

SIC ET NON: VIEWS IN REVIEW

Westminster Seminary California Distinctives? Part Two.

The Republication of the Covenant of Works (Cornelis Venema with response by J. V. Fesko).

THE MOSAIC ECONOMY AND THE COVENANT OF GRACE¹ By Cornelis P. Venema

If Reformed theology is known for any fundamental theme, it is the doctrine of the covenant(s). In the historical development of Reformed theology, the doctrine of the covenant became the primary idiom within which Reformed theologians of the orthodox period (late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries) articulated the relationship between the Triune God and human beings whom he created after his own image for fellowship with himself. In the orthodox formulation of Reformed covenant theology, which was classically codified in the Westminster Standards at the midpoint of the seventeenth century, human beings obtain their blessedness only within the framework of the covenant relationship that God established with the human race in the first Adam before the fall and that he graciously re-establishes and brings to fruition in the “last” Adam, the promised “seed” of the woman, after the fall.

In the period of Reformed orthodoxy, the doctrine of the covenant was commonly articulated in the form of a bi-covenantalism that distinguished a prelapsarian “covenant of works” from a postlapsarian “covenant of grace.” In this two-covenant scheme, the covenant of works, as its common name intimates, included the promise of life to Adam and his posterity “upon condition of personal and perfect obedience,” and the curse-sanction of condemnation and death in the event of Adam’s disobedience to its stipulations.² Because the first Adam was appointed the covenant “head” of the human race—a “public person” in the traditional language of covenant theology—his disobedience under the covenant of works demerited God’s favor and brought the entire human race under God’s just displeasure and condemnation. Though abrogated as a means to inherit life in perfected and indefectible communion with God, this covenant of works constitutes the background for

the biblical story of God’s work of redemption through Christ, the last Adam.

After the fall into sin, the covenant of grace serves as the means whereby the Triune God, now as Redeemer of a new humanity in Christ, restores fallen sinners to fellowship with himself and freely grants them eternal life. Within the overarching and sovereign purposes of God, the covenant of grace is the appointed means whereby the eschatological life forfeited through Adam’s sin and disobedience would graciously be granted to his elect posterity. Furthermore, in the work of Christ, the Mediator of the covenant of grace, the truth and justice of God, which were manifest in the prelapsarian covenant

VIEWS IN REVIEW: *Sic et Non: Views in Review* is an occasional feature under the purview of the Reviews & Responses editor and will afford a place for a collegial and scholarly discussion of noteworthy if not controversial positions within the Confessionally Reformed community. The first round of discussions of “Westminster Seminary California Distinctives?” appeared in the last issue. The three topics and six participants were I. Law and Gospel (Michael S. Horton with response from Mark A. Garcia); II. The Reformed Two Kingdoms Doctrine (David VanDrunen with response from Jeffrey C. Waddington); III. The Republication of the Covenant of Works (J. V. Fesko with response from Cornelis Venema). Those authors and respondents are to exchange roles and in this issue appears a paper by Dr. Venema and response from Dr. Fesko on the third topic of the Republication of the Covenant of Works. The papers and responses on the first two topics will run in the 2014 issue, D.V.

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1. In the following, I am making considerable use of material from my journal essay, “The Mosaic Covenant: A ‘Republication’ of the Covenant of Works? A Review Article: *The Law is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 21 (2010): 35–101.

2. In this paragraph, I am summarizing the main elements of the Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 7, which treats the doctrine of the covenants of works and of grace. The prelapsarian covenant relationship is variously denominated by covenant theologians. Sometimes it is termed a “covenant of nature” or a “covenant of creation.”

of works, are upheld, since Christ fulfilled all the obligations of the law in the place of and on behalf of his people. Life and blessing in communion with the Triune God are only possible through the work of Christ, in whom God's grace superabounds and the just demands of God's law are fully satisfied. Though there are a number of important differences between the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, there is a fundamental sense in which the work of Christ remedies graciously and justly the consequences of Adam's sin and obtains eternal life for those who are united to him by faith. In the work of redemption, the justice and mercy of God are simultaneously demonstrated, and the promise of blessedness originally made to Adam before the fall is granted to those for whom Christ was appointed as covenant head.

In the classic period of Reformed covenant theology, accordingly, the doctrine of the covenants of works and of grace provided a comprehensive biblical-theological account of the way human beings, created in God's image, obtain life and blessing in communion with the living God. The covenant theology of the Reformed tradition also provided a coherent account of the unity within the diversity of the various administrations of the covenant of grace throughout the history of redemption. From the moment of the first "mother promise" (*protovangelium*) in Genesis 3:15 until the coming of Christ in the fullness of time to fulfill all the types and shadows of the Old Testament economy, the Triune Redeemer was progressively revealing the one way of salvation and blessing for fallen sinners, which is by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

In language that was already employed by John Calvin in the sixteenth century, a standard feature of Reformed covenant theology was the insistence that the covenant of grace throughout redemptive history was *one in substance though diverse in mode of*

administration.³ Through the various administrations of the covenant of grace from Adam to Abraham to Moses to the time of the so-called latter prophets, the promise of restored communion with God through the promised "seed" was progressively adumbrated and foreshadowed. With the coming of Christ in the fullness of time, all of the promises of the Old Testament economy were fulfilled and God's redemptive purposes were accomplished. A principal theme, therefore, of the covenant theology in the period of Reformed orthodoxy was that of the basic unity of the gospel throughout the course of the history of redemption. Whereas Old Testament believers trusted in the Christ who was to come, New Testament believers trust in the Christ who has come and in whom the blessing of restored communion with God the Redeemer will be consummated.

While this summary of the main tenets of classic Reformed covenant theology is in some respects inadequate, it does provide a background for the subject of this essay, namely, the nature of the Mosaic economy within the course of redemptive history. In my treatment of this subject, I am especially interested to address the claim by some recent writers that the administration of the covenant of grace through Moses was "in some sense" a "republication" of the covenant of works.⁴ While these writers maintain their general adherence to the main lines of historic Reformed covenant theology, they claim that the Mosaic covenant plays a distinctive role in the history of the covenant by reiterating the "works principle" of the covenant of works as the basis for Israel's inheritance of and continuance within the land of Canaan. According to proponents of the republication thesis, Israel's disobedience to the legal requirements of the Mosaic administration represented a kind of repetition of Adam's prelapsarian disobedience and failure to obtain life in communion with God under the covenant of works. By means of the republication of the works principle of the covenant of works under the Mosaic administration, Israel and all who are members of the covenant of grace were taught to look for a covenant mediator who would satisfy all the obligations of the law on behalf of his people and secure for them the inheritance of eternal life in communion with God. Israel's disobedience under the law of the Mosaic administration becomes, therefore, an "anti-type" of the obedience of the true Israel in the person of God's own Son who became incarnate in order to accomplish the redemption of his people. Appealing to the language of the apostle Paul in Galatians 3:12 ("the law is not of faith"), advocates of the republication thesis contrast the Mosaic administration, which in some

3. The Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter 7.6, expresses well the consensus on this point: "There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations."

4. See, e.g., *The Law is Not of Faith*, ed. Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009); Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 292–355; J. V. Fesko, "The Republication of the Covenant of Works," *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 197–212; Mark W. Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000); idem, "The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology" (Th.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980); and idem, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (Fall, 1980): 1–57.

sense required obedience to the law as the basis for Israel's inheritance of the land, and the new covenant in Christ, which reveals that faith is the exclusive means of obtaining the free promise of justification and life.

