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**The *Pactum*, Simplicity, and the Covenant of Life:**  
The Covenant of Life's Origin in the *Pactum Salutis* and Regula-  
tion via Divine Simplicity

By  
Samuel Kassing

A Project Submitted to  
the Faculty of Covenant Theological Seminary  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in Biblical and Theological Studies

Saint Louis, Missouri

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## Abstract

I will offer a paradigmatic reading of the covenant of life that originates in the *Pactum Salutis* and is regulated by the doctrine of divine simplicity. Centering conversation surrounding the coordination of the covenant of life and divine simplicity in the *Pactum* will allow me to work directly with the doctrine of beneficence and simplicity across the full range of redemptive history because the *Pactum* occurs within the *ad intra* life of God immediately. From this viewpoint, we can offer a more faithful coordination of divine beneficence and divine justice that allow us to delineate proper and improper ways of constructing the covenant of life based upon our understanding of divine beneficence and simplicity. This construction has the opportunity to inform our overall account of covenant theology and has various ecclesial and missional entailments.

To Mom and Dad

*Thank you. I love you.*

“Dogmatics is the system of the knowledge of God as he has revealed himself in Christ; it is the system of the Christian religion. And the essence of the Christian religion consists in the reality that the creation of the Father, ruined by sin, is restored in the death of the Son of God and re-created by the grace of the Holy Spirit into a kingdom of God. Dogmatics shows us how God, who is all-sufficient in himself, nevertheless glorifies himself in his creation, which, even when it is torn apart by sin, is gathered up again in Christ (Eph. 1:10). It describes for us God, always God, from beginning to end—God in his being, God in his creation, God against sin, God in Christ, God breaking down all resistance through the Holy Spirit and guiding the whole of creation back to the objective he decreed for it: the glory of his name. Dogmatics, therefore, is not a dull and arid science. It is a theodicy, a doxology to all God’s virtues and perfections, a hymn of adoration and thanksgiving, a “glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14).”

— *Herman Bavinck, Reformed  
Dogmatics, v. I, 112*

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## **Preface**

In many regards, this project began in the fall of 2015. ST300 Covenant Theology I. Two credit hours would alter my theological trajectory and give me a deeper love for the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Many of Dr. Michael Williams' refrains from that class still echo in my ears. "Tell the story!" "God is the covenant-keeping God." "All theology is for the sake of worship and mission." My joy in studying covenant theology began there.

Over the course of the following seven years, that joy only deepened, and more questions began to arise. The fruit of which is this project. It took one course to start this train of thought. But it took the entire curriculum for me to arrive here.

## Acknowledgments

To Leslie, who was a constant source of encouragement and well of sacrifice. I love you. To Adeline, Hannah, and Eleanor, daddy adores you. I thank God for you.

### Psalm 128

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה הֵלִיף בְּדַרְכָּיו:  
יִגִּיעַ בְּפִידָה כִּי תֹאכַל אֲשֶׁר יָדָה וְטוֹב לָךְ:  
אֲשַׁמְרָהוּ כִּגְפוֹן פְּרִיָּהּ בְּיַרְכְּתֵי בֵיתָהּ בְּנֵיהָ כְּשֹׂתְלֵי זֵיתִים סְבִיב לְשַׁחֲמָהּ:  
הִנֵּה כִּי־בָנוּ יִבְרָךְ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל יְהוָה:  
יְבָרְכֶךָ יְהוָה מִצִּיּוֹן וְרֵאָה בְּטוֹב רְוִשְׁלָם כֹּל יְמֵי תְהִיָּה:  
וְרֵאָה־בְּנֵיהֶם לְבָנֵיהָ אֲשֶׁר־עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

To my many friends, but to Dave, Lance, and Adam in particular, thank you for entertaining my constant and incessant theological and missiological questioning. Friendship is a blessing from God.

### Psalm 133

שִׁיר הַמַּעֲלוֹת לְדָוִד הִנֵּה מֵה־טוֹב וּמֵה־נְעִים שָׁבַת אַחֲמִים גַּם־יַחַד:  
כַּשֵּׁמֶן הַטוֹב עַל־הָרֹאשׁ יֵרֵד עַל־הַנְּקוּוֹת וְנִחוּ־אֲהָרָן שִׁירֵד עַל־פִּי מִדְּוָתָיו:  
כַּטֶּל־חַרְמוֹן שִׁירֵד עַל־הַרְרֵי צִיּוֹן כִּי תִשָּׂם צִנְהָה יְהוָה אֶת־הַבְּרִכָּה חַיִּים עַד־הָעוֹלָם:

To Brian Hough, Jonathan Dunning, Travis Shanahan, and Tim Durrett, thank you for showing me the beauty of a Presbyterian church rooted in the common means of grace and, for exulting the triune God in the life of the church, both gathered and dispersed.

### 1 Peter 5:5

Ὅμοιως νεώτεροι, ὑποτάγητε πρεσβυτέρους, πάντες δὲ ἀλλήλοις τὴν ταπεινοφροσύνην ἐγκομβώσασθε, ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ὑπερηφάνους ἀντιτάσσεται, ταπεινοῖς δὲ δίδωσιν χάριν.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

# Chapter 1

## An Introduction to the various views of the Covenant of Life and their relationship to Divine Simplicity

### 1.1 The Covenant of Life

#### *1.1a Its Significance and History*

The covenant of life has become a key distinctive of magisterial Reformed theology.<sup>1</sup> A bi-covenantal structure predicated upon the federal headship of Adam in the garden and the second Adam, Jesus, is the backbone of covenant theology. Members of the human race are either found in Adam or in Christ. This has led advocates of the covenant of life to argue, “Acquaintance with this covenant is of the greatest importance, for whoever errs here or denies the existence of the covenant of works, will not understand the covenant of grace, and will readily err concerning the mediatorship of the Lord Jesus. Such a person will readily deny that Christ by his active obedience has merited a right to eternal life for the elect.”<sup>2</sup> Because the articulation of this doctrine will inherently shape essential doctrines of the faith, there is a need to articulate its contours faithfully and clearly.

To complicate matters further, this doctrine has been articulated differently throughout its development and takes on distinctive hues in various ecclesial settings. J.V.

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<sup>1</sup> There is a tremendous amount of discussion surrounding the nomenclature of the covenant with Adam in the Garden. I will use the nomenclature of the covenant of life taken from the Westminster Larger Catechism question 20. I prefer this nomenclature for the simple reason that it avoids confusion that can surround a reductionistic understanding of the word works and it captures the comprehensive nature of a covenant that entails both beneficence and works.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service*, vol. 1, *God, Man, and Christ*, ed. Joel Beeke, tr. Bartel Elshout (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 355.

Fesko has ably traced the development of the doctrine from its pre-reformation roots to its modern context showing the various dimensions and unique emphasis it has taken on within the different streams of Reformed thought.<sup>3</sup> Due to the unique place that the covenant of life holds in the Westminster Standards and Catechisms, it is still a loadstar doctrine for the Reformed faith today.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the development of the doctrine over many centuries, another key facet to understanding the covenant of life is the various controversies that have refined the various articulations of the doctrine over time.<sup>5</sup>

### *1.1b Current Conversations*

Today the conversation has cooled considerably, but several questions still need to be answered. This thesis will focus on how divine simplicity regulates our understanding of the covenant of life and how the *pactum salutis* is the origin of the covenant of life. The primary question is how does simplicity and the *pactum* work together to arbitrate various questions in the discussion.<sup>6</sup> Attached to these methodological-systematic ques-

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<sup>3</sup> J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works: The Origins, Development, and Reception of the Doctrine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020); J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works* (Fern, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> WCF 7:2; WLC Q 20, 30; WSC 12. The standards refer to the covenant of life in these four places. Alternating nomenclature. It is important to note that the Irish Articles (1615) were the first protestant confessions to include the covenant with Adam in the garden and were used as a source document for the Westminster Standards.

<sup>5</sup> Examples of these would be: The school of Saumur and hypothetical universalism, the anti-confessional posture that began in the 17th-century Scottish theology and blossomed in 19th and 20th centuries, the rejection of natural theology by Barth, the school of Calvin against the Calvinist, the Marrow controversy, John Murray's re-castings of the Adamic administration, the Norman Shepherd controversy, the Republication debate, Federal Vision, etc. Etc. All have shaped the current conversations surrounding the covenant of life.

<sup>6</sup> Questions like "in what sense is the covenant of life "gracious?", "What was the nature of Adam's reward in the garden?", "What role does the Mosaic covenant play in our articulation of the covenant of life?", "What role does natural theology play in our understanding of the Law?" will only be touched upon briefly as they illuminate this dynamic.

tions are a host of exegetical questions. I will use the final chapter to offer further avenues of study at the intersection of systematic coordination and exegesis. I will focus on “What is the meaning of Leviticus 18:5 in its original context?” and how this text could serve as a potential window into the use of dogmatic reflection in the task of exegesis. This final chapter will not offer a conclusion but can serve us in our conversation surrounding the origin and regulation of the covenant of life amid current conversations surrounding it.<sup>7</sup>

These theological and exegetical questions are still being debated today, with various schools forming different emphases.<sup>8</sup> Westminster Escondido has a particular flavor.<sup>9</sup> Reformed Theological Seminary is also cultivating a particular stream.<sup>10</sup> Those who follow the late John Murray have often articulated their own variation.<sup>11</sup> Each of these schools makes exegetical decisions that cause them to coordinate the various theological

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<sup>7</sup> Once again there are a host of exegetical questions that are entailed in these theological constructs. For example, “What are we to make of the trees in the pre-fall state?” “How do we interpret the Prophetic passages of Isaiah 24:5 and Hosea 6:7?” “What do we make of Paul’s use of Lev. 18:5 in Romans 5:12–21, Galatians 4:24, or Romans 10:5?” Similarly, how do we interpret Jesus’ quotation of Lev. 18:5 in Luke 10:29?”

<sup>8</sup> It is important at this point to emphasize that these “schools” have far more in common than they have differences. Much of this thesis will explore where there are differences of substance and mere differences of semantics.

<sup>9</sup> Representative of this school are Michael Horton, *Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2009); Bryan D. Estelle, David VanDrunen, and J.V. Fesko., *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Guy Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muethers, *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020); Brandon D. Crowe, *The Path of Faith: A Biblical Theology of Covenant and Law* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2021); Richard P. Belcher, *The Fulfillment of the Promises of God: An Explanation of Covenant Theology* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2020).

<sup>11</sup> A.T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant* (London: Apollos, 2016); Michael D. Williams, *Far As The Curse Is Found: The Covenant Story Of Redemption* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Pub., 2005).



and systematic questions differently.<sup>12</sup> This also informs the various ways they structure the story of redemption.<sup>13</sup> This becomes particularly evident in the choice of which historical covenant becomes the paradigmatic covenant for their variation of covenant theology.<sup>14</sup> Schools that follow John Murray tend to see the Noahic covenant as paradigmatic.<sup>15</sup> The schools that follow Meredith Kline see the Mosaic as paradigmatic.<sup>16</sup> And schools following O. Palmer Robertson see the Abrahamic covenant as paradigmatic.<sup>17</sup> If someone were to pursue ordination, it would become clear that these questions still have significant ecclesiastical ramifications for today.

### *1.1c Its Relationship to the Covenant of Grace*

In a thesis devoted to the intersection of the covenant of life and divine simplicity, it may seem strange to have an excursus on the covenant of grace. But, due to the nature of the covenant of life being a composite doctrine, we need to address its relationship to the covenant of grace for three reasons. (1) There is tremendous reverse engineering from

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note that these various streams have far more in common than they separate. To say they have a distinct emphasis is not to exaggerate their differences. Each of these streams is well within confessional orthodoxy and share fellowship. If you were to chart these differences on a Venn diagram, the picture would be much closer to one circle than three attached rings. I draw the contrast to highlight the emphasis, not to draw a line within the Presbyterian traditions.

<sup>13</sup> In an unpublished essay, “The New Covenant and Redemptive History”, by Dr. C. John Collins lays out a seven-fold taxonomy of various ways redemptive history can be read. These various views will be informed by the nature of the New Covenant and how various interpreters structure the continuity and discontinuity between the various historical covenants.

<sup>14</sup> I’m indebted to Dr. Martin for pointing this trajectory out in an initial advising meeting.

<sup>15</sup> John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblico-theological Study* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1988), 15.

<sup>16</sup> Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 16, 29–30.

<sup>17</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980); Jonty Rhodes, *Covenants Made Simple: Understanding God's Unfolding Promises to His People* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2014).

the covenant of grace to the covenant of life in the theologizing surrounding the various schools of covenant theology. Theologians often take the Adam-Christ relationship and infer from due and necessary consequences the structure of the covenant of life. Depending on the controversy or context; this cascading doctrinal consequentialism runs the risk of overloading the presentation and can distort the doctrine of the covenant of life.<sup>18</sup> (2) Due to the historical priority of the covenant of life, the covenant of grace is inherently related to the covenant of life in a way that the covenant of life is not related to the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is a response to the broken covenant of life. Adam's rebellion created the state of humanity post-fall. This is the state of rebellion that humanity needs to be delivered from by Christ. This means that a understanding of re-creation will need to be correlated with our understanding of creation. If the covenant of life can not be connected to the covenant of grace, then there is inherently something wrong with construction of the covenant of life under consideration. (3) Similarly, the purpose of re-creation must find a connection in the original intent of creation.<sup>19</sup> Meaning the covenant of grace has to be linked to the covenant of life in some fashion. It is critical that this relationship not overplay the continuity of the covenants creating a functional monocovenantalism or overplay the discontinuity as to destroy God's will in creating Adam in the first place. They must cohere because the covenantal structure is an aspect of the *ad extra* work of God that proceeds from his life *ad intra*. The processions are the

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<sup>18</sup> These consequences and the various debates prompted by them can be seen in John H. Stek, "Covenant Overload in Reformed Theology," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29, no. 1 (1994): 12–41.; Craig G. Bartholomew, "Covenant and Creation: Covenant Overload or Covenantal Deconstruction," *Calvin Theological Journal*, 30, no. 1 (1995): 11–33.

<sup>19</sup> What this connection is, or how the connection works is beyond the scope of this thesis.

fountainhead of the mission of God in history.<sup>20</sup> The latter point leads me to the importance of the doctrine of divine simplicity.

## 1.2 Divine Simplicity

### *1.2a Its Significance and History*

Divine simplicity may have fallen on hard times in modern theology but its pedigree is well established. From Augustine to Anselm and onto Aquinas the doctrine is well supported in the broader Christian tradition, and this remains the same in the Reformation and post-Reformation periods where we see it assumed and clarified the Reformed Scholastic.<sup>21</sup> This broad consensus in the tradition does not mean that doctrine was articulated uniformly. We can trace the development of the doctrine throughout history, and it may be more accurate to argue that there are various “divine simplicity(s)” at work in the tradition. But, these subtle differences in the various articulations do not undermine or change the substantial unity that the tradition has around this doctrine.

