

THE DOCTRINE OF THE COVENANT IN THE ELENCTIC THEOLOGY OF FRANCIS TURRETIN

by Peter J. Wallace

I. Introduction

IN RECENT DECADES several excellent dissertations have begun to look at Francis Turretin (1623-1687), at least in part due to the increasing attention on the theology of Old Princeton, and while not uniform in their conclusions, they have indicated that Turretin is not the “dry as dust” scholastic that he was made out to be by earlier historians of Reformed theology.¹ Still, the paucity of Turretin studies is disappointing, as most Post-Reformation scholars have focused on the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Even more disappointing is the absence of a single study of Turretin’s doctrine of the covenant of grace.² This lack is not only true of

¹John Walter Beardslee, III, “Theological Development at Geneva Under Francis and Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1648-1737)” (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1956); Timothy Phillips, “Francis Turretin’s Idea of Theology and Its Bearing Upon His Doctrine of Scripture” (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1986); Stephen Robert Spencer, “Reformed Scholasticism in Medieval Perspective: Thomas Aquinas and Francois Turretini on the Incarnation” (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1988).

²On the Covenant of Nature Stephen Spencer has provided a helpful discussion in “Francis Turretin’s Concept of the Covenant of Nature,” *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, edited by W. Fred Graham, Vol. XXII Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994): 71-92. Stephen Strehle has given a brief (though unsatisfying) sketch of Turretin’s covenantal views in his *Calvinism, Federalism, and Scholasticism: A Study of the Reformed Doctrine of Covenant* (Bern & New York: Peter Lang, 1988), 301-322.

Turretin, but also of the late seventeenth century as a whole. With the exception of a few treatments of Johannes Cocceius, virtually no one has looked at the continental Reformed responses to the Arminian and Amyraldian reformulations of the covenant.

Francis Turretin, often known as one of the chief defenders of Reformed confessionalism in the declining years of Genevan orthodoxy, articulated a nuanced response to these developments, as well as the rising Cocceianism in the Dutch churches. Turretin's response is of further interest because he distinguishes between the heretical Semi-Pelagian challenge of the Arminians and the dangerous and erroneous, but not heretical conclusions of Amyraut.³ Far from the reactionary conservative of many portraits, at least on this issue Turretin appears as a moderate conservative, attempting to maintain the traditional Reformed doctrines, while making careful distinctions in his analysis, and treating his opponents fairly and responsibly. So while Turretin may on the one hand affirm that "I avoided [novelty] most diligently lest it should contain anything new, a stranger from the word of God and from the public forms received in our churches, and nothing is built up there that is not confirmed by the vote of our most proven theologians" in the same tenor of Charles Hodge's affirmation nearly two-hundred years later,⁴ it is with the same understanding that what is being preserved is the content of Reformed theology,

³Turretin appears to distinguish between heresy and error, because even while he is in the midst of refuting Amyraut and his colleagues, he declares that "the foundation of faith thus far remains safe on both sides through the grace of God" and speaks of the Salmurians as "our men" who affirm "the capital doctrines of the faith which we all constantly defend against the Pelagians and Semi-Pelagians" (i.e., the Arminians), *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1993-1994), IV.xvii.12. This does not prevent him, however, from spending the next twenty pages refuting their "general" decree of universal mercy as "less becoming to God . . . inconsistent with itself, departs from the form of sound words and . . . dangerous on account of multiple consequences which it draws after itself" (IV.xvii.13).

⁴Hodge remarked in his "Retrospect of the History of the *Princeton Review*" in 1870, "an original idea in theology is not to be found on the pages of the *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* . . . the phrase 'Princeton Theology,' therefore, is without distinctive meaning." Quoted in Peter Wallace and Mark Noll, "The Students of Princeton Seminary, 1812-1929: A Research Note," *American Presbyterians* 72:3 (Fall 1994): 203.

not necessarily that there has been no growth and development in the understanding of that theology.

A. Thesis

While appreciating the contributions and concerns of the leading innovators in Reformed theology such as Moises Amyraut and Johannes Cocceius, Turretin refrained from following in their footsteps, recognizing that their departures from traditional orthodoxy would seriously impair the integrity of Reformed theology. Nonetheless, Turretin himself was more concerned with the radical heresies which confronted the Reformed churches, and attempted to reconcile his friendly foes both on the left and on the right, through irenic polemics.

Standing firmly in the federalist camp, Turretin advocated a moderate covenant theology, refraining from positing a third covenant of Law while recognizing significant discontinuity between the Old and New Testaments. Vigorously asserting the unity of the covenant of grace against its seventeenth-century detractors, Turretin nonetheless carefully distinguished between those who had departed from Reformed orthodoxy, and those who were on the fringes. Attempting to hold together the fragmented remnant of the continental Reformed churches, Turretin sought to avoid the twin pitfalls of theological arrogance and theological relativism. His masterful treatment of the covenants maintains careful distinctions between covenant and testament, universal and particular, substance and accidents, law and gospel, works and faith — distinctions often lost in contemporary polemics.

Since Turretin's is a polemical theology, it is necessary to sketch the historical background which he assumed would be familiar to his readers. Having studied at Geneva, Leyden and Saumur, he was well acquainted with the leading figures of continental Reformed theology, and the controversies which swirled around them. Therefore after briefly discussing the question of the relationship between scholasticism and covenant theology, we will explore the seventeenth century debates surrounding the covenant, before turning to address the treatment of these debates in his *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (1679-1685).

B. The Question of Scholasticism

While many scholars have attempted to pit scholasticism against federal theology, they have inevitably had to admit that the two were not diametrically opposed.⁵ The traditional definition of Protestant Scholasticism has generally agreed with McCoy's assertion that scholasticism moved from philosophy to faith, resting upon deductive reasoning from accepted authority, and "tending toward massive systematization, buttressed by appeal to authority, and intellectualistic with reference to faith,"⁶ but in recent years, a more nuanced definition has arisen, recognizing that scholasticism is more a pedagogical than a theological method. Richard Muller first questioned the propriety of McCoy and Armstrong's definition on the grounds that it did not correspond to the actual method of the supposed "scholastics" themselves,⁷ and Stephen Spencer has since pointed out the value of comparing Reformed and Medieval Scholasticism, showing areas of continuity and discontinuity between representative theologians of the two periods, Francis Turretin and Thomas Aquinas.⁸

Timothy Phillips's work on Turretin's theological method has conclusively shown that his scholasticism is not to be equated with a sort of rationalistic approach, but is firmly rooted in his Reformed understanding of the character of theology as a *sui generis habitus*: that

⁵Following Hepppe, this interpretive tradition has included Armstrong, Bell, Good, Lincoln and McCoy. Strehle has done us the favor of pointing out that Turretin is a scholastic federalist, but so far few scholars have challenged the idea as a false dichotomy.

⁶Charles S. McCoy, "The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1957), 136. He goes on to assert that the Reformed scholastics began "with the Eternal Decree of predestination ...[and] deduced their systems with ruthless consistency, exercising a chilling and deadening influence on much church doctrine of the seventeenth century." Also see Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 32, which has been influential in many subsequent studies. What is interesting to note is that recent scholarship into the seventeenth-century "scholastics" has been largely unable to turn up any such theologians.

⁷Richard A. Muller, "Giving Direction to Theology: The Scholastic Dimension," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28:2 (June 1985): 183-193.

⁸Stephen Robert Spencer, "Reformed Scholasticism in Medieval Perspective: Thomas Aquinas and Francois Turretini on the Incarnation," (Ph.D. dissertation, Michigan State University, 1988).

theology cannot be identified as a strict science, following the dictates of reason, but is dependent upon the joint operation of Word and Spirit.⁹ Crucial to Turretin's discussion of theology is his distinction between archetypal theology (the original and infinite knowledge which God has of himself and of all created things) and ectypal theology (the derivative and finite knowledge which man has of God and created things), and the further distinction between the ectypal theology of vision, which is the theology of the saints in heaven, and the ectypal theology of the traveler—"the theology of revelation"—with which we must remain content.¹⁰ Far from exuding too much confidence in his own powers of ratiocination, Turretin himself implores his readers in his preface: "since I am a man (and I do not suppose that I am free from any human limitations), if anything would be said by me here that would correspond little with Scripture united with the rule of our faith, not only do I want it to be unsaid, but even to be stricken out."¹¹

The relationship between covenant theology and scholasticism has not yet been fully worked out, but Spencer's comments on Turretin demonstrate that they came to a happy union in his theology: "Whereas for Cocceius, covenant theology seemed to be opposed to scholasticism, Turretin displays the harmonization of those movements. He is at once thoroughly scholastic and profoundly covenantal."¹²

II. Covenantal Influences on Turretin

The son of Benedict Turretin (1588-1631), himself professor of theology at the Academy (1612-31), Francis Turretin was educated in Geneva by two staunch defenders of Reformed orthodoxy, Jean Diodati (1576-1649) and Theodore Tronchin (1582-1657), both of whom had been the Genevan delegates to the Synod of Dort. A

⁹Phillips, "Francis Turretin's Idea of Theology," 301-2. Turretin develops this in I.vi.1-8, where he asserts that philosophy and reason must always remain handmaidens to theology, to which all other disciplines must bow.