It should be noted that the question of the distinctive nature and role of the Mosaic covenant in the history of redemption was much discussed by the principal Reformed authors in the course of the formulation of the doctrine of the covenant in the period of Reformed orthodoxy. There is ample precedent in the history of Reformed theology on the doctrine of the covenant for a careful reflection upon the peculiar features of the Mosaic administration within the history of redemption. However, the thesis of several contemporary authors is that classic Reformed covenant theology *commonly* viewed the Mosaic administration as in some sense a republication of the prelapsarian covenant of works.⁵ According to these authors, the doctrine of republication was a common view within Reformed orthodoxy and can be defended on historical, exegetical, and theological grounds as integral to a biblical-theological doctrine of the covenant that preserves the radical contrast between the law and faith (in Christ) as antithetical means of obtaining justification and life in communion with God.

From my understanding of the history of Reformed theology, the claims of contemporary defenders of the republication view of the Mosaic economy are at best overstated. There is little evidence that the recent version of republication, which owes a great deal to the formulations of Meredith Kline, represents a rediscovery of a forgotten piece of Reformed covenant theology. More importantly, however, there are ample confessional, historical, and theological reasons to view the Mosaic economy to be *nothing but* an administration of the covenant of grace. As an administration of the covenant of grace, the Mosaic economy neither reintroduces the covenant of works at some level nor reveals the law as a means to secure Israel's corporate inheritance of and tenure in the land of Canaan.

In making a case for viewing the Mosaic economy as *simpliciter* an administration of the covenant of grace, I will treat three topics: 1) the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith on the Mosaic economy; 2) the view of the Mosaic economy in the theology of Francis Turretin, who defends the "received opinion" on the question in the period of Reformed orthodoxy; and 3) the nature of the Mosaic economy in biblical revelation. After my consideration of these topics, I will conclude with a series of summary observations regarding the nature of the Mosaic economy and the claim that it

republished the covenant of works at some level of its administration. I choose to follow this sequence of topics (beginning with the confessions and the viewpoint of a formative and consensus theologian in the Reformed tradition), not to diminish the supreme authority of the Scriptures in ascertaining the nature of the Mosaic economy, but to establish first how the standard Reformed view differs from the republication view. Once this is established, I will offer a survey of some of the relevant biblical data to confirm the biblical fidelity of the prevalent opinion on this question in the history of Reformed theology.

THE MOSAIC ECONOMY IN THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSION OF FAITH

The most authoritative source for identifying the historic Reformed consensus on the doctrine of the covenant is undoubtedly the Westminster Confession of Faith. As is typically the case with confessional documents, the formulations of the Westminster Confession represent the common and accepted features of the doctrine, and leave aside those peculiar features that belong only to this or that theologian of the tradition. For example, even though it was fairly common by the time of the writing of the Westminster Confession of Faith to speak of an intra-trinitarian "covenant of redemption" (*pactum salutis*), the Westminster Confession of Faith restricts its discussion of the covenant to the historical covenants before and after the fall into sin. Consequently, the Westminster Confession of Faith is an excellent standard to test the claims of those who appeal to the history of Reformed theology in defense of the republication view. Is there any evidence that the Westminster Confession of Faith views the Mosaic administration as a kind of republication of the covenant of works?⁶

In Chapter 7 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which is entitled "Of God's Covenant with Man," the

5. See *The Law is Not of Faith*, 6, 9, 13, where the editors describe the republication view as belonging to the "warp and woof" of biblical theology, and as a "regular staple" of Reformed covenant theology; and Karlberg, *Covenant Theology in Reformed Perspective*, 18, who claims that the republication view was held by the "vast majority" of Reformed covenant theologians in the period up to 1648.

6. For a recent exchange on this question, see D. Patrick Ramsey, "In Defense of Moses: A Confessional Critique of Kline and Karlberg," *Westminster Theological Journal* 66/2 (2004): 373–400; and Brenton C. Ferry, "Cross-Examining Moses's Defense: An Answer to Ramsey's Critique of Kline and Karlberg," *Westminster Theological Journal* 67/1 (2005): 163–68. As their article titles indicate, Ramsey is arguing against the republication thesis, as it is represented in the works of Kline and Karlberg, and Ferry, one of the contributors to *The Law is Not of Faith*, is arguing for it.

Confession presents a classic statement of historic Reformed bi-covenantalism. The first article of Chapter 7 underscores the importance of the doctrine of the covenant and offers a general definition of God's covenant with man. According to this article, all human beings were created in God's image and can only have "fruition of him as their blessedness and reward" by means of covenant (WCF 7.1). Even though human beings who bear God's image are obliged by nature to obey God, they would never be able to enjoy the perfection of eternal life without God's sovereign initiative or "voluntary condescension" to enter into covenant with them. For the Westminster divines, the covenant relationship between God and human beings as his image-bearers, whether before or after the fall, is always based upon God's free and unmerited condescension.

After making these fundamental points about the indispensability of the covenant to human blessedness and the nature of the covenant as a "voluntary condescension" on God's part, the Confession proceeds to distinguish and define the prelapsarian covenant of works and the postlapsarian covenant of grace. What distinguishes the covenant of works is that it promises Adam (and all whom he represented) life "upon condition of perfect and personal obedience" (WCF 7.2). By virtue of Adam's sin and disobedience, there is no possibility open to Adam or his posterity for life and blessedness upon the basis of the covenant of works. Consequently, God was "pleased to make a second, commonly called the *covenant of grace*; wherein he freely offereth unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ; requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising to give unto all those that are ordained unto eternal life his Holy Spirit, to make them willing, and able to believe" (WCF 7.3).

The covenant of works and the covenant of grace are similar in respect to their source and promise. Both covenants originate with the triune God who voluntarily condescends to enter into covenant with his creatures. In the covenant of works, the parties are God, the triune Creator, and Adam and his posterity. In the covenant of grace, the parties are God, the triune Redeemer, and all who by faith are partakers of Christ and all his

benefits. The life promised in the covenant relationship before and after the fall into sin is nothing less than the perfection of eternal life and blessedness in unbreakable communion with God. What distinguishes these two covenants as to their substance is that the first requires "personal and perfect obedience" as the condition for obtaining life, whereas the second requires faith in Christ, the Mediator.

The two concluding articles of Chapter 7 of the Westminster Confession of Faith are of special importance to the question of the unity of the covenant of grace throughout the history of redemption. In these articles, the Westminster divines embrace the formulation of Calvin and other Reformed theologians that the covenant of grace is one in substance throughout the course of history and in all its various dispensations.

This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law, and in the time of the gospel: under the law, it was administered by promises, prophecies, sacrifices, circumcision, the paschal lamb, and other types and ordinances delivered to the people of the Jews, all foreshadowing Christ to come; which were, for that time, sufficient and efficacious, through the operation of the Spirit, to instruct and build up the elect in faith in the promised Messiah, by whom they had full remission of sins, and eternal salvation; and is called the old testament (WCF 7.5).