I will assume a broadly classical understanding of the doctrine throughout this thesis. This means that the understanding of divine simplicity that I am working with is largely informed by ancient and medieval sources and embraced in the Reformed Scholastics. Many people may wonder what the significance is of affirming a historic un-

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<sup>20</sup> Christopher R. J. Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*. (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> Augustine, *Trinity* 6.7; Anselm, *Proslogion* 18; Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*; 1a.3.7; Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI Reformation Heritage Books), 2019, 2:143–152.; Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992), 1:191–193.

derstanding of simplicity. It is a valid question to wonder how this seemingly abstract and philosophical doctrine can inform Christian discipleship. Divine simplicity is the truth that every attribute is identical with God's essence and that God is not composed of parts. Briefly, there are two areas that simplicity informs that every Christian will experience implicitly in their Christian life. (1) How do we understand God's attributes to cohere in God's essence? And (2) how do these attributes inform creation and our creaturely life within creation? It is in regard to these two questions that the doctrine of simplicity has often been recast in modern theology and would be detrimental to our construction of the covenant of life.

### *1.2b Modern Challenges*

It is not uncommon to see modern articulations of pastoral theology that question divine simplicity and its logical entailments like divine impassibility because they can seem cold or sterile amid human suffering.<sup>22</sup> This questioning is not only happening in the pew but it is also widely assumed in Christian Philosophy and the academy.<sup>23</sup> Some theologians have even accused confessional and Reformed thinkers of abandoning the

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<sup>22</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 203. Moltmann is a prime example of this. In a pastorally motivated move he claims that God suffers.

<sup>23</sup> J.P. Moreland and William Lane Craig, *Philosophical Foundations for a Christian Worldview* (Downer Groves IL, InterVarsity Press, 2017), 530–532; Alvin Plantinga, *Does God have a Nature?* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1980), 39–44.

Colin E. Gunton, *Act and Being: Towards a Theology of the Divine Attributes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 122-123; Paul R. Hinlicky, *Divine Simplicity: Christ the Crisis of Metaphysics* (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2016), Hinlicky's treatment of divine simplicity is a book-long treatment of this.; *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Barth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 92–110.

doctrine.<sup>24</sup> These challenges are substantial and ranging. Some have sharper teeth than others. Ranging from theologians poorly parroting historic formulations to legitimate critique and questioning that pertains to particular modern dilemmas.

If I were to boil down these differences, I would lump them into three different categories. Philosophical issues, modern issues, and pastoral issues. Philosophically the doctrine is questioned because. The philosophical issues relate to the identity of apparently contradictory attributes. If God's attributes are identical with his essence how can we meaningfully say that in God's acts that he is merciful or gracious without also saying in the same act that he is wrathful and just? This leads various philosophers to reject the doctrine as intellectually incoherent. Modern issues revolve around the notion of equality and the fairness of God. God is love and many modern theologians prioritize various attributes over and implicitly against other attributes. Creating composition in God's nature allows modern theologians to temporarily avoid certain pressing questions around the goodness and justice of God.

Lastly, we would be remiss to not mention the proper pastoral intuition to comfort God's people in amid suffering and evil. This proper pastoral intuition has caused some theologians to question the usefulness of impassibility. Once we remove the doctrine of

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<sup>24</sup> James E. Dolezal, *All That Is in God: Evangelical Theology and the Challenge of Classical Christian Theism* (Grand Rapids MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2017). In chapter 4, "Simply God Lost", Dolezal accuses a myriad of evangelical theologians of denying or modifying the doctrine. Bruce Ware, Ronald Nash, Kevin Vanhoozer, John Frame to name a few.

I do not have time to arbitrate all of Dolezal's claims. I cite Dr. Dolezal's work because it shows that there is a spectrum of opinions on the classical understanding of the doctrine even amongst women and men who confess the historic Christian faith.

impassibility, we will see that we can not positively affirm simplicity because if God can change or experience emotions, then we have a God of composition.

If the conclusions of these three modern challenges to the doctrine of simplicity were embraced, it would have a ringing effect in our doctrine of the covenant of life because it would change the nature of God and inherently inform the *ad intra ad extra* relations that produced the covenant of life.

### *1.2c Its Relationship to the Covenant of Life*

Divine simplicity and the covenant of life are two doctrines that people may not quickly coordinate. But because of the role of divine simplicity in our doctrine of God as a coordinating doctrine for the various attributes and the question of how and why God established a covenant with Adam in the first place, these doctrines are in an essential relationship. How someone coordinates these doctrines will have far-ranging ramifications. The nature of God's attributes will inherently inform our articulation of God's will in creating Adam in covenant and the nature of Adam's embedded existence.

How we coordinate these doctrines will become abundantly clear in the conversation around the attributes of beneficence and justice and the relative expression of these attributes, grace and wrath. Divine simplicity requires God to act beneficently and justly in his original purposes with Adam. Since God is simple he is pure act and must act as he is. To argue that God could act apart from his character would posit potentiality in God, or create composition. Both of these realities are denied by the classical conception of divine simplicity.

A question like, “is God gracious before the fall?” or “what is the role of the law in the covenant of life?” highlight this dynamic. To answer questions like these we inherently must decide how God’s attributes adhere in God’s being because we are asking questions that pertain to the relative attributes of “grace” and “wrath.” Since both of these relative attributes flow from the respective attributes of beneficence and justice we can not answer the above questions in a way that they would contradict each other because that would imply a contradiction in God’s very being. Divine simplicity rules out this contradiction because it teaches that there is no composition in God and that God is one in every sense of the word. The unity of God’s excellencies is the foundation and fountainhead of the covenant of life.

## **1.3 Literature Review**

### *1.3a Ancient, Medieval, and Scholastic*

When engaging the doctrine of simplicity, it is helpful to identify key figures in church history. In identifying key figures across history who have espoused the doctrine, we can see that the substance of the doctrine has not changed. This is abundantly evident in the theologies of St. Augustine of Hippo, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the Reformed Scholastic Petrus Van Mastricht. At first glance, Van Mastricht might seem like an odd grouping. But, upon closer examination, we can see that with respect to the doctrines of divine simplicity, they are nearly identical.

If one were to put a side-by-side comparison of *The Trinity* by Augustine, Aquinas *Summa Theologia Prima Pars 1-49*, and *Faith in the Triune God*, what comes into focus

is the substantial continuity of their formulations. Some sample quotations from each theologian will demonstrate this unity.

Agustine speaking about the nature of the Trinity, says, “it cannot lose any attribute it possesses,” and because “there is no difference between what it is and what it has, as there is, for example, between a vessel [cup] and the liquid it contains, a body and its colour, the atmosphere and its light or heat, the soul and its wisdom.” Augustine concludes, “None of these is what it contains.”<sup>25</sup> In *The Trinity* Augustine would be more explicit, saying “God has no properties but is pure essence... They neither differ from his essence nor do they differ materially from each other.”<sup>26</sup> It is abundantly clear from Augustine’s work that he is operating within the bounds of classical theism.

Similarly, Aquinas cites Augustine in his defense of simplicity and goes on to define simplicity, “For there is neither composition of quantitative parts in God, since He is not a body’ nor does his nature differ from His suppositum; nor His essence from His existence’ neither is there in Him composition of genus and difference, nor of subject and accident. Therefore, it is clear that God is nowise composite, but is altogether simple.”<sup>27</sup> Aquinas builds upon the exegetical theology of Augustine and provides a philosophical defense of the doctrine of simplicity that harmonizes with the early Augustine.

This line of thought is assumed and built upon in the Reformed scholastics. Petrus Van Mastricht writes,

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<sup>25</sup> Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 11.10.

<sup>26</sup> Augustine, *De trinitate*, 6.7.

<sup>27</sup> Aquinas *Summa Theologica* 1-49 Article 7; 34.



The consequent of spirituality is simplicity: not a shared and restricted simplicity, which applies to created spirits because they are spirits only analogically, but rather, an original and omnimodal simplicity, because God is Spirit from himself, and is called Spirit univocally. Scripture teaches this simplicity whenever it represents God, not only in composite and concrete terms, but in simple and abstract terms, when it call him love (1 John 4:8, 16), life (1 John 5:20), light, in which there is no darkness (1 John 1:5), that is a deity in which there is nothing heterogeneous, a deity that is nothing but pure deity.<sup>28</sup>

Van Mastricht would go on to list seven reasons that confirm this and five types of simplicity.<sup>29</sup> This is one example of the Reformed tradition sharing continuity with the catholic doctrine of God at large and the doctrine of simplicity narrowly.<sup>30</sup> This doctrine was not revised by the Reformed tradition. It was warmly accepted and assumed for the scriptural reasons cited in the Van Mastricht quote above. The scriptures teach that God is always who and what he is at all times. There is nothing other than God in God's being proper.

### *1.3b Bavinck to Duby*

As we turn to modern theologians to examine the doctrine of simplicity, we will see the same well-worn paths. Once again, representative quotations from modern theologians like Herman Bavinck and contemporary theologians like Stephen Duby demonstrate that the doctrine of simplicity has always entailed particular features and is still a doctrine of substance in the life of the church today. This continuity from the ancient

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<sup>28</sup> Peter van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester, (Grand Rapids MI, United States: Reformation Heritage Books), 2019. 2:143.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 144–145

<sup>30</sup> There are others who would narrate the development of this doctrine differently for biblicist reasons. An example of this would be John Feinberg. John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 329.

church to the present day undergirds my thesis. It demonstrates that I am not working with a novel notion of simplicity on the one hand but that I'm working with a notion of simplicity that is radically relevant and applicable to the contemporary theological landscape on the other. Once again, sample quotations from respective theologians will draw out this conclusion.

“The simplicity is of great importance, nevertheless, for our understanding of God. It is not only taught in Scripture (where God is called “light,” “life,” and “love”) but also automatically follows from the idea of God and is necessarily implied in other attributes. Simplicity here is the antonym of “compounded.” If God is composed of parts, like a body, or composed of *genus* (class) and *differentiae* (attributes of different species belonging to the same *genus*), substance and accidents, matter and form, potentiality and actuality, essence and existence, then his perfection, oneness, independence, and immutability cannot be maintained.”<sup>31</sup>

Bavinck affirms the importance of simplicity, and highlights the dual notion that positively, simplicity entails the unity of God, and that negatively it rules out the possibility of composition in God. Duby argues similarly,

“The identity of God *in se* and God *pro nobis* may be fleshed out with the help of the doctrine of divine simplicity. If God is complete *a se*, then his attributes are not “parts” or qualities that must be added to his essence. They are nothing other than his

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<sup>31</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation*, ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Publishing, 2004), 2:176.

eternal essence itself considered under diverse aspects. To be God is to be good, omnipotent, and so forth.”<sup>32</sup>

So even here in a contemporary writer responding to Karl Barth we see the doctrine of divine simplicity can be articulated in the modern idiom. Simplicity is a doctrine that was not novel or merely affirmed due to scholasticism or medieval theology. It has always been a logical entailment of scriptural teaching and a part of the church’s confession.

### *1.3c Murray and Kline, Torrance and Muller, Fesko and Perkins*

Unlike the doctrine of divine simplicity, when turning to the literature on the covenant of life there is far less consensus within the tradition on the particular details of a proper articulation of the doctrine. Whereas the overwhelming consensus amongst Reformed divines was an affirmation of the traditional catholic doctrine of God, the doctrine of the covenant of life was far from confessionalized in the life of the church with the same level of specificity.<sup>33</sup> In reading the literature on the covenant of life, there are three primary conversations of particular importance to this thesis, (1) the disagreement be-

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<sup>32</sup> Steven J. Duby, *God in Himself: Scripture, Metaphysics, and the Task of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 49-50. Duby will go on to argue in this section that, “In light of this, when God reveals his many attributes to us in the economy, he is genuinely revealing *himself*. He is not giving us arbitrary constructs that keep us from knowing him as he truly is.” He does this with Bruce McCormack as a dialogue partner. See McCormack’s essay “Grace and Being” for a contrary position.

<sup>33</sup> Belgic Confession is one of the earliest Reformed confessions, written in 1561, and begins with the simplicity of God.

The Westminster Standards being the first reformed standards to include constructions of the covenant of life in their confessional documents.

tween John Murray and Meredith Kline, (2) Richard Muller’s critique of James Torrance, and (3) the ongoing historical work of J.V. Fesko and Harrison Perkins.

Murray and Kline were colleagues at Westminster Theological Seminary. There was a significant dispute over the relationship between law and grace. Murray’s articulation of the covenant of life, he referred to it as the Adamic administration, prioritized grace over law.<sup>34</sup> He felt the freedom to ‘recast’ certain elements of traditional federal theology and was, by trade, an exegete who taught systematics at Westminster.<sup>35</sup> In his booklet *The Covenant of Grace* he argues that “a divine covenant is a sovereign administration of grace and of promise.”<sup>36</sup> Kline disagreed with this position sharply arguing, “Historical priority belongs incontestably to law covenant since pre-redemptive covenant administration was of course strictly law administration without the element of guaranteed, inevitable blessings.”<sup>37</sup> Much of the current debate surrounding the presence of grace before the fall can be seen in the writings of these two men. With much ink being spilled in the area of exegetical and Biblical theology.

When we turn to Torrance and Muller, we see how historical theology has shaped this conversation. Muller's essay “The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in the Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy” and his work in four-volume *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* has conclusively shown that Torrance’s work in

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<sup>34</sup> John Murray, *Select Lectures in Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh, UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 49. Murray rejects the nomenclature of the Covenant of Works for two primary reasons (1) it misconstrues grace before the fall, and (2) it isn’t explicitly stated in scripture.

<sup>35</sup> John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, (Phillipsburg N.J., Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing), 4-5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31

<sup>37</sup> Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, (Grand Rapids MI, Eerdmans Publishing, 1968) 29-30.

“The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and its Legacy” and his chapter “The Concept of Federal Theology” are inaccurate and rely on a distortion of Calvin and the scholastic tradition.

Lastly, building on various aspects of the Muller thesis Fesko and Perkins have ably traced the roots of the doctrine and displayed its catholicity within the greater Reformed tradition. Fesko able shows that the Reformed understanding of the covenant of life did not appear de novo in the life of Reformed churches. But the first articulations of the covenant of life were in the Roman catholic church under the teaching of Diego Lañyez and Ambrogio Catharinus, both delegates to the Council of Trent!<sup>38</sup>

## **1.4 Methodology**

### *1.4a Historically Situated*

All theology is historically situated. The discussion surrounding the covenant of life and divine simplicity is no exception. This is particularly important because these doctrines have been contested in different ways within different periods of time. Throughout this thesis I will seek to answer this question with a historical awareness. Although this will not be an attempt at historical theology, it will be deeply informed by various primary sources and the Muller thesis. This means I will assume a broad continuity in the Reformed tradition. Various views will be used to contrast each other but these views should not be held in a zero-sum matter.