¹⁰Turretin, I.ii.6.

¹¹Turretin, "Preface to the Reader," xlii.

¹²Spencer, "Francis Turretin's Concept of the Covenant of Nature,"

promising theological student, he was sent to travel and study abroad in the Netherlands and France, the two hotspots of seventeenth-century covenantal debate and development on the continent. His first stop was Leyden where he studied with Friedrich Spanheim who had taught philosophy and theology in Geneva from 1626-41, (succeeding Benedict Turretin as professor of theology in 1631).¹³ After making the acquaintance of Voetius, Rivet, and other Dutch luminaries, he spent several months in Paris before traveling to Saumur to hear the famous Salmurian trio of Placaeus, Capellus, and Moises Amyraut, whom he would later strongly but gently oppose. He returned to Geneva in 1648, where he served the Italian congregation for three years before being called to a pastorate in Leyden, from 1651-52. In 1653, however, the council of Pastors of Geneva issued a call to the young Turretin to take up the retiring Tronchin's chair as professor of theology at the Academy. This theological education gave him a broad exposure to the various developments in Reformed theology since the late sixteenth century.

Francis Turretin would have studied with Tronchin, Diodati and Morus in the early 1640s at Geneva, where he would have received mixed signals: while the leading theologians were opposed to the Salmurian school, Morus was sympathetic. In Leyden, however, Turretin would have been studying with Spanheim at a time (the mid-1640s) when he was engaged in an exhaustive refutation of Amyraut's teaching on universal grace. It is perhaps noteworthy to remark that Spanheim's successor at Leyden in 1649 was Johannes Cocceius, who would have been professor of theology at the time that Turretin pastored in that city from 1651-52.¹⁴ It would have been impossible—especially for a thinker of Turretin's

¹³The departure of the solidly conservative Friedrich Spanheim from Geneva to Leyden in 1642 had been a sore loss to the Reformed, because this stout defender of orthodoxy was replaced by Alexander Morus (1616-70), a young theologian of markedly Salmurian tendencies.

¹⁴A variety of sources provided the information in the preceding two paragraphs: Samuel Alexander, "Francis Turretin," *Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 20 (1848): 452-463; McCoy, "The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius," 104-110; and especially Roger Nicole, "Friedrich Spanheim," in *Through Christ's Word*, eds., W. Robert Godfrey and Jesse L. Boyd III (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1985), 167-179. The weakness of my Latin renders this first section simply a summary of the work of others.

caliber—to be a pastor in Leyden even for a year in the early 1650s without having to engage Cocceius’s ideas.

A. The Covenant in Geneva from Calvin to Turretin

While many have argued that covenant theology was a late importation into Geneva, this depends greatly upon how one defines covenant theology. Certainly Calvin did not structure his whole theology around the idea of the covenant, but then again, very few theologies have been *thoroughly* structured around the covenant. Rather, in covenant theology the covenant plays a key role in viewing how God relates to his people, and in showing how God’s decrees relate to the historical unfolding of redemption. Turretin, who declares that the covenant is “the center and bond of all religion,”¹⁵ simply utilizes the covenant to explain God’s redemptive activity.¹⁶

Turretin’s brand of covenantal theology, which in his case is articulated on a carefully developed federal scheme, may be seen as the development of an inherent tendency within Calvin’s thought. While Calvin had not developed as systematic a treatment, some of his statements in his treatise *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* suggest at least the beginnings of the idea of a covenant of works, and certainly a federal understanding of the first Adam. Responding to Pighius’s abhorrence of his doctrine of reprobation, Calvin declares that there are three considerations which must be maintained: First, that God’s eternal predestination “by which before the fall of Adam He decreed what should take place concerning the whole human race and every individual, was fixed and determined.” Second, that Adam was appointed to death “on account of his defection.” Third, that “in his person now fallen and lost, all his offspring is condemned.” Adam’s fall brought destruction upon himself and his posterity, and hence “all the reprobate are justly left in death, for in Adam they are dead and condemned.”¹⁷ Calvin stresses that Adam is federally connected

¹⁵Turretin, *Institutio*, XII.i.1.

¹⁶As an example of fixation I would point to Cocceius, who attempted to structure his entire theological project around the covenant. Turretin wisely refrains from this extreme.

¹⁷Calvin, *Concerning the Eternal Predestination of God* (London: James Clarke, 1961), 121.

with his posterity, and that it was due to his defection from God's commandment that the human race was plunged into death.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin does not speak of a prelapsarian covenant except in passing with reference to the Tree of Life in the garden as a sacrament which are "proofs and seals of his covenants."¹⁸ In his treatment of Adam's fall he does not speak of a covenant, but his insistence that the means of the transmission of original sin is through God's decree leads naturally to viewing Adam as the federal head of the human race.¹⁹ Peter Lillback has argued cogently for a prelapsarian covenant in Calvin, though acknowledging that it falls short of the later definition of the covenant of works.²⁰ Calvin's views become particularly important in the Amyraldian controversy, because Amyraut studied Calvin more seriously than most theologians of his day, and believed that he was a truer exponent of the Genevan Reformer's approach than any of the "orthodox" theologians of his day.

During the latter part of the sixteenth century, Swiss and German influences continued to build in Geneva as well, as the covenant idea was developed more thoroughly in the Rhineland. It is clear that by the 1590s a full federal theology is being taught at many of the leading universities of Switzerland, Germany and Holland.²¹ Unfortunately, the era between Calvin and Turretin has not been explored with reference to covenantal development in the Academy of Geneva, and so it is difficult to uncover the flow of thought in a project of limited magnitude. Still, a glimpse of the covenantal ideas current among the city's theologians may be seen through their enthusiastic participation in the Synod of Dort and its response to the covenantal modification made by the Arminians.

B. The Dutch Connection

¹⁸Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), IV.iv.18.

¹⁹Ibid., II.i.7.

²⁰Peter Alan Lillback, "The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology" (Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985), 467-478.

²¹McCoy, "The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius" (60-81) spells out this development in summary form, acknowledging the seeds of federal thought in Calvin who "foreshadows a teaching of a double covenant" (76).

One tendency in Reformed covenant theology which has confused some is the Reformed emphasis upon one covenant of grace, with several administrations. This seems to many critics to deny Paul's distinction between Law and Gospel, as well as Jesus' emphasis on the *New* covenant. While the actual difficulty is more of terminology than substance, it produced no less than two significant controversies related to the doctrine of the covenant in seventeenth-century Holland. The Arminian controversy of the 1610s and 20s was loaded with political and social ramifications, and the condemnation of their teaching at the Synod of Dort in 1619, while removing them from the pale of Reformed orthodoxy did not resolve the issues as much as it did force the questions into a narrower field.

The second controversy arose in response to Johannes Cocceius's attempt to define the one covenant, several administrations question. The ensuing battle between Voetians and Cocceians continued long after Turretin's death, but was in full swing by the late 1650s. Fifteen years later, at the time that Turretin was consulting with the theologians who eventually produced the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* in 1675, there were some among them (particularly it seems in Basel and Zürich), who wanted to condemn Cocceius's teachings, but the more moderate party prevailed.²² Turretin deals explicitly with the Arminians, condemning their innovations at several points in the *Institutio*, but his references to the Cocceian disputes are more veiled, no doubt due to the fact that these were sensitive issues among the Swiss churches which Turretin desired to influence.

1. *The Arminian Challenge*

Jacob Arminius attempted to resolve the linguistic difficulty between Scripture and the Reformed covenant theology by articulating a threefold covenantal scheme: the covenants of "*Lex, Promissio, et Evangelion*."²³ The first covenant with Adam is not

²²James I. Good, *History of the Swiss Reformed Church Since the Reformation* (Philadelphia: RCUS, 1913), 164-66. Good intimates that Gernler of Basel was opposed to Cocceius, as well as the majority at Zürich, including Muller and Waser, who were overruled by Heidegger.

