrine of conversion as something that occurs without any advance warning, while ". . . by putting the relationship between God and man into contractual terms, they (covenant theologians) found themselves blessed with the corollary that the terms could be known in advance."¹⁶ This conception is surely inappropriate in light of Calvin's teaching the preparatory work of the law. In Calvin's reply to Cardinal Sadolet's letter, he writes,

First, we bid a man begin by examining himself, and this not in a superficial and perfunctory manner, but to sift his conscience before the tribunal of God, and when sufficiently convinced of his iniquity, to reflect on the strictness of the sentence pronounced upon all sinners. Thus confounded and amazed at his misery, he is prostrated and humbled before God. . . .¹⁷

The work of the law then leads one to Christ,

Hence it appears that it is expedient for them to be slain by the Law, and that the death which it inflicts is life-giving. And this occurs in two ways; for, first being stripped of the false opinion of their righteousness, wherein they prided themselves,

questions as the perpetuity of the sabbath, the forgiveness of sin experienced by Old Testament saints, and the number of the economies of the covenant of grace. In fact, a clear statement of the covenant of redemption appears at least as early as Ursinus' co-worker Caspar Olevianus' *De Substantia Foederis Gratuiti inter Deum et Electos* (Geneva, 1585), p. 23. Thus Ryrie's statements, that the covenant of redemption ". . . is not in Cocceius. . ." and "The Cocceian party repudiated Witsius' views, but they gained acceptance among subsequent covenant theologians," are without historical foundation (*op. cit.*).

¹⁵ Two examples of those who have attempted to correct Miller's overstatement of the tension between Calvinism and Covenant Theology are Everett H. Emerson, "Calvin and Covenant Theology," *Church History*, 25 (1956), 136-44, and George M. Marsden, "Perry Miller's Rehabilitation of the Puritans: A Critique," *Church History*, 41 (1970), 91-105.

¹⁶ Miller, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁷ *Calvin's Tracts and Treatises* (trans. Beveridge), I, 41.

they begin to seek in Christ what they mistakenly supposed might be found in themselves, so as to please God by gratuitous reconciliation, whereas they had previously sought to propitiate Him by the merit of their works, secondly, they learn that they are not sufficient to perform a single tittle of the Law, unless, being regenerated by God's Spirit, they who were the slaves of sin live unto righteousness. And hence, in fine, the utility and fruit of the teaching of the Law proceeds;

. . .¹⁸

Further, Miller advances the notion that God for Calvin was inscrutable and arbitrary, while for the covenant theologians God was restricted and circumscribed in that He had placed Himself in covenant with man.¹⁹ It must be emphasized in opposition to this, however, that Calvin already had spoken of God's binding Himself in covenant with man,

We now consider how the covenant is rightly kept; namely, when the word precedes, and we embrace the sign as a testimony and pledge of grace; for as God binds himself to keep the promise given to us; so the consent of faith and of obedience is demanded from us.²⁰

Because God has bound Himself by covenant, God's promises are sure since they are built upon the foundation of this covenant,

And we ought carefully to observe the word *covenant*, by which the Prophet points out the greatness and excellence of this promise; for the promises are more extensive, and may be regarded as the stones of the building, while the foundation of it is the covenant, which upholds the whole mass.²¹

With these few remarks regarding the inaccuracy of opposing covenant theology to predestination, this study must return to its central theme of the relationship of the covenant of works in Ursinus to Melancthon and Calvin.

While none have followed Heppé's union of Melancthon with the origin of covenant theology, many have accepted the notion of Melancthonian influence in Ursinus' development of the covenant of works. Those scholars who advocate this view in-

¹⁸ *Commentary of the Last Four Books of Moses*, III:198-99.

¹⁹ Perry Miller, "The Marrow of Puritan Divinity," *Pubs. Col. Soc. Mass.*, XXXII (1938), pp. 262-63.

²⁰ *Comm. ad Gen.* 17:9.

²¹ *Comm. ad Isa.* 59:21.

clude Paul Althaus, Karl Barth, August Lang, J. Moltmann, Otto Ritschl, Gottlob Schrenk, and Erdmann Sturm.²² Thus the consensus of recent scholarship would appear to favor the connection between Melanchthon and Ursinus with respect to his formulation of the covenant of nature.

Three key ideas appear to be at the center of this assertion of Melanchthonian influence: Melanchthon's teaching on 1) natural law, 2) the law-gospel dichotomy, and 3) the sacrament of baptism. With respect to the natural law idea, Lang writes,

. . . Ursinus discovered the creation covenant whose content is later repeated by the Law, which was a development otherwise unparalleled by the other reformers. This can be explained only by Melanchthon, who in his *Loci* (Op. XXI:711-16) like Ursinus, places the law of nature on a par with the innate *imago Dei* and with the revealed Law in the narrower sense.²³

Calvin, however, cannot be seen to be an exponent of such a conception, "Calvin, on the other hand, does not want to know much concerning the darkened law of nature. . . ."²⁴ Similarly, Althaus states,

The *Institutes* was very reserved as another expression. Calvin speaks therein indeed of the law of nature and maintains the principle of the identity of the inner law with the decalogue. But even stronger, he stresses the empirical depravity of the moral judgments, on account of which the law of Scripture was necessary. Moreover he did not think thereby, to identify the legal covenant with a covenant of nature or covenant of creation.²⁵

In accord with Althaus' comment on Calvin's use of the "legal

²² The citations for these authors' discussion of this point are as follows: Paul Althaus, *op. cit.*, pp. 146-163; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (trans. G. W. Bromiley) IV/1:54ff.; August Lang, *op. cit.*, pp. LXIV-LXVII; J. Moltmann, "Foederaltheologie," *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche* (Freiburg: Herder, 1960), IV:190-92; Otto Ritschl, *Dogmengeschichte des Protestantismus* (Göttingen, 1926), III:416-18; Gottlob Schrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-49; Erdmann Sturm, *op. cit.*, pp. 253-56.

²³ Lang, *op. cit.*, p. LXV. All translations are the author's unless otherwise indicated.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 61, insists that the "idea of a covenant of nature or works . . . was alien to the Reformers."

²⁵ Althaus, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

covenant" (*foedus legale*; *Institutes*, II,xi, 4 and *Comm. ad Jer.* 32:40) is Sturm,

While it is true that one can find the idea of the *foedus legale* in Calvin, it is not used in the sense of the *foedus creationis*. Here the word "law" signifies God's revealed law, but not natural law. The *foedus legale* is the covenant with Moses. Over against this, Ursinus' idea of the creation covenant is oriented toward Melancthon's doctrine of natural law.²⁶

Thus Ursinus is seen to further the development of federal theology under the influence of Melancthonian natural law.²⁷

The second feature of the Melancthonian influence on Ursinus' development of the covenant of creation is the Melancthonian law/gospel distinction. It cannot be denied that this distinction had an important role in Ursinus' theological construction. He himself wrote,

Partes doctrinae ecclesiae sunt duae, Lex et Evangelium, quibus summa totius scripturae sacrae continetur . . . Scripta prophetica et apostolica continent vetus et novum testamentum seu foedus inter Deum et homines. Ergo necesse est in illis explicari praecipua capita foederis, nempe, quid nobis promittat et praestet Deus . . . et quid a nobis vicissim requirat.²⁸

The Melancthonian character of Ursinus' perspective is defended by Althaus,

Ursinus is fully Melancthonian in his doctrine of law and gospel, reason and revelation, philosophy and theology. He repeats Melancthon's propositions: The whole doctrine of the church is attached to the law and the gospel; the difference of the law from the gospel is well known to all by nature as the pre-fall revelation. . . .²⁹

While Calvin did hold to a strong law/gospel distinction, he also tried to identify the Old and New Testaments as the same covenant, and thus "Calvin's covenant teaching kept itself generally in a marked lack of clarity."³⁰ Thus no movement toward a covenant of works could take place in Calvin according to Althaus,

²⁶ Sturm, *op. cit.*, p. 256.

²⁷ Cf. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

²⁸ Lang, *op. cit.*, pp. LXV-LXVI.

²⁹ Althaus, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-54.

Calvin struggles in dogmatic formulation with the great problem of the historical-religious characterization of the OT: a religion of law or a religion of redemption? It is precisely characteristic of him not fully to sympathize with the Lutheran alternative. He was not able to designate the old covenant with an idea. Thence it could not happen so long as the legal covenant was pushed onward towards the new covenant, and so long as it appeared half "evangelical."³¹

Ursinus was the first to develop the covenant of nature, because he was able to untangle Calvin's ideas and join them to the doctrine of natural law — both of which were possible due to Melanchthon's influence. Althaus explains,

This first became possible, when Calvin's merging of these two systems of ideas was given a neater separation so that the legal covenant was not distinct from the gospel covenant as the Old Testament and New Testament differed, and secondly when within the narrow range of dogmatics the revealed law of God was equated with the law of nature. Both presuppositions are fulfilled by Ursinus. The student of Melanchthon turned his master's doctrine from the law of nature to the federal arrangement . . . and thereby established the covenant of nature. . . .³²

The third Melanchthonian stimulus on Ursinus' development of the covenant of creation is with respect to the sacrament of baptism. Because of Melanchthon's expression of baptism in covenantal terms, there has been the suggestion that this influenced the development of covenantal theology.³³ It should be pointed out, however, that this influence has been seen in broader terms than just in the specific case of Ursinus' development of the covenant of works, that is, in the development of covenant theology in general inclusive of the covenant of grace. Having said this, however, the suggestion is made by Lang that this did indeed have a direct bearing upon Ursinus.³⁴ As early as the 1521 edition of the *Loci Communes*, Melanchthon had already compared circumcision to baptism in the context of signs of the

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 154–55.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 155.