Under the gospel, when Christ, the substance, was exhibited, the ordinances in which this covenant is dispensed are the preaching of the Word, and the administration of the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper: which, though fewer in number, and administered with more simplicity, and less outward glory, yet, in them, it is held forth in more fullness, evidence and spiritual efficacy, to all nations, both Jews and Gentiles; and is called the new testament. There are not therefore two covenants of grace, differing in substance, but one and the same, under various dispensations (WCF 7.6).⁷

In these articles, the administration of the covenant of grace "under the law" refers broadly to the entire Mosaic economy. In the view of the Westminster divines, the Mosaic administration in its entirety foreshadowed the person and work of Christ as Mediator. Believers under the Mosaic economy were saved in the same way, and enjoyed the same spiritual blessings that are now enjoyed by believers after the coming of Christ.⁸

Though recent proponents of the republication view

7. Cf. the Heidelberg Catechism, Q. & A. 19, which similarly treats the Mosaic economy as a revelation of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the form of shadows and ceremonies: "Whence do you know this? [that Jesus Christ is the Mediator of redemption] From the holy gospel, which God Himself first revealed in Paradise; afterwards published by the holy patriarchs and prophets, and foreshadowed by the sacrifices and other ceremonies of the law; and lastly fulfilled by His only begotten Son."

8. The Westminster Confession of Faith 11.6 affirms, for this reason,

acknowledge these features of the Westminster Confession of Faith's conception of the Mosaic economy, they especially appeal to Chapter 19 to argue for the view that the law of Moses "in some sense" republished the covenant of works.⁹ In Chapter 19, "Of the Law of God," the Westminster Confession of Faith makes a number of important statements about the law within the context of the prelapsarian covenant of works and the postlapsarian covenant of grace. With respect to the covenant of works, the Confession notes that "God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience" (WCF 7.1). Reiterating what was stated in Chapter 7 regarding the covenant of works, the Confession affirms that the "promise of life" made to Adam would have been granted upon the basis of Adam's fulfillment of this condition.

In several subsequent articles of Chapter 19, the Confession also affirms that the moral law of God continued after the fall to be "a perfect rule of righteousness" for all human beings created in God's image, and that it was communicated to Israel through Moses in the form of the Decalogue at Mount Sinai (WCF 19, 2–5). In addition to the moral law, which was summarized for Israel in the Decalogue, God also gave Israel various ceremonial laws, which foreshadowed the coming of Christ and are abrogated under the new covenant (WCF 19, 3). Of particular significance is the Confession's declaration regarding the moral law that God gave to believers under the Mosaic administration and that continues to "bind" believers to obedience under the new covenant in Christ.

Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly.... The promises of it, in like manner, show them God's approbation of obedience, and what blessings they may expect upon the performance thereof; although not as due to them as a covenant of works... (19.6).

It is difficult to see what basis republication advocates have for appealing to these articles in Chapter 19 of the Westminster Confession of Faith to prove that the Mosaic economy in some sense republished the covenant of works at a particular level of its administration. The Confession clearly affirms that the moral law, whether promulgated through Moses or by Christ himself, constitutes a "perfect rule of righteousness" that is abidingly

normative for the conduct of God's people. Indeed, the moral law continues to obligate all creatures, "as well justified persons as others," to a pattern of conduct in respect to God and to others that is pleasing to God as their Creator or Redeemer. The moral obligations of obedience remain the same after the fall into sin as they were before, though the particular form or expression of these obligations may differ throughout the course of redemptive history. But, most importantly, the Confession expressly denies that the law was given through Moses "as a covenant of works." Unlike the covenant of works, which required "personal and perfect obedience" to the law as the condition for obtaining life and blessedness, the Mosaic economy requires faith in Christ alone for salvation. The obligations of the law under the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace are not set forth as a basis for the believer's justification or Israel's inheritance and tenure in the land of promise, but to teach believers of their need for Christ and to encourage them in their life of grateful obedience.¹⁰ All of the proper "uses" of the law set forth in Chapter 19.6 serve the overarching purposes of the covenant of grace in all of its administrations, including the Mosaic. Whether the law serves as a "rule of life informing [believers] of the will of God" or as a means of revealing their "sinful pollutions," it was not given in the covenant of grace as a covenant of works. At no point in God's gracious dealings with his people were they placed "under the law" as a covenant of works.

While there may be room to debate the compatibility of some form of the republication view with the affirmations of Chapter 19 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, it is clear that the Confession does not endorse the view that the law was given through Moses to place Israel in some sense under the law as a covenant of works.¹¹

that believers under the old covenant administrations of the covenant of grace enjoyed the blessing of free justification: "The justification of believers under the old testament was, in all these respects, one and the same with the justification of believers under the new testament"

9. See, e.g., *The Law is Not of Faith*, 10–11, 43.

10. Ernst Kevan, *The Grace of the Law: A Study in Puritan Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker reprint, 1976 [1964]), 117, offers a helpful summary of the position set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, especially in Chapters 7 and 19: "The outcome of the debate [regarding the nature of the Mosaic economy among the divines] was that, on the whole, it was agreed that the Mosaic Covenant was a form of the Covenant of Grace; and this view was embodied in the *Confession of Faith*."

11. For a more extended discussion of this point, see Cornelis P. Venema, "The Law of Moses: Not a Disguised Covenant of Works: A Response to F.V. Fesko's 'The Republication of the Covenant of Works,'" *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 218–20.

THE MOSAIC ECONOMY IN TURRETIN'S
ELENCTIC THEOLOGY

One of the difficulties confronting anyone who endeavors to interpret the history of the doctrine of the covenant in Reformed theology is the absence of any comprehensive account of this history. Though there are a number of secondary studies on particular Reformed theologians, the interpreter is confronted with a number of difficult choices in determining which doctrinal formulations belong to the consensus of Reformed covenant theology and which of them belong uniquely to a particular theologian. Historians of the orthodox period of Reformed theology are increasingly aware of the wide diversity of formulation that existed among the theologians of this period. The temptations that confront anyone who attempts to interpret the development of the doctrine of the covenant in this period include, among others, a selective reading of the sources or an anachronistic reading, which imposes categories of subsequent theologians upon those of an earlier period. The work of Richard Muller on the development of Reformed theology in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, illustrates the problem in terms of the debates regarding "Calvin and the Calvinists." Muller has persuasively argued that the interpretation of Calvin's theology was "accommodated" to a variety of twentieth century theological concerns, particularly those of neo-orthodoxy, and that in the process Calvin's theology was often not interpreted in its historical context.¹² When it comes to the question of the view of the Mosaic economy in the period of Reformed orthodoxy, it is always possible to succumb to

the temptation to "accommodate" the sources to contemporary theological concerns.

For this reason, I have chosen to focus my attention in this section on Francis Turretin, who is generally regarded as a defender of the "received opinion" on various topics in the period of Reformed orthodoxy. Rather than a theologian whose views were idiosyncratic or outside the mainstream of Reformed covenant theology, Turretin is a figure who deliberately aimed to set forth the consensus view on disputed topics, including the topic of the particular nature of the Mosaic economy in the history of redemption.¹³ Turretin's principal theological work, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, was written, as its title intimates, in order to defend the consensus of Reformed theology against its theological opponents, whether within the Reformed community or within orthodox Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism.¹⁴ For our purpose, which is to identify the way Reformed theology generally viewed the Mosaic administration within the history of the covenant of grace, Turretin's handling of the question is of special value. Not only does Turretin offer his own conception of the unique place of the Mosaic administration within the broader history of the covenant of grace, but he also identifies the diversity of viewpoints among leading Reformed theologians of the period. Consequently, Turretin's exposition of the Mosaic covenant offers an especially significant piece of historical evidence for what may be described as a commonplace view among Reformed theologians on this feature of traditional Reformed theology.