²³In this section I am relying heavily upon Richard Muller's analysis in "The Federal Motif in Seventeenth Century Arminian Theology," *Nederland*

intrinsically opposed to grace, but rather “differ in that the promise of fellowship with God was offered under the former as the reward of sinless obedience but under the latter as the gift of grace to sinners.”²⁴ Arminius introduced at this point an element of natural law into the Adamic covenant, which he argued remained in force throughout the covenant of grace as well. In other words, the obedience required and possibility of performance both remain in the covenant of grace. The Law of Moses, however, is utterly opposed to grace and has no place in the new covenant; it is abolished in Christ.²⁵ By eliminating the impossibly high requirements of the Law, Arminius was able to reintroduce the medieval principle of *facere quod in se est* (doing what is in him). This new covenantal principle was worked out more fully in his disciples, Phillip Limborch and Simon Episcopius, whom Muller calls “the Cocceius of Arminianism” due to his emphasis on the historical nature of the covenants. Episcopius posited four covenants: the Natural Covenant with Adam, essentially a “natural religion” covenant; the Dipleuric Covenant with Abraham, including a vague promise of grace; the Old Covenant with Moses, which contained a fuller promise, but also combined a system of obedience with a testimony to grace; and the New Covenant in Christ, the full manifestation of grace.²⁶ Limborch took radical Arminianism to the fringes of Pelagianism, denying the federal headship of Adam and any Covenant of Works/Nature allowing for a Law of Nature alone, and insisting upon a radical disjunction between the Old and New Covenants. Limborch’s rejection of the Old Mosaic Covenant went to the extent of denying the validity of the Ten Commandments for the Christian, claiming that the New Testament contains its own divine precepts and rule of conscience.²⁷

Arminianism quickly became linked to the rising Cartesian rationalism with its insistence upon natural law and human autonomy. In response, the Synod of Dort denied that the natural light of reason was sufficient to bring man to salvation, because of man’s inability. Dort affirmed that the Law was in the same position

Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis 62:1 (1982): 102-122. The quotation is from page 104.

²⁴Ibid., 105.

²⁵Ibid., 107.

²⁶Ibid., 113.

²⁷Ibid., 119-20.

because it is only able to heighten the awareness of sin, but cannot lift a finger to succor man in his distress.²⁸ While the Synod did not focus directly on the covenantal issues which Arminius and Episcopius were raising, the teaching on the Law rejected the extremes of the Arminian modifications of the covenant. Nonetheless the Synod's silence allowed for a great variety of views within the Reformed churches, a variety which soon caused tension as Cocceius's radical covenantalism began to trouble some of the older Dutch theologians, including Gisbertus Voetius.

2. *Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669)*

While some early claims about the radical opposition between Reformed scholasticism and Federal theology are overstated, there were scholastics who were opposed to the rising emphasis on the mutuality of the covenant. Johannes Maccovius (1588-1644), professor at Franeker from 1614-1644, was one such theologian. His supralapsarian emphasis upon the unilateral nature of the divine decree made him uncomfortable with the moderate infralapsarian position, but it did not prevent him from raising a young colleague, Johannes Cocceius, who had been teaching at Franeker since 1636, to the doctorate in 1644. Cocceius had studied under Maccovius and William Ames (1576-1633) at Franeker, and later would go on to succeed Friedrich Spanheim at Leyden in 1650, the leading Dutch university where he would remain for the final two decades of his life. Cocceius was originally trained as an orientalist and had done much of his early work in exegetical theology before adding duties in the systematics department.²⁹ By the mid-1650s his adherence to the divine authority of the Sabbath was questioned, since he denied that strict Sabbath observance was a New Testament duty. The underlying issue of the relationship between the economies of the covenant, however, did not erupt until the 1660s when Maresius of Groningen and Voetius of Utrecht challenged his teaching that “under the Old Testament there is an overlooking of sin (*paresis*),

²⁸Canons of the Synod of Dort, third and fourth head, articles 5-6.

²⁹McCoy, “The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius,” 104-106. On Maccovius, see Michael Daniel Bell, “Propter Potestatem, Scientiam, ac Beneplacitum Dei: The Doctrine of the Object of Predestination in the Theology of Johannes Maccovius,” (Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1986).

not a complete forgiveness erasing all guilt. Under the New Testament, after the atonement of Christ, in which the covenant and testament of God is brought to fulfillment, there is complete forgiveness of sins (*aphesis*).³⁰ Cocceius insisted that the historical nature of the covenant means that God could not *actually* forgive sins until the *actual* sacrifice was made. Voetius responded that this “denied that the Patriarchs were justified by faith and could attain to eternal life.”³¹ Cocceius replied that he believed that the patriarchs were justified by faith in the future atonement, and since that atonement was certain, they could indeed receive eternal life.

Cocceius’s distinctive contribution to Reformed theology is found in his attempt to consider all of theology in its relation to the covenant and testament of God (the title of one of his leading works was *Summa doctrinae de foedere et testamento Dei*). Cocceius may fairly be said to have a theology thoroughly structured around the covenant idea, to a greater extent than any before him. Seeing the covenant as the “framework of the system existing in Scripture,” he attempted to articulate the different economies of the divine covenant.³² Connecting the accomplishment of redemption with the eternal decrees of God in the institution of the covenant, Cocceius followed the now-traditional Covenant of Works/Covenant of Grace distinction. He attempted to articulate a nuanced position regarding the relationship of the Old and New Testaments within the Covenant of Grace—a position which did not endear him to foes like Voetius. Affirming a stricter Law/Gospel distinction than most Reformed theologians before him, Cocceius tended to interpret the law in a spiritual sense (which led him to rethink the binding character of the Sabbath), and viewed the Old Testament with a strong element of typology.³³ While not going as far as Amyraut had in differentiating Law and Gospel into two separate covenants, Cocceius pressed in this direction, wanting to emphasize the great benefits of the New Testament era.

The Covenant of Grace partakes of the nature of a Testament (because of the necessity of the death of Christ and the inability of

³⁰Ibid, 34.

³¹Ibid., 35.

³²Ibid., 175.

³³Martin I. Klauber, “Francis Turretin on Biblical Accommodation: Loyal Calvinist or Reformed Scholastic?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 75.

sinful man to enter into a covenant with God) as well as the nature of a Covenant (because God has allowed us—and indeed caused us—to enter into a covenant with himself by faith in Christ). This is true of the Old as well as the New Testaments, but not equally so. The Old are but types, whereas the New contains the reality. But whereas Christ is the substance of both the Old and New Testaments, the sacraments of the Old Testament do not have the efficacy of the New Testament sacraments—which led Cocceius to allow only a passing over of sin in the Old, but complete forgiveness only in and after Christ. The promises of the Old Testament do not contain within themselves the content of the New Testament reality, but only point to that reality. Hence the promises of the Gospel, of the reconciliation of the Gentiles, of the circumcision of the heart, and of the new heaven and new earth are all shadows which do not find reality until the redemption accomplished by Christ.³⁴

Cocceius insisted that what is applied to the believer under the Old Testament economy is distinct from what is applied to the believer under the New. It is the same justification, but rather than offered as a passing over to the Jews alone, it is now offered as full remission of sins to Jew and Gentile alike. The onerous restrictions of the Mosaic Law are now passed away, and the New Testament believer lives under the “law of faith and love” removed from all legalism.³⁵ It is disappointing that McCoy, seemingly oblivious to the debates which followed Cocceius, does not address with any clarity how Cocceius dealt with the issues surrounding the relationship of the Law to the Christian, particularly the third use of the law. Klauber insists that Cocceius denied the applicability of the Law for the believer, but does not give enough evidence to determine the truth of the matter.³⁶ Nevertheless, from Turretin’s veiled references to the controversy, it will be seen that *he* at least felt that Cocceius had gone a little too far in separating Law from Gospel.

C. Moises Amyraut

³⁴McCoy, “The Covenant Theology of Johannes Cocceius,” 216-227.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 230-32.

³⁶Klauber, “Francis Turretin on Biblical Accommodation: Loyal Calvinist or Reformed Scholastic?” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 (1993): 73-86.

The tension between Law and Gospel in the Dutch tradition pales in comparison to the actual division between the two which was effected in the French Reformed Church, particularly at the Academy in Saumur. Moises Amyraut (1596-1664) studied with John Cameron prior to 1618 at Saumur, where he also pastored before being promoted to full professor there in 1631, a position which he retained for the rest of his life.³⁷ Three years later he published his infamous *Brief Traite de la predestination et de ses principales dependances*, which provoked the controversy which would forever be associated with his name. Acquitted on a number of occasions by the French Synod, though sometimes censured for immoderate language departing from the form of sound words, he quickly became a leading figure in the French church. By positing an actual Covenant of Law, as well as those of Nature and of Grace, Amyraut thought that he had succeeded at returning to the biblical formulation, and argued that Calvin had taught a similar position. An advocate of union with the Lutherans, his disjunction between Law and Gospel was rejected by Lutherans as not giving enough, and by the Reformed for giving away too much. Armstrong points out that these emphases led Amyraut to divorce ethics from dogmatics in the interest of a natural law based on a natural theology.³⁸ Turretin arrived at Saumur around 1646, at a time when Amyraut was in the process of responding to Friedrich Spanheim's assault, in a work published thereafter as *Specimen animadversionum in exercitationes de gratia universalī*. In this volume he set forth what he believed to be the three doctrines which he and the orthodox were at odds over: "the universality of God's will to save, the universal intent of Christ's redemptive act, and the sufficiency of the external call."³⁹

1. *The Threefold Covenant*

³⁷This section is almost entirely dependent upon Brian G. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

³⁸Armstrong, 124-5. Amyraut attempted to construct "upon the basis of *la Nature* the teachings which have been given by revelation" (Unattributed quote in Armstrong, 125).