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<sup>38</sup> J.V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works*, (Oxford, UK, Oxford University Press, 2020), 11–31.

This is particularly important in three areas. (1) when engaging the work of James Torrance and his work on the Reformed tradition at large. Torrance is a brilliant theologian, but many of his sweeping claims about relationship vs. Law in Reformed theology are demonstrable overstatements.<sup>39</sup> (2) Similarly, many modern philosophical arguments misunderstand the Church Fathers. Many variations of divine simplicity and classical theism are rejected that do not take into the context the historical context of the language that is being used. Modern definitions are read into classical works, and meaning is imported into their words that were never there in the first place. (3) Lastly, when engaging the various constructions of the covenant of life I will seek to honor the constructions in their historical particularity. In the period leading up to the confessionalization of the doctrine in the Westminster standards there were a host of debates. These debates informed the conversation uniquely at various points. So the absence of certain arguments or the absence of certain words or formulations is often contingent upon the time period of the argument. This absence may or may not mean that the substance of a particular construct or idea within the covenant of life was absent during this time period.

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<sup>39</sup> “The Covenant of Works and The Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy” Muller, Richard A. CTJ 29 (1994):75–101. In his essay he conclusively demonstrates that Witsius and à Brakel do not have an overly legal reading, and that they ground their positions in extensive exegesis.

In addition to this, in volume one of Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics, *Prolegomena to Theology of Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* he demonstrates the role of natural theology, in volume two *Holy Scripture* he shows the extensive continuity of covenant theology, and in volumes three and four *The Divine Essence and Attributes* and *The Trinity of God* he demonstrates the continuity of the doctrine of God: Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725, 4 Vols.* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2003).

### *1.4b The Composite Nature of Various Doctrines*

A word about the composite nature of the doctrines of divine simplicity, the covenant of life, and the *pactum salutis* is necessary. These doctrines can not be supported with simplistic proof-texting. But simply because these doctrines do not have a single proof-text does not mean that they do not have substantial scriptural support.<sup>40</sup> Nor does it entail that these doctrines do not flow from the narrative of scripture. Systematic reflection can be done in a way that keeps exegetical work at its core and is alert to the redemptive historical timeline.<sup>41</sup>

As I move to demonstrate the validity of these doctrines I will not merely seek to show that a text has a grammatical-historical context. The doctrine of simplicity and the doctrine of the covenant of works are not doctrinal constructs that appear explicitly in scripture. They are *sedes doctrinae*, and come together through the collation and exegetical analysis of key passages, themes and doctrinal loci. A theological reading of the scriptures enhances this discussion and allows us to move beyond some of the current impasses in the conversation because it avoids a narrow biblicism on one hand and yet is tethered to the text of scripture explicitly on the other. This dual effect will shape how certain questions are approached while simultaneously helping us reach a more comprehensive

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<sup>40</sup> For a defense of a healthy view of proof-texting see Michael Allen and Scott R. Swain, “In Defense of Proof-texting,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 54, no. 3 (September 2011): 589–606.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Allen, *The Fear of the Lord: Essays on Theological Method* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022). For a defense of this type of work see Michael Allen’s Essay “Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology.”

conclusion. I will not constrain myself to a grammatical historical interpretation and I will seek to move deeper into exegesis.<sup>42</sup>

It is beyond the space of this thesis to argue that this is a valid exegetical methodology. A modern movement that does this type of work is the theological interpretation of scripture (TIS). TIS is a blending of four different levels of reading in the text.<sup>43</sup> Summarizing these views Andreas Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell quote D.A. Carson summary of TIS,

First is the exegesis of scriptural texts in historical contexts and in terms of their literary features (including genre), in an attempt to discern the underlying authorial intent as much as this is feasible. Second is the interpretation of a given text within the scope of biblical theology in its entirety, in an effort to determine its contribution to the biblical metanarrative. Third is the quest to understand theological structures in a given text in conjunction with other major theological themes in Scripture. Fourth is the subjection of all teachings derived from the biblical writings to the interpreter's larger hermeneutical proposal. While interpreters have traditionally operated mostly on levels 1 and 2, most recent practitioners of the theological interpretation of Scripture operate on levels 3 and 4.<sup>44</sup>

He goes on to encourage working at all four levels of the text. When one steps back from Carson's description of TIS there are clear parallels to Augustine's four levels of reading in *On Christian Doctrine*. So whether ancient or modern, there is precedence for this assumption.

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<sup>42</sup> A modern example of this type of work would be the theological project of theological interpretation of scripture (TIS). TIS is a wide-ranging movement with many different expressions.

<sup>43</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 15.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.



### *1.4c Ad Intra and Ad Extra*

A large portion of this thesis will entail tracing the movement of creation from nothing back to the processions and missions of the Godhead. This will inherently raise a host of questions. (1) Is this even possible? Does creation *ex nihilo* rule out a connection between the nature of God and his creation? The obvious answer is “no.” God clearly continues to exercise a relationship with his creation. But, this does raise the question of voluntarism vs. Intellectualism and the role of natural law. (2) In addition to these dynamics, modern movements that espouse eternal functional subordination (EFS) have created confusion around the proper way of tracing divine missions.<sup>45</sup> What are the controls or parameters on tracing the processions and missions? (3) Lastly, there has been a recent movement in modern Trinitarianism to identify the immanent and economic trinity.<sup>46</sup> What keeps us from collapsing the economic trinity into the immanent trinity and vice versa?

Our understanding of the *ad intra* and *ad extra* relations will inherently inform the way we engage these questions. In this thesis I will primarily be “reading backwards.” This is where I will start with the effect of a divine procession as revealed in holy scripture and trace it backwards into the mystery of the Godhead. But, I will not confine myself to this direction of reading. I will also start with various systematic categories that have been revealed in scripture and reason from God to back to the effects of the divine missions. One way of reading is not necessarily more faithful than the other. They both

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<sup>45</sup> A notable example would be Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).

<sup>46</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Image of the Immanent Trinity: Rahner's Rule and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005). Sanders' work is an excellent treatment of this.

have their place in the work of systematic theology. The key is that the source of both directional-readings is divine revelation.

## 1.5 Organization

### *1.5a Theologia and Economia*

The thesis will begin with the explication of divine beneficence and simplicity. The reason for this is that I will be privileging *theologia* over the *economia*. Although we can never separate theology and the economy, this is an ontological and conceptual priority that should be given to theology proper. God is the source of the economy. The economy is not the source of God. By giving theology precedence, we will avoid the error of collapsing our theology proper into our doctrine of revelation and have a conceptual clarity surrounding terms frequently conflated in our conversations surrounding the covenant of life.<sup>47</sup> If we can articulate clearly what the relationship between beneficence and grace, and justice and wrath, we better be able to coordinate grace and law in the covenant of life. The distinction between a relative and absolute attribute is crucial.

### *1.5b Creation and Covenant*

After establishing our understanding of beneficence and simplicity we will move to examine the various constructions of the covenant of life. Here, we will moderate the debates between Murray and Kline, Muller and Torrance, and show how Fesko and

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<sup>47</sup> Gordon J. Spykman, *Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 64–75. It is not always clear where God's being and revelation are distinct.

Perkins recent historical work can illuminate various impasses in the conversation. My work here will be descriptive of various positions and I will seek to show how the various paradigms of the covenant of life are being shaped by their understanding of the covenant of grace even when they are discussing the covenant of life. I will offer a different paradigmatic reading of the covenant of life that is centered in the *Pactum Salutis*. Centering the conversation in the *Pactum* will allow me to work directly with the doctrine of beneficence and simplicity because the *Pactum* immediately occurs within the ad intra life of God. From this viewpoint, we can offer better coordination of divine beneficence and justice that allow us to delineate proper and improper ways of constructing the covenant of life based upon our understanding of divine beneficence and simplicity.

### *1.5c Covenant and God*

Lastly, I will conclude with a brief summary of the overlap and difference of the various covenant of life constructions and demonstrate that although there is substantial continuity between the various family trees of covenant theology, there are more than semantic differences. Then I will briefly seek to show how these differences will play themselves out in the life of the church by taking the question of, “what is the mission of the church?” as a case study. It is here that the doctrine of divine simplicity and its entailment of beneficence and grace will apply directly to the covenant of life and will inform how we envision grace restoring and consummating nature. By accurately viewing the covenant of life we will have greater clarity on the mission entrusted to Adam in the garden. This mission which was later picked up by Jesus and fulfilled in the covenant of

grace will give us a helpful window to view the role of grace as a relative attribute in the covenant of life and the covenant of grace.

I will then conclude by offering avenues of future exploration for a benevolent and gracious understanding of the covenant of life by examining Leviticus 18:1–5 and offering questions for future reflection. The doctrine of divine simplicity and divine beneficence relationship to the essence and nature of God will undergird this gracious understanding and be at the heart of these questions.

## Chapter 2

### Divine Beneficence, Simplicity, and Creation

#### 2.1 Divine Beneficence

##### *2.1a Essential Property*

There is much debate over which attributes can be considered an essential property of God and how we classify the divine attributes. What can be agreed upon is that essential properties are the divine attributes, and a divine attribute is an attribute that is identical with his divine being. This is what an attribute *is*. A uniquely Christian notion of divine attributes will incorporate God's powers, predicates, and personal nature as revealed in the redemptive history. A divine attribute is not merely a philosophical way to attribute certain characteristics to God. A divine attribute is an attribution to God drawn from his interactions with humanity in redemptive history or from synthetic reflection upon revelation.

There is confusion around what an attribute is for two reasons. One, there is often a mistaken notion that attributes are identical to each other because they are identical to the essence of God. Secondly, confusion creeps into our conversations surrounding attributes in regard to where we draw our understanding of attributes from. Is it proper for man to attribute characteristics to God? And if so, what is the proper source of these attributes? So whether the attributes are contested for philosophical or scriptural reasons, there remains a conversation surrounding the propriety of a classical understanding of divine simplicity and the historic understanding of attributes.

In addition to the philosophical and scriptural problem of defining an essential attribute, there is also the problem of conflating predicates and attributes. A predicate is different from an attribute in that a predicate denotes a role or relation that God has to his creation, whereas an attribute adheres in the divine essence.<sup>48</sup> This conflation becomes evident when we examine the relationship between predicates and attributes. For example, the evangelical notion of grace expressed through the predicate of Redeemer is different from the evangelical notion of grace expressed through the predicate of Creator. The relative attribute of grace can remain the same but be expressed differently due to the predicate that is used to express God's relationship to man at a particular moment in redemptive history.

### *2.1b Beneficence as Grace*

The attribute of beneficence expressed in the respective historical covenants differ according to the epoch of redemptive history in which each covenant is found. For this reason, I will build off of my threefold definition of "grace" that is rooted in the attribute of divine beneficence, which will mirror the Pactum Salutis, the Covenant of Life, and the Covenant of Grace.<sup>49</sup> In doing this we will see how the essential property of beneficence manifests itself in different predicate relationships at different moments in redemptive history. In the pactum God acts as a Creator, Father, and King; his role changes, and

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1981.) 1:368–371. The categories of properties, predicates, and accidents are fairly common in Reformed theology. I first encountered this taxonomy in Charles Hodge.

<sup>49</sup> John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 11–65. Barclay has shown conclusively that the word *grace* has a range of meanings within the Bible. It is a logical necessity to form a systematic taxonomy for the word that does justice to the breadth and particular uses of it in Christian theology.

we predicate the role of Redeemer only after the fall. This change is not a change in God's essence but in a predicate. Humanity's relationship to God changes but nothing in God himself changes.

A redemptive historical tracing of the predicates of God helps us understand the different expressions of beneficence, and it allows us to speak of grace before the fall without diminishing redemptive grace. As theologian Herman Bavinck says, "If God were to speak to us in a divine language, not a creature would understand him. But what spells out his *grace* is the fact that *from the moment of creation*, God stoops down to his creatures, speaking and appearing to them in human fashion."<sup>50</sup> (Emphasis mine.) We do not need to be shy of saying that God is gracious before the fall as long as we speak of a form of divine beneficence that is not tied to the predicate of redeemer.

When speaking of the divine attributes the image of light refracting through a prism is often used to describe the relationship between divine simplicity and the various attributes in God. In this metaphor, beneficence would be light or the essential property shown through the prism of God's nature and refracting into various colors. The various colors would be different variations of beneficence. As creatures, we experience different manifestations of beneficence in different epochs of redemptive history. But this change is not a change in God's essential attribute of divine beneficence. We see different colors because of our location in redemptive history. Not because there are different colors in God. Our understanding of divine simplicity requires that we hold together the different expressions of beneficence throughout redemptive history because they have the same

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<sup>50</sup> Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2004) 2:100.

source. Also, rooting our understanding of the covenant of life in the *pactum salutis* allows us to see the need for some variation of beneficence towards man before man was created.

### *2.1c Beneficence ad intra and ad extra*

Beneficence *ad intra* functions in the same way as any other attribute *ad intra*.

This is critical to understand. Divine simplicity entails divine harmony between the attributes because positively it expresses the unity of God. This unity of God is typically expressed logically, naturally, and supernaturally.<sup>51</sup> What is proper to God is good. In saying this, we are referring to a goodness that is of a different genus from humanity. Our understanding of goodness is analogous to this notion of goodness. He is the archetype of goodness from which we experience ectypal goodness.<sup>52</sup>

Now, when we move from beneficence *ad intra* to beneficence *ad extra*, we begin to see a difference between the two. This difference is not in the property of God but in our experience of it. Beneficence *ad extra* is woven into the very fabric of creation.<sup>53</sup> This is most evident in the creation accounts in Genesis's first two chapters. The consistent refrain at the end of each day is that "it was good. כִּי־טוֹב", this refrain demonstrates that creation reflects the one who made it. God has created all things in such a way that they reflect his glory.

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<sup>51</sup> Geerhardus J. Vos. *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids MI: Lexham Press, 2014), 1:9.

<sup>52</sup> James, Ussher. *A Body of Divinity*. (Birmingham, AL.: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2007), 54. I acknowledge that some divines within the Reformed tradition would actually argue that grace is its own essential property. James Ussher is an example of this.

<sup>53</sup> There is a debate between intellectualists and voluntarists at this point. At this point, I will assume the intellectualist point of view and briefly describe the contours of it later in the thesis.



What changes in beneficence in the movement from *ad intra* to *ad extra* is humanity's relationship to beneficence and our ability to participate in divine beneficence. Because as Bavinck says, "It [Scripture] posits no split, much less a contrast, between God's ontological existence and his "economic" self-revelation." We must recognize the continuity of the attribute as it moves from absolute in its *ad intra* ontology to its relative expression *ad extra* in creation.