Consistent with the scholastic form and method of his elenctic theology, Turretin offers a carefully nuanced and highly complex presentation of the doctrine of the covenant. In keeping with our limited purpose in this review, I will not attempt to trace out the complexities of Turretin's discussion, but focus upon the specific question whether the Mosaic economy included a republication of the covenant of works. However, before treating Turretin's handling of this specific question, I will begin with a brief summary of the main tenets of Turretin's doctrine of the covenant.

Unlike Calvin in the early history of Reformed theology, who does not expressly distinguish between a prelapsarian covenant of works and a postlapsarian covenant of works, Turretin maintains that life and fellowship with the triune God, whether as Creator or as Redeemer, is always communicated by way of covenant. In the pre-fall state, God covenanted with the human race, promising life upon condition of Adam's perfect and personal obedience and threatening death upon Adam's disobedience.¹⁵ In the pre-fall covenant, which

12. See Richard A. Muller, *The Unaccommodated Calvin: Studies in the Foundation of a Theological Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. 3–18.

13. For a recent treatment of a Reformed theologian whose views on the Mosaic economy were outside of the mainstream, see Michael Brown, *Christ and the Condition: The Covenant Theology of Samuel Petto (1624–1711)* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012). Though Brown attempts to link Petto's view with more recent views that speak of a republication of the covenant of works in the Mosaic economy, Petto's view does not serve this purpose well. For a critical review of Brown's study, see Ryan M. McGraw, "Review of Michael Brown, *Christ and the Condition*," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 23 (2012): 152–55.

14. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., ed. James T. Dennison, Jr., trans. George Musgrave Giger (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1992–1996). For a comprehensive treatment of Turretin's doctrine of the covenant, see J. Mark Beach, *Christ and the Covenants: Francis Turretin's Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

15. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:574–5.

Turretin denominates a “covenant of nature,” God gratuitously conferred upon Adam the right to eternal happiness upon condition of perfect obedience. Due to the infinite difference between God as Creator and man as creature, and due to the disproportion between the creature’s obedience and the eternal life promised, Turretin clearly rejects the idea that Adam or the creature could “properly merit” life through obedience, though he acknowledges that, speaking improperly, we may affirm a kind of “covenanted merit” (*meritum ex pacto*) that derives “from the pact and liberal promise of God.”¹⁶

By virtue of Adam’s disobedience and fall, it is no longer possible for human beings to enjoy happiness in fellowship with God by means of this covenant of works. In distinction from the prelapsarian covenant of nature, Turretin affirms that God as Redeemer instituted the covenant of grace as the means to restore the elect in Christ to fellowship with himself and to obtain the blessing of eternal life. Turretin summarizes his commitment to the standard Reformed doctrine of bi-covenantalism in the following manner:

[God] entered into a twofold covenant with men: first, a legal covenant (or one of works) with innocent man; another of faith and evangelical with fallen and sinful man. By the former, God promised eternal life to the man perfectly fulfilling the law and threatened the sinner with death according to the clauses, “do this and live” and “cursed is he who continueth not.” By the latter, he promises to the believer safety in Christ and on account of Christ. The former was made with Adam before the fall and in him with all men.... The latter was entered into with the elect in Christ after the fall.¹⁷

In his extended treatment of the covenant of grace, Turretin addresses a series of questions such as the identity of the parties of the covenant, the promises and stipulations of the covenant, and the senses in which the covenant of grace is “conditional” or “unconditional.” For our purpose, the most important questions that he addresses have to do with the unity of the covenant of grace in its diverse administrations throughout the history of redemption, and the peculiar features of the Mosaic administration. In the course of his consideration of these questions, Turretin addresses explicitly the debates among Reformed theologians regarding whether the Mosaic administration was an administration of the covenant of grace, whether it was also an administration in some manner of the covenant of works, or whether it was a distinct covenant altogether, neither a covenant of works nor a covenant of grace. In

his discussion of these topics, Turretin offers an account of the received opinion of Reformed theologians that is relevant to the claims of contemporary writers that the Mosaic economy republished the covenant of works.

On the topic of the unity of the covenant of grace, Turretin distinguishes the Reformed view from that of the Socinians, the Remonstrants (Arminians), and the Anabaptists. Contrary to these alternative views of the relation between the Old and New Testaments, the Reformed teach that the covenant of grace is “the same as to its substance and essential parts” in all of its diverse administrations. Whereas the substance of the covenant remains the same throughout redemptive history, the diverse administrations of the covenant differ only in respect to their “accidentals and the different modes and degrees of dispensation and manifestation.”¹⁸ In every administration of the covenant of grace, we find the same Mediator (Christ), the same obligation of faith in Christ, the same promise of spiritual blessings, and the same way of reconciliation and salvation. So far as the “intention” of God is concerned, therefore, the Mosaic administration, as an administration of the covenant of grace, rightly belongs to the covenant of grace and differs from the new covenant only in terms of its accidental features.

Within the framework of these fundamental themes of Reformed covenant theology, Turretin takes up specifically the subject of what is unique to the Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace. In doing so, he acknowledges that there is a lack of consensus, even among Reformed theologians, on this question.¹⁹ Indeed, he admits that

[t]he opinions of theologians vary on this subject. Some maintain that the Sinaitic covenant was a covenant of works; others that it was a mixture of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace; others that it was properly neither a covenant of nature nor of grace, but a third

16. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 1:578.

17. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:174.

18. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:194.

19. It is significant that, in his consideration of the Decalogue, Turretin observes a difference between the Reformed view and that of traditional Lutheranism. As he puts it, “[i]n assigning the difference between the Old and New Testaments the Lutherans differ also from our men and a question was agitated by them on this subject growing out of the sacramental controversy. They maintain that these two covenants are not only to be distinguished in substance, but also that the promise of grace is to be excluded from the old covenant” (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:234). For a summary of Turretin’s assessment of the Lutheran view of the old covenant, see Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 265–69.

covenant distinct from both in its whole species and was instituted to minister to the covenant of grace (and for this reason properly called “subservient”). Finally others (with whom we agree) say that it was a covenant of grace, but promulgated with the law and lying under it (which was sanctioned in the unusual manner of terror and servitude, in accordance with the state of the Israelite people and the age of the church at the time).²⁰

As this statement of the differing viewpoints of the relation of the Mosaic administration to the covenants of work and of grace indicates, by the time of the writing of Turretin’s *Institutes* considerable difference of opinion had emerged among Reformed theologians on the subject. Turretin’s summary of these differences identifies at least four distinct opinions: 1) some viewed the Mosaic administration as a covenant of works; 2) some taught that the Mosaic administration was an admixture of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace; 3) a third opinion taught that the Mosaic administration was a distinct, subservient covenant, that was neither a covenant of works nor a covenant of grace; and 4) still others, with whom Turretin concurs, viewed the Mosaic administration as in substance a covenant of grace, though promulgating the law as a means to teach human inability and sinfulness and the need for the Mediator, Jesus Christ. In his consideration of these views, Turretin spends most of his time refuting the third opinion and arguing for the propriety of the fourth. With respect to the third or “subservient” covenant view, Turretin notes that it was primarily taught by John Cameron and Amyraut of the Amyraldian school. Though Turretin does not wage the same sharp polemic against each of the other views, he expressly repudiates the idea that the Mosaic covenant “subservied” the covenant of grace by “inflaming” the children of Israel with a desire for the promise of the covenant of grace and restraining their sinful inclination toward obedience.²¹

20. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.262.

21. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.262. Cf. the Helvetic Consensus Formula (1675), Articles 23–25 (printed in *Creeds of the Churches*, ed. John H. Leith [Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1963], 32–22), which repudiate the Amyraldian view of a “subservient” covenant and treat the Mosaic economy as an administration of the covenant of grace, suitable to the church in the period of preparation for the coming of Christ. The Helvetic Consensus Formula, which, as its name attests, sets forth the consensus opinion of Reformed theologians in the period of Reformed orthodoxy, offers no encouragement to the idea that the Mosaic economy was an “admixture” of the covenant of grace and the covenant of works.

22. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.263.

23. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.263.

24. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2.267 (emphasis mine).

In defense of the fourth opinion, Turretin argues that the Mosaic administration was an administration of the covenant of grace. Since there are only two kinds of covenants, a covenant of works and a covenant of grace, he rejects outright the idea that the Mosaic administration was a third kind of covenant. For Turretin, the Mosaic administration was “as to substance and species ... nothing else than a new economy of the covenant of grace.”²² The Mosaic covenant was no different in its substance than the covenant with Abraham, though by its promulgation of the law it was “clothed as to external dispensation with the form of a covenant of works ...”²³ The specific purpose of the Mosaic administration’s promulgation of the law was not to reinstitute a covenant of works with Israel, but to remind Israel of her sinful inability to do what the law demands and thereby cultivate a more ardent thirst for the righteousness of Jesus Christ. The law served Israel as a pedagogue that led her by the hand to Christ, and taught the people that there is no basis for salvation than that which is found in him.

In his elaboration of the place of the law, narrowly considered, within the Mosaic administration, Turretin offers an account that closely follows the view of John Calvin.

The Mosaic covenant may be viewed in two aspects: either according to the intention and design of God and in order to Christ; or separately and abstracted from him. In the latter way, it is really distinct from the covenant of grace because it coincides with the covenant of works and in this sense is called the letter that killeth and the ministration of condemnation, when its nature is spoken (2 Cor. 3:6,7). But it is *unwarrantably abstracted here* because it must always be considered with the intention of God, which was, not that man might have life from the law or as a sinner might be simply condemned, but that from a sense of his own misery and weakness he might fly for refuge to Christ.²⁴

In this explanation, Turretin is making a point that Calvin also makes in his treatment of the role of the law in the Mosaic economy. When New Testament writers (especially the apostle Paul) contrast the “law” of Moses and the covenant of grace in Christ, the contrast is not between the Mosaic covenant as such and the covenant of grace. The contrast is between the law, abstracted from its setting within the Mosaic administration and considered only in terms of what it demands and promises, and the covenant of grace. However, when the law, narrowly considered, is regarded as having been

promulgated by God through Moses to teach Israel to obtain salvation and life through works of obedience, then the law has been turned to a design contrary to God's intention. Within the purposes of the God of the covenant, the Mosaic law was designed to serve the preaching of Christ and to point Israel to the only Mediator whose obedience could procure salvation. In his interpretation of the apostle Paul's language about the law in Galatians 3:12, Turretin observes that Paul speaks of the law "not as taken broadly and denoting the Mosaic economy, but strictly as taken for the moral law abstractly and apart from the promises of grace (as the legalists regarded it who sought life from it)."²⁵ Accordingly, in Galatians 3:12, the apostle Paul is not equating the "law" with the Mosaic administration as such, and then sharply opposing the Mosaic administration to the covenant of grace. Rather, the apostle is contrasting what the law, wrested from its covenant setting, demands, and arguing against his legalistic opponents who pursued a righteousness that consisted in obedience to the law.²⁶

Though I will have occasion in what follows to consider further the role of the law in the Mosaic economy, it does not appear from my summary thus far that Turretin understands it to function at some level as a covenant of works. To be sure, Turretin affirms that the law, narrowly considered, reminds Israel of the requirements and consequences of obedience, and thereby closes the door to justification and life by the works of the law. In this respect, the law reiterates the demands of the covenant of works and shows why the promise of life and blessing cannot be obtained through the law. However, in doing so the law serves the gospel of God's grace in Christ, demonstrating that the covenant of works has been wholly abrogated as an instrument for obtaining life. Part of God's purpose in giving the law within the broad framework of the Mosaic economy, was to point Israel to Christ who alone fulfills all the obligations of the law on behalf of his people. To view the law as though it were given *covenantally* as a means for obtaining the blessing of life and justification would be to "abstract" the law from the promises of grace that are an integral part of the Mosaic economy. Indeed, such an abstraction of the law from its divinely intended place within the Mosaic economy is the error of the legalists whom the apostle Paul opposes in his letter to the Galatians. Though the Mosaic administration may include a *formal* republication of the law's obligations, together with the consequences that follow in the instance of obedience or disobedience to its requirements, it does not thereby reinstitute at some level the pre-fall covenant of works.

Turretin's view of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace, including his handling of the role of the law in the Mosaic covenant, is wholly consistent with what we have seen in the consensus statement of the Westminster Confession of Faith. Turretin follows the Confession by making a clear distinction between two substantially different covenants. The first covenant is the prelapsarian covenant of works, whose substance consists in God's promise of life to Adam and his posterity upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. The second covenant is the postlapsarian covenant of grace, whose substance consists in God's gracious promise of life to all who are united to Christ by faith and become thereby partakers of all his benefits. With respect to the postlapsarian covenant of grace, Turretin maintains that this covenant, though diversely administered throughout the course of redemptive history, was one in substance. In all of its administrations, including the Mosaic, the covenant of grace promises life upon condition of faith in Jesus Christ. So far as the obligations of obedience under the covenant of grace are concerned, the moral law of God, which was known to Adam before the fall, serves as an abiding rule of conduct.

Moreover, the law of God, which was promulgated through Moses in the form of the Ten Commandments, does not function as a republished covenant of works. Though the law's moral demands remain *formally the same* as those required of Adam in the pre-lapsarian covenant of works, the law was not given through Moses or under any of the administrations of the covenant of grace as an instrument for obtaining the inheritance of life and blessing. While the law enunciates the requirement of perfect obedience, and ever reminds the people of God that life in fellowship with God can only be

25. *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:267–8.

26. Turretin reiterates this point in the conclusion to his discussion of the question whether the Mosaic covenant was a covenant of works or a covenant of grace: "It is one thing to speak of the law in itself (which had the form of a covenant of works and was enacted not with the end of making alive, but to convict of transgression, extort the confession of debt and lead to Christ); another concerning the Sinaitic covenant itself, in which the law was enacted" (*Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:269). See Beach, *Christ and the Covenant*, 243–72, for an extensive discussion of Turretin's view of the "twofold economy" of the covenant of grace. Beach argues that Turretin viewed the Mosaic economy as an administration of the covenant of grace, though the promulgation of the moral law, when distinguished from its setting within the evangelical promise, does have the "form" of the covenant of works, "showing humans what they owe God and the consequences of failing to live according to his will" (252). In Beach's estimation, however, Turretin subordinates this feature of the Mosaic economy to the level of a "form" or adjunct that does not materially alter the substance of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace.

obtained by means of the law upon condition of perfect obedience, it was not given for this purpose within the administration of the covenant of grace through Moses. Rather, the law functions in its first use to teach believers their need for Christ and his saving work, and in its third use to be a “rule of gratitude” for the sincere, though imperfect, obedience of God’s redeemed people.