³⁹Armstrong, 109.

Amyraut adapted and developed the idea of a threefold covenant from his mentor, John Cameron, who had posited a threefold covenant *in time*. Recognizing that this was flatly unacceptable, Amyraut articulated a threefold covenant from all eternity, pushing the universal offer of the gospel back to a universal decree of salvation. Asserting that “all true religion necessarily consists in some covenant which exists between God and men,” he insisted that a proper understanding of these covenants is of the highest importance.⁴⁰ Armstrong argues that the key to understanding Amyraut’s theology is his “peculiar covenant theology.” He identified two types of covenants—two ways in which God related to man—the *foedus absolutum* which does not depend upon man at all, and the *foedus hypotheticum* which is a mutual covenant and the “proper object of theological discussion.” The absolute covenant is hidden in the secret will of God and is to be believed where God has revealed it, but otherwise is to be left alone. Theological discourse must pay chief attention to the reciprocal covenants because through them God has accommodated himself to us. It is within this latter type (the conditional covenant) that all three of the divine covenants fall.⁴¹ The following schema should show the general framework of Amyraut’s covenantal thinking:⁴²

	<i>foedus naturae</i>	<i>foedus legale</i> ⁴³	<i>foedus gratiae</i>
Extent	one man (Adam)	Israel	mankind
Condition	Perfect obedience to the natural law	Perfect obedience to natural law clarified by Mosaic Law	faith alone
Promise	Eden	Canaan	Eternal Life
Mediator	None	Moses	Christ
Efficacy	None, apart from Perfect Obedience	Restraining Evil, and pointing to	Inclination to Good

⁴⁰Ibid., 140. Quote from Thesis 1, “De tribus foederibus divinis,” *Theses Salumuriensis*, 1:212, written before 1637.

⁴¹Ibid., 143-4.

⁴²This is taken from Armstrong’s discussion, 146-147.

⁴³Armstrong points out that Amyraut’s radical disjunction of the Law Covenant from the Grace Covenant is reminiscent of Luther’s Law-Gospel distinction (p. 144 and elsewhere).

man's need

Foundation Creation

Exodus

Christ⁴⁴

Armstrong states that the two themes running through Amyraut's discussion of the covenant are (1) "the progression of God's revelation" and (2) "the final full and perfect experience of God's redemption in the age to come" as seen in the excellency of the promises of the covenant of grace.⁴⁵ Amyraut acknowledged that the covenant of grace had its origin in the promise to Adam after the fall, but contended that it was obscured by the covenant of law, which had no revelation of the mercy of God. In keeping with his emphasis on progress, Amyraut insisted that the covenant of grace could not be made only with the elect, because that would deny the superlative character of this covenant in distinction with the other covenants before. There is always a progression from the lesser to the greater—to limit the extent of the covenant of grace would be to reject the progress of God's redemptive purposes. Amyraut will always insist that salvation is only by faith in Christ, however obscurely the Old Testament saints may have recognized him, but he firmly denied that Law is merely an administration of the covenant of grace. Armstrong maintains that the reason why Amyraut insisted on a threefold covenant is because he was moving toward Luther's emphasis on justification by faith, and had to do something to remove the tension between Law and Gospel which the Reformed retained with their affirmation of the third use of the Law.⁴⁶

2. *The Conditional Decree and Covenant*

Amyraut taught that just as God's will is one, yet must be considered under the twofold distinction between the revealed "will which commands" and the hidden "will which discerns,"⁴⁷ so also

⁴⁴This last category is taken from Turretin, whose summary is otherwise virtually identical to Armstrong's (XII.xii.3.).

⁴⁵Ibid., 147.

⁴⁶Ibid., 222-224. Armstrong suggests that Amyraut developed in this direction due to the Reformed tendency toward minimizing the Law-Gospel distinction, and also in rejection of the Arminian tendency to consider faith as the obedience of the Christian.

⁴⁷Ibid., 195. Armstrong points out that this terminology is taken from

the one *foedus gratiae* must be considered as containing both a *foedus absolutum* and a *foedus hypotheticum*.⁴⁸ At this point it is useful to hear Armstrong's comments:

the use that he makes of this bifurcation is quite peculiar to Amyraldian theology. For while using it to emphasize the hidden and revealed nature of God's will, the absolute, incomprehensible and the conditional accommodated work of God in grace, he shifts his emphasis decidedly to the latter as the proper object of religious contemplation. . . . [H]is own use of it tends to sound a great deal like Luther. Indeed, Luther had propounded the same bifurcation of God's will.⁴⁹

But Amyraut takes it one step further and proposes a bifurcation in the covenant, whereby the Father covenants with the Son to provide for the salvation of the whole human race (the *foedus hypotheticum*). This is conditioned, however, upon an impossible predicate: that man should turn to Christ in faith. Therefore, the Father covenants with the Holy Spirit to apply the work of the Son to those he has chosen (the *foedus absolutum*).⁵⁰ Therefore Christ's death is not merely a "sufficient price for the sins of the whole world" (an orthodox statement), but also is *intended* as a sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, based upon the eternal will of God that all should be saved—provided that man responds in faith. This, of course, man is unable to do. Hence Amyraut is able to maintain that salvation is actually all of God, and does rest upon the decree of election.⁵¹

Amyraut's attempt to resolve the tensions of Reformed theology became increasingly popular as rationalism grew on the continent. One of his chief spheres of influence outside of France was Geneva, largely due to the fact that so many Genevan students came to Saumur to study. Turretin returned after his years of

William Twisse, the prolocutor of the Westminster Assembly.

⁴⁸Ibid., 199.

⁴⁹Ibid., 200.

⁵⁰Ibid., 208-9. Amyraut, while usually appealing to Calvin for support, here acknowledges that he has gone further, but suggests that he is merely working out the implications of the Genevan Reformer's thought.

⁵¹Ibid., 210-12. I cannot refrain from anticipating one of Turretin's criticisms here, that this sharply divides redemption accomplished from redemption applied, to the point that the application of redemption is placed into a different *type* of covenant from the accomplishment.

foreign study to a Geneva standing at the crossroads. His influence at the Academy would postpone the decisive moment, but Geneva was caught up in the changing intellectual currents of the times, and had no desire to seek after ancient paths.⁵²

D. Genevan Developments in Turretin's Day

1. *The Rise of Amyraldianism in the Academy*⁵³

By the time that Turretin was recalled to take the professorship in theology, the softening of Genevan orthodoxy was well under way. Alexander Morus returned from foreign study in 1641, at which point the Council of Pastors refused to ordain him because he was suspected of Arminianism. Yet the very next year, after Friedrich Spanheim had left for Leyden, Morus was appointed professor of theology in his place. Tensions rose over the next four years as Morus became more popular with the students, until in 1646 a controversy broke out over Morus's condemnation of his supralapsarian colleagues. Three years later he resigned and went to Holland, but not before he was required to subscribe to "the Articles of Morus" a series of theses which became a test of orthodoxy in Geneva. Yet far from solving the problem, Morus's departure was only the beginning of the decline, as two theologians who were added to the faculty (Mestrezat, who replaced Morus in 1649, and Louis Tronchin who replaced Leger, an orthodox Calvinist, in 1661) had decided Salmurian sympathies. The election of Francis Turretin, therefore, in 1653, was a key appointment for the orthodox party.

This, of course, is the hindsight of history. It was not clear at first that Mestrezat and Tronchin were as heterodox as later events were to make manifest. It was only in 1669 that matters came to head: a new minister, Charles Maurice, was required to subscribe to a statement condemning the doctrines of Saumur. Tronchin and Mestrezat protested against this requirement, affirming that they themselves could not sign such a statement in good conscience, and

⁵²See John B. Roney and Martin I. Klauber, *The Identity of Geneva: the Christian Commonwealth, 1564-1864* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1998).

⁵³This section depends heavily upon Good's *History of the Swiss Reformed Church since the Reformation*, 160-163. This work is not always accurate in describing theological positions, but Good is better than nothing.

four ministers joined them. The Company of Pastors denied their protest, but the City Council attempted a compromise, requiring that they “teach according to the standards, but not to do so polemically. This tolerated liberals, but forbade the conservatives to attack them.”⁵⁴ This compromised the orthodoxy of the Genevan Academy, and the churches of Zürich, Basel, Bern and Schaffhausen issued a united declaration that unless the City Council repealed this action, they would immediately recall their students from the Academy. Within a week the City Council “returned to the old subscription on the Articles of Morus and ordered controversy to cease.” Later that August the new philosophy professor, Chouet, refused to sign the Articles of Morus on the grounds that he was not a theologian. This weakening of the standards caused great consternation among the orthodox, and it is interesting to note that within two months of these events, Turretin wrote to Heidegger “suggesting a new confession to which subscription should be required.”⁵⁵ Six years later the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* was issued.