³³ Cf. Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 190, and Schrenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 48–9.

³⁴ Lang, *op. cit.*, p. LXV.

covenant.³⁵ Further, he had clearly spoken of the baptismal covenant idea in his *Examen Ordinandorum*,

Sciamus autem, Baptismum non tantum esse foedus Infantium cum Deo, sed omnium adultorum, omni tempore, qui etiamsi lapsi sunt, tamen rursus ad Deum convertuntur. . . .

Certo igitur sciant conversi, ipsis renovatum esse foedus Baptismi, et ad ipsos pertinere promissionem Baptismo additam: Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit, salvus erit.³⁶

Since Ursinus had employed this work in his own teaching, it surely had to have made an impression on him. Melancthon further indicated that this covenant had stipulations and was seen as a mutual covenant,

Sciant rursus Baptismum ipsis stipulationem esse bonae conscientiae erga Deum per resurrectionem Iesu Christi, qui est in dextra Dei, ut scriptum est in Epistola Petri, id est, sciant tunc mutuuum foedus esse factum inter Deum et baptizatum.³⁷

Apart from these two places in Melancthon's works, it appears he did not make further use of the concept. None have denied the idea of a baptismal covenant in Calvin except the dispensationalists who have asserted that covenant theology was not even mentioned by the primary leaders of the Reformation.³⁸

In spite of this nearly unanimous opinion in favor of Melancthon, M. A. Gooszen and Geerhardus Vos have asserted that the connection is to be found in terms of the covenant theology developed in the Zurich area by Huldreich Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger.³⁹ Gooszen's line of argument stresses the fact that the covenant doctrine is the basic idea of Bullinger's theology and this emphasis was in turn the decisive stimulus for Ursinus' development of the covenant of creation.⁴⁰ In rejecting

³⁵ Philip Melancthon, *Loci Communes in Melancthon and Bucer* (ed. W. Pauck; trans. L. Satre; Philadelphia, 1969), pp. 133-35.

³⁶ *Corpus Reformatorum*, XXIII:42.

³⁷ *Cor. Ref.*, XXIII:42.

³⁸ Lincoln, *op. cit.*; Ryrie, *op. cit.*

³⁹ M. A. Gooszen, *De Heidelbergsche Catechismus*, (Leiden, 1890), pp. 69ff.; Geerhardus Vos, *The Covenant in Reformed Theology* (trans. S. Voorwinde and W. Van Gemeren; published privately by K. M. Campbell (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 1-3.

⁴⁰ Gooszen, *op. cit.*, pp. 69ff.

Heppe's view, Vos also rejects completely any connection with Melanchthon:

The covenant idea is regarded as one of the features of an entirely original trend which some would like to call the German Reformed school. It, in turn, is taken as not having originated in connection with the Swiss Reformation and Calvinism, but rather as being the heir of genuine, old German Protestantism as expressed by Melanchthon in the Augustana. . . . Thus, the doctrine of the covenant is supposed to be German-Protestant, not Reformed. Or rather we should not be looking for the genuine Reformed position in Geneva, but with the Germans. Melanchthon, not Calvin, would have to set the pace.

Heppe was the one who proposed this remarkable construction of history and has defended it vigorously. If it were true, the covenant concept would have to be regarded with suspicion as a strange intrusion into Reformed territory. Whatever has grown on synergistic soil cannot bear any healthy Reformed fruits.⁴¹

Vos in harmony with Gooszen suggests that Zurich rather than Wittenburg should be seen as the source of the covenantal development of Ursinus:

Both Olevianus and Ursinus, the well-known Heidelberg theologians, stood in the closest connection to the Zurich theologians. Olevianus had had a stay in Zurich, and Ursinus had even been there twice. It is, therefore, obvious that the influence which the covenant concept had on them is to be attributed to this connection. Ursinus applied it in his *Larger Catechism*⁴² [i.e., the *Summa Theologicae* cited earlier].

Calvin, however, should not be seen as a primary influence:

In Calvin, too, mention is not seldom made of the covenants. However, his theology was built on the basis of the Trinity, and therefore the covenant concept could not arise as a dominant principle in his case. He is the forerunner of such Reformed theologians who allocate it to a subordinate place as a separate locus. Even his Geneva Catechism, where one would most expect this idea to be worked through, bypasses this issue.⁴³

⁴¹ Vos, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴³ Porter, *op. cit.*, relates the fact that it was a full set of Calvin's

Ursinus' relationship with the Reformed theologians is a crucial point in this debate. While he had been Melanchthon's pupil, he also had taken an extensive study trip in 1557-58, during which time he met Calvin twice and received a full copy of his works.⁴³ During this time, he also met Bullinger and studied with Peter Martyr. Following Melanchthon's death in April, 1560, he returned to Zurich, where he spent the winter with Peter Martyr. In fact, it was Martyr who had originally been called to fill the theological chair at Heidelberg. Having declined the call on the basis of his advanced age, he recommended Ursinus who in September, 1561, at the age of 28, was made principal of the divinity school in Heidelberg. These facts are highly significant since it must be admitted that Ursinus is by this time fully Reformed, which is particularly illustrated by his presidency of a Reformed theological school. Moreover, Ursinus' *Summa Theologiae* was not published until 1562, or well into his mature Reformed ministry.

Thus an interesting problem confronts the student of the history of dogma: Is a fundamental doctrine of Reformed orthodoxy an aspect of Melanchthonian synergism, or is it to be attributed to the solidly Reformed theologians of Zurich? Perhaps a question that is of equal magnitude arises as well: Is the covenant of creation foreign to Calvin's theology, and must it therefore be understood as an intrusion into the Calvinistic system? The remainder of this study will seek to offer solutions to these intriguing questions.

I. AN EVALUATION OF THE THREE MELANCHTHONIAN INFLUENCES ON URSINUS

The first issue to be considered is whether the doctrine of natural law as expressed by Melanchthon is in some way unique

works that were given by him to Ursinus. Sturm, however, does not mention this but speaks only of an individual book. Sturm further relates a passage from M. Adam, ". . . inde Lausannam et Genevam se contulit, ubi Calvinum ac collegas audivit sibi conciliavit. A Calvino quidem et libellis a se tum editis donatus est, quibus manu propria nomine praescripto testatus est amorem in Ursinum," pp. 109-10. This illustrates the close relationship enjoyed by Calvin and Ursinus as well.

to him, such that if it were found in Ursinus, it would have to be termed *Melanchthonian* natural law. Melanchthon expressed himself clearly on this point:

Est ergo vera definitio legis naturae, legem naturae esse notitiam legis divinae, naturae hominis insitam. Ideo enim dicitur homo ad imaginem Dei conditus esse, quia in eo lucebat imago, hoc est, notitia Dei et similitudo quaedam mentis divinae, id est, discrimen honestorum et turpium, et cum his notitiis congreuebant vires hominis.⁴⁴

It is important to realize, however, that such a perspective on natural law is found also in Melanchthon's mentor Luther. While Melanchthon had expressed his view as cited above in the 1543 edition of the *Loci*, Luther had expressed himself with equal clarity in 1538:

Circumcision and other ceremonies belonged to a certain people and to a certain time; then they came completely to an end. The Decalogue is indeed now attached to conscience. For if God had never established the law through Moses, the natural human mind would still have this notion to worship God and to esteem him highly.⁴⁵

Again in 1539, Luther wrote,

The law is written in the depth of the heart; it cannot be removed, as one can see quite well in the psalms of lamentation where the dear saints cannot bear the wrath of God; this cannot be anything else but the feeling of the law's sermon in the conscience. And the devil, too, knows very well that it is impossible to remove the law from the heart; St. Paul attests in Romans 2:14–15 that the pagans who have not received the law through Moses, and thus have no law, still are a law to themselves. They have to admit that it is the work of the law written in their hearts.⁴⁶

Thus for Luther, natural law was the same as the Decalogue itself and could be found written upon all men's consciences. This same construction is also present in Calvin's writing,

. . . the very things contained in the two tablets (of the law)

⁴⁴ *Cor. Ref.* XXI 712.

⁴⁵ *Second Disputation Against the Antinomians*, 1538, *WA* 39, 374:1ff.

⁴⁶ *Against the Antinomians*, 1539, *WA*, 50, 471:23ff.

are in a way dictated to us by that internal law . . . written and stamped on every heart.⁴⁷

. . . the law of God, which we call moral, is nothing other than the testimony of the natural law and of that conscience which God has engraved on the minds of men. . . .⁴⁸

That Calvin connects this with the image of God is demonstrated in this,

The gifts which God hath left to us since the fall, if they are judged by themselves, are indeed worthy of praise; but as the contagion of wickedness is spread through every part, there will be found in us nothing that is pure and free from every defilement. That we naturally possess some knowledge of God, that some distinction between good and evil is engraven on our conscience, that our faculties are sufficient for the maintenance of the present life, that — in short — we are in so many ways superior to the brute beasts, that is excellent in itself, so far as it proceeds from God; but in us all these things are completely polluted. . . .⁴⁹

Hence it becomes evident that Melanchthon did not have a monopoly upon the concept of natural law.