THE MOSAIC ECONOMY IN BIBLICAL REVELATION

As I noted in my introduction, the principal basis for ascertaining the nature of the Mosaic economy in the history of redemption is the teaching of Scripture. In the final analysis, the teaching of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the position of leading theologians in the Reformed tradition must meet the test of Scripture. Do the data of biblical revelation confirm that the Mosaic economy was in all respects, in its substance and its accidents, an administration of the covenant of grace? Or do these data warrant the claims of some contemporary writers that the Mosaic economy also included a republication of the covenant of works at some level of its administration?

Undoubtedly, a fulsome answer to these questions lies beyond the reach of this essay. Such an answer would require a comprehensive survey of the Scriptures and a synthetic account of the peculiar nature of the Mosaic administration in the unfolding of the covenant of grace in the course of redemptive history. For the purpose of this essay, I will only be able to offer a sketch of the key elements of the Mosaic economy and an interpretation of the principal biblical texts often adduced as evidence for the republication view. In my treatment of the biblical data, I will cite representative Reformed exegetes whose interpretation of the biblical data coincides with my understanding of the Mosaic economy as simply an administration of the covenant of grace.

The Giving of the Law (the Decalogue) through Moses: Grace Before Law

In the Old Testament recounting of the Mosaic economy, the calling and ministry of Moses as covenant Mediator is grounded and sustained by God’s gracious initiative and merciful condescension toward his people. The entire story of Israel’s redemption from captivity in Egypt through the ministry of Moses demonstrates the Lord’s covenant faithfulness in “remembering” the promises he had first made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (see, e.g., Exod. 2:24). Through all the twists and turns of the Lord’s dealings with his people, including

the repeated episodes of complaint, grumbling, and disobedience on their part, which led to the forty years of Israel’s wandering in the wilderness under the chastisement of the Lord—the one unchangeable feature of the covenant is the steadfast love and resolute patience of the Lord toward his wayward people. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that, when the Lord reveals his “name” to Moses, he declares: “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy” (Exod. 33:19).

At no point in the extended history of the Mosaic economy does God deal with Israel upon the basis of a “works principle” that treated Israel by the standard of “strict justice” or according to her merit. If such a principle were operative at any moment in the course of the history of the children of Israel during the Mosaic economy, the covenant relationship would never have granted Israel the grace of taking possession of the land of promise or spending any significant time in it. Indeed, if Israel’s tenure in the land of promise were based upon a strict works principle, it would have ended as abruptly as Adam’s tenure in paradise! So soon as Israel failed to obey the law of God perfectly, she would have deserved immediate banishment from Canaan. And yet, the Lord exhibited again and again throughout Israel’s history that he is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love” (Psalm 103:8). The Lord repeatedly demonstrated that he does not deal with his people according to their sins nor repay them according to their iniquities (Psalm 103:10).

Within the framework of the story of God’s gracious and undeserved kindness toward the people of Israel, the Mosaic economy promulgates the law of God, particularly the Decalogue or Ten Words of the covenant, as an invitation to respond to God’s grace in thankful obedience. To use the traditional language of Reformed theology, the revelation of the law of God in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 serves to summon Israel as a redeemed people to live in accordance with the law as a rule of gratitude. Rather than placing Israel “under the law” in the sense of a covenant of works, the Decalogue summarizes the moral obligations of God’s covenant people to live in a manner that comports with their status as God’s peculiar possession. To use the customary distinction between the so-called “first” or “pedagogical” use of the law (as a teacher of sin and pedagogue that points to Christ as the only Mediator) and the “third” or “normative” use of the law, the Decalogue was given primarily to serve God’s purposes to

consecrate a people unto himself in obedience to his holy law.²⁷ While the law of Moses certainly served to teach Israel to know her sin and need for redemption, it especially served to remind Israel of the obligations of obedience to which she was subject as a redeemed people. For this reason, the Psalter or song-book of the Lord's covenant people frequently celebrates the goodness of the law of God, which was given to preserve the people in service to God and point out the way of life that leads to blessedness (see, e.g., Pss. 1, 5, 12, 15, 19, 25, 50, 51, 112, 119, etc.). Thus, the giving of the law of God through Moses was grounded and enveloped by the priority of God's sovereign grace and provision for the redemption of his people through Christ, typified and foreshadowed in all the ceremonies and provisions of the Mosaic economy. It was not given, even "hypothetically" upon the condition of perfect obedience, as an invitation to merit by the standard of justice the covenant promise of tenure in the land of Canaan.

Leviticus 18:5 in its Old Testament Setting

Undoubtedly, the most important passage for determining whether the Mosaic economy republished the covenant of works at some level is Leviticus 18:5 ("You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them; I am the Lord," ESV). This text, which is cited by the apostle Paul at critical points in his dispute with Judaizers who sought to justify themselves before God upon the basis of the "works of the law" (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:16), is interpreted by proponents of the doctrine of republication to enunciate a "works principle" that promised life in the land of Canaan upon the basis of Israel's obedience to the law's demands.²⁸

In my estimation, it is critical to first ascertain the meaning of Leviticus 18:5 in its original Old Testament context, and not to read the passage too quickly in terms of Paul's use of it in his dispute with those who were seeking to base their justification before God upon the basis of their works of obedience to the law. For in its original setting within the Mosaic economy, Leviticus 18:5 can scarcely be understood apart from other essential elements of the covenant of grace. The obligations of obedience stipulated in Leviticus 18:5 assume the truth of Israel's redemption from bondage in Egypt by God's outstretched arm, and are placed within this context in a manner that is similar to the promulgation of the law at Sinai. When the Lord calls his people to holiness, he does so as one who is holy, but also as one who graciously makes provision for the justification

and sanctification of his people. He does not summon his people to obedience in this passage in order to reintroduce the covenant of works at the level of her tenure in the land.

It is especially noteworthy that the statutes of the Mosaic covenant to which Leviticus 18:5 requires compliance include all the provisions in the Levitical legislation that concern the offering of sacrifices for the cleansing away of the guilt and pollution of sin. Indeed, all of the ceremonies of the law to which Israel is bound constitute a typological prefigurement of the person and work of Christ as Mediator and Savior. The life promised to the people of Israel includes the ministry of the Aaronic priesthood, and the presentation of expiatory and propitiatory sacrifices to atone for their sins. Because these provisions for the remission of sins and the purification of the people for communion with God typologically foreshadow the person and work of the one Mediator, Jesus Christ, whose blood alone perfectly cleanses his people from their sins, they proclaim the gospel of gracious redemption and forgiveness to the children of Israel. Through its ceremonies and priestly mediation, the Mosaic economy clearly reveals that Israel's fellowship with the Lord of the covenant is grounded upon and maintained by the undeserved mercy and grace of God.