## 2.2 Simplicity and Beneficence

### 2.2a Simplicity Positively Considered

Divine simplicity has a unique place among the attributes of God. This is because divine simplicity is the attribute that helps properly coordinate the attributes to one another. As Richard Muller says, "Among the Divine attributes, one stands forth as a governing concept which determines the way in which theology discusses the attributes and their relation to the divine essence: the divine simplicity."<sup>54</sup> The essence of Muller's argument is that simplicity has a unique role in our understanding of the doctrine of God because it functions as a referee between the attribute's relationship to themselves and between the attribute's relationship to the divine essence.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing Group, 2003), 3:38.

<sup>55</sup> At this point, one may wonder if divine simplicity is an attribute in the proper sense or merely a conceptual framework for coordinating the attributes and divine essence.

This relationship becomes particularly important as we seek to articulate a positive notion of the doctrine of divine simplicity that is built upon scripture.<sup>56</sup> As John Webster concisely argues, “Concepts developed in articulating the Christian doctrine of God. Including the concept of aseity, are fitting insofar as they correspond to the particular being of the Triune God in his self-moved self-presentation.”<sup>57</sup> Or in other words, there is nothing wrong with using philosophical words to describe God as long as we acknowledge that we are using these words uniquely in the Christian tradition because we are deriving the content of our doctrine from a unique source and speaking of the Christian God.<sup>58</sup>

When we speak of the doctrine of divine simplicity, we must speak scripturally and positively, not merely in the negative, if we are to be faithful to a Christian notion of

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<sup>56</sup> Richard A. Muller. *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2003), 3:38. Muller helpfully notes that there are two broad schools of articulating the divine attributes in the Reformed tradition. One that follows Anselm and the other that follows Lombard. With Anselm’s approach being predicated in a logical schema and Lombard’s approach contenting itself to present the stated doctrines of the church.

<sup>57</sup> I would argue that we could swap the term aseity for simplicity and the thrust of Webster’s argument would still be valid. John Webster, “Life in and of Himself,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 108.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* Or as Webster states it, “Rather, theology is simply concerned to ensure that its talk of aseity concentrates on that which is proper to *this one*.” Webster’s emphasis on “this one” highlights this point.

the doctrine.<sup>59</sup> To offer a positive definition of divine simplicity is difficult but necessary due to the historic penchant for primarily offering apophatic definitions of the term.<sup>60</sup> Yes, divine simplicity is that which opposes the composition of parts. But, positively divine simplicity entails a God that is one, pure act, and spiritual. As Duby ably argues, “Inferred from such attributes as the singularity, aseity and immutability of God, divine simplicity affirms that in his abundance, perfection and absoluteness God is pure act, mightily alive and identical with all the fullness that he has and is in himself, which claim then constitutes the inner theological ratio of the aforementioned attributes.”<sup>61</sup> In the cataphatic sense, divine simplicity is the quality control of the attributes of God. When God is,

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<sup>59</sup> Fred Sanders, *The Triune God* (Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan Academic, 2016), 70. The point of reiterating this is, of course, a very narrow one: verbal revelation must be acknowledged at the very foundation of Trinitarian revelation. Revelatory words are not epiphenomenal to revelatory acts. Rather they are equiprimordial and unavoidable. The missions of the Son and the Holy Spirit are irreducibly verbal, though not exclusively verbal.”

Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, (London, UK, T&T Clark, 2015), 56. “while dogmatics can be distinguished from exegesis insofar as the latter is often taken as the interpretation of individual passages prosecuted without the conceptual, inferential rigor and scope typically displayed in dogmatic work, dogmatics in another sense just is exegesis carried out in a certain elaborative manner.”

Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2004), 2:100. Bavinck says, “Scripture never even attempts to describe these perfections of God positively in terms of their own essence and apart from any relation to the finite.” I disagree with Bavinck at this point for the reason argued in this paragraph.

<sup>60</sup> Gerald L. Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 58. “In borrowing the language of eternity and impassibility from Platonism, Christianity did not borrow the Platonic concepts as well, but used the vocabulary within its own conceptual framework.”

<sup>61</sup> Steven J. Duby, *Divine Simplicity*, (London, UK, T&T Clark, 2015), 88

God is fully himself.<sup>62</sup> Simplicity entails not only the denial of composition but the positive purity of God's being in all of his being and acts.<sup>63</sup>

## 2.2b Simplicity and Grace

Since the positive entailment of divine simplicity informs our understanding of the attribute of divine beneficence. God's beneficence is the fountainhead of the relative attribute of grace. Grace is the expression of divine beneficence coupled with divine freedom that creates a relationship with covenantal-creatures. This would mean that grace can be considered as an essential attribute of God.<sup>64</sup> We can infer that there is a notion of grace in every epoch of redemptive history because grace is rooted in the eternal God and does not find its genesis in time.<sup>65</sup> Therefore there must be a gratuity to creation because God's decision to create humanity "begins" outside of time and eventually culminates in time. The reality that he is not a composite being entails that whatever attribute is present

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<sup>62</sup> Aquinas, ST I, q. 42, aa 1-4. Aquinas argues that because of the doctrine of divine simplicity, we must insist that the fullness of the divine life and essence is always present. He makes this argument in his discussion about the Trinity. This is another sign that divine simplicity that is cataphatically considered is positively about the life of God.

<sup>63</sup> This is precisely where tethering the doctrine to exegesis pays off. The exegetical payoff is that the doctrine of divine simplicity entails both an apophatic and cataphatic contour.

Geerhardus Vos. *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI, Lexham Press, 2014),1:9.

<sup>64</sup> Relative attributes are still essential attributes because they are identical to the divine essence.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29, no.1 (1994), 75–101. Muller argues this much in footnote 57 of his essay when he says, "but he arguably avoids the term *grace* inasmuch as he typically uses the term quite strictly to be the divine response to sin. In a broader sense, grace can also indicate the divine gift of original righteousness and of the right ordering of reason, will, and affections in subjection to God (cf., Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologian*, 1a, q.95, a.1). In this sense Calvin — and the federal theologians as well — assume grace before the fall (cf., Calvin, *Institutes*, I.xv.1-3 with idem, *Commentary on Genesis*, 2:9 [CTS, 1,116-18]): this is precisely the issue of the scholastic doctrine of the *donum superadditum*." This distinction is critical in this discussion.

*ad intra* before creations must be present *ad extra* post creation. The creation of time does not and can not create composition in the divine essence.

Historically, this distinction has been maintained by classifying the attributes as absolute or relative. This distinction allows us to affirm that the grounds for all of God’s attributes reside in his being, whether or not we would have encountered them in God before the world’s creation. It is important to note that this is a conceptual classification. In the narrow sense, all of God’s attributes are absolute, and all are relative. None of God’s attributes are predicated upon or dependent upon any aspect of creation, even if we only encounter some of his attributes in relation to creatures. Theologian Geerhardus Vos summarizes this point well, “In other words, the ground for them resides in His being, apart from the existence of the world, although we must admit that we could not conceive of some of them in action (e.g., grace and mercy) if the world did not exist.”<sup>66</sup> In this sense, we can argue that grace is an essential attribute of God, and if it is essential, then divine simplicity causes us to affirm its role in the original creation in a relative function and regulated by the epoch of redemptive history.

### *2.2c Simplicity From Ad intra: The Beginning of Grace*

At this point, Aquinas’s reflection on the connection between divine processions and divine missions is illuminating. Aquinas defines a “the mission of a divine person of a divine person as an eternal procession with the addition of a temporal effect.”<sup>67</sup> Aquinas

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<sup>66</sup>Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Grand Rapids, MI, Lexham Press, 2014), 1:6–7. I, Q:1 A:C.

<sup>67</sup> Thomas White, “Resourcement Thomism,” *The New Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 364.

scholar and theologian Thomas White distills Aquinas's reflection when he says, "the missions of the Trinitarian persons are distinct from their eternal processions but that they reveal processions, manifesting to us in time the true eternal identity of God."<sup>68</sup> This is directly illuminating because all of God's missions must proceed from the processions, and all processions find their protology in the life of God *ad intra*.<sup>69</sup>

When theologians note that the use of "grace" can be problematic in describing the voluntary condescension of God in the covenant of life, they are trying to guard against an abuse or misuse of the doctrine.<sup>70</sup> *Abusus non tollit usum* is the proper response to this concern because our doctrine of divine simplicity entails that we speak of God's grace before the fall and in the covenant of life, and if we choose not to speak of God's grace pre-fall, it will inherently distort how we coordinate various doctrines in relation to the covenant of life.

In this sense, divine simplicity helps us properly read the relationship between the processions *ad intra*, and the missions *ad extra*. Divine simplicity holds the various attributes together, Creator to creation, from beginning to end, from *pactum salutis* through the covenant of grace. To separate the attribute of grace from the *ad intra* processions would logically entail that we can not say grace is an attribute of God *ad extra*. Grace would merely be a state of the relationship between God and man and not something that

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 364.

<sup>69</sup> As we read the relationship between the *ad intra* and *ad extra* relationship, we are free to start from either place when creating our doctrinal constructs as long as we know that our starting place is merely conceptual and does not dictate the flow of the economy. The danger of reading the economy back into the Godhead is present. This is functionally what happens in social trinitarianism.

<sup>70</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, Reid, Meuther, *Covenant Theology* (Wheaton, IL, Crossway, 2020), 27. This is Ligon Duncan's argument.

adhered in God's being proper. If grace only exists in the economy of redemption, then it can not properly be an essential property of God. This would make grace a substance and not an attribute. Therefore we should not rule out all uses of grace before the fall in a totalizing way. But, if we do choose to use grace as a descriptor before the fall it must be defined differently than the notion of grace post-fall because the relative attribute of grace is relative to the state of man before God.

## **2.3 Simplicity Gone Ad Extra: Creation from a Simple God**

### *2.3a Simplicity and Creation Accounts*

It is critical that the move from procession to mission not impugn the essence of God. There are two ways this can happen, either through construing creation in a monistic sense or in a dualistic sense. Divine simplicity guards against both of these errors and offers us a way to coordinate God's essence with creation that preserves the essence of God but allows us to speak of a creation that is consistent with God's nature. In the creative act God does not plant part of himself into existence that then manifests his character. This would entail parts to God and is why divine simplicity rules out any form of monsim. Equally, we can not say there was something that existed apart from God, this too would be a denial of God's aseity and would make him dependent or contingent upon something else. This too would then entail parts of God, once again denying simplicity.

As we move from the *ad intra* processions to the missions *ad extra* we must do so in a way that honors God and speaks of him fittingly.<sup>71</sup> This means we must examine our move from theology (θεολογια) to economy (οικονομια) to prevent distortion in either, we need to give theology priority over economy. Theology maintains the authority to norm our statements about the economy. This means our understanding of simplicity should inform and control our understanding of creation because simplicity is a doctrine that belongs to theology. This also logically entails that we must move beyond merely speaking of God in his works. It is not mere speculation to think of God as he was before he created the world. In arguing that theology receives precedence over economy, I am not arguing that we separate the two. We must distinguish without separating. But this does mean that our various constructions of the covenant of life must be normed by theology proper.

### *2.3b From God to Economy*

Without the processions, a Christian notion of creation is impossible. Riffing on Herman Bavinck, theologian Robert Letham says, “Without generation, creation would be impossible, and so if God were not triune, creation would not be possible. The procession of the Spirit from the Father and the Son is the basis of the willing of that world. The creation proceeds from the Father through the Son in the Spirit in order that, in the Spirit

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<sup>71</sup> Christopher Holmes, *The Holy Spirit*, (Grand Rapids MI, Zondervan Academic, 2015), 28. “We only ask about God’s inner life, because we wonder where God’s goodness toward us comes from. The basic reason one cannot concentrate exclusively on the economy of the Trinity, as much contemporary theology does, is that God’s self-revelation encourages us to speak of its source in God’s life. It is God’s life that must govern any account of what God does.”



and through the Son, it may return to the Father.”<sup>72</sup> Without a uniquely Christian understanding of God, we can not have creation as we know it.

The trinity of God protects our understanding of the divine processions because it creates space for there to be relations of origin in God without creating parts in God. This in turn, protects our understanding of the divine missions because it prevents us from collapsing the divine missions into the Godhead.<sup>73</sup> On the one hand, unlike in Islam and Judaism, where God is one but can not share his divine life until after he creates, Christianity has a God who shares his life in eternal relations without ever creating. On the other hand, unlike pantheism or polytheism, this is truly a simple God who can create the word from a place of peace. The Trinitarian nature of God allows us to simultaneously affirm the person of God without altering simplicity or denying his ongoing relationship to his creation.

When we move from God to the economy, we are tracing the contours of the freedom of God because we know God only acts in accordance with his character. Any act that he does is an act of freedom. When we speak of the freedom of God, we must have a notion of the incomprehensibility of God that prevents us from making God’s acts arbitrary or gutting them of mystery. These realities should chasten us. We will be tracing the

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<sup>72</sup> Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2019), 524.

<sup>73</sup> John Webster, *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 118. “This does not entail that all other doctrines are to be derived from the doctrine of creation, or that those other doctrines do not also in their turn illuminate teaching about creation. Consideration of the *opus gratiae* enriches and extends what is said about the *opus naturae*, most of all by enabling closer identification of the archetype and agent of creation (in him all things were created) and of its *telos* (all things were created through him and for him, Col. 1.16). At the same time, teaching about God the creator and his work exercises considerable sway in articulating the work of grace, whose intelligibility depends in some measure upon principles about the coming-to-be and the nature of created things in relation to God which are laid down in a theology of creation.”

contours of a mystery as we seek to root our historical notions of the covenant of life in the *pactum salutis*.<sup>74</sup> This is important for my thesis because there will be points that seem to be speculative. But this speculation is not mere speculation or presumptuous speculation. It is a disciplined speculation for the sake of examining the relationship between divine simplicity and the *ad intra* and *ad extra* relationships.

### 2.3c Reading Backwards

To help chasten any undue speculation it will help if we “read backwards.” Reading backward is tracing the historical acts of God back to the Godhead. This is a backward act because we know that the acts of redemption proceed from the Godhead and occur at a later point in redemptive history than the *pactum*. But, we can only move from the economy to theology from a historical point of view. All knowing of God as he is in himself is rooted in revelation. This is due to the incomprehensibility of God and the nature of general and special revelation.<sup>75</sup> But, once we’ve begun in history, we begin a hermeneutical loop. The economy leads us to God, and God leads us back to himself through the economy.

Reading backward requires reading within the grain of redemptive history but this does not rule out a logical reading of history. Once we’ve established that our understand-

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<sup>74</sup> Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Chapter three of Louth’s work offers a healthy vision for what it looks like to knowledge of God *ad intra*.

<sup>75</sup> Webster, *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1:118. “Teaching about creation Opens the logical and theological space for other Christian beliefs and mysteries” because contemplation of that teaching enables discernment of essential properties of the relation between God and created things which will be further displayed when considering the history of their interaction as it unfolds in the economy.

ing of God has roots in redemptive history, we begin synthesizing.<sup>76</sup> From here, it is proper to begin in either place. We can begin our theologizing from theology or from the economy. We are within orthodoxy as long as we always demonstrate that our theology is revealed from the economy and that our theology has conceptual and logical precedence over the economy.