The chief objection to seeing the presence of a proper type of natural law in Calvin that would result in a creation covenant was that Calvin depreciated the function of natural law to too great an extent due to sin.⁵⁰ Apparently Lang and Althaus failed to recognize that this same point is made by Melanchthon in every edition of his *Loci*. In his 1521 edition discussing natural law, he writes,

For in general the judgment of human comprehension is fallacious because of our innate blindness, so that even if certain patterns of morals have been engraved on our minds, they can scarcely be apprehended.⁵¹

Similar comments can be found for the editions of 1535, 1543, and in the final 1555 edition.⁵² Thus even after Melanchthon's

⁴⁷ II, viii, 1.

⁴⁸ IV, xx, 16.

⁴⁹ *Comm. ad* John 3:6.

⁵⁰ See argument above.

⁵¹ *Loci* (ed. W. Pauck), p. 50.

⁵² *Corpus Reformatorum* XXI:139 (1521), 416-17 (1535), 711-12 (1543).

softening of the earlier position he had maintained with respect to free will, he still denied any real value to man's natural law knowledge because of the effects of sin. He wrote in 1555,

Now, one might ask, since an understanding of the Ten Commandments is implanted in all men at their creation, why then did God proclaim the Ten Commandments with so many great miracles before so many hundreds of thousands of men? Answer: There are many important reasons for this open magistral proclamation, but two are especially important. In the wake of sin, the light in human reason was not as clear and bright as before. Men became ever more shameless and savage, and incurred more blindness. The heathen invented and invoked many eternal beings and repugnant gods. They permitted all sorts of frightful immorality, and did not record it as vice. Against such blindness God not only proclaimed his law on Mt. Sinai, but has sustained and upheld it since the time of Adam in his Church. . . .⁵³

Ursinus expresses his conception of natural law in identical terms as found with Calvin and Melanchthon.⁵⁴ The obvious conclusion in the light of this evidence is to assert that there is really no difference in the conception of natural law found in Melanchthon, Luther, or Calvin with respect to its being identical to the Decalogue and being written on all men's hearts. It is also clear that Calvin and Melanchthon both considered natural law hopelessly damaged for any spiritual good. Thus if Calvin's doctrine of natural law excludes him from consideration as an influence upon Ursinus' development of the covenant of nature, then Melanchthon must be excluded also. If Melanchthon is seen as a possible stimulus upon Ursinus, then Calvin must be considered also.

Upon closer examination, the point with respect to the effect of sin upon natural law doctrine in Calvin actually has little bearing upon the question at hand. Since the role of the covenant of works was to offer life by perfect obedience in the pre-fall economy, the key issue is therefore not so much what remains of the original covenant by way of conscience and natural law

⁵³ Philip Melanchthon, *Loci Communes* (1555) (trans. and ed., Clyde L. Manschreck; Oxford, 1965), pp. 128–29.

⁵⁴ Zacharias Ursinus, *The Summe of the Christian Religion* (trans. D. Henry Parry; London, 1633), pp. 39, 44, 49.

according to one's teaching, but rather if such an innate natural law covenant is articulated by a theologian in his explication of the pre-fall situation. So even if Melanchthon had not taken a parallel course with Calvin in diminishing the value of natural law due to the effects of sin, one would still have to consider Calvin's possible influence because of his pointed declarations of the presence of natural law in man's unfallen state as part of the *imago Dei*.⁵⁵

It must be admitted that Melanchthon took the common doctrine of Luther and Calvin in a direction that neither of the latter did. From the beginning of his career, Luther held Aristotle's philosophy in great disdain. In his *Disputation against Scholastic Theology* in 1517, he had written,

It is an error to say no man can become a theologian without Aristotle.

Indeed, no one can become a theologian unless he becomes one without Aristotle.

No syllogistic form is valid when applied to divine terms.

Briefly, the whole of Aristotle is to theology as darkness is to light.

It would have been better for the Church if Porphyry with his universals had not been born for the use of theologians.⁵⁶

Calvin expressed himself against the Aristotelian method of the Scholastics in negative terms as well,

And even if there were in the papacy a doctrine not bad and fully false in itself, it would nonetheless be necessary to detest such a style as they have invented, because by this means they have perverted the true and natural use of the word of God.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Other passages where Calvin makes further expression of natural law either as innate or still functioning although affected by sin are: *Harmony of the Last Four Books of Moses* III:196-97, *Comm. ad Psalm* 119:52, *Romans* 2:14-15; Other significant secondary sources include: Josef Bohatec, *Calvin und das Recht* (Feudigen in Westphalen, 1934), pp. 1-50; Edward A. Dowey, *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (N. Y., 1952), pp. 56-72; John T. McNeill, "Natural Law in the Theology of the Reformers," *Journal of Religion*, XXVI (July, 1946) 168-88; Ernst Tröltzsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (trans. Olive Wyon, London, 1950), II:534-44.

⁵⁶ *Luther's Works*, (Phila., 1957), XXXI, 112-13.

⁵⁷ This is from Calvin's sermons on Job and is cited in Dowey, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-28.

Melanchthon had begun his theological writing with a negative view of Aristotle as is indicated by his remarks in the 1521 edition of the *Loci*,

When I say that the laws of nature have been impressed on our minds by God, I mean that the knowledge of these laws consists of certain so-called "concreated attitudes." This knowledge is not the product of our own mental powers, but it has been implanted in us by God. I am not concerned to make this agree with the philosophy of Aristotle. For what do I care what that wrangler thought?⁵⁸

After his early rejection of Aristotle under Luther's influence, he began to have a keen interest in philosophy. Eventually, it did become his concern to show that natural law and Aristotle agreed.⁵⁹ Melanchthon's interest in philosophy was seen particularly in ethics, and it is evident that this interest was motivated by his conception of natural law. Thus in his *Ethicae Doctrinae Elementorum* he asks the question, "Quid est philosophia moralis?"⁶⁰ To this he gives the following answer,

Est explicatio legis naturae, demonstrationes ordine in artibus usitato colligens, quantum ratio judicare potest, quarum conclusiones sunt definitiones virtutum, seu praecepta de regenda disciplina in omnibus hominibus, congruentia cum decalogo, quatenus de externa disciplina concionatur.⁶¹

It is only in this sense of justifying the Aristotelian ethics via natural law that the term "Melanchthonian natural law" can be used accurately. As far as important fundamental considerations that impinged upon Ursinus in his explication of the covenant of creation, Luther, Calvin, and Melanchthon were in full agreement.

The second suggested Melanchthonian influence upon Ursinus' development of the covenant of creation is his sharp law/gospel distinction. Melanchthon's expression of this is as follows,

Generally speaking, there are two parts to Scripture, law and gospel. The law shows sin, the gospel grace. The law indicates disease, the gospel points out the remedy. To use Paul's words,

⁵⁸ *Loci* (ed. W. Pauck), p. 50.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Corp. Ref.* 16:183ff.; 21:711ff.

⁶⁰ *Corp. Ref.* 16:167.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

the law is the minister of death, the gospel is the minister of life and peace. . . .⁶²

Again, however, this important hermeneutical device is in no way unique to Melancthon. Luther, writing against Erasmus, stated,

In these passages our Diatribe makes no distinction whatever between expressions of the law and of the gospel; for she is so blind and ignorant that she does not know what law and gospel are. For out of the whole of Isaiah, apart from that one verse, "If you are willing," she quotes not a single word of the law, all the rest being Gospel passages, in which the broken-hearted and afflicted are called to take comfort from a word of proffered grace. But Diatribe turns them into words of law. Now, I ask you, what good will anyone do in a matter of theology or Holy Writ, who has not yet got as far as knowing what the law and what the gospel is, or if he knows, disdains to observe the distinction between them? Such a person is bound to confound everything — heaven and hell, life and death — and he will take no pains to know anything at all about Christ.⁶³

If Luther's sentiments were so strong with respect to this issue, it would indeed be surprising to discover that Calvin was equally "blind and ignorant." Assuredly, Althaus is correct in asserting Calvin's identification of the Old Testament as "evangelical."⁶⁴ This is borne out in his statement to the effect that "The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation."⁶⁵ But such a broad statement must be understood by his careful exposition of the difference between law and gospel,

The promises of the Gospel, however, are found only here and there in the writings of Moses, and these are somewhat obscure, while the precepts and rewards, appointed for those who observe the law, frequently occur. The function, therefore of teaching the character of true righteousness is, with justi-

⁶² *Loci* (ed. W. Pauck), pp. 70-71.

⁶³ Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will in Luther and Erasmus: Free Will and Salvation* (eds. E. Gordon Rupp and Philip S. Watson; Phila., 1969), pp. 194-95.

⁶⁴ Althaus, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-55.

⁶⁵ II, x, 20.

fication, properly and peculiarly attributed to Moses, as is also the function of showing the nature of remuneration which awaits those who observe it, and what punishment awaits those who transgress it. For this reason Moses himself is contrasted with Christ by John when he says: "The law was given by Moses; grace and truth came by Jesus Christ" (John 1:17). Whenever the word *law* is used in this restricted sense, Moses is implicitly contrasted with Christ. We are then to see what the law contains in itself when separated from the Gospel. I must, therefore, refer what I say here of the righteousness of the law not to the whole office of Moses but to that part of it which was peculiarly entrusted to him.⁶⁶

Calvin maintained his insistence upon the unity of the covenants and the simultaneous distinction of law and gospel with remarkable consistency and clarity throughout his writings.⁶⁷ The question of Calvin's use of *foedus legale* in relation to the covenant of creation raised by Althaus and Sturm above, will be postponed to the following section in which the positive evidence for Calvin's use of the covenant of creation will be presented.