Furthermore, the Lord, who makes provision for the removal of the guilt and uncleanness of the people through the Levitical legislation, also promises the people in Leviticus that he will sanctify them (see, e.g., Leviticus 22:32–33). For this reason, Leviticus 18:5 should not be read in its original setting as a republication of the covenant of works, which obliges Israel to a perfect obedience as a "meritorious" basis for her blessedness in the land of promise. The point of Leviticus 18:5 is not to place Israel under a works principle in order to prove that obedience to the law of God is not the way to find favor with God. This would not only wrest Leviticus 18:5 from its setting within the Mosaic economy and the Levitical legislation, but it would also suggest that this

27. Calvin regards the third use of the law as a rule of gratitude to be its "principal" use (*Institutes* II.vii.12 [OS 3:337]): "Tertius usus, qui et praecipuus est, et in proprium Legis finem propius spectat ..." On Calvin's view of the diverse uses of the law, see Cornelis P. Venema, *Accepted and Renewed in Christ*, 229–47.

28. See, e.g., Bryan Estelle, "Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:1–14 in Biblical Theological Development," in *The Law is Not of Faith*, 136: "In this regard, the necessity for obedience plays a somewhat different role under the old covenant. Although the substance of the covenant of grace is the same in both testaments, in the old covenant there was the need for compliance so that this would be the *meritorious grounds* for Israel's continuance in the land, the typological kingdom" (emphasis mine).

economy was no longer undergirded by the promises first made to Abraham, who was justified before God through faith alone and in no other wise than believers are justified in the New Testament economy. Leviticus 18:5 stipulates the positive demands of obedience to the law that are indispensable to the people of Israel's blessing in fellowship with the Lord. Though these demands now take a distinct form, with obligations that belong to the Mosaic economy in particular, they are not different in kind (substance) from the obligation of obedience that was given to Abraham in an earlier administration of the covenant of grace. When God formally established his covenant with Abraham, he said to him: "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly" (Gen. 17:1–2). The obligation of obedience set forth in Leviticus 18:5 simply reiterates what God had earlier declared to Abraham.

Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5

The reason Leviticus 18:5 plays such an important role in the argument for the republication view is the way it is cited by the apostle Paul in the epistles to the Romans and the Galatians. Since Paul appeals to Leviticus 18:5 (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12) in order to draw a sharp contrast between a righteousness that is based upon the law and a righteousness that is based upon faith, he appears to understand Leviticus 18:5 to set forth a works principle of justification upon the basis of obedience to the law. Paul seems to be affirming that the exhortation, "do this

and live," summons Israel not to grateful, albeit imperfect obedience, but to an obedience that will secure their life in favor with God. Accordingly, for those who view the Mosaic economy as a republication of the covenant of works at the typological level of Israel's inheritance and tenure in the land of promise, Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 offers important evidence for the doctrine of republication.

However, a proper understanding of Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 must attend to the particular problem that he is addressing. The problem the apostle Paul is addressing is a kind of "legalism" that appeals to the law as an instrument for pursuing righteousness and justification before God upon the basis of works of the law. Consequently, when Paul appeals to Leviticus 18:5 in this passage, he does so in the context of an extended polemic against the legalism of his opponents. The use Paul makes of Leviticus 18:5 in the course of his polemic is contoured to meet his opponents upon their own terms. Since these opponents sought to base their righteousness before God upon their works of obedience to the law, Paul responds by reminding them that the law, *narrowly and abstractly considered*, could never serve as an instrument of self-justification before God.²⁹ In its narrow and abstract meaning, apart from the promises of God's grace and mercy, the law reveals only the demands and obligations of perfect obedience. By means of the law, God reveals to his people what truly pleases him, namely, perfect conformity to his statutes. Therefore, when the law with its demand for perfect obedience is separated from the promises and provisions of God's grace, it can only impress upon its recipients their sinful inability and the futility of obtaining acceptance with God on the basis of the works of the law.

This understanding of Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 is a common one in the Reformed tradition. I have already observed it in my treatment above of the view of Turretin on the Mosaic economy. To demonstrate further the pedigree of this understanding, I will first consider Calvin's comments on this passage and then note how it is handled in John Murray's commentary on the book of Romans.

In his commentary on Romans 10:5, Calvin explains Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 by distinguishing between "the whole of the doctrine (*universam doctrinam*) taught by Moses" and "that part of it which belonged peculiarly to his ministry."³⁰ In his "universal office," Moses taught nothing that is contrary to the gospel. The Mosaic economy or administration of the covenant included the preaching of repentance and faith, and therefore it

29. Cf. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 126: "It is of the utmost importance carefully to distinguish between the purpose for which the law was professedly given to Israel at the time, and the various purposes it actually came to serve in the subsequent course of history.... In this sense Paul has been the great teacher of the philosophy of law in the economy of redemption. Most of the Pauline formulas bear a negative character. The law chiefly operated towards bringing about and revealing the failure of certain methods and endeavours. It served as a pedagogue unto Christ, shut up the people under sin, was not given unto life, was weak through the flesh, worked condemnation, brings under a curse, is a powerless ministry of the letter. These statements of Paul were made under the stress of a totally different philosophy of the law-purpose, which he felt to be inconsistent with the principles of redemption and grace. This pharisaic philosophy asserted that the law was intended, on the principle of merit, to enable Israel to earn the blessedness of the world to come."

30. Comm. Rom. 10:4–5, in *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, vol. 8: *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 222–23 (CO 49.197). Hereafter I will use CNTC to refer to this translation of Calvin's commentaries.

included “offering the promises, the free promises, of the divine mercy.” In the discharge of this comprehensive office, Moses preached the gospel with its summons to faith and repentance. Within the context of the universal office of Moses, the law provided the people instruction in their duties and obligations of obedience. However, the apostle Paul appeals to Leviticus 18:5 as an example of Moses’ peculiar office as a teacher of the demands and obligations of the law, which by God’s design served as a means to instruct the people of Israel “in how many ways they were accursed and how far they were from being able to earn anything from God by their works. Being thus led to despair of attaining any righteousness of their own they were to flee to the haven of divine goodness—to Christ himself. This was the purpose of the ministry of Moses.”³¹ Though the ministry of Moses included a preaching of the gospel and its promises, Calvin observes that, in his particular office as a teacher of the law, Moses was called to teach the character of the righteousness of works and to remind the people of the rewards and punishments due to those who obey or disobey its precepts. When Paul contrasts the “law” of Moses and the gospel, the contrast is not between the universal office of Moses and the gospel, but between the peculiar office of Moses and the gospel. “Whenever the word *law* is used in this restricted sense, Moses is implicitly contrasted with Christ. We are then to see what the law contains in itself when separated from the Gospel. I must, therefore, refer to what I say here of the righteousness of the law not to the whole office of Moses, but to that part of it which was peculiarly entrusted to him.”³²

According to Calvin, in this passage Paul is opposing those who “put their trust for salvation” in their works performed in obedience to the law. When Paul speaks of those who are “of the works of the law,” he is speaking of the Judaizers who sought to use the law as a means of self-justification before God.³³ Though the law of God is holy and good, *by itself* it can only “curse” all those who are unable to perform perfectly what it requires.