2. *The Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675)

While Good calls the *Formula* “the clearest statement of scholastic Calvinism, and . . . the highest of the Calvinistic creeds,” he also admits that it refrains from attacking persons, and avoids anathemas, but sticks to doctrinal issues. The chief issues were the rejection of three doctrines: (1) that the Hebrew vowel-points were not inspired, (2) hypothetical election and universal atonement, and (3) the denial of immediate imputation of Adam’s sin. While strict subscription was required in Protestant Switzerland during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, by 1720 it was a dead letter in virtually all of the Swiss cantons.

The short life of the *Formula Consensus Helvetica* may indicate that the tightening of confessional standards was ineffective without the necessary theological consensus which the title of the *Formula* indicated. Neither did the orthodox have the clout to make it stick. Geneva had moved considerably since Calvin’s day: no longer was the City Council willing to listen to the voice of the Venerable Company of Pastors. The only stick which the orthodox could wield

⁵⁴Good, 162.

⁵⁵Good, 162.

was the unanimity of the Swiss cantons, without whose political goodwill Geneva was doomed to Catholic military aggression. Even after the Peace of Westphalia (1648), Geneva was not safe from attack (as Turretin's fund-raising trip to Holland in 1661 indicates). And once the Swiss churches wavered, Geneva would be the first to depart from Reformed orthodoxy, largely because so many Genevan students had studied at Saumur (Turretin not excluded). Naturally this led to the rise of Amyraldian ideas in the Academy, and even Turretin seems to have recognized that the complete expulsion of the Salmurians was not possible in Geneva. Rather, the *Formula* provided a halter to keep them gagged until sound teaching could work a reverse effect. Unfortunately, the *Zeitgeist* of the late seventeenth century was not conducive to Reformed orthodoxy. The common thread between Socinianism, Arminianism and Amyraldianism was a rationalistic emphasis on human autonomy. The desire for a reasonable orthodoxy would lead Turretin's son, Jean-Alphonse, to wage a campaign to end subscription to his father's beloved creed, and emphasize a lowest common denominator theology which would reconcile Protestants of opposing views on a number of issues. Francis Turretin's firm but gentle orthodoxy, insisting upon the limits of reason in the realm of theology, had no chance in an age of optimistic rationalism.⁵⁶

III. Turretin's Exposition of the Covenant

A note should be made regarding the nature of the *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae*. Spencer correctly points out that Turretin is attempting a polemical (elenctic) and not a systematic theology, a point which is critical to a correct understanding of the work. On

⁵⁶John Walter Beardslee, III, "Theological Development at Geneva Under Francis and Jean-Alphonse Turretin (1648-1737)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1956); Martin I. Klauber, "Family Loyalty and Theological Transition in Post-Reformation Geneva: The Case of Benedict Pictet, 1655-1724," *Fides et Historia* (Winter/Spring 1992): 54-67; Klauber, "Reformed Orthodoxy in Transition: Benedict Pictet (1655-1724) and Enlightened Orthodoxy in Post-Reformation Geneva," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham, Vol XXII *Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* (Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994): 93-113.

the one hand, if there is little controversy over a particular issue, then Turretin will gloss over it, while on the other hand he will treat such trivialities as the date of Christmas in an attempt to show students that this is not an issue which should occupy their time.⁵⁷ The covenant is a critical idea under attack from several angles; hence it receives fairly thorough treatment. When explicating the debates on the Covenant of Grace, Turretin departs from his normal method and rather than plunge straight into his polemics, he uses the first question to do some preparatory exegetical work, the second question to expound the nature of the Covenant of Grace, and only then moves on to specific controversies in question three.⁵⁸

A. The Twofold Covenant

In opposition to the Arminian and Amyraldian tendency to divide the covenant of grace into separate covenants of law and grace, Turretin insists that there is but one postlapsarian covenant: the covenant of grace. Since God has only one disposition toward man after the fall, there can be only one postlapsarian covenant. In fact Turretin will go further and declare that there is but one covenant, revealed under a twofold aspect: the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace, which rest upon the different relations of God to man. Strictly speaking, they are not two covenants, but one “double covenant.” Nonetheless, although he conceives of the covenants of nature and of grace as united in their fundamental characteristics, Turretin will often speak of two covenants.⁵⁹

Turretin proposed five similarities and ten differences between the covenants. They both have: (1) God as their author; (2) God and man as their contracting parties; (3) the glory of God as their end; (4) stipulations attached; and (5) the promise of heavenly eternal life.⁶⁰ These points of identity demonstrate that there is a

⁵⁷Spencer, 177-180. Turretin’s able and edifying treatment of the Christmas debate is found in XIII. x.

⁵⁸Turretin, *Institutio*, XII.i-ii. This is not the only instance where Turretin does this, but it is rare that he takes as much space as he does to lay the groundwork for a particular doctrine.

⁵⁹Turretin, VIII.iii.4. For this insight I am indebted to Spencer’s “Francis Turretin’s Concept of the Covenant of Nature,” particularly p. 75.

⁶⁰Turretin, XII.iv.1.

fundamental unity in the covenant, both before and after the fall. After the first covenant was abrogated God initiated the covenant of grace, in which Christ reversed Adam's fall: "Thus what was demanded of us in the covenant of works is fulfilled by Christ in the covenant of grace."⁶¹ Yet the differences between them are crucial, and show that there is to be no confusion between the covenants of nature and grace.⁶² The following scheme delineates Turretin's distinctions:

	<i>foedus naturae</i>	<i>foedus gratiae</i>
Author	God as Creator and Lord	God as Father and Redeemer
Parties	God and man	God and man, with the Mediator
Foundation	Man's obedience	Christ's obedience
Promise:	Eternal life	Eternal life and salvation from sin and death
Condition	Works	Faith ⁶³
End	Declaration of justice	Manifestation of mercy
Manifestation	Conscience in the state of nature	The mystery "entirely hidden" from reason, and available only by revelation
Order	First (violator has hope in new covenant)	Last (violator has no further recourse)
Extent	Universal in Adam	Particular with the elect in

⁶¹Turretin, XII.xii.22

⁶²Turretin, XII.ii.3-4.

⁶³Turretin expands on this point, insisting that faith *was* required in the first covenant, but as a work of obedience; and works *are* required in the second covenant, not as an antecedent condition for eternal life, but as a "subsequent condition as the fruit and effect of the life already acquired" (XII.iv.7). This might be a useful insight for contemporary debates regarding the relationship between faith and works in the covenant of grace.

	Christ	
Effects	Glory to obedient man	Glory to God alone
	Terror to fallen man	Gracious to fallen man
	Bondage to sinners	Freedom to sinners
	Drives man away from God.	Calls men back to God. ⁶⁴

Note particularly the substantial differences from Amyraut’s chart given above. By positing three emphatically distinct covenants, Amyraut allows his emphasis on the progress of redemption to obscure the unity of God’s redemptive activity.⁶⁵ This chart will be useful for considering Turretin’s discussion of the covenants.

1. *The Covenant of Nature*

Over against the Arminian theologian Simon Episcopius, Turretin asserts that God indeed made a covenant of nature with Adam. Defining the covenant of nature as the giving of “eternal happiness and life under the condition of perfect, personal obedience,” Turretin insists that the legal covenant is founded upon the nature of man and is dependent on man’s fulfilling of the law of nature and proper obedience.⁶⁶ Adam is the federal head of mankind, “the root and the seminal principle from whom the whole human race was to descend Hence that covenant pertained not only to Adam, but to all his posterity in him. The illustrious Amyrald acknowledges ‘as he was the first man, he, as it were, represented the whole human race, which was to be born from him.’” Both as the natural father and as the forensic head of the race, Adam is bound with a twofold bond to his descendants.⁶⁷

a. Prelapsarian Merit and Grace

⁶⁴Turretin, XII.iv.1-12.

⁶⁵Turretin’s discussion and rejection of the threefold covenant will be found below, under his analysis of Amyraldianism.

⁶⁶Turretin, VIII.iii.5.

⁶⁷Turretin, VIII.iii.11. Whereas Turretin uses strong language to condemn the Arminians in every instance, he goes out of his way to show where he has common ground with Amyraut. Note also how Turretin maintains both a federalist as well as a realist approach to our relationship to Adam by his “twofold bond.”