Again, it appears that Althaus has overlooked a remarkable similarity between Melancthon and Calvin at this very point. Melancthon also was guilty of making the legal covenant "evangelical":

Nor has the Scripture so given us law and gospel that you should think that only that is gospel which Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John have written, and that the books of Moses are nothing but law. But the presentation of the gospel is scattered, and the promises are sprinkled throughout all the books of the Old and New Testaments. On the other hand, law also is scattered in all the books of both the Old and New Testaments. Contrary to common opinion, history is not divided up into some periods of law only, other periods of gospel only. Sometimes law has been revealed immediately followed by the gospel; at other times they have been revealed in another way. Every age known to us is a time of law and a time of gospel

⁶⁶ *Comm. ad* Romans 10:4. For a detailed discussion of this point cf. Andrew Bandstra, "Law and Gospel in Calvin and in Paul," *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin*, pp. 11-39; and Hans Wolf, *Die Einheit des Bundes* (1958), pp. 38-55. Cf. also II, ix, 3-5.

⁶⁷ Cf. *Comm. ad* Isaiah 49:8, 55:3; Jeremiah 31:31, 32; Ezekiel 16:60-61 and *Institutes* II, x, 1-23 for passages where the continuity is stressed, and *Comm. ad* Romans 3:20, 8:3-7; Galatians 3:24-26, and *Institutes* II, xi, 1-14, for passages where the discontinuity is emphasized.

just as men have been justified in all ages in the same way. . . .⁶⁸

So it must be underlined that if Calvin's conception of the law/gospel distinction prohibited a development of the covenant of works, then Melanchthon's expression could not have been contributory either. If Melanchthon's view was a positive stimulus for Ursinus, then Calvin's presentation could have equally served as a prime mover. In fact, Ursinus expressed his idea of the continuity of the covenant in both the Old and New Testament in the precise format which is found in Calvin's *Institutes* (II, x, 1-23 and II, xi, 1-14).⁶⁹ It is therefore apparent that Ursinus did not conceive of his doctrine of the covenant of creation as being in conflict with a confused conception of the unity of the covenant. Rather, Ursinus places himself squarely within the Calvinistic understanding.

It is therefore to be concluded that the law/gospel distinction is not unique to Melanchthon; instead, there is an underlying agreement between Melanchthon and Calvin. It is therefore not proper to exclude the possibility of a Calvinian influence on this score. In fact, Ursinus shows his understanding to be exactly that of Calvin in regard to the unity of the covenant in both dispensations.

The third aspect of the Melanchthonian influence on Ursinus' development of the covenant of works grows out of Melanchthon's idea of the sacrament of baptism as a covenant. Two chief difficulties are inherent in attempting this connection between Ursinus' covenant of creation and Melanchthon's baptismal covenant. First, Melanchthon's usage of the idea was quite circumscribed and thus seemed to have no central emphasis in his system.⁷⁰ Second, there is no direct evidence that this specific idea was related by Ursinus to the covenant in the pre-fall economy. Having said this, however, the idea of a baptismal covenant surely played a crucial role in the growth of the covenant of grace. Luther had used this idea in one of his sermons on baptism as early as 1519.⁷¹ His unique translation of I Peter 3:21 (a

⁶⁸ *Loci* (ed. W. Pauck), p. 71.

⁶⁹ Ursinus, *op. cit.*, pp. 124-27.

⁷⁰ See argument above.

⁷¹ Cf. Hagen, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-10.

covenant of a good conscience with God) also resulted in Anabaptistic developments in covenantal theology.⁷² But, undoubtedly, the real focus of this idea's maturation was in Zurich with Zwingli and Bullinger. It is clear that this is the source for Martin Bucer's covenantal understanding,⁷³ and it is likely that Calvin received his initial inculcation into the covenantal baptism via Bullinger directly or mediated through Bucer.⁷⁴ Calvin spends nearly the entire sixteenth chapter of book IV of the *Institutes* discussing various phases of the baptismal question with respect to infants in the light of the covenant of grace. Ursinus' exposition of baptism is clearly covenantal, but in the light of this evidence, it would seem to be unwise to consider this a Melanchthonian baptismal covenant. It would perhaps be best to call it a Melanchthonian parallel, especially since the idea was most extensively developed and employed by the Reformed. Again it is important to reiterate that this idea in Melanchthon, while encouraging the growth of covenant theology, had no immediate effect on Ursinus' covenant of creation.

Having discussed the three Melanchthonian influences on Ursinus' development of the covenant of creation, it is quite apparent that each of them is found before Melanchthon in Luther and after him in the Reformed theologians and especially in Calvin. This fact warrants the conclusion that these ideas cannot be termed "Melanchthonian" if this implies that Melanchthon is their originator or that these ideas were in some way unique to him. It further removes the onus of synergism from the origin of covenant theology. The covenantal idea as seen in Luther and Calvin did not intend to diminish the bondage of the will in sin nor the sovereign work of God in salvation. Thus in spite of a parallel with Melanchthon at these three points, a synergistic motive cannot be placed at the source of covenant theology in general or the covenant of works in particular.

The total rejection of any influence by Melanchthon on Ursinus as affirmed by Vos must be lauded for its insight into the

⁷² George H. Williams, *The Radical Reformation* (Philadelphia, 1975), pp. 154-55.

⁷³ Cf. Bucer's letter to Zwingli, dated Oct. 31, 1524, and Zwingli's letter to the Strassburg preachers, dated Dec. 16, 1524 in *Zwingli's Sämtliche Werke*, VIII:241-50, 261-78.

⁷⁴ Cf. Schrenk, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

incongruity between Melanchthon's synergism and Reformed monergism. Nevertheless, this perspective fails to account for the close connection between the two men in their lengthy student-professor relationship. Undoubtedly, these three key ideas were learned by Ursinus from Melanchthon. But inasmuch as they were common property of the Reformers in general, it is at least misleading constantly to connect them with only Melanchthon. It must be further emphasized that Ursinus is found to be in agreement with Melanchthon only when Melanchthon's views are in unison with the Reformed theology. At those points where Melanchthon differs with the Reformed, Ursinus is found in harmony with the Reformed and opposed to Melanchthon. Examples of this diversity from Melanchthon include: monergism in conversion, predestination, and definite atonement.⁷⁵ This indicates that Ursinus was quite conscious of his disparity with Melanchthon and his affinity with Reformed doctrine. Thus it is best to remove the adjective "Melanchthonian" when discussing Ursinus' reception of the natural law idea, the law/gospel dichotomy, and the covenantal baptism.

In connecting Ursinus more closely with the general Reformed theology, the question still remains if Calvin failed to teach a covenant of works. Not only have those who have linked Ursinus with Melanchthon rejected a Calvinian expression of the doc-

⁷⁵ Ursinus pointedly rejects synergism by affirming the bondage of the will and necessity of the Holy Spirit in regeneration, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75. While Ursinus excluded a direct reference to predestination in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, in the *Summa Theologiae* published the preceding year he teaches a strong predestinarianism in question 217, "An igitur Deus non est injurius illis, quibus gratiam hanc non dat, ut possint credere et respiscere, dum eos condemnat? Nequaquam. Primum enim nemo prior dedit Domino, ut retribuatur ei, sed licet illi de suo facere quod vult. Secundo, omnes homines sua quam ex Adamo trahunt pravitate in aeternum deserunt et abjici a Deo merentur, ita ut nemo nisi ex immensa Dei misericordia servetur. . . ." in Lang, *op. cit.*, p. 183. Ursinus' doctrine of a definite atonement is found on p. 694 of *The Summe of the Christian Religion*. It must be pointed out, however, that this portion was completed by Ursinus' student David Pareus who completed the work after Ursinus' death. It does not appear unreasonable to assume that he faithfully reproduced his teacher's doctrine, especially since Ursinus' intimate co-worker Olevianus clearly taught a definite atonement. Cf. Roger Nicole, "The Doctrine of the Definite Atonement in the Heidelberg Catechism," *The Gordon Review*, VII (1964), 143-44.

trine, but so have those who would argue for the closer connection of Ursinus with Reformed theologians. Examples of this include Geerhardus Vos and John Murray.⁷⁶ Because Calvin developed all three of the so-called "Melanchthonian" influences, the possibility yet exists that Calvin was an advocate of a covenant of works. The last section of this study will endeavor to establish Calvin's status as a covenant theologian and that he did indeed teach a covenant of works.

II. IS THERE A COVENANT OF WORKS IN CALVIN'S THEOLOGY?

To challenge such a monolithic negation of the existence of a covenant of works in Calvin's theology, weighty evidence must be unveiled that has been either overlooked or improperly evaluated. The first question that needs attention in attempting an affirmative answer to the immediate question is if Calvin can legitimately be placed among the covenant theologians at all. Charles Ryrie has written, "It [covenant theology] was not even mentioned by the primary leaders of the Reformation."⁷⁷ This statement has indeed overlooked a great deal of evidence. According to the author's approximate count, Calvin uses the various forms of *foedus* and *pactum* over 150 times in the *Corpus Reformatorum* edition of the *Institutes*. The frequency breakdown of this count is as follows:⁷⁸

	<i>Foedus</i>		<i>Pactum</i>		
Introduction	0		0		
Book One	5		0		
Book Two	43		4		
Book Three	33		11		
Book Four	74		14		
Approximate Total	155	+	29	=	184

⁷⁶ G. Vos, *op. cit.*, p. 2, and John Murray, "Covenant Theology," in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, III:200-01.