Reading backwards, then, is most simply a method of reading that prioritizes exegesis and Biblical theology in the process of hermeneutics without creating a hierarchy between the various disciplines of theology. I'm belaboring this methodological point because many people will accuse doctrinal constructs like divine simplicity, the covenant of life, and the *pactum salutis* as foreign categories to the Bible. But these are rational categories that arise naturally from the Biblical text and even from the story itself.<sup>77</sup> It is not speculative to think about or meditate upon the *ad intra* relations of God and how they produce the *ad extra* missions of God. The economy serves the purpose of pointing us back to God!

## 2.4 The Gratuity of Creation

### 2.4a The Contingency of Creation

The opposite of *contingent* is that which is *necessary*. The Bible opens with the line "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." Since God is the only necessary being this means that creation is contingent. Creation has as its source the cre-

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<sup>76</sup> Geerhardus Vos. *Biblical Theology*, (Edinburgh, UK, Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 21–22.

<sup>77</sup> Michael Allen; Swain, *Christian Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 135. Webster has an extended dialogue about why this is the case.

ative act of God. There is not a war between other gods or some other factor external to God that prompts God to create. The simple God that *is* creates a world from nothing. Theologian Ian McFarland says, “So if creation is nothing other than God’s being God to that which is not God, then it necessarily takes the form of God’s giving existence to whatever is not God. Quite simply, that there should *be* anything other than God is possible only because God *gives* being, along the lines of the of the “let there be” language found in Genesis 1.”<sup>78</sup> What is key to note for my thesis is that the existence of creation is contingent upon God *giving*. McFarland would go on to say, “the contingency of creation establishes the possibility and limit of created life: where creatures live, it is because God has granted them life; and because their life is created, it is at every point contingent on God’s gracious permitting.”<sup>79</sup> The contingency of creation establishes a need to speak of a gracious form of beneficence before the fall.

This dynamic is then mirrored in re-creation as Vos in his *Biblical Theology*, argues that, “The provision of this new, higher prospect for man was an act of condescension and high favour. God was in no wise bound on the principle of justice to extend it to man, and we mean this denial not merely in the general sense in which we affirm that God owes nothing to man but in the very specific sense that there was nothing in the nature of man nor of his creation, which by manner of implication could entitle man to such

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<sup>78</sup> Ian A. McFarland, *From Nothing: A Theology of Creation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2014), 58. It is important to note that in quoting McFarland here I am highlighting the emphasis of creation as a gift. I am not signing off on all of the possibilities that could be included in McFarland’s notion of creation or the conditionality of the “if” in his statement.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 63

a favour from God.”<sup>80</sup> Vos correctly identifies the continuity of beneficence in both eras of redemptive history.

No matter how we approach the creator predicate of God we see that at the heart of it lies the freedom of God and his benevolence. Since creation is an act of God permitting or giving life we can infer that this is an act of benevolence. God is being gracious towards his creation in the very act of establishing its existence. So all of creation is radically dependent upon God, this would include Adam in the covenant of life.

### *2.4b Creator-Creation distinction*

This creator-creature relationship is often described as the “creator-creature distinction” in Reformed circles. The creator-creature distinction impinges upon my thesis because we see no conflict in God in the creation account nor anything that does not harmonize with God. The fundamental antithesis of the world is not between God and evil or between creation and some other facet of creation. The fundamental distinction is between creator and creation. So although the creation is radically dependent upon God, God is not radically dependent upon creation. God does not need Adam to do anything for him in Genesis 1 to sustain his existence.

Divine simplicity entails one being whose aseity can not be separated from his goodness. When God creates the world he does not create the world out of some form of need. Once again Webster is illuminating on this point and worth quoting at length, “God the creator wholly exceeds the act of creation, which in no way constitutes, perfects, or

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<sup>80</sup> Geerhardus Vos. *Biblical Theology*, (Edinburgh, UK, Banner of Truth Trust, 1975), 21–22.

extends the perfection of his life as Father, Son and Spirit. God's inner works (the relations of origin paternity, filiation, and spiration) are wholly sufficient; God is entirely realized without potentiality."<sup>81</sup> Since God is simple he can not be related to creation in any way that would make creation an accident of his being or form of his "becoming." This would entail parts in God.

### *2.4c The Gracious Grain of Creation*

Creation does not create God, nor does it create itself. This may seem self-evident but our doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* causes us to recognize that the grain of creation was set by God and God alone. It had a beginning, and that beginning came from someone. This means that the flow of creation is from God. As John Webster has said, "The Doctrine of creation out of nothing finds its places in consideration of the works of the Triune God. These works can be divided as God's inner works (*operations Dei internae*) — that is, the divine processions that are God's inner life in his perfect bliss — and his outer

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<sup>81</sup> Michael Allen; Swain, *Christian Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 137

works (*operations Dei externae*) — that is God’s “transitive” acts whose term lies outside the divine being.”<sup>82</sup>

## 2.5 The Forms of Beneficence

### 2.5a Creational Beneficence

When we speak of creational beneficence, we are talking about the freedom of God expressing itself in speaking the world into being. To quote Webster one last time, “Creation, we might say, results from something like a decision, in that as creator God is wholly self-determining. But again, this self-determination is not arbitrary self-causation but simply God being the one he is, the one characterized by unrestricted goodness. “Will” and “goodness,” like “freedom” and “necessity” or “nature,” are identical in God.”<sup>83</sup>

When God creates a world, he creates a world that he is pleased with. This act is a benevolent act. An act that is entirely free. What is created from this act is a creation that

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 127–128

Ibid., 128. “A number of aspects of the Christian doctrine of creation acquire special visibility when treating creation out of nothing, and not without reason; it has from the second century often served as an index of the Christian authenticity of teaching about creation. At the formal level, the doctrine of creation out of nothing is a gauge of the scriptural character of the dogmatics of creation. Materially too it reflects some primary features of this dogmatic topic. It draws attention to the fundamental role played by prior teaching about the simplicity and perfection of God's triune life in himself; it sets before the mind the absolute distinction between uncreated and created being on which much else in Christian doctrine turns; it displays how the doctrine of creation reaches back into the being of God but also reaches forward into the works of conservation and redemption; it demonstrates the necessary speculative impulse in Christian dogmatics. All this means that reflection on creation out of nothing unfolds a topic that may legitimately be regarded as, if not “the decisive point of the Christian doctrine of creation,” at least a point where its chief concerns coalesce.” This quote captures everything I’ve been wanting to say. But, does it more concisely and better than I could say.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 139

has no claim upon God from its own merit or existence. A simple God could not create a world that he was dependent upon. God's simplicity entails aseity and rules out God creating anything that could be identical to himself. To do that he would need to create another simple being. This is not possible.

### *2.5b Creational Grace*

We've established that we can speak of a creational beneficence. But, can we speak of a "creational grace?" I think the answer is "yes." If by grace we mean an expression of God's beneficence that is utterly and entirely free. The gracious element of this expression would be tied to the freedom of God. This expression of gracious beneficence differs from the redemptive gracious beneficence because the gratuity is being expressed towards creation in a different predicate and because of the relative attribute status of grace. God as creator and grace as the relative attribute. The other major difference is the nature of man's dependence. At this point in redemptive history man's dependence has not been altered by sin. God's freedom and man's creaturely dependence are what makes it proper to speak of a creational grace.

### *2.5c Redemptive Grace*

Redemptive grace has a relation to creational grace in that it finds its origins in the same divine attribute, beneficence, but as detailed above it finds its difference in



man's covenantal standing before God.<sup>84</sup> It is critical to retain the continuity between the source of both expressions of beneficence while distinguishing the predicate and redemptive historical differences. Redemptive grace is necessary because sin is an ethical and moral distortion of God's good creation. Sin's presence in God's good creation is what makes redemption necessary and does not create a new attribute in the essence of God. Our understanding of simplicity allows us to maintain the unity of creational and redemptive grace but it also demands that we distinguish between them.

In summary, we can see that each covenant, *pactum*, covenant of life, and covenant of grace are rooted in divine condescension and benevolence. This shared root is why we can insist that the *pactum* is the origin of both the covenant of life and the covenant of grace.

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<sup>84</sup> Webster, *God Without Measure: Working Papers in Christian Theology* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1:118. "In much modern exegetical and dogmatic theology, the doctrine of creation does not have this place and function. This may be attributed in part to the war in which in all conceptions of the matter of Christian teaching some doctrines achieve prominence and others contract. Concentration on the outer works of God, for example, may be such that the first body of dogmatic material on God's infinite perfection in se receives only slight attention. By consequence, the existence and history of created things may be assumed as a given, quasi-necessary, reality, rather than a wholly surprising effect of divine goodness, astonishment at which pervades all Christian teaching. Moreover, treatment of the *opera Dei externae* may be so structured that the *opus gratiae* has precedence over the *opus naturae*, of which it is the 'inner ground' Exposition of the history of grace as the final cause of creation takes priority over contemplation of God the creator and God's act of creation as the first cause of created being and history, including the history of redemption. The resultant conceptions of Christian doctrine are customarily historical or 'dramatic in idiom, presenting the relation of God and creatures as one between divine and human persons and agents who for all their differences, are strangely commensurable, engaging one another in the same space. deciding, acting and interacting in the world as a commonly-inhabited field of reality. This may be especially the case when, in the absence of other considerations, the person and career of Jesus are deemed irreducible, since he is the one as whom God is and acts as God. The setting of the work of grace in the work of nature (as well as in the divine processions) thereby recedes from view because of the sheer prominence and human intensity of the central subject and episode of redemption history."

## Chapter 3

### Covenant of Life Constructions Considered

#### 3.1 From Murray to Kline

##### *3.1a Which Covenant is Paradigmatic*

In reading the literature surrounding the covenant of life, one quickly finds that each school of covenant theology has a historical covenant that becomes a paradigmatic covenant.<sup>85</sup> This covenant becomes the paradigmatic arbitrator for coordinating key debates surrounding the covenant of life. There is significant continuity in each framework, but at key junctures, there is discontinuity. The continuity is far more extensive in principle than the discontinuity, but the discontinuity between the various positions is more than semantics and often plays significant roles in various discussions.

The continuities are manifold between the various schools.<sup>86</sup> All parties affirm that the covenant of life (1) declares God's justice and goodness, (2) man was created in a state of integrity, (3) that Adam was mutable and thus needed glorification, (4) God required perpetual obedience from Adam, (4) there was a promise of life held out to Adam, (5) that there was no mediator of the covenant, (6) that the covenant of grace has both continuity and discontinuity with the original covenant with Adam. From these six affir-

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<sup>85</sup> This emphasis is seen in the proportion and emphasis each stream gives to each respective covenant and which covenant is used to answer key questions about the life of the church and Christian discipleship. In many regards, this would be a good thing. With respect to different aspects of covenant theology, various historical covenants will and ought to have greater significance. It should also be noted that this notion of schools creating a paradigmatic covenant comes directly from conversations with Dr. Drew Martin.

<sup>86</sup> Contemporary expressions of the various parties are represented by Robertson, Horton, and McGowan. For simplicity's sake I will reference page numbers for these works. In referencing these men I do not intend to make these men the arbitering voice for the various schools. I am simply demonstrating that these schools exist. these schools of thought.

mations, the various schools have derived significant agreement about the relationship between the covenant of life and the covenant of grace. What comes to the fore is a bi-covenantal system that views the Adamic covenant as coterminous with the covenant of life and each of the subsequent historical covenants as administrations within the overarching covenant of grace.<sup>87</sup>

Although there is substantial unity, there are differences among the varying schools of covenant theology. This is highlighted uniquely in the Murray and Kline debates and various theologians rejecting the *Pactum Salutis* altogether.<sup>88</sup> These differences have numerous practical implications, but at the systematic level, the core disagreement is which historical covenant should be prioritized in our understanding of the overarching covenant of grace and how the covenant of grace interfaces with the covenant of life. Thus the structure of the covenant of grace quickly becomes a foil for the covenant of life. Since all parties within the confessional stream of Reformed orthodoxy affirm a bi-covenantal structure, this interpretive move to read dynamics of the covenant of grace back into our covenant of life is not only natural but proper in many regards. But because it is proper does not mean that there are not improper ways of performing this interpretive move.

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<sup>87</sup> I am only referencing schools of thought that affirm the bi-covenantal structure. Variations could be enumerated if I included those who are monocovenantal and those that create a third covenant by excluding the Mosaic covenant from the covenant of grace.

<sup>88</sup> Robertson, *Christ of the Covenants*, (Phillipsburg, N.J., Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1987), 53–54; John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray*, (Carlisle, PA, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), 2:130.

### *3.1b Redemptive Historical Informed Beneficence*

The forms of beneficence expressed in respective historical covenants differ according to the epoch of redemptive history in which each covenant is found.<sup>89</sup> For this reason, I will build off of my threefold definition of “grace” that is rooted in the attribute of divine beneficence, which will mirror the *Pactum Salutis*, the Covenant of Life, and

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<sup>89</sup> Yet all of these expressions of grace are found in the God-head itself. As John Webster argues in his essay, “Love is a Lover of Life”, “a. Talk of God as creator of heaven and earth presupposes the distinction of God’s immanent from his transitive operations, that is, the distinction of those works which remain in God and whose term is God’s perfect life from those works which have an external object. The importance of this distinction is not simply that it states the difference between the inner divine processions (generation and spiration) as *actio* from the external work of creation as *factio*. It is also that, by so ordering God’s works, it sets before the mind the principle that because God the creator is perfect in himself, he has no need of creation, acquiring no augmentation from its existence, and being deprived of no good by its absence. The non-necessary character of God’s *opera ad extra* is fundamental to understanding all the elements of the doctrine of creation out of nothing: the creator and his act of creation, the nature of creatures, and the relation which obtains between creator and created things. The careful specification of this non-necessity is, moreover, of capital importance for treating anxieties about the debasement of creatures.” “Love is a Lover of Life” (Modern Theology 29:2, 2013), 5. Note that Webster refers to different *expressions* of grace that are rooted within the Godhead.

the Covenant of Grace.<sup>90</sup> Uniquely we will see that each historical covenant interacts with grace uniquely without changing the fundamental relationship of the attribute to God's simple essence. This is important because if our understanding of grace is informed distinctly in each historical covenant under the covenant of grace, then it would be permissible to assume that this would also be true of the covenant of life. The need to be cognizant of which covenant is operating paradigmatically and how it functions within each epoch of redemptive history becomes important at this point. Whether one chooses the Noahic, Abrahamic, or Mosaic as the controlling paradigm will determine how one

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<sup>90</sup> Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 2015), 11–65. John Barclay in *Paul and the Gift* has definitively shown that there are different uses of the word grace with the scriptures. Similarly within the field of systematic we should not be surprised to see different uses of the word grace. We do need to be clear with how we are defining this word but that does not mean we should shy away from using it all together simply because of potential misunderstanding. Although there are good reasons for avoiding the use of the word *grace* if it does cause confusion.