Turretin is careful to maintain that Adam had no proper merit before God, but only merited the reward from God's gratuitous promise to which "God had of his own accord bound himself." Therefore there can be no talk of God owing anything to man apart from the covenant.⁶⁸

Adam had the natural ability and obligation to obey God, but did not have the benefit of the immediate help of God. In other words, there was no salvific grace present in the garden to infuse man with new power in the covenant of nature—otherwise God could be blamed for not strengthening man against his tempter. Rather, in order to remain upright, man was simply in need of God's help "to actuate [his] faculties and powers and to preserve them from change." But, Turretin notes, this was not promised in the covenant of nature, because it "depended on the most free good pleasure of God; otherwise the covenant of nature had been immutable, and man had never sinned."⁶⁹ In other words, God chose to allow man to face the temptation without any immediate assistance. By calling the covenant of nature a gratuitous promise, based upon God's own "goodness, fidelity and truth," Turretin affirms that the covenant itself was objectively gracious, but that it did not provide grace to accomplish its conditions. He insists that "there was no debt (properly so called) from which man could derive a right, but only a debt of fidelity, arising out of the promise by which God demonstrated his infallible and immutable constancy and truth."⁷⁰ God does not owe man anything—even if Adam had never sinned—and it is solely by his gratuitous promise and pact that man has any claim on God.

b. Sacramental Trees

A key element of Turretin's discussion is the sacramental character of the Trees in Paradise. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil did not have inherent powers to convey the knowledge of good and evil, but was given as a sign to Adam, (1) as an "exploratory law" to demonstrate that God was the Lord of man,

⁶⁸Turretin, VIII.iii.17.

⁶⁹Turretin, VIII.iii.14.

⁷⁰Turretin, VIII.iii.16. Cf. Spencer, "Francis Turretin's Concept of the Covenant of Nature," 87. In Augustinian terms, the covenant of nature provides only external grace—no internal work of the Holy Spirit.

(2) to demonstrate the wickedness of sin, (3) to declare that man was created with a free will, (4) to teach that his happiness did not consist in earthly things, but (5) that man's highest good is to be sought in the service of God.⁷¹ The tree of life, Turretin asserts, was a sacrament to signify and to seal the promise of eternal life which would have been man's if he had remained upright. It was to remind man that his life came from God, as well as to point him to the heavenly life that awaited him. Finally, it was also a "type of Christ himself who acquired and confers it upon us and who is therefore called 'the tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God' (Rev. 2:7)."⁷² Turretin concludes by stating:

Hence it is evident that these two trees of paradise are not free from mystery. For as the first was a sacrament of trial (which prescribed to man his duty) and the second a symbol of the reward (by which God wished to remunerate his obedience), so each shadowed forth to us in the best manner, the mode of God's acting in his church by commands and promises.⁷³

Yet far from being empty symbols, the sacraments of the covenant of nature conveyed the realities which they symbolized. The tree of life had for its substance Christ himself, and the one who partook of it received the benefits of the covenant. This typological interpretation may be distinguished from Cocceius's approach because Turretin does not see the trees merely as pointers to the reality, but also insists that the reality was present.⁷⁴

c. The heavenly goal of the covenant

Turretin responds to Amyraut's threefold covenantal distinction by claiming that Amyraut misses the point of the covenant of nature. Far from simply promising eternal life in Paradise, the covenant of nature promised him an eternal heavenly life once he passed his probationary period. But if the covenant of nature promised heaven, then Amyraut's emphasis on progressive revelation is misplaced. Rather than say that the *substance* of the

⁷¹Turretin, VIII.iv.

⁷²Turretin, VIII.v. (quote from paragraph 3).

⁷³Turretin, VIII.v.7.

⁷⁴This will be fleshed out in greater detail below under "Christ the Center."

promises are grander in the covenant of grace, Turretin contends that it is the *mode* of the promises which surpass the covenant of nature in offering such a great gift to such unworthy objects through the inestimable mediation of Christ.⁷⁵ Amyraut had argued that progressive revelation moved from the particular to the general: from the individual (Adam, who was given Eden) to the nation (Israel, who was given Palestine) to the world (the human race, who will be given the whole earth). Turretin rejects this notion by pointing out that Adam was not merely an individual, but was the representative of the whole human race who inherited the entire earth, not merely Eden. Once this is accepted, Amyraut's whole scheme is undermined.

2. *The Covenant of Grace*

Affirming both the testamentary and covenantal character of the covenant of grace, Turretin defines the covenant of grace as a "gratuitous pact entered into in Christ between God offended and man offending."⁷⁶

a. The Conditionality of the Covenant of Grace

The covenant of grace is both unconditional and conditional, depending whether it is viewed antecedently or consequentially. Considered antecedently in the light of the meritorious cause, it is wholly gratuitous and depends solely upon God's good pleasure. Considered consequentially in light of the instrumental cause, it is undeniably conditional, depending upon the condition of faith.

⁷⁵Turretin, VIII.vi.2-17. It is somewhat disconcerting to hear Turretin speak in this manner, particularly because he seems to suppose too close an identity between what Adam *would have had* and what those who are in Christ *will have*, seemingly ignoring our union with Christ. This is the price of a polemical theology: it is difficult to ascertain what is being left out for elenctic reasons, and what is actually missing from Turretin's theology.

⁷⁶Turretin, XII.ii.5. Turretin will make explicit a few paragraphs later that the offended God does not act as the Creator and Lord of the abrogated covenant of nature, because sinful man cannot behold a just and holy God, but rather has acted as "a merciful Father and Redeemer—as offended, indeed, but as to be appeased, who through his love of benevolence wished to reconcile offending men to himself" (XII.ii.9). (Note Turretin's schema above).

Faith however (*contra* the Arminians) cannot be accepted as righteousness by God, because it cannot replace proper obedience. Rather, faith “must be considered relatively and instrumentally, inasmuch as it embraces Christ and applies to him for righteousness and through him obtains the right to eternal life.” Faith is not a work, but a receiving of Christ’s work.⁷⁷ Faith and obedience are causally separate in the covenant of grace, faith alone being efficacious as the “means and instrument of our union with Christ which reconciles him to us.” Responding to an intramural debate within the Reformed community, Turretin asserts that properly speaking, faith is the sole causal condition of the covenant of grace, but at the same time, taken “broadly and improperly” the conditions of the covenant of grace may be said to include “repentance and the obedience of the new life . . . because they are reckoned among the duties of the covenant (Jn. 13:17; 2 Cor. 5:17; Rom. 8:13).”⁷⁸

b. Christ the Center

A good example of Turretin’s clear-headed attempt to forge unity among the orthodox is his discussion of the distinction between the covenant of redemption and the covenant of grace. Rejecting Amyraut’s dual covenant of the accomplishment of redemption between the Father and the Son, and the application of redemption between the Father and the Spirit, Turretin affirms that each member of the Trinity “has his own mode of operation” in the one covenant of grace, but that Christ must be clearly portrayed as the center of the covenant.⁷⁹ Turretin refuses to get caught up in the quarrel over whether the covenant was made “with Christ as one of the contracting parties and in him with all his seed” (which would make it the proper counterpart to the Adamic covenant of nature) or whether it was made “in Christ with all the seed so that he does not so much hold the relation of a contracting party as of Mediator, who stands between those at variance for the purpose of reconciling them.” Confessing that he cannot tell the difference between these

⁷⁷Turretin, XII.iii.1-11.

⁷⁸Turretin, XII.iii.13, 15. This resolution of the quarrel would be appropriately applied to much of the current debate in Reformed circles. Turretin argues that the covenant is a multifaceted doctrine, and may (perhaps even must) be approached from different relations (*schesin*).

⁷⁹Turretin, XII.ii.7.

positions, Turretin declares that either way, “it amounts to the same thing.”⁸⁰

In any case, Christ remains the center and the goal of the covenant of grace. Turretin outlines three periods of the covenant: (1) “with regard to destination” from the vantage point of the decree of God; (2) “with respect to the promise” in the Old Testament, when Christ was beginning to function as a Mediator, as the Prophet interpreting the divine will both through theophany and through the prophets, as the King ruling and leading his people, and as the Priest interceding for his elect; and (3) “with regard to the execution” in the incarnation where he accomplished the work of our salvation.⁸¹ Here we see that Turretin is utilizing a certain amount of typology to maintain the unity of the covenant of grace throughout the diverse administrations. Christ is not merely foreshadowed in the Old Testament, he is actually present and working as prophet, priest and king. The connection which Turretin maintains between symbol and reality in the sacramental character of the Trees of Paradise is echoed here in the affirmation that Christ was really present in the Old Testament dispensation. If there are shadows in the era of promise, it is because Christ is standing there casting those shadows by the reality of his presence with them. While following Cocceius in his use of typology, by asserting the connection between symbol and reality, Turretin was able to maintain stronger ties between the Law and the Gospel through the centrality of Christ in the covenant of grace.

B. Polemical Thrusts

1. *The Arminians*

a. The Unity of the Covenant of Grace

Acknowledging that Arminius himself recognized that both testaments partake of the one covenant of grace, differing in nothing but accidentals, Turretin points out that his followers denied that there was a clear promise of eternal life in the Old Testament, and therefore concluded that the Old Testament did not partake of the same covenant as the New.⁸² He recognizes that

⁸⁰Turretin, XII.ii.12.