⁷⁷ Ryrie, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

⁷⁸ This count was made from Ford Lewis Battles' *Concordance to Calvin's Corpus Reformatorum edition of the Institutes*. The inaccuracy of Ryrie's statement is further highlighted when one takes into account the other references given in this study. For further discussion of Luther's use of the covenant idea, cf. Heiko A. Oberman, "Wir sein Pettler. Hoc est verum," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 78, 3 (1967), 246-52.

He also uses *contractum* three times and *compactum* four times. Thus it is clear that Calvin found great use for the covenant concept in his development of the themes of the knowledge of God the Redeemer, the way in which believers receive the grace of Christ, and the church and sacraments.

Calvin's employment of this concept in a significant number of problem areas in systematic theology shows him to be much more than just a precursor of the covenant theology. Calvin uses the idea of the covenant to solve the hermeneutical problem of the relationship of the Old and New Testaments. Calvin develops the idea of progressive revelation under the rubric of God's covenant of mercy.⁷⁹ The sovereignty of God's grace in redemption is proved for Calvin in that God establishes the covenant that brings salvation (III, xiv, 6). Calvin explains passages that seem to relate justification and works by reference to the covenant (III, xvii, 6). Calvin's doctrine of predestination inclusive of both election and reprobation are developed in the context of covenant (III, xxi, 5-7). In Calvin's explication of the Christian's life of obedience, he repeatedly appeals to the conditions of the covenant as he discovers this theme in his commentaries and sermons.⁸⁰ Calvin suggests that the covenant is part of the solution of the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility (III, xxi, 6). Calvin's exposition of the church and sacraments is replete with references to the covenant (IV, xiv, 6; xvi, 1-16; xvii, 21). While it is true that no reference is made by Calvin to the covenant in his creeds or confessions,⁸¹ it would be very inappropriate to exclude him from the ranks of the covenant theologians in the light of his great utilization of the

⁷⁹ II, x, 20. It is important to note that the use of covenant as a means of describing progressive revelation precedes Cocceius in order to balance the one-sided treatment of J. A. Dorner, *op. cit.*, II:31ff.

⁸⁰ Cf. III, xvii, 5; *Comm. ad Ex.* 24:5, Gen. 17:9, Lev. 2:13, Ps. 103:18 and 132:12, Daniel 9:4. For Calvin's sermons cf. *Corpus Reformatorum* XXV, 694; XXVI, 243, 525-26, 533-37; XXVIII, 288-89. Cf. also Elton M. Eenigenburg, "The Place of the Covenant in Calvin's Thinking," *The Reformed Review*, 10 (1957), 1-22; Anthony A. Hoekema, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace," *The Reformed Review*, 15 (1962), 1-12, and "The Covenant of Grace in Calvin's Teaching," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 2 (1967), 133-61.

⁸¹ Cf. *Calvin: Theological Treatises* (ed. J. K. S. Reid; Philadelphia, 1954), pp. 26-180. Calvin omits the covenant in these writings.

concept in his development of the central doctrines of the Christian faith.

One of the key reasons as to why one is uncertain if Calvin belongs in the category of the covenant theologians is due to the varying definitions of covenant theology. McCoy defines covenant theology by three distinctive traits.

First, the doctrine of the covenant plays a pervasive and determinative role in the theology. Secondly, both Old and New Testaments are included under the covenant of grace. And thirdly, a covenant of works between God and man before the fall is said to precede the covenant of grace.⁸²

Moltmann, on the other hand, defines "Föderaltheologie" without mention of the covenant of works,

Als F. bezeichnet man eine theol. Methode, die den bibl. Hauptbegriff des Bundes als Schlüsselbegriff für a) die Bestimmung des Verhältnisses von Gott u. Mensch u. BO die Darstellung von Kontinuität u. Diskontinuität der Heilsgeschichte in AT u. NT verwendet.⁸³

Cottrell designates covenant theology by five traits,

One, covenant terminology must be used and used deliberately in the construction of the theology. . . .

Two, God's covenant with men must receive the primary emphasis. This may involve a mutual or two-way covenant between God and man, but it need not do so. . . .

Three, the use of the covenant motif must be an attempt to set forth a theology of history. That is to say, it must be an attempt to interpret the history of the redemptive relationship between God and man (*Heilsgeschichte*) in terms of the covenant. . . .

Four, the covenant of grace must extend into both the Old Testament and the New Testament eras. . . .

Five, the concept of the covenant must be the dominant motif or unifying theme of the theology; or as Moltmann puts it, it must be the *Schlüsselbegriff* or key idea. . . . it must be the "organizing principle" of the theology.⁸⁴

On the basis of these three definitions, Calvin may or may not be considered a covenant theologian. McCoy's definition would

⁸² Charles S. McCoy, *The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius*, Yale Ph.D. dissertation, 1957, p. 59.

⁸³ Moltmann, *op. cit.*, p. 190.

⁸⁴ Cottrell, *op. cit.*, pp. 292-93.

exclude Calvin on the basis of the absence of the covenant of works, provided that the scholarly consensus is correct. On the definition of Cottrell, Calvin would be disqualified due to the lack of an organization structured on the covenant. On the basis of Cottrell's fifth point, one would think that Moltmann was insisting that there be this structural aspect in the definition as well. On a more careful reading, however, Moltmann uses the *Schlüsselbegriff* with reference to "Verhältnisses von Gott u. Mensch" and not one's theology. Hence he does not require this organizing trait, which would in turn include Calvin in the genus of "covenant theologian."

All three definitions are essentially the same in that they stress the role of the covenant in explaining the relationship of the Old and New Testaments and God's soteric actions toward man. The legitimacy of requiring that there be a covenant of works or a covenantal structure prior to calling a theology "covenantal" is questionable. If the requirement of the presence of the covenant of works be maintained, then the highly influential work of Bullinger on the covenant, *De Testamento seu Foedere Dei Unico et Eterno* would have to be segregated from covenantal theology as it does not develop a covenant of works.⁸⁵ It would appear to be wiser to understand the possession of a covenant of works as a development in covenant theology rather than an essential feature. Further, the stipulation of a covenantal structure or organization is misleading. While it is true that Cocceius built his theology around the concept of the five-fold abrogation of the covenant of works, this does not imply that he was not a trinitarian theologian because he did not follow Calvin's structural pattern of the Apostle's Creed: Father (book one), Son (book two), Holy Spirit (book three), Church (book four).⁸⁶ Simi-

⁸⁵ Lang, *op. cit.*, pp. LXIV-LXVII, affirms the absence of a covenant of works in Bullinger. Althaus can be cited as one who would include Calvin in the category of covenant theologians while denying that Calvin taught a covenant of works, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-54.

⁸⁶ Johannes Cocceius, *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (Amsterdam, 1648), *passim*. The five abrogations of the covenant of works for Cocceius are: 1. sin, making the promise useless; 2. the covenant of grace, breaking the covenant of works' obligation for perfect obedience; 3. the promulgation of the New Testament, which abolishes terror and servitude, in that the sins of the OT were only overlooked, but in the NT

larly, Calvin can also be seen to be a covenant theologian while not employing a covenantal structure.⁸⁷

Having conceded that there is no covenant of works in Calvin's theology for the sake of the preceding discussion, the remainder of this study will seek to demonstrate that only the view that asserts the presence of a covenant of works in Calvin best accounts for all of the salient data. Considering the importance of the covenant idea in Calvin's thought, it should not be surprising if there is a covenant of works functioning in conjunction with Calvin's doctrine of the covenant of grace.

A. ARGUMENTS AGAINST A COVENANT OF WORKS IN CALVIN'S THEOLOGY

In seeking to demonstrate the presence of a covenant of works in Calvin, a few remaining arguments against such a view must first be considered. Bruggink begins his denial of such a covenant in Calvin by asserting that there is a complete absence of any intimation of a covenant of works made with Adam in Calvin's writings.⁸⁸ If such a statement is based on the fact that Calvin never uses the term "covenant of works," then it is obviously weak. The question is not whether the term is present but if the concept is present. Biblical parallels to this are numerous. One looks in vain in Scripture for such terms as "trinity," "hypostatic union," "inerrancy," or "the covenant of works" itself. While such is the case, many recognize the necessity of these terms due to the presence of the corresponding *concept* in Scripture. This, of course, does not demonstrate the existence of the concept; but it does neutralize the force of the argument.

sin is actually forgiven; 4. by the death of the body or sanctification in that the power of sin is conquered; 5. the resurrection of the body in that all that remains for the glorified saint are the benefits of the covenant of grace. Cf. Barth, *op. cit.*, pp. 59ff. for an interesting discussion of these five abrogations.

⁸⁷ The structural requirement encounters additional difficulty with such a theologian as Gijsbert Voetius, who used the traditional locus approach yet taught all three covenants. This same difficulty is confronted with all of the modern covenant theologians who utilize the locus method as L. Berkhof, Robert Dabney and Charles Hodge.