Once again, drawing upon John Webster we can see that there are various forms of goodness. But all of their sources find their origins in God himself. “D. In creating, God acts in accordance with his goodness. Here “good-ness” is meant not so much in its moral as its metaphysical sense: God’s goodness is his entirely realised nature. Of this goodness of his, there can be no supplementation. In creating, therefore, God is not bringing his goodness to realisation, for this would make the creator’s goodness depend upon the creature. God’s goodness is not the result but the cause of his creating. But divine goodness is, indeed, the source of the being of other things. Divine goodness includes as one of its ends the existence of created goodness, of a further reality which in its own order is good. Divine goodness is creative of likenesses of itself; divine being bestows being. Here metaphysical goodness shades into moral goodness, in that God’s work of creation manifests that, precisely because his perfect goodness cannot be expended, he does not begrudge other things their being, but, on the contrary, gives being to other things. “God is good—or rather the source of goodness—and the good has no envy for anything. Thus, because he envies nothing its existence, he made everything from nothing through his own Word, our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>22</sup> John Webster, “Love is a Lover of Life” (*Modern Theology* 29:2, 2013), 6.

Note Patrick Gillespie a leading proponent of the *pactum salutis* as the very thing that undergirds the graciousness of salvation. Historian Carl Trueman argues this saying, “Gillespie also explicates the practical significance of the covenant for believers: it ushers in the new dispensation, a point he supports by citing Cocceius’s exposition of Job 33:24;56 it undergirds the graciousness of salvation; it provides an objective basis for salvation which gives the believer security in his or her knowledge of personal salvation; it points the believer away from self and to God as the source of salvation; it provides a covenant head whose obedience has guaranteed the believer’s rights in the new dispensation; it provides a better reward than the covenant of works; it guaranteed salvation even before the Fall; and, finally, it closed off any possibility of boasting before God. In other words, we might sum it up by saying that it provided the intratrinitarian foundation for the decree of predestination”. Carl Trueman “Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant”, 393.

Peter van Mastricht. *Theoretical-Practical Theology*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Reformation Heritage Books, 2019.) 2:345. Van Mastricht makes similar distinctions by parsing the goodness of God via different relative attributes. I do so by showing that various historical covenants draw out different notions of grace.

prefers to speak of the various expressions of divine beneficence and in turn will inform how they understand the covenant of life.<sup>91</sup>

If the Noahic covenant is taken as paradigmatic, then grace will take on a wider understanding that mirrors the extensiveness of common grace and God's intent to include all creation in his covenantal purposes.<sup>92</sup> Here the relationship between the covenant of life and the covenant of grace will emphasize the continuity of God's purposes within the bi-covenantal structure and the graciousness of God's relationship with creation. If the Abrahamic covenant is taken as paradigmatic, then the emphasis on grace will be that of redemptive grace experienced through the election of God's people. Grace will largely be limited to its salvific forms. And their emphasis on the relation between the covenant of life and the covenant of grace will be construed as the difference between eternal life and eternal death. If the Mosaic covenant is taken as paradigmatic, grace will be emphasized over against law. The law-grace relationship will become primary in understanding the relationship between the covenant of life and the covenant of grace.

Here, centering our understanding in the *Pactum Salutis* helps us coordinate these various emphases. By grounding the covenant of life and the covenant of grace in the *pactum*, we can structure our covenant theology bi-covenantally in a non-competitive formulation. The covenant of life is not contrary to the covenant of grace in its appointed

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<sup>91</sup> Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1967), 14–22; Michael S. Horton, *Covenant and Salvation: Union with Christ* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 12–29.

For the sake of space my thesis I will focus on the Noahic and Mosaic paradigms. Hopefully it will be evident how the Abrahamic covenant could be used as a controlling paradigm in parallel examples.

<sup>92</sup> I recognize that there is debate about how many covenants have been made with Noah but this debate does not touch the heart of my argument. If a reader would want to know more I would refer him to the chapter on the Noahic covenant in the compiled work of RTS faculty, *Covenant Theology*.

end. Both covenants' ultimate purpose is the glory of God. We often contrast the covenant of life and the covenant of grace for proper reasons. Mainly because the covenant of life has been broken and therefore can no longer produce life with God. But originally the covenant of life was not broken and could produce life.<sup>93</sup> By beginning in the *pactum* and articulating our doctrine of simplicity we can see that the origin of both covenants is the gracious initiation of God and in both covenants the law has an active legal function that is not in competition with God's gracious initiation.

### *3.1c The Pactum, and the Covenant of Life and the Covenant of Grace*

As argued above, making any historical covenants paradigmatic will inherently privilege one notion of grace over the other. But there is a covenant, the *pactum*, that allows us to speak to each historical covenant in its own particularity without diminishing its individual significance because it stands outside of time. This is the *pactum salutis*. Michael Allen argues that, “*Given divine simplicity, God’s free and sovereign good pleasure concerning all things outside of himself is inseparable from the eternal pleasure he takes in himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.* Because the blessed Trinity is the decreeing God, we must identify the love that produces and guides all creatures to the appointed ends with the love that resides in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.”<sup>94</sup> The crux of

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<sup>93</sup> There is much debate as to what kind of life it could produce and the role of merit within this system. I would refer the reader to J.V. Fesko’s work *Adam and the Covenant of Works* for many helpful taxonomies that parse out these differences. J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works*, (Ross-Shire Great Britain, Christian Focus Publications, 2021), 377–418.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Allen; Swain, *Christian Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing Group, 2016), 111. It is this train of thought that John Owen follows in his articulation of the relationship of the *pactum* to the covenant of life in *The Gospel Defended*. John Owen, *The Gospel Defended*, (UK: Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 12:496

Allen's statement is that it is impossible to separate the execution of the divine decrees in history from the eternal foundation in the Godhead.<sup>95</sup> This both, the covenant of life and covenant of grace have their roots in the *pactum salutis*.<sup>96</sup>

There are three benefits to taking the covenant of redemption as paradigmatic that pertain directly to my thesis. (1) By rooting our understanding of covenant theology in the eternal Godhead, we can clearly see that grace and justice can not be set in opposition to one another because it would create conflict within the divine attributes. (2) We can speak clearly of the duality of law and grace without creating a spectrum of the two or by placing these in competition with one another. External law is a part of creation, whereas grace is a divine attribute.<sup>97</sup> These are not in the same genus therefore, we can reject any coordination of the two that creates an opposition between them.<sup>98</sup> And (3) we can affirm a variegated notion of grace and *justice* that has an immutable source. In making this move, we will follow the Reformed tradition, as Muller argues, "The ultimate relationship of the covenant of works to the covenant of grace and, equally so, of Adam to Christ

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<sup>95</sup> John Webster helpfully unpacks the relationship between the Creator and creature at this critical junction. "Rather, participation is theologically to be understood in terms of the operation of creative benevolence, and so in terms of the *differentiated* sharing of creator and creature in the good of being, each in their proper order and mode." Webster *Love is Also a Lover of Life*" 9. This does not mean that there is no distinction between God and creation.

<sup>96</sup> The Christian doctrine of creation treats three principal topics: the identity of the creator, the divine act of creating and the several natures and ends of created things. These topics are materially ordered: teaching about the identity of the creator governs what is said about his creative act and about what he creates. John Webster, "Love is a Lover of Life" (Modern Theology 29:2, 2013), 2.

J.V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Focus Publications, 2016). The first two chapters of J.V. Fesko's work *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* are great historical surveys of the various Reformed divines who made this connection.

<sup>97</sup> Justice would be the divine attribute. Law is what proceeds forth from the attribute of God's justice. Grace, although a relative attribute, is still an attribute proper like justice.

<sup>98</sup> "But the being of created things is had by the divine gift, or *per participationem*." Here Webster quotes Aquinas. John Webster, "Love is a Lover of Life" (Modern Theology 29:2, 2013), 9.



as the old and new federal heads of humanity, is established and outlined by Witsius, à Brakel, and virtually all of the major Reformed covenant theologians of the seventeenth century in their discussion of the "covenant of redemption" or *pactum salutis* between God and Father and God the Son.<sup>99</sup>

## 3.2 **Condigno Merit, Strict Justice, and Ex Debito**

### *3.2a Condigno and Congruent Merit*

Justice parallels beneficence in its relationship to the divine simplicity of God because both are essential attributes that are expressed.<sup>100</sup> Justice being the absolute attribute, and wrath being the relative correlate attribute in the same way that beneficence and grace correspond. There is a parallel argument in regard to the notion of justice and wrath. Recognizing that justice is an absolute attribute of God helps us see that the covenant of life must have a notion of justice woven through the covenant. The commands given to Adam in the garden are not arbitrary, and violating them as consequences is linked directly to the attribute of God's justice. Adam was created just, in a place of justice and from a just God. This inherently entails that Adam was created in a relationship that was governed by legal demands. At this point, Torrance and others have incorrectly read the Reformed tradition and read the beneficent and justice dimensions of the covenant of life in opposition to one another. In Torrance's insistence to prioritize grace

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<sup>99</sup> Richard Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy" *CTJ* 29 (1994), 75–101. 23. Cites Witsius in footnote 78

<sup>100</sup> WSC 4: "What is God? God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable in his being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth.

over law he creates animosity between the essential attributes of God. This is what is at the heart of the Murray and Kline debate surrounding justice, grace, and merit.<sup>101</sup> Kline's prioritization of law before grace and Murray's prioritization of grace before law inherently create tensions that violate divine simplicity. This is a false choice.

But if both beneficence and justice adhere in the essence of a simple God we should not place them in opposition to each other. Doing so would entail a conflict in God's being and deny his simplicity by creating a compositional hierarchy or antagonism in the essence of God. To avoid this tension the Roman Catholic tradition has often appealed to various notions of *condigno* and *congruent* merit.<sup>102</sup> The Reformed would deny the Roman Catholic schema of merit but would reappropriate the notions of *condigno* merit its own purpose, choosing instead to speak of a version of *ex pacto* merit or covenantal merit.<sup>103</sup> Other Reformed theologians would reject the notion of merit altogether.

An example of a theologian attempting to hold these tensions together would be Herman Bavinck in RDII. Bavinck is worth quoting at length here. "There is no such thing as merit in the existence of a creature before God, nor can there be since the relation

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<sup>101</sup> John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987); Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1968), See Murray's *Covenant of Grace* and Kline's *A Oath Consigned* for their respective treatments.

<sup>102</sup> Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Publishing Group, 1985), 191–192. Muller's Dictionary of Latin Terms summarizes these terms well.

<sup>103</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2004), 2:539.

A full examination of the scope of the various uses of *condigno* and *congruent* merit is beyond the scope of this thesis. I would refer readers to J.V. Fesko's chapter "Grace and Merit in the Covenant of Works" in his volume *Adam and the Covenant of Works* for a good overview. J. V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works*. (Ross-Shire, UK, Christian Focus Publications, 2021)

between the Creator and a creature radically and once-and-for-all eliminates any notion of merit. This is true after the fall but no less before the fall. Then too, human beings were creatures, without entitlements, without rights, without merit. When we have done everything we have been instructed to do, we are still unworthy servants (*douloi achreioi*, Luke 17:10).” It is clear that Bavinck rejects any notion of *condigno* or *congruent* merit. Bavinck would go on to say,

“All this is possible solely because God in his condescending goodness gives rights to his creature. Every creaturely right is a given benefit, a gift of grace, undeserved and nonobligatory. All reward from the side of God originates in grace; no merit, either of condignity or of congruity, is possible. True religion, accordingly, cannot be anything other than a covenant: it has its origin in the condescending goodness and grace of God. It has that character before as well as after the fall. For religion, like the moral law and the destiny of man, is one. The covenant of works and the covenant of grace do not differ in their final goal but only in the way that leads to it. ... Religion is always the same in essence: it differs only in form.”<sup>104</sup>

This summarizes much of the tension surrounding merit, Adam’s reward, and the role of the covenant of life and covenant of grace. The tradition affirms that all is of condescending goodness and grace, that Adam had work to do and something to gain, but that his acquisition of what he had to gain could not be merited in a way that would either impinge upon God’s grace on the one hand or upon the justice of God on the other. This is why the Reformed would speak of an *ex pacto* merit, a notion of merit that is radically qualified and contextually located within the divine beneficence.

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<sup>104</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2004), 2:570.

### 3.2b Murray, Kline and the Grace-Law relationship

This tension is highlighted acutely in the disagreements between Murray and Kline. For Murray, the paradigmatic covenant was the Noahic. With this came an emphasis on the universal dimension of grace towards creation. For Kline, the paradigmatic covenant was the Mosaic. With his emphasis came the priority of law. Murray sought to uphold the gracious character of the covenant of life with his articulation, and Kline sought to uphold the just character of the covenant of life with his articulation. The problem with both articulations is that they prioritize one attribute of God over the other. This is the very thing that our doctrine of simplicity should prevent us from doing because it prevents the creation of a hierarchy of the attributes. In addition to this, by grounding the covenant of life in the *pactum* the very structures of the covenant of life can not be conditioned by anything in creation. Therefore we can not import a creational hierarchy into the fabric of the covenant of life. The same form of harmony must exist in the divine attributes that exist in the structure of the covenant of life.

With Murray we see clearly the desire to construe the covenant as essentially gracious. “From the beginning of God’s disclosures to men in terms of covenant we find a unity of conception which is to the effect that a divine covenant is a sovereign administration of grace and of promise. It is not a compact or contract or agreement that provides the constitutive or governing idea but that of dispensation in the sense of disposition.”<sup>105</sup> Earlier in his essay he would argue, “We are far away from the idea of a bond as sealed on the acceptance of certain prescribed stipulations and the promise of fulfillment of

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<sup>105</sup> John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), 30-31.

these stipulations on the condition that other parties to the contract fulfill the conditions imposed upon them. The thought is rather that of unreserved, whole-souled commitment.”<sup>106</sup> Contra Murray we do not need to pit God’s gracious initiation against his stipulations. We can say that the covenant of life is essentially gracious and still has legal demands that flow from God’s just nature. Before the fall the law is a gracious gift to Adam and there is nothing inherently wrong with the legal and gracious elements of God’s relationship with Adam in the covenant of life existing alongside each other in the analogous way they exist in his being via divine simplicity.