⁸¹Turretin, XII.ii.15.

⁸²Turretin, XII.v.3.

The question is not whether the fathers of the Old Testament were saved, whether their sins were pardoned, whether they had any hope of eternal life, whether Christ was preached to them. Most of our adversaries do not dare deny this. Rather the question is whether they looked to Christ and were saved in the hope of his coming. Whether promises not only temporal, but also spiritual and heavenly concerning eternal life and the Holy Spirit were given to them.⁸³

Turretin argues for the unity of the covenant on seven grounds: (1) from the New Testament's teaching that "the covenant of grace (which God contracted with us in the New Testament) is the same with the covenant previously made with Abraham;"⁸⁴ (2) from the identity of the parts of the covenant in both administrations; (3) from the identity of the Mediator in both administrations: the one and the same Jesus Christ; (4) from the identity of the condition of the covenant in both testaments: *viz.*, faith; (5) from the New Testament teaching that the same promises were given to them as to us, "although often under the shell and veil of temporal things;" (6) from the identity of the sacraments under both administrations; and (7) from the use of the Mosaic law which pointed the Israelites to Christ and his sacrifice.⁸⁵ While vigorously affirming the unity of the covenant of grace, Turretin acknowledges the distinctions of administration.

b. The diversity of the Covenant of Grace

Turretin presents a summary of redemptive history to explain the purpose of the economical diversity of the covenant of grace. Suggesting that God's will is sufficient reason for why God chose to administrate the covenant in this fashion, Turretin attempts to expound *a posteriori* the "various wise reasons for this counsel:" (1) God's mode of progressive revelation, (2) the immaturity of the church, (3) the dignity of the Messiah and the necessity for man to see his misery, and (4) the nature of the case—namely that prophecies are necessarily more obscure the further they are from

⁸³Turretin, XII.v.6.

⁸⁴Turretin, XII.v.7, referring to Lk. 1:68-73; Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8; Rom. 4:3; and Gal. 3:17.

⁸⁵Turretin, XII.v.7-23.

fulfillment.⁸⁶ Turretin proposes a simple periodization for understanding the covenantal development within the covenant of grace:

The Old Testament	external law and internal grace
Adam to Abraham	the primeval promise
Abraham to Moses	the federal promise, and the conditions of the covenant
Moses to Christ	the double relation—legal and evangelical
The New Testament	Incarnation of Messiah and Pentecost ⁸⁷

The difference between the “old and new covenants,” Turretin acknowledges, has been a sticking point even within the Reformed community. He therefore attempts to articulate a position which can mediate between the orthodox while excluding the Arminians. He starts out by distinguishing between the broad and strict meanings of the Old Testament: broadly it refers to the whole of the time from Adam to Christ, but strictly to the “covenant of works or the moral law given by Moses . . . apart from the promise of grace.” The true end of the Old Testament “was Christ for righteousness to every believer” but this was distorted by the Jews into “a false end, maintaining that the law was given in order that by its observance they might be justified before God and be saved (Rom. 10:30-5). Against this error the apostle everywhere disputes from that hypothesis which takes the law strictly and opposes it to the promise.” Similarly, the new covenant can be read broadly to stand for the entire covenant of grace, or strictly as a new covenant made at the time of Christ. Granting that some of the Reformed have held to the strict formulation (identifying Rollock, Piscator, and Trelocatius), Turretin concedes that this tends to create “two covenants diverse in substance,” but affirms that although they depart from the more traditional orthodox formulation of one substance, different administrations, the difference lies in a “different use of terms, but not as to the thing itself.”⁸⁸

⁸⁶Turretin, XII.vii.1-5.

⁸⁷Turretin, XII.vii.

⁸⁸Turretin, XII. viii. 6. Good (166) notes that there were some among the Swiss theologians who wished to condemn Piscator on this point in the

Nonetheless, it is useful to consider the law in its strict relation when considering Paul’s discussion of the letter and the Spirit, because the law was designed to display man’s worthiness of death while the gracious gift of the Spirit has been given to bring him to life. The orthodox explication of the differences between the Testaments may be seen as to:

	<i>Old Testament</i>	<i>New Testament</i>
Time	Precedes and predicts Christ	Follows and exhibits Christ
Clarity	Obscure and shadowy	Clear and open
Easiness	Burdensome	Easy
Sweetness	Emphasis on obedience	Emphasis on grace
Perfection	Essential, but not accidental	Essential and accidental
Freedom	Infancy and minority	Maturity and adulthood
Amplitude	Jews alone	Jew and Gentile alike
Duration	Until Christ came	Everlasting ⁸⁹

Hence there is no place for the Arminian (or Lutheran) rejection of the Old Testament, yet at the same time, there are crucial, though accidental, differences which are essential for our understanding.

2. Amyraldianism

a. The Extent of the Covenant of Grace

Turretin treats Amyraut as one of “our men,” and when it comes to the substance of Amyraut’s doctrine, Turretin must admit that he is within the pale of the Reformed camp and a fellow

Formula Consensus Helvetica. It is safe to say, on the basis of this passage, that Turretin would have demurred, although it should be pointed out that he is not comfortable with Piscator’s language, and would prefer that all the Reformed would agree on Calvin’s usage which saw Moses most fundamentally as a part of the covenant of grace.

⁸⁹Turretin, XII.viii.18-25.

combatant against the Arminians. Nonetheless, he frequently condemns the theologian's views as dangerous in language and tendency, and had no qualms about declaring some of his formulations flatly unacceptable in the Genevan church.⁹⁰

Responding to both the Arminians and Amyraldians on the question of extent, Turretin recognizes that whereas the former insist that sufficient grace is granted to all both objectively and subjectively, the latter allow the "universality of the covenant only to objective and not to subjective grace."⁹¹ In other words, the Amyraldians only grant a hypothetical universalism in the atonement of Christ, but while there is a universal covenant by which their salvation is objectively accomplished, it is not subjectively applied, because the subjective covenant is particular. In opposition, Turretin states that the covenant is particular both objectively and subjectively. The fundamental question is whether God's intention for the covenant was universal or particular, but this involves the subordinate questions of whether there is "a real call through the works of nature by which all are summoned to the covenant of grace; whether a knowledge of Christ is necessary for adults to be saved; whether "common grace" (to use the modern term) flows from "the covenant of grace and the merit of Christ" with the intention of the salvation of all who receive it.⁹²

In response Turretin affirms the particularity of the covenant of grace, showing that since there is but one covenant of grace, there can be but one intention and promulgation. Amyraut's error was in creating a conditional covenant of grace, which "is repugnant to the nature of the covenant of grace" but is reintroducing a covenant of works, whereby God promises life to man on the basis of a condition, which fallen man can in no way fulfill. The condition of the covenant of grace is not dependent upon man, but upon God's determination "to give to all the elect certainly and infallibly the condition itself without another condition."⁹³ Further, if the covenant of grace were universal, then its promulgation would also have to be universal, or else God would fail in his purposes. This is indeed where Amyraut found himself returning to a natural

⁹⁰See footnote 3 above. The *Formula Consensus Helvetica*, it will be remembered, denied Amyraut's doctrine of universal grace.

⁹¹Turretin, XII.vi.2-4.

⁹²Turretin, XII.vi.6.

⁹³Turretin, XII.vi.10.

theology, affirming the natural ability but moral inability of man to respond to God's general revelation. Turretin pounces on this, contending that the assertion of a universal call to the covenant of grace confounds nature and grace, all for the sake of a universal objective grace which is subjectively impotent!

[S]ince universal objective grace is vain and illusory without subjective grace, we must either say that sufficient strength is restored to each and all, by which they can (if they will) obey God and be received into the covenant . . . or that God intends something under an impossible condition which neither man can have of himself, nor does God, who alone can, will to bestow upon him.⁹⁴

The first option is impossible, because God's common grace (what Turretin calls "various testimonies of his goodness and patience to the pagans") does not reveal his mercy—only the satisfaction of Christ can do that. But even if it did point to God's placability, it would still be insufficient for salvation, because it is not enough to know that God is willing to be reconciled to us, we must also know that he *is* (or at least will be) reconciled to us.⁹⁵ Hence we are left with the second option—that God intends something which he has no intention of accomplishing—which is a patent absurdity.

b. The Third Covenant

Cameron, the teacher of Amyraut, had introduced the idea that the Sinaitic covenant was distinct from the covenant of nature and the covenant of grace. Amyraut adapted and developed this in his threefold scheme (see above). Admitting that the Sinaitic covenant was different in dispensation, Turretin rejects the notion that it is different in substance on three grounds: (1) Scripture only allows for two covenants: the legal and the evangelical; (2) there are only two scriptural ways to obtain happiness: by works or by faith; and (3) the Sinaitic covenant declares itself to be a covenant of grace.⁹⁶ This last assertion he fleshes out exegetically and theologically from the Old Testament itself, as well as the New: (1) God declares himself to be

⁹⁴Turretin, XII.vi.17.