⁸⁸ Donald J. Bruggink, "Calvin and Federal Theology," *The Reformed Review*, 13 (1959-60), 16.

A second argument leveled against the covenant of works in Calvin by Bruggink is Calvin's statement in his commentary on Jeremiah 31:31-34, "God has never made any other covenant than that which he made formerly with Abraham, and at length confirmed by the hand of Moses."⁸⁹ This argument on closer examination proves to be specious as well. In the immediate context, Calvin is seeking to show that the "new covenant" is not contrary to the first covenant, that is that of Moses, which was in turn a confirmation of the covenant of Abraham. Thus this statement can just as easily mean that God has in essence only made *one* covenant of grace, which He continues to re-establish in history. Thus Calvin is stressing the essential unity of the contents of the covenants rather than the first moment of confirmation of the covenant. In fact, such a literal understanding of Calvin at this point would negate the very point he is attempting to expound, namely, the "new" covenant. If God only made a covenant with Abraham and Moses, then He did not make a new covenant. This understanding of Calvin is confirmed by several other considerations. Two passages clearly teach that the covenant preceded Abraham:

Now we can clearly see from what has already been said that all men adopted by God into the company of his people since the *beginning of the world* were *covenanted* to him by the same law and by the bond of the same doctrine as obtains among us.⁹⁰

The Lord held to this orderly plan in administering the *covenant of his mercy*. . . . Accordingly, at the *beginning* when the first promise of salvation was given to *Adam*. . . .⁹¹

This further overlooks the positive proof for a covenant of works in Calvin, which will be given below. Calvin also expounds the Noachian covenant in Gen. 9:9-17, which would again be another contradiction of Calvin's statement if it means what Bruggink suggests. This has considerable force for the question at hand. The Noachian covenant is not identical with the covenant of grace established with Abraham, just as the covenant of works is not identical with this covenant. If Calvin can say that God

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ II, x, 1.

⁹¹ II, x, 20.

has made no other covenant than that with Abraham and Moses and teach that God has made a covenant of another sort, namely the Noachian, then it is no more difficult to suggest that Calvin taught another covenant, the covenant of works, which too is a covenant of a different sort.

A third line of negation with respect to the question of a covenant of works in Calvin is to attempt to drive a wedge between Calvin's theology and the federal theology. Bruggink endeavors to do this first by suggesting that Calvin is essentially gracious in his doctrine of the *imago* whereas in the covenant of works of the federal theologians the confirmation in righteousness of the *imago* is anticipated on the basis of works.⁹² Unfortunately, Bruggink builds this point exclusively on a quote from T. F. Torrance's *Calvin's Doctrine of Man*. The quote itself, however, does not exclude the question of obedience from grace as Bruggink would argue. The quote is as follows:

Within the single thought of *imago dei* there is included a two-sided relation, but it is a relation which has only one essential motion and rhythm. There is the grace of God, and *man's answer to that grace*. Such an answer partakes of and subsists in the essential motion of grace. . . .

Man was not made with any settled constancy, but it was the intention of God that *by living in this wise, in utter dependence* on God's grace in a world which witnessed to him every day of how absolutely dependent he was on God's unmerited kindness, man should eventually be endowed with a more permanent *imago dei* and a more permanent life [*italics mine*].⁹³

From the italicized words, it becomes apparent that the stress on grace does not rule out man's work. Bruggink has definitely here prejudiced his case. Further, if such is the case, Calvin has no explanation for the fall at all if only grace was operative exclusively from man's work. How could grace cause the fall and why should man's work of disobedience be even considered and punished by God? Further, as pointed out above, Calvin even includes the Mosaic *legal* economy under the light of the covenant of *grace*. It will be pointed out in addition below that Calvin did see life as a result for Adam's obedience to law. A

⁹² Bruggink, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁹³ T. F. Torrance, *Calvin's Doctrine of Man* (London, 1949), pp. 52-3.

second question with respect to the *imago* cited by Bruggink⁹⁴ is that the gracious and therefore dynamic *imago* is quite incompatible with usually substantival *imago* of the later covenant of works. Yet, Calvin at Gen. 2:7 can speak of the soul as having the image engraved upon it and in the *Institutes* (I, xv, 4) speak of the "faculties" of the soul (which he defines as "an incorporeal substance") with the very parts of what he elsewhere attributes to the *imago*: understanding and will. With such a merging of "substantival" and "dynamic" features of Calvin's doctrine of the image of God, Bruggink's alleged difference is non-existent.⁹⁵

A further use of this approach of separating Calvin and federal theology is with respect to the mutual idea of the covenant, or if the covenant of grace can be spoken of with respect to man's requirement to fulfill certain conditions. Bruggink contrasts Calvin and federal theology as follows:

Whereas Calvin insisted upon God's one gracious covenant with man, and understood man, even as he existed before the Fall, to be sustained by God's grace, the federal theologians brought in the concept of attainment by works — albeit works before the Fall. Nevertheless, the seriousness with which these pre-Fall works were proclaimed set the mood for putting works between man and God. The federal constructs which further insisted upon both parties fulfilling certain conditions as prerequisites to a valid covenant constituted a further danger, which when paired with the triple covenant of works, redemption, and grace demanded works on the part of man to fulfill the conditions of the covenant of grace.⁹⁶

This portrait of Calvin's opposition to federal theology receives a destructive blow when Calvin's sermons are brought under

⁹⁴ Bruggink, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ Cf. Richard Prins, "The Image of God in Adam and the Restoration of Man in Jesus Christ: A Study in Calvin," *The Scottish Journal of Theology*, 25 (1972), 32-44.

⁹⁶ Bruggink, *op. cit.*, p. 20. Leonard J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism," *Church History* 20, 56, n. 27, can be found saying similar things respecting the question of mutuality in Calvin's covenantal idea. Murray, *op. cit.*, p. 208, seems to imply that this question was not discussed until the seventeenth century, thereby exempting Calvin from such a view of covenant and conditions.

consideration along with his commentaries. In a sermon of Calvin preached in 1555 on Deuteronomy 7:11–15, he wrote,

Let us consider in what manner this agrees that God graciously blesses us . . . and that yet He makes this condition, that we will be blessed if we have served and honored Him. At first glance there seems to be some contradiction here. If God loves us without regarding our merits, then He should not say: If . . . ! Then there should be no condition. Well, He makes a condition, as we see in this passage. And even the whole Scripture is full of this doctrine that God renders to each one according to what he deserves.⁹⁷

This particular emphasis can be found repeatedly in Calvin's sermons and commentaries.⁹⁸ Thus Calvin stresses conditions in his doctrine of the covenant to maintain a balance between sovereignty and responsibility.

One final way of proving an absence of the covenant of works in Calvin is by showing that he is deficient with respect to some of the pivotal points. An example of this is to show that Calvin did not hold to a federalist understanding of the imputation of Adam's sin. Thornwell writes in his analysis of Calvin's *Institutes*, "Federal representation was not seized as it should be, but a mystic realism in place of it."⁹⁹ Further, it must be pointed out that at the *crux interpretum* of Romans 5:12, Calvin is Augustinian and does not hold forth the federalist view.¹⁰⁰ Cunningham suggests that the reason for Calvin's failure to come to grips with this doctrine was that it was not a controverted point at his time, as is illustrated by Ambrosius Catharinus, a bishop at the Council of Trent, who held to a federalist understanding of original sin.¹⁰¹ But a facile identification of Calvin with realism must not be made because the principle of Adam as the *root* as well as the federal *head* is maintained by federalism.¹⁰² The ques-

⁹⁷ Cf. *Corpus Reformatorum*, XXVI, 532. This English translation is in Hoekema's "Calvin's Doctrine of the Covenant of Grace," p. 9.

⁹⁸ See above, note 80.

⁹⁹ J. H. Thornwell, *Collected Writings* (Richmond, Va., 1871–73), I:619.

¹⁰⁰ John Murray, *The Imputation of Adam's Sin* (Grand Rapids, 1959), p. 17.

¹⁰¹ William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (Edinburgh, 1862), pp. 371–18.

¹⁰² Murray, *Imputation*, pp. 27–31.

tion then is if there is any place at all where Calvin maintains a clear statement of the federalist principle while admitting that at a strategic spot he failed to make this point. It is worthy of note that a federalist such as Turretin, in Loc. IX, q. IX, s. 41, does not hesitate to include Calvin with the federalist view and offers pertinent passages in his works that he believes bears this point out. Two passages lucidly identify Calvin's understanding of the federalist view in terms of both *root* and representative *head*:

That is, the beginning of corruption in Adam was such that it was conveyed in a perpetual stream from the ancestors into their descendants. [This indicates the *root* concept.] For the contagion does not take its origin from the substance of the flesh or soul, but because it had been *so ordained by God that the first man should at one and the same time have and lose, both for himself and for his descendants*, the gifts that God had bestowed upon him [italics mine].¹⁰³

Calvin's use of the phrase "at one and the same time . . . both for himself and his descendants" strongly implies that Calvin did not conceive of the sin so much as the whole of humanity actually sinning in Adam (realism) as that Adam as "ordained by God" lost for "himself and for his descendants" the divine gifts belonging to the human race as their legal representative. The second passage again shows Calvin's restraint from speaking of a realistic sin of humanity in Adam and instead speaking clearly of Adam's representative action and God's ordination,

. . . for the corruption of all mankind in the person of Adam alone did not proceed from generation, but from the appointment of God, who in one man had adorned us all, and who has in him also deprived us of his gifts.¹⁰⁴

In conjunction with his federalistic understanding of original sin, he was also cognizant of the Adam-Christ parallel and expressed Christ's active obedience in a federalistic sense. Thus in Calvin's first published theological work, *Psychopannychia*, he clearly asserts the parallelism of Adam and Christ in opposition to the Anabaptist doctrine of soul-sleep:

The whole controversy turns on a comparison between Adam and Christ. They must necessarily concede to the Apostle

¹⁰³ II, i, 7.