With Kline we can affirm that the covenant of life is a legal covenant in that God’s law regulates it. Yet we do not have to affirm this to the same extent or in the same way as Kline. Kline argues, “Historical priority belongs incontestably to law covenant since pre-redemptive covenant administration was of course strictly law administration without the element of guaranteed, inevitable blessings. By the same token promise covenant is disqualified from the outset as a systematic definition of covenant because it is obviously not comprehensive enough to embrace the pre-redemptive covenantal revelation.”<sup>107</sup> We must disagree with his assertion that the presence of the law rules out the gracious promise aspect of God’s dealings with Adam in the covenant of life any yet we can affirm a dimension of law administration within the covenant of life. Once again, God’s relationship to Adam in the covenant of life can be simultaneously governed by grace and justice. Our doctrine of simplicity inherently entails this. There is no need to

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>107</sup> Meredith Kline, *By Oath Consigned*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Eerdmans, 1968), 29-30.

prioritize law over gracious promise in the covenant of life when we recognize the origins of grace and justice that structure the covenant of life reside in the God-head.<sup>108</sup>

### *3.2c Ex Pacto and Ex Debito in the Covenant of Life*

The Murray Kline debate can be further illuminated by examining Reformed Scholastics' understanding of *ex pacto*, *ex debito*, and strict justice in the covenant of life. It is here that the grace-law discussion can be clarified. If our understanding of justice and merit are separated from their origins in the Godhead, it could cause us to misconstrue the nature of God and his relation to creatures in many ways, as evidenced by Murray and Kline's false choice between God's promise and God's law.<sup>109</sup> Because God created out of nothing as an *a se* being, there are clear ways in which it would be improper to speak of God needing something which will shape our understanding of merit and indebtedness.<sup>110</sup> At the same time we must affirm that Adam has something to gain and that there was a legitimate God-ordained way of attaining it. However we choose to structure the covenant of life, our formulation needs to harmonize with God's attributes of grace

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<sup>108</sup> It is worth highlighting that this relationship does change when we move from the covenant of life to the covenant of grace. There is a sense that grace is prioritized over law for the believer is in the covenant of grace. This is one reason why it is essential to maintain a clear bi-covenantal structure. Grace restores and consummates nature and in re-creation humanity is not returned to Eden but is moved forward because of this dynamic.

<sup>109</sup> John Webster holds this tension together when he says, "Here I address one such misperception: the anxiety that the pure non-reciprocal gratuity of God's creation of all things out of nothing debases the creature, for a being so radically constituted by another as to be nothing apart from that other is a being evacuated of intrinsic worth. The anxiety is misplaced, sometimes destructively so. Showing why this is the case involves dispute about the elements of the doctrine of creation, that is, exposure of points at which habits of thought are contradicted by faith in God the creator." John Webster, "Love is a Lover of Life" (Modern Theology 29:2, 2013), 157

<sup>110</sup> "Creation is an operation of generosity on the part of one who in his inner trinitarian life is wholly realised, satisfied and at rest." John Webster, "Love is a Lover of Life" (Modern Theology 29:2, 2013), 165.

and justice. This is why the Reformed scholastics used precise definitions to avoid errors on either side.<sup>111</sup>

Within the Reformed tradition, it has been common to speak of Adam's reward being granted in a strict justice or *ex debito* fashion. This view is summarized concisely by Muller in, "Even in the covenant of works (foedus operum, q.v.) the Reformed deny and dignitas operum to human obedience that could cause debitum or debt to exist on God's part in an absolute sense. Nevertheless, since God in covenant, has ordained that he will respond graciously to human obedience and faithfulness, God can *ex pacto* (q.v.), on the basis of his own covenant, become debtor. This later qualification is rooted in the late medieval conception of *pactum*, or covenant, in relation to the conception of *potentia ordinata* (q.v.), though here is no longer in any relation to the temporal *ordo salutis* (q.v.) or to human works."<sup>112</sup>

In Muller's definition we both attribute God's gracious character held together. It is God who has "ordained that he will respond graciously to human obedience and faithfulness" and yet God can become a "debtor" in response to Adam's work. The latter entailed that God was dealing with Adam in a strict justice.<sup>113</sup> We also see that the Reformed have consistently rooted this harmony in the covenantal nature of God's relation-

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<sup>111</sup> There may be something to be said to both Murray and Kline innovative and positive projects. Murray was an exegete teaching systematics. Similarly with Kline, his focus was ANE literature. Perhaps their speaking past each other was induced by their disciplines.

<sup>112</sup> Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms*, 92-93.

<sup>113</sup> This sense of strict justice is different from simple justice as espoused by Kline. "Adam would have fully deserved the blessings promised in the covenant, had he obediently performed the duty stipulated in it. Great as the blessings were to which the good Lord committed himself, the granting of them would not have involved a gram of grace. Judged by the Stipulated terms of the covenant, they would have been merited in simple justice." Meredith G. Kline, "Covenant Theology Under Attack," *New Horizons in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church* 15 (February 1994): 4.

ship with Adam. It is at this point in the argument where the natural progression is to ask where did the covenant of life come from? The proper response is from the *pactum salutis*, and the *pactum* which is unconditioned by any outside of God is governed by God's simple being.

### 3.3 Differences of Semantics and Substance

#### 3.3a Pastoral Intuitions and Fears

Briefly, it must be acknowledged that pastoral intuitions and fears animate theological discussions in ways that can often cloud our thinking.<sup>114</sup> Three different sets of pastoral questions pertain to my thesis indirectly and in interlocking ways. (1) The use of a law-gospel duality, the scope of the gospel, and the mission of the church. Taking each of these, in turn, can further illuminate how the origins of the covenant of life in the *Pactum Salutis* and its regulation by divine simplicity inform my thesis.

A law-gospel duality is a standard doctrinal facet of Reformed theology. This does not mean that every Reformed theologian's position on the relation of the law and the gospel is the same. There is much discussion around the proper way to coordinate the law

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<sup>114</sup> Robert Letham, *Systematic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 362. "The answer to the question of whether the covenant of life was gracious reflects on the character of God. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are from eternity in indivisible union, in love, goodness, and blessedness. If God had related to man in creation exclusively by law, then his revelation of himself to Adam would not have been a true self-revelation at all, and creation would not express the character of God. He would be, behind his revelation, something other than Adam was given reason to believe him to be. The being and acts of God would be in radical disjunction. If, on the other hand, we were to hold that this supposed nongracious revelation was a true revelation of who he is, we then would be in the exceedingly dangerous position of holding that the relations between the person of the Trinity were purely legal, with unity of God legal and contractual rather than ontological." Although I do not agree with the wording of Letham's position here it captures well some of the pastoral concerns that animate this conversation.



and gospel.<sup>115</sup> Popular portrayals abound, and maximums like “indicative imperative” are well-worn.<sup>116</sup> What is agreed on in Reformed circles is that the law and the gospel are not coterminous. There is no strict identity between the two. There is a Venn diagram, and the disagreement resides in how we draw the circles. This discussion pertains directly to my thesis because advocates of a Klinian view are zealous to guard God’s justice but also to protect against a muddying of the gospel. They do not want to undermine the assurance of saints, and they want to shepherd saints to the freeness of the gospel. This is expressed clearly in their emphasis on the doctrine of justification and their rigorous and proper defense of the historic doctrine of Adam’s imputation. By making the *pactum* the origin of the covenant life and the origin of the covenant of grace we do not need to revise our doctrine of imputation nor do we need to soften the duality of the law-gospel relationship.

Likewise, regarding the scope of the gospel and the church’s mission, we do not need to diminish the “all” of “all things being made new.” We can rightly protect distinctive elements of the church’s mission without shrinking the Church’s mission to one respective historical covenant by insisting that one particular historical covenant answers all of our questions pertaining to faithful Christian practice. By rooting our understanding of the covenant of life in the *pactum* and regulating with the doctrine of simplicity, we can allow each historical covenant to speak with its own historical particularity to the scope and nature of the mission of the church. We can repeatedly ask the question of “in respect to what?” This allows us to integrate the best of these various emphases that are

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<sup>115</sup> It is beyond the scope of my thesis to parse out all of these debates.

<sup>116</sup> For an interesting critique of this view I recommend the reader consult *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom* by J. de Waal Dryden. J. de Waal Dryden, *A Hermeneutic of Wisdom*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic, 2018). 41–48.

found within the broader Reformed tradition without diminishing their significance at various pastoral junctures. Since the *pactum* begins before time and produces the covenant of life in a period of time where the sacred and the secular were in complete harmony, we can allow the covenant of life to reflect these dynamics without prioritizing one of the historical covenants in the covenant of grace. The covenant of life can then allow for an Adam-Christ parallel that runs from the top to bottom in a way that does not prioritize grace or justice in any of the respective covenants. We can say yes and no, and both and without committing the mistake of creating a third way that is unsatisfying to any side in the various disputes.

### *3.3b Semantics and Similarities*

If what I have argued above is correct, much of the conversation that involves the covenant of life is merely semantic differences and the local context of pastoral intuitions and fears creating misunderstanding. For example, taking Michael Allen's understanding of the covenant of life, "The covenant of works involves a goal: life for Adam and all his posterity. It also involves a condition or requirement: "perfect and personal obedience" to God's commands. While the covenant of works was initiated unilaterally by the Lord, maintenance of life in God's favor and enjoyment of his final bestowal of life forevermore requires human responsive action. Thus the provision of grace-not only life itself, but also divine presence and divine proclamation--leads to and calls forth human action."<sup>117</sup> There is little here that would be disagreed with by Reformed theologians of

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<sup>117</sup> Michael Allen, *The Knowledge of God: Essays on God, Christ, and Church* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 141.

various stripes. There would be a shared consensus that the covenant of life had a telos or “goal,” that it was a form of “life,” and that there were laws or “conditions” contained in it. That God is the benevolent or gracious initiator and that man’s response is required for him to attain or inherit this final goal. Although each school would have semantic differences, their similarities and agreement would be overwhelming.

### *3.3c Substance and Separation*

We would do well to follow Allens’ reasoning about the covenant of life to see where our separations truly lie. He says, “First, this primal covenant, as with all others, tells us of God, not merely of creatures. God chooses to be with us and not apart from us. God enters freely and apart from need or lack within and prompting or pressure without. Nonetheless, God does enter into this pact with our ancestors, and this--like every word of the gospel to come--tells us something profound first and foremost of the triune God. Not that God can be reduced or framed fully by the works of the divine economy and the glorious news of merciful action for our good, but that God is revealed herein.” Notice here that Allen’s first instinct is to locate the ultimate purpose of the covenant of life in the triune God. He goes on to say, “Third, the covenant of works shows that communion with God is bounded by the commands of God. A moral order governs relational proximity. “My eyes are upon the faithful in the land, that they may dwell with me” (Ps. 101:6). Not only must we see the moral shape to this fellowship, but we observe that the Creator God is the Covenantal Lord and, thus, the one who determines the order of fellowship. God initiates life together. God sketches its contours. God gives commandments and sets

expectations. There is no room for negotiation.”<sup>118</sup> He then concludes with a construction of the covenant of life that honors both God’s initiation and his commandments. By rooting his understanding of the covenant of life first in the triune God, his account of the contours of the covenant of life does not place the relational or legal aspects of the covenant of life at odds. At this point, we can see that the substance of the covenant of life is largely shared and that any separation in various constructions of the covenant of life can not exist because of the *Pactum* or God’s being. So beginning with the *pactum* and simplicity, we would find greater unity and substance. From there we can move forward and begin to untangle our various positions about the relationship of the various historical covenants to the covenant of life and the covenant of grace.

### **3.4 The Place and Purpose of Law in Creation: A Brief Test Case**

#### *3.4a The Use of the Law*

The role of the Mosaic covenant in formulating our understanding of the law is crucial. How does someone define it, and what type of law is dictated by numerous contextual realities? Suffice to say there are as many views on the role and purpose of the law within various covenant paradigms as there are views of the covenants themselves. The proper use of the law is typically the most debated and gives us a window into the heart of my thesis.

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<sup>118</sup> Michael Allen, *The Knowledge of God: Essays on God, Christ, and Church* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 143.

### 3.5b Merit and Ex Debito in Light of the Law

In light of this Reformed divines have avoided the Roman Catholic notion of merit in Adam's work or opted for an *ex pacto* notion of merit. Adam had nothing to merit in a *condino* or *congruent* sense but everything possible to inherit via his faithfulness and perpetual obedience in the *ex pacto* sense.<sup>119</sup> In making this distinction the Reformed notion of merit offers a window into the motivation for obedience that highlights both the relational and legal dynamics of the covenant of life. J.V. Fesko exposition of the work of Thomas Boston says it well, "The trial of his obedience, however, was not a legal test tube to see if Adam would submit to the arbitrary imposition of God's rule. Rather, the natural and symbolical law were of a piece with the ten commandments, which Christ summarized in the need to love God and neighbor. Adam's trial was first and foremost, the context for him to love his covenant Lord; even nature itself taught Adam the need to love God. The covenant of works was "a compend of the law of nature. Love to God and one's neighbor was wrapt up in it; and all the ten commands were summarily comprehended therein."<sup>120</sup> This means that love lies at the heart of the covenant of works. Adam was supposed to render his perfect, perpetual, and personal obedience to God's command, which once again echoes the formulation of the Westminster Standards."<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Michael Allen, *Justification and the Gospel*, (Grand Rapids MI, Baker Publishing Group, 2013), 29. Michael Allen highlights this truth concisely in his excellent work on justification when he argues, "Merit or desert need not be interpreted in a strictly legal sense; they can refer to any need or obligation that one might meet, any demand or command that might be fulfilled. In no way does the creation and sustenance of this world befit its performance. Hence Christians are committed to the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo precisely to signal the free work of a God who gives and does not take life. All the way down goes God's grace. As Bayer says, "Creation and new creation are both categorical gift."

<sup>120</sup> Boston, *Human Nature in Its Fourfold State*. (Edinburgh, UK, Banner of Truth Trust, 1989.) 49. Another place that Boston articulates this view is in *Human Nature in its Fourfold State*.

<sup>121</sup> J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Works*, (New York, NY, Oxford University Press, 2020), 147.

This articulation of Boston's work allowed him to connect grace to the covenant of life. To quote Fesko once more, "Unlike the confession's reticence to connect the term *grace* with the covenant of works, Boston had no such hesitation. If Adam had continued in obedience, it was due entirely to the covenant that God made with him: "And where was grace even in the covenant of works, that God was pleased by promise to secure the continuance of man's being, while he continued obedient." This fits well within the views of an *ex pacto* and *ex debito* understanding of the covenant of life. It also fits within a view of divine simplicity that sees the attribute of divine beneficence uniquely refracted within each covenant God has made with man. Beginning with the covenant of life and in each subsequent historical covenant that make up the covenant of grace.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> It should also be noted that the notion of merit in the covenant of life and the covenant of grace are not synonymous. This is another reason why it is important to maintain a bi-covenantal system. What Jesus merited for the church is more than what Adam could have merited in the garden because the circumstances are far more perilous and because he needed to redeem fallen humanity from sin.