⁹⁵Turretin, XII.vi.23.

⁹⁶Turretin, XII.xii.1-9, appealing to Dt. 7:11-12; 29:10-13.

the Redeemer of his people; (2) the Israelites are considered as helpless sinners; (3) the circumstances of the covenant, including the communal meal of the elders with God (Ex. 24:10), presupposes a merciful covenant; (4) the typical nature of the ceremonial law; (5) the Old Testament sacraments are continuous with the New Testament sacraments and hence demand that they be signs and seals of the same covenant; (6) the absurdity of supposing that God made a covenant with Moses inferior to the covenant made previously with Abraham. This would reverse the order of redemptive history. Hence the Sinaitic covenant must be seen as substantially and essentially a covenant of grace.⁹⁷ He further takes issue with the Amyraldian insistence that Moses be seen as *the* mediator of the Sinaitic covenant, claiming that while “Moses can in a measure be called a mediator in the Sinaitic covenant” his mediatorial function is only as an interpreter, not as the one who is able to reconcile God and man.⁹⁸ Turretin qualifies his insistence on the unity of the covenant, by emphasizing the accidental differences between the Sinaitic and New Covenants, once again demonstrating his flexible use of language, but he maintains that the Amyraldian distinction of three substantially distinct covenants is untenable.

3. Cocceianism

While not mentioning Cocceius by name, Turretin addresses two of the concerns surrounding the Dutch controversy: the state of the Old Testament saints and the third use of the law, particularly in relation to the Sabbath.

a. The Old Testament and the forgiveness of sins

Cocceius had been accused of saying that Christ gave security for the elect, but “in such a way that there was not an actual transference of the debt to him; nor were the fathers freed from the guilt of sin,” until Christ actually accomplished their redemption.⁹⁹ In contrast, Turretin asserts that the fathers were “truly freed from

⁹⁷Turretin, XII.xii.9-17.

⁹⁸Turretin, XII.xii.23.

⁹⁹Turretin, XII.ix.3. Turretin does not name Cocceius, and I am not certain that Cocceius actually went this far, but it seems that there were “Cocceians” who were advocating this position.

the punishments due to them.”¹⁰⁰ But in order to avoid falling into the opposite error of overly extolling the fathers’ privileges, he then goes on to maintain that the remission of sins was not actually *obtained* for them until Christ’s death. This question Turretin sums up as “whether under the Old Testament the sins of the fathers were so translated to Christ, the surety, that in virtue of the payment to be made in his own time, they obtained a true and full remission of all their sins and from a sense of it, . . . they could have a tranquilized conscience and enjoy solid consolation.”¹⁰¹ Denying that this remission of sins was a mere passing by (*paesin*), he contends that it is a real and true removal (*afesin*). To demonstrate this he argues that the opposing view is repugnant: (1) to the suretyship of Christ; (2) to the nature of the covenant of grace; (3) to the guilt of sin, which demands that either the offender bear his punishment, or that another should bear it for him, neither of which the Cocceians allow; (4) to the justification of the fathers, for if they were justified, how could they still remain under the slightest possibility of condemnation?; (5) to the justifying faith of the fathers, which consists “especially in the fiducial apprehension and application of the righteousness of Christ and of his most perfect satisfaction (whether as already made or as infallibly to be made)”; and (6) to their sanctification which if it delivered them from the power of sin, ought also to deliver them from its guilt.¹⁰² Turretin then goes on to undermine the validity of a distinction between *afesin* and *paesin* on exegetical grounds, before presenting his view of the fathers as receiving a full, though relatively and comparatively less efficacious, manifestation of grace.¹⁰³ Admitting that this is a fine distinction, Turretin refrains from nitpicking any further, stating that the agitation on these issues “can break the bonds of peace and divide the souls of the brethren in contrary pursuits (with great offense to the pious and injury to faith).”¹⁰⁴

b. The third use of the Law

Turretin sets his discussion of the three uses of the law in the terms of the two states of man. In the “destitute state” the law is

¹⁰⁰Turretin, XII.ix.4.

¹⁰¹Turretin, XII.x.6.

¹⁰²Turretin, XII.x.9-14.

¹⁰³Turretin, XII.x.15-30.

¹⁰⁴Turretin, XII.x.32.

used for conviction of sin, restraint of wickedness and condemnation of the reprobate. Yet in the “state of grace” the law functions in two ways prior to conversion—by convincing man of sin and humbling him, and by leading him to Christ by casting down his trust in his own strength—and in one way after conversion—directing him in the ways of the Lord, “serving him as a standard and rule of the most perfect life.”¹⁰⁵ Acknowledging that the dispute about the abrogation of the moral law was an intramural debate between Reformed theologians, Turretin seems to try to walk the middle road between Cocceius and Voetius, admitting that

Moses . . . can be viewed in two lights: either generally and indefinitely as a teacher of the whole church; or particularly and definitely as a leader of the people and legislator of Israel. . . . In the latter sense, the law . . . pertained to the Jews alone, but in the former is extended to all no less than the law of nature (of which it is a compend). And thus the diverse opinions of the orthodox about the use and obligation of the Mosaic law can be reconciled.¹⁰⁶

Admitting that when the Mosaic law is considered apart from the covenant of grace it takes the form of “the letter that killeth,” Turretin concludes that “considered precisely in itself” the law looks like a covenant of works. Nonetheless, when understood in its relation to the promise, it becomes a means of grace.¹⁰⁷

One of the issues which exercised the Dutch in the Cocceian-Voetian controversy was that of the Sabbath. Turretin, as expected, takes the *via media*: insisting that the divine institution of the Sabbath as a commandment for all generations mandates its observance in the church, but the proper mode of rest and worship should focus on abstaining from the employments of the week and servile labor. He allows all works directly related to the worship and glory of God, works of charity and mercy, works of common honesty, and works of necessity, including those whereby “some great advantage and emolument accrues to us or our neighbor if they are done or some great disadvantage and loss if they are omitted.” Hence, among other things, Turretin allows cooking, war, continuing a journey, and “innocent relaxation of the mind and body, provided

¹⁰⁵Turretin, XI.xxii.9-11.

¹⁰⁶Turretin, XI.xxiii.15.

¹⁰⁷Turretin, XI.xxiii.12.

they are done out of the hours appointed for divine worship.”¹⁰⁸ Far from bogged down in the minutiae of legal questions, Turretin attempts to extract his readers from the debate and remind them of the purposes of the Sabbath, which are to be an encouragement into “true piety and holiness.” This approach successfully steers between the Scylla of the extreme Cocceians’ alleged carnal frivolities, as well as the Charybdis of the strict Voetians’ supposed grim legalism.¹⁰⁹

IV. Conclusion

Far from the dry and dusty scholastic which Turretin has been portrayed as, we have seen that Turretin merged a scholastic teaching style with a vigorous confessional theology and irenic polemics, designed to unite the orthodox (including those whose positions differed from his own) while keeping out the heretics. As a textbook for students attempting to understand the issues facing the churches in the late seventeenth century, the *Institutio* is a masterpiece, both for clarity and for fairness. His articulation of an orthodox Reformed response to the Arminian and Amyraldian challenges, as well as other intramural discussions, is invaluable to understand how Reformed covenant theology developed throughout the century.

Does Turretin succeed in maintaining traditional Reformed orthodoxy, as Muller says, employing “the breadth of the tradition and the techniques of scholasticism without detriment to the original message of Protestantism”?¹¹⁰ Is his doctrine of the covenants an appropriate development of the Reformers? Many have suggested that Turretin failed, largely on the grounds that Geneva rejected his program in favor of his son’s “reasonable orthodoxy,” but is the fact that the entirety of Europe was in the process of rejecting Reformed orthodoxy a valid argument against it? Most scholars have attempted to answer these questions on the basis of purely theological and philosophical issues, disregarding the historical context into which Turretin was speaking. This essay has

¹⁰⁸Turretin, XI.xiv.19-26.

¹⁰⁹Turretin, XI.xiv.31-32. Turretin refrains from naming these parties, but the issues fit the Dutch controversy to a tee, and Turretin himself quotes from the Acts of the Synod of Dort on the matter.

¹¹⁰Muller, “Scholasticism Protestant and Catholic: Francis Turretin on the Object and Principles of Theology,” *Church History* 55 (1986): 205.

only been able to address this issue slightly, and further study into the social, political and intellectual climate would doubtless be very fruitful. When seen in this light, Turretin appears to be a moderate and careful thinker, who, while frustrated by many of the trivial issues which exercised his contemporaries, attempted to call a recalcitrant age to return to the ancient paths. His failure is not to be attributed to his theological orthodoxy, any more than the Hebrew prophets failed because their message was inappropriate for their times. Rather, his audience—most tragically his son—was unwilling to listen.