¹⁰⁴ *Comm. ad John* 3:6.

not only that everything which had fallen in Adam is renewed in Christ, but inasmuch as the power of grace was stronger than that of sin, so much has Christ been more powerful in restoring than Adam in destroying. . . .¹⁰⁵

Even more clear are Calvin's remarks in the *Institutes*:

The second requirement of our reconciliation with God was this: that man, who by his disobedience had become lost, should by way of remedy counter it with obedience, satisfy God's judgment, and pay the penalties for sin. Accordingly, our Lord came forth as true man and took the person and the name of Adam in order to take Adam's place in obeying the Father, to present our flesh as the price of satisfaction to God's righteous judgment, and in the same flesh, to pay the penalty that we had deserved.¹⁰⁶

Because Calvin describes the fact of original sin in federalistic terms, and because he teaches that Christ's obedience was necessary to fulfill the law which was unfulfilled by Adam's sin, then if Calvin can be seen to describe justification in terms of imputation, it would be indeed difficult to deny that Calvin maintained a thorough-going federalistic fall and redemption in light of his avowed commitment to the parallel between Adam and Christ. Calvin's commitment to justification by imputation is succinctly stated in his work *The True Method of Giving Peace*, "We say, therefore, that we are justified by faith, because the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us."¹⁰⁷ In light of this consistent federalism, it would appear to be an error to exclude Calvin from the ranks of those theologians who teach a covenant of works because of his Augustinian understanding of Romans 5:12. While it must be affirmed that Calvin is not a federalist at this juncture, nevertheless, he elsewhere articulates a definitive federalism in the precise terms needed for a *foedus creationis*.

Another point where Calvin is considered deficient with regard to one of the fundamental aspects of the covenant of works doctrine is with respect to his rejection of the usual federalist interpretation of Hosea 6:7:¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁵ Beveridge, *op. cit.*, III, 456.

¹⁰⁶ II, xii, 3; *cf.* II, xvi, 4-7.

¹⁰⁷ Beveridge, *op. cit.*, III, 244.

¹⁰⁸ This point is decisive in Murray's rejection of Calvin's possession of a covenant of works, "Covenant Theology," p. 201.

Others explain the words thus, "They have transgressed as Adam the covenant." But the word, Adam, we know, is taken indefinitely for men. This exposition is frigid and diluted, "They have transgressed as Adam the covenant;" that is, they have followed or imitated the example of their father Adam, who had immediately at the beginning transgressed God's commandment. I do not stop to refute this comment; for we see that it is in itself vapid.¹⁰⁹

On a *prima facie* reading this text might seem to be an absolute denial of any idea of a covenant of works. But the point Calvin is making is that the Hebrew *Adam* usually means "mankind" rather than the first man. Thus he rejects the idea of a comparison with Adam in this text, but it cannot be equally asserted that he rejects the idea of a covenant with Adam. In fact, it might be plausibly argued that since Calvin does not specifically reject here a covenant with Adam, and since he parallels the term "covenant" with "God's commandment" in the above citation, he actually can be seen to be favoring the idea of a pre-fall covenant although not approving of this verse to support it.¹¹⁰ Even if this immediate inference is refused, still those passages which shall be cited below where Calvin clearly includes Adam in a pre-fall covenant must force us to accept the above analysis unless Calvin is to be seen in contradiction with himself.

Having responded to the various challenges against the legitimacy of finding a covenant of works in Calvin, it is now appropriate to consider the positive evidence for discerning a covenant of works in Calvin.

B. THE EVIDENCE FOR A COVENANT OF WORKS IN CALVIN'S THEOLOGY

Calvin's treatment of Adam's pre-fall state indicates that he considered Adam to be under some sort of a covenant of works. First, Calvin creates the problem for which a covenant of works is a perfect solution, namely, he describes Adam as in a temporary period of innocence, ". . . the image of God was only

¹⁰⁹ *Comm. ad Hosea* 6:7.

¹¹⁰ Calvin at times rejects the use of a passage to support what he believes because he feels that the passage cannot be used in that way legitimately, e.g., *Comm. ad Gen.* 1:1.

shadowed forth in man till he should arrive at his perfection." Again he writes, "The state of man was not perfected in the person of Adam . . ." and "before the fall of Adam, man's life was only earthly, seeing it had no firm and settled constancy."¹¹¹

Secondly, Adam was under law which if kept faithfully would have led him to a better life of no death. Calvin writes,

We now understand what is meant by abstaining from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; namely, that Adam might not, in attempting one thing or another, rely upon his own prudence; but that, cleaving to God alone, he might become wise only by his obedience.¹¹²

This abstinence was under God's law, "A law is imposed upon him in token of his subjection; for it would have made no difference to God, if he had eaten indiscriminately of any fruit he pleased."¹¹³ Ultimately, Adam would have received life for his obedience, "Truly the first man would have passed to a better life, had he remained upright; but there would have been no separation of the soul from the body, no corruption, no kind of destruction, and, in short, no violent change."¹¹⁴

A third point that aligns Calvin with the covenant of works is his treatment of the *imago dei* with respect to natural law and conscience. As was presented above, Calvin teaches that the conscience is part of the *imago dei* possessed with the law of nature which is identical with the decalogue. Thus it is clear that Calvin's conception of the pre-fall legal relationship was not simply the single prohibition of God to Adam, but was composed of the moral law as well. Since Adam would have procured eternal life by obedience according to Calvin, this implies that full obedience to the moral law and any other stipulations placed upon Adam by God would have been needed to have been fully obeyed to receive his "settled constancy." In agreement with this, Calvin gives full weight to those passages in Scripture that promise life by obedience to the moral law even after the fall. Commenting on Lev. 18:5 he writes:

Foolishly, then do some reject as an absurdity the statement,

¹¹¹ *Comm. ad Genesis* 1:26, 2:7.

¹¹² *Comm. ad Gen.* 2:9.

¹¹³ *Comm. ad Gen.* 2:16.

¹¹⁴ *Comm. ad Gen.* 3:19.

that if a man fulfills the Law he attains to righteousness; for the defect does not arise from the doctrine of the Law, but from the infirmity of men. . . . We must observe, however, that salvation is not to be expected from the Law unless its precepts be in every respect complied with; for life is not promised to one who shall have done this thing, or that thing, but by the plural word, full obedience is required of us.¹¹⁵

Again Calvin writes:

Besides, he considers the Law as connected with promises and threatenings. Whence it follows, that salvation can only be procured by it if its precepts be exactly fulfilled. Life is indeed promised in it, but only if whatever it commands be complied with; whilst, on the other hand, it denounces death against its transgressors, so that to have offended in the slightest point is enough to condemn and destroy a person; and thus it overwhelms all men with despair.¹¹⁶

If Calvin thus sees a legal relationship before and after the fall in which obedience is rewarded with life and disobedience with death, and that the law in both cases is the moral law, then it becomes very difficult to deny that Calvin has a functioning covenant of works. Further corroboration of this point is seen in the later argumentation of the federalists in which they follow this same line of reasoning as has just been gleaned from Calvin.¹¹⁷

Because of the central role of the decalogue and the innate law of nature in the development of Ursinus' covenant of nature, it has just been indicated above that this same distinction is present in Calvin's thought. In this context, the question of Calvin's use of the *foedus legale* must be considered. While Althaus and Sturm have asserted that Calvin does not relate this with a *foedus creationis* but only with the Mosaic covenant, the fact remains that Calvin sees a great consonance between the pre-fall relationship and Moses' "proper office" as lawgiver in the covenant of the law, as has just been discussed. In addition, Calvin is able to conceive of the covenant of the law as existing even in Abram's day long before Moses' work as lawgiver:

The argument of Paul is of this kind: The circumcision of Abram was posterior to his justification in the order of time,

¹¹⁵ *Harmony of the Last Four Books of Moses*, III, 204–05.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹¹⁷ Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 288–92.

and therefore could not be its cause, for of necessity the cause precedes its effect. I also grant, that Paul, for this reason, contends that *works are not meritorious, except under the covenant of the law*, of which covenant circumcision is put as the earnest and the symbol. But since Paul is not here defining the force and nature of circumcision, regarded as a pure and genuine institution of God, but is rather disputing on the sense attached to it, by those with whom he deals, he therefore does not allude to the covenant which God before had made with Abram, because the mention of it was unnecessary for the present purpose. Both arguments are therefore of force; first, that *the righteousness of Abram cannot be ascribed to the covenant of the law*, because it preceded his circumcision; and, secondly, that the righteousness even of the most perfect characters perpetually consists in faith [*italics mine*].¹¹⁸

The importance of this passage for the present discussion is that while Calvin recognizes that the covenant of the law is the particular ministry of Moses, nevertheless, he is able to call Abraham's circumcision a covenant of law in a proleptic sense. Thus for Calvin the idea of meritorious works in a covenant of law is a general principle that is not locked in specifically with the Sinaitic covenant. If one were to ask where Calvin first recognized this general principle, undoubtedly the answer would have to be in the pre-fall relationship of God and Adam. It therefore becomes even more clear that Calvin sees a great continuity between the pre-fall natural law and the Mosaic covenant of the law, which in turn argues for the fact that the pre-fall covenant of works was a reality in Calvin's mind.