## Chapter 4

### Conclusion - Avenues for Future Study

#### 4.1 Summary

The Gratuity of God’s Creation and the covenant of life are shared amongst Reformed theologians of various stripes. As Richard Muller says, “Virtually all of the Reformed theologians of the era recognized, albeit in varying degrees, that there could be no relationship between God and the finite, mutable creature apart from grace. This was also the burden of the medieval doctrine of the *donum superadditum*, particularly in its full Augustinian form, a doctrine most probably at the root of the idea of the covenant of works.”<sup>123</sup> With Muller I conclude that we need a notion of *grace* in the covenant of life. Whether we prefer to call it “beneficence” or “love” or opt for the language of “grace” that is coupled with a taxonomy for what we mean by the word, we are acknowledging the amazing condescension and care of the triune God.<sup>124</sup>

The examining Leviticus 18:5 can demonstrate the need for future explorations of this shared continuity.<sup>125</sup> This is a key verse to examine in light of my theological reflections throughout this thesis because it could help us examine the question of the priority

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<sup>123</sup> Richard A. Muller, *After Calvin*, (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003), 183.

<sup>124</sup> J.V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works*, (Ross-Shire, Great Britain, Christian Focus Publishing, 2021), 377-379. Adam and the Covenant of Works offers an example of this position.

<sup>125</sup> I recognize that choosing such a debated verse can lead to more confusion than clarity at this point in my thesis. Fesko points to as many as six different positions that were held by Reformed orthodox theologians. This coupled with inter-textual use of Lev. 18:5 in places like Ezk. 20:1-26, Nehemiah 9:29, Luke 10:25-28, Galatians 3:10-12 and Roman 10:5 create even greater complexity. But the reason for my choice is that if it can be demonstrated that my reading of the origin of the covenant of life in the Pactum and its regulation by divine simplicity is consistent with a Reformed understanding of Lev. 18:5 then there is substantial weight to my thesis at the exegetical level.

of the law or gospel in the covenant of life, it has been a historical proof text for the covenant of life for various Reformed theologians and it happens within the context of the covenant of grace. This last point is of particular interest because if we are to maintain a bi-covenantal structure between the covenant of life and the covenant of grace that does not conflate or flatten the difference between the two covenants we need to demonstrate how grace is operative in each respective covenant in parallel and yet distinct ways. I will offer a brief reading of Leviticus 18:5 that points towards a need for future reflection of a gracious and legal reading of the passage that harmonizes with the doctrine of divine simplicity and connects the covenant of life to the *pactum salutis*.<sup>126</sup>

## 4.2 Grammatical Exegesis

### 4.2a: A Brief Exegetical Examination of Leviticus 18:5<sup>127</sup>

In examining Lev. 18:1–5 the call to obedience is for the purpose of experiencing God’s blessing and extending that blessing throughout the covenant community. This interpretation satisfies both the gracious nature of the covenant of life and its legal demands because there is a distinct “call” and the “purpose” is for the maintenance of the relationship not its establishment. It should not be understood as a call to obedience for the sake of meriting a covenant relationship in a *condigno* or *congruent* sense, but we must recognize that the Israelites have something to gain by obeying God’s law in an *ex pacto*

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<sup>126</sup> J.V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works*, (Ross-Shire, Great Britain, Christian Focus Publishing, 2021)

<sup>127</sup> Large portions of the exegetical work for this section were taken from a paper I wrote in Pentateuch OT320.C and significantly adapted for the purpose of this thesis.



sense.<sup>128</sup> Thus, Israel’s disobedience to the covenant would entail covenant sanctions and the loss of something good within their context of a grace-based relationship. This can be demonstrated by exegetical reasoning and by considering Lev. 18:1–5 lexical features and its historical context. Once this exegetical reasoning has been demonstrated, we can move to synthetic and dogmatic reflection upon the text the tie directly to the origin of the covenant of life in the *pactum* and its regulation by divine simplicity.

#### *4.2b: Leviticus 18:1–5 Text*

[1] And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, [2] “Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the LORD your God. [3] You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. [4] You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the LORD your God. [5] You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD. (ESV)

#### *4.2c: Lexical Analysis of Leviticus 18:1-5*

A quick lexical study highlights three notions expressed clearly at the word level in this passage and a key refrain that pertain directly to the origins and regulation of the

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<sup>128</sup> This notion helps us navigate the thorny questions of *condigno* and *congruent* merit. For a full examination of these positions see Fesko chapter on merit in his book *Adam and the Covenant of Works*. J.V. Fesko, *Adam and the Covenant of Works*, (Ross-Shire, Great Britain, Christian Focus Publishing, 2021)

covenant of life. (1) The words that pertain to commandments, the words used to call forth obedience from Israel, and (3) the word that pertains to life. The noun *מַעֲשֵׂה* and its verbal form *עָשָׂה* in addition to the word grouping for decrees and judgments (i.e., *הִקְדָּה* and *מִשְׁפָּט*) make up the first group.<sup>129</sup> The descriptive verbs *שָׁמַר* and *הִלָּךְ*, and their relationship to the Israelites obedience to the law of God make up the second. While the pragmatic meaning of the verb *הִיָּה* constitutes the third. Lastly it is important to note the refrain of divine self-disclosure, *אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם*. I'll briefly take each of these in turn.

When examining *מַעֲשֵׂה* and its verbal form *עָשָׂה*, the two most common glosses are “to do” and “to make.” When we come to Lev. 18:1–5, the most frequent use fits well because the content of what is to be done (*עָשָׂה*) is fleshed out more fully in the rest of the chapter.

The proper understanding of the verb *הִיָּה* is pertains to my thesis because we need to understand what type of “life” is to be experienced and how this life can be gained.<sup>130</sup> It occurs 806 times in the OT, 94 of these times occur in the Pentateuch and only three times in the book of Leviticus. The other two uses in Lev. are in chapters 25:35–36. The most frequent and standard gloss merely describes life in the biological sense. This is

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<sup>129</sup> The interesting thing about this verb is that it is the same verb that is used in Deuteronomy 1:37 where Moses says he won't be *entering* the promised land. We see that for the Israelites to enter the promised land they will have to enter by God's agency.

Nobuyoshi Kiuchi, *Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL, Intervarsity Press, 2007), 22–24. Kiuchi has a helpful commentary on the difficulty of translating the word group surrounding *תּוֹרָה*. There is considerable semantic overlap, yet each word tends to have a pragmatic meaning in various contexts. For example, *תּוֹרָה* tends to occur more frequently in the early parts of the book of Lev. whereas *מִשְׁפָּט* occurs more frequently later in the book. In the greater context of the book as a whole, *תּוֹרָה* tends to deal with strict legislation about sacrifices and *מִשְׁפָּט* tends to deal with ethical and moral choices.

<sup>130</sup> Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., “Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally)?” *Journal of Evangelical Theological Society* 14 (1971). With Kaiser, I agree that there is a plain sense of “live” and a fuller sense of “live” in this passage.

seen in its use to describe the various lifespans of men in Gen. 11. But this is not the only sense of life in the OT. Deuteronomy 8:3 is a key example of this. Deuteronomy 8:3 “[3] And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD. (ESV).” I contend that the use of  $\text{בְּ}$  in Lev. 18:5 accords with Deut. 8:3 because the context of these passages is describing how a covenant-abiding Israelite would experience a living relationship with God. A spiritual life is at play in Lev. 18:5, not merely a biological life. We can conclude that spiritual life is offered in God’s covenantal dealings with man.

Related to my lexical understanding of  $\text{בְּ}$  is the role of the preposition  $\text{בְּ}$  in verse five. The ESV, NIV, and NASB all translate it with the gloss “by.” Only the KJV uses the gloss “in.” With the translator of the KJV, I agree that “in” is the better gloss for the preposition. It may sound clunky to modern ears. But, it better captures the relational dynamic that is at play in the covenantal instruction between the LORD and the Israelites. Secondly, when compared to the LXX, we see the early greek translator chose the preposition  $\text{ἐν}$  over the preposition  $\text{ἐκ}$ . The Israelites were meant to live in the instruction, not from the instruction to experience the promised life of the covenant.

Lastly, the syntagm  $\text{אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם}$  is critical to understanding the pericope of Lev. 18:1–5 because of where it occurs and because of how the divine name is used throughout the OT. By God beginning his address to the Israelites with his self-identification, he is stating that they belong to him and he belongs to them before any of the blessings and

curses come forth. This self-identification with the Israelites forms the justification for relational boundaries that are to come later in the pericope and the chapter as a whole. Secondly, we see this self-identification used elsewhere in the OT (Lev. 19:2, 20:7, 23:22, 24:22, 25:17, 26:1, Num. 15:41 Ezk. 20:5, Joel 4:17, ) and in all of these settings God is pledging himself to his people apart from their own righteousness. None of these settings provide a way for the Israelites to merit or establish their special covenant relationship with the God of Israel. Their relational obedience is a form of *ex pacto* obedience. So here we see God both regulating his covenant with law, and yet we see the divine origin of the covenant resting in God's gracious provision.

This lexical analysis of Lev. 18:1–5 has the potential to connect to my thesis because the type of instructions the Israelites were to do, the context they were to do them in, and the type of life that is being described do not naturally lend themselves to a meritorious reading of Lev. 18:1–5 in the *condign* or *congruent* sense. Now if the covenant of grace parallels the covenant of life, then divine simplicity and the *pactum salutis* could potentially help us coordinate the role of law and grace in Lev. 18:5.

In addition to those word studies, a literary outline of Lev. 18 is that of a Hittite vassal treaty. Where the preamble is the divine self-disclosure, אָנֹכִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם. The historical prologue would be the detailing of God delivering them from Egypt. The blessing and curse are the divine commands to not practice the actions of other nations and the promise of experiencing life in their covenant obedience. True to Hittite vassal treaties a detailed list of the prohibitions is what the rest of the chapter entails. And, the curses far outnumber the blessings. The insight drawn from the literary form and genre of the pas-

sage is simply that God wanted a covenant relationship with Israel. To understand the nature and form of that covenant, and God's dealings in that covenant, we will need to look at the larger context of his historical actions.

### 4.3 Systematic Exegesis

#### 4.3a: *Law First or Grace First?*

It is here that insights from my thesis might be applied to the covenant of grace. How might the *pactum* as fountain and the divine simplicity as regulation shape or inform the way we articulate the use of law in the covenant of grace? What is the continuity and discontinuity between the circumstance that surround the law in the covenant of life and covenant of grace? There are parallels here. But more work needs to be done to establish the continuity and discontinuity of these parallels. Biblical scholar Jay Sklar holds the tension of law and grace when he says, “This is because commands are like the borders of his kingdom, and those who stay within those borders proclaim their allegiance... and remain within the sphere of his blessing.”<sup>131</sup> This twofold aspect of covenant relationship is important to preserve because if we lean too far to either side we will miss the positive or negative aspect of the decrees and judgments in their respective covenants. There are clearly divine sanctions and consequences for disobeying God’s law. In every covenant these legal elements are not at odds with God’s gracious initiation and preservation of his covenant people. Divine simplicity and the *pactum* could potentially help us navigate

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<sup>131</sup> Jay Sklar, *Leviticus*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentary 2014 (Downer Groves, IL, Intervarsity Press), 228–229.

these conversations but more work is needed to establish the extent of continuity and discontinuity.

#### *4.3b Harmony in God and Harmony in His Gifts Across Covenants*

For example, there is the potential of a non-competitive understanding of Law and Grace in Leviticus. For that to be a reality it must square with our understanding of divine simplicity. God's gifts are not in competition with one another because they flow forth from God's good and gracious character. When we view the demands and the covenantal context of Lev. 18:5 in relation to divine simplicity we can see that although the historical covenant has changed due to man's relation to God changing, God's way of relating to man is still gracious in its character. To cite Muller, "The clear implication of the doctrine is the ultimate parity of the divine attributes of righteousness and mercy or graciousness and the resultant balance of righteousness or justice (*iustitia*) with mercy and grace in the plan and work of God."<sup>132</sup> Even in Lev. 18:5 we see a God who is one in both his law and his gracious provision for his people. Our doctrine of simplicity and the *pactum* could help us move towards a reading in the covenant of grace that best articulates and coordinates this dynamic.

#### *4.3c Summary: A Benevolent Covenant of Life and Grace because A Simple God with Benevolent Purposes?*

In conclusion, when we trace the origins of the covenant of life to the *pactum salutis* we trace the covenant of life back to its source. The very being of God. Since

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<sup>132</sup> Richard Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy", 25.

God's nature is simple any formulation of the covenant of life must accord with God's gracious and just character. From there we can see that God has always been a gracious God relative to the state of man. Adam's task has always been a gift that is regulated by justice and Adam in the covenant of life, lived by a pre-fall grace. He lived by the benevolence of God. These insights could be taken and applied to the covenant of grace. This further reflection could yield helpful insights. But, to flesh these insights or their structure out is beyond the scope of this thesis.

We would do well to follow Carl Trueman's reasoning about the relation of the covenant of life and the *pactum salutis*, "Thus, the question for modern systematicians is not, can there be a return behind the Reformed tradition on this point to the pristine work of Calvin? Such pristine work is a true piece of theological mythology. The question is rather: can the trinitarian questions raised by adherence to a two-nature Christology in a Reformed context where there is an appropriate emphasis upon mediation as a personal act be addressed in any more adequate a way than that which is found in men like Gillespie in the seventeenth century? And is there insight to be gained for today from a careful mapping of the doctrinal tendencies within Reformed theology as it move from the first- and second-generation Reformation to that of the elaborate polemics and codifications of the seventeenth century?"<sup>133</sup> More work is needed to demonstrate that the *pactum salutis* is the proper paradigmatic covenant. But this thesis is one small exercise in examining if this is a faithful and necessary project.

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<sup>133</sup> Carl Trueman "From Calvin to Gillespie on Covenant", International Journal of Systematic Theology vol. 11. 397

#### 4.4 Summary Conclusions

In examining a paradigmatic reading of the covenant of life that originates in the *Pactum Salutis* and is regulated by the doctrine of divine simplicity we can see how this project helps us coordinate our construction of the covenant of life with Biblical fidelity and systematic coherence. When the *Pactum* is the origin for our covenant theology paradigm it allows us to speak directly to the source of revelation adhering in God's nature. This entails a natural relationship for divine simplicity in our conversations surrounding the relationship between beneficence and justice and their requisite roles in the covenant of life. This also allows us to do justice to the historical particularity of God's expression of beneficence and justice across redemptive history without altering the essence of covenant theology. From this viewpoint, we can offer a better coordination of divine beneficence and justice that allow us to delineate proper and improper ways of constructing the covenant of life based upon our understanding of divine beneficence and simplicity. This construction has the opportunity to inform our overall account of covenant theology and has various ecclesial and missional entailments. It can also inform inter-Reformed dialogues. For these reasons I commend the pursuit of a covenant theology that takes the *pactum* as the paradigmatic covenant and regulates our covenant theology constructions by the simplicity of God.



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