One final aspect of Calvin's treatment of the pre-fall situation that argues for a covenant of works in Calvin is the presence of a sacrament:

He gave the tree of life its name, not because it could confer on man that life with which he had been previously endued, but in order that it might be a symbol and memorial of the life which he had received from God. For we know it to be by no means unusual that God should give to us the attestation of his grace by external symbols. He does not indeed transfer his power into outward signs; but by them he stretches out his hand to us, because, without assistance, we cannot ascend to him.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ *Comm. ad Gen.* 15:6.

¹¹⁹ *Comm. ad Gen.* 2:9.

The sacrament of the tree of life was a figure of Christ.

Yet I am not dissatisfied with what has been handed down by some of the fathers, as Augustine and Eucherius, that the tree of life was a figure of Christ, inasmuch as he is the Eternal Word of God: it could not indeed be otherwise a symbol of life, than by representing him in figure.¹²⁰

The importance of this Edenic sacrament is seen further in that Calvin understands the driving of Adam and Eve from the garden as an excommunication:

We know what is the efficacy of sacraments ; and it was said above that the tree was given as a pledge of life. Wherefore, that he might understand himself to be deprived of his former life, a solemn excommunication is added; not that the Lord would cut him off from all hope of salvation, but, by taking away what he had given, would cause man to seek new assistance elsewhere.¹²¹

The importance of the presence of this sacrament for the present context is that for Calvin the existence of a sacrament necessarily implies the existence of a covenant between God and man. Calvin writes:

It is well known, however, that sacraments receive that name, from being *testimonies* to us of the divine will, to confirm it in our minds. For as a covenant is entered into among men with solemn rites, so it is in the same manner that the Lord deals with us. Nor is it without strict propriety that this term is employed; for in consequence of the connection between the word and the sign, the covenant of the Lord is really included in the sacraments, and the term *covenant* has a reference or relation to us. This will be of no small importance for understanding the nature of the sacraments; for if they are *covenants*, then they contain promises, by which consciences may be roused up to an assurance of salvation.¹²²

On this basis, provided Calvin is consistent with his own view of the relationship of sacraments and covenants, there must be a pre-fall covenant. Since this covenant was built on the basis of obedience to law, it appears entirely justified to call this pre-fall covenant of Calvin's a covenant of works. Further, the excom-

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Comm. ad Gen. 3:22.*

¹²² *Comm. ad I Cor. 11:25.*

munication from the sacrament which Calvin describes as God "taking away what he had given" which would in turn "cause man to seek new assistance elsewhere" can be understood as Calvin's conception of the first abrogation of the covenant of works.

In final proof of this connection between sacrament and covenant, Calvin can at one point be found to be calling this relationship of God and Adam in Eden a covenant. Writing in the context of God's establishment of the rainbow as the sign of the Noachian covenant, Calvin remarks:

A sign is added to the promise, in which is exhibited the wonderful kindness of God; who, for the purpose of confirming our faith in his word, does not disdain to use such helps. And although we have more fully discussed the use of signs in the *second chapter* [that is, Genesis 2], yet we must briefly maintain, from these words of Moses, that it is wrong to sever signs from the word. . . . Hence we also infer that from the *beginning*, it was the peculiar property of sacraments, to avail for the confirmation of faith. For certainly in the *covenant* that promise is included to which faith ought to respond [italics mine].¹²³

It is therefore evident that Calvin considered Adam's pre-fall relationship to God to be a covenant and marked out by a sacrament that promised life or Christ Himself. When it is recalled that this life was to be gained by obedience, then it is entirely fitting to conclude that Calvin held to a covenant of works at least in a rudimentary or inchoative form. The relevance of this argument for connecting Calvin's doctrine with the later more clearly developed doctrine of the covenant of works of the federal theologians in the seventeenth century can be ascertained by comparing Cocceius' and Witsius' studies on the covenants where they both lay a great deal of stress on the tree of life as being the sacrament of the covenant of works.¹²⁴

¹²³ *Comm. ad Gen.* 9:12.

¹²⁴ Cocceius, *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei*, p. 32, "Sacramentum coelestis civitatis & aeternae vite fuit *Paradisus & Arbor vitae*, quippe haec *veram illam & aeternam vitam*, ille (hortus Dei dictus Genes. 13:10, ex eo, quod Deus ipsum plantasset, inque eo foedus vite cum homine pepigisset, & eum tanquam in suo, Dei, inquam, domicilio, ubi se ei revelaret, collocasset), *beatorum sedem adumbrabat . . .*" Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I:81, II, "God also granted to man such

CONCLUSION

If the thesis of this study is correct, the *foedus creationis* denomination of the pre-fall relationship of God and Adam cannot be understood uniquely in terms of Melanchthonian influences. While it is true that Ursinus was long a student of Melanchthon, it is equally certain that Ursinus identified his theology with that of the Reformed. While Melanchthon taught three crucial ideas necessary for the exposition of the covenant of works, namely, the natural law idea of an innate knowledge of the Decalogue, the law/gospel distinction, and the covenant of baptism, nevertheless, it must be remembered that these ideas preceded Melanchthon in Luther and were forcefully maintained by Calvin. This fact assures the separation of Melanchthon synergism from the doctrine of the covenant of works. As has been demonstrated, the contraposition of covenantal thinking with predestination is a historical inaccuracy stemming from Heinrich Heppes love for Melanchthon and German Reformed theology. This is not to deny that Ursinus may have learned these central ideas from Melanchthon, but to affirm that they are not uniquely "Melanchthonian" and thereby suspicious and perhaps dangerous for true Reformed theology.

The attempt has also been made to show that the covenant of nature or creation is not necessarily foreign to Calvin's thinking. While no absolute historical connection has been established in this discussion between Calvin and Ursinus' covenant of creation, it has been indicated that there are no trustworthy grounds to deny absolutely any connection whatsoever. In considering the "Melanchthonian" influences, it was shown that the reasons which have been used to deny that these ideas were also present in Calvin would also exclude Melanchthon's influence. Melanchthon, even as Calvin, rejects the natural law as a means of spiritual attainment. Melanchthon also recognizes, in terms sim-

symbols under the covenant of works; concerning which we are now to speak, that nothing may be wanting in this treatise; and if I mistake not, they were four in all, which I reckon up in this order. 1. Paradise. 2. The tree of life. 3. The Tree of knowledge of good and evil. 4. The Sabbath." The disagreement over the number of the sacraments of the covenant of works as well as other related questions are well illustrated in Heppes, *Reformed Dogmatics*, pp. 296-98.

ilar to Calvin, that the Old Covenant was partly evangelical. Calvin with a great deal more force than Melancthon insisted upon the baptismal covenant. Other arguments that indicated either a denial of such a covenant or the lack of a necessary component for the covenant of works or a contradiction with the theology of such a covenant have been shown to be in general weak, invalid, or inconclusive. A remarkable consonance exists between Calvin and federalism.

The arguments for affirming that Calvin taught a covenant of works in an inchoative sense appear conclusive. Calvin asserts the probative nature of Adam's pre-fall state, which would be made permanently his provided that he fully obey the legal stipulations present within himself as part of the *imago dei* and external to himself as revealed divine stipulation. Calvin's understanding of the possibility of gaining life by perfect obedience is tied to the Mosaic law even after the fall. And while Calvin designates the Mosaic covenant the covenant of the law, he is equally free to see this covenant of the law expressly at work proleptically in Abram's life, which argues that Calvin saw the covenant as a general principle that harks back to the pre-fall economy. Finally, Calvin expressed the idea of a covenant of works in his identification of the tree of life with the sacrament of life or Christ Himself. Since Calvin's doctrine of sacraments requires the presence of a covenant whenever a sacrament exists, Calvin must recognize a pre-fall covenant to be consistent with his doctrine. This consistency was discerned in that Calvin includes the pre-fall relationship of Genesis 2 within the purview of covenant in his comments on Genesis 9:12.

In final summation, Ursinus' designation of the pre-fall divine-man relationship as a *foedus creationis* must be seen as an effect of generally accepted doctrine of the reformers rather than as a specific result of Melancthon's theological formulations. Further, the possibility of Ursinus having been directly influenced by Calvin's doctrine must be positively considered rather than rebuffed in light of the incipient covenant of works in Calvin's theology. It is entirely possible that the appellation of "*foedus creationis*" is Ursinus', but the substance of the concept is a debt Ursinus owes to Calvin.

Westminster Theological Seminary,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Westminster Theological Journal
Est. 1938

(ISSN: 0043-4388)

PO Box 27009

Philadelphia, PA 19118

w tj@wts.edu

Published by Westminster Theological Seminary

*For information on subscribing, submitting articles, and more,
visit www.wts.edu/wtj.*

*For faculty information, articles, and resources,
visit www.wts.edu/faculty.*

*© 2015 Westminster Theological Seminary
All rights reserved*