[The apostle] concludes boldly that all are cursed because all have been commanded to keep the law perfectly, and this is because, in the present corruption of our nature, the ability is wanting. Hence we conclude that it is accidental that the law should curse, though at the same time perpetual and inseparable.³⁴

In order to interpret Paul’s appeal in this passage to Leviticus 18:5, it is necessary, according to Calvin, to bear in mind that his “language is adapted to these particular

circumstances. The contradiction between the law and faith lies in the cause of justification.”³⁵ While the law of God continues to serve believers as a rule of gratitude, the law of God serves, so far as justification before God is concerned, to show the impossibility of justification by works. When Paul adduces Leviticus 18:5 against his opponents, he is not offering a complete account of the law within the framework of the Mosaic covenant. Nor is he denying that, with respect to the believer’s conduct, the law serves as a norm for the good works that faith necessarily produces. What the apostle wishes to deny is the claim that it is possible to do what the law requires and upon that basis obtain favor with God. In respect to the decisive question of justification, the law can only serve to remind sinners of their unworthiness and need for the work of Christ as Redeemer. As Calvin remarks, “[w]e admit that the doers of the law, if there were any, would be righteous. But since that is a conditional agreement, all are excluded from life because none offers the righteousness that he ought.”³⁶

In his commentary on the book of Romans, Murray devotes an appendix to the question of Paul’s appeal to Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5. Murray devotes special attention to this question since, as he acknowledges, Paul’s use of Leviticus 18:5 seems to contradict the meaning of the passage in its Old Testament context. In the Old Testament economy of redemption, Leviticus 18:5 does not appear in a context “that deals with legal righteousness as opposed to that of faith.”³⁷ Rather, Leviticus 18:5 presents the law in the same way as it is presented in Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, and in many other passages in the Pentateuch, namely, as a rule of gratitude that norms the conduct of a redeemed people in their life-fellowship with the Lord. According to Murray, Paul’s use of Leviticus 18:5 cannot help but raise the question: “could Paul properly have appealed to Lev. 18:5 as an illustration of works-righteousness in opposition to that of faith?”³⁸ In Murray’s answer to this question, three “distinct relationships” are identified in which the principle enunciated in Leviticus 18:5, “the man that does shall live,” has particular relevance.

First, in “a state of perfect integrity,” Murray argues,

31. Comm. Rom. 10:4–5, CNTC 8:223 (CO 49.97).

32. Comm. Rom. 10:4–5, CNTC 8:223 (CO 49.98).

33. Comm. Gal. 3:10–11, CNTC 11:53 (CO 50.208).

34. Comm. Gal. 3:10–11, CNTC 11:53 (CO 50.208).

35. Comm. Gal. 3:12, CNTC 11:54 (CO 50.209).

36. Comm. Gal. 3:12, CNTC 11:54 (CO 50.209).

37. *The Epistle to the Romans, New International Commentary on the New Testament*, F.F. Bruce, gen. ed., 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959, 1965), “Appendix B: Leviticus 18:5,” 2:249.

38. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 249.

the law of God reveals a “principle of equity in God’s government.”³⁹ Since the law discloses to human beings what accords with God’s will, obedience to the law will invariably be pleasing to God and warrant his approbation and justifying verdict, whereas disobedience will always be displeasing to him and warrant his disapproval and condemnation. God always judges human conduct according to the truth, whether it be conduct that pleases or displeases him. In the state of Adam’s integrity before the fall, it was possible for him to enjoy God’s approval by doing what the law required. However, by virtue of Adam’s fall and disobedience, the law of God as such can now only expose him and his posterity to condemnation and death, since all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory. Since the fall of Adam, man’s original relationship to the law is no longer operative. Now the law can only reveal the sinfulness of all human beings and their just liability to condemnation and death.

Second, “within the realm of sin” or the world subsequent to the fall of Adam, the principle, “the man that does shall live,” must be regarded as “totally inoperative” as a means for obtaining favor and acceptance with God.⁴⁰ According to Murray, the absolute contrast that the apostle Paul wishes to set forth in Romans 10:5–6 between the righteousness of works and the righteousness of faith is a contrast between *doing* what the law requires and *embracing* what God freely gives in Christ. When Paul adduces Leviticus 18:5 to illustrate this contrast, he appeals properly to what the language of this text *by itself* expresses. Leviticus 18:5 expresses what “holds true when law-righteousness is operative unto justification and life and also express[es] the conception entertained by the person who espouses the same as the way of acceptance with God (cf. also Gal. 3:12).”⁴¹ When the apostle Paul appeals to Leviticus 18:5 to prove the futility of obtaining a right standing with God on the basis of works, he properly demonstrates the futility of any such endeavor. No one is able to do all that the law requires, and therefore no one is able to obtain life through the works of the law.

And third, the purpose of Paul’s quotation of Leviticus 18:5 is shaped by his polemic with those who would appeal to their works of obedience to the law as a basis for justification and life. In making his appeal to this passage, the apostle legitimately opposes any attempt to use the law as an instrument of self-justification.

However, in Murray’s judgment, the misappropriation of the law as a means to obtain life and justification before God by Paul’s opponents, does not mitigate the proper use of the law as a norm for Christian obedience and sanctification. “But we must not suppose that doing the commandments as the way of life has ceased to have any validity or application. To suppose this would be as capital a mistake in its own locus as to propound works-righteousness as the way of justification.... In the realm of grace, therefore, obedience is the way of life. He that does the commandments of God lives in them.”⁴² When Paul adduces Leviticus 18:5 to expose the futility of any effort to obtain justification upon the basis of the works of the law, he does not thereby deny the legitimacy of an appeal to Leviticus 18:5 in support of a sincere and grateful obedience to the law of God. Nor does he deny the sense in which such sincere obedience is the way of life and blessing for the redeemed people of God.

Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12

The second place where the apostle Paul appeals to Leviticus 18:5 is in Galatians 3:12 (“But the law is not of faith, rather, ‘The one who does them shall live by them’”). In this passage, the apostle is again engaged in a sustained polemic with Judaizers who were relying upon the “works of the law” to justify themselves before God (Gal. 3:10, 11). The burden of the apostle’s argument in this passage is to remind his readers that the law requires perfect obedience, and that any failure in respect to meeting the law’s obligations results in God’s curse. Rather than seeking futilely to find favor and acceptance with God upon the basis of works, believers are justified through faith in Christ who “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’” (Gal. 3:13).

The apostle Paul’s appeal to Leviticus 18:5 in this passage is similar to the one we have considered in Romans 10:5. In what might be termed an *argumentum ad hominem*, the apostle assumes the position of his opponents and, in a manner of speaking, hoists them on their own petard. If you wish to find favor with God upon the basis of your works, the apostle argues, then you must assume the obligations of the law which require perfect obedience. If you once embark upon the pathway of life in communion with God upon the basis of works, you must meet the full demands of the law. The implied minor premise in the apostle’s argument is that no one perfectly meets the law’s obligations (cf.

39. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 249.

40. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 250.

41. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 250.

42. *The Epistle to the Romans*, 250–51.

Gal. 5:2–3, where this is made more explicit). In making the argument, the apostle treats the law's obligations, as these are stipulated in Leviticus 18:5, in the narrow and abstract manner of Romans 10:5. Wrested from its proper place in the Mosaic economy, and treated as though it set forth a pathway of justification by works, the stipulation/demand of obedience in Leviticus 18:5 can only leave the person who seeks to be justified by the law under the curse of that law.

Just as was the case with the interpretation of Romans 10:5, this understanding of Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12 is common in the history of Reformed exegesis. To illustrate this, I will again appeal to the comments of two Reformed interpreters, the venerable Calvin and the Reformed biblical theologian, Herman Ridderbos.

In his interpretation of Paul's argument in Galatians 3, especially the contrast the apostle draws between the promise given to Abraham and the law mediated through Moses, Calvin observes that the law of Moses was never intended to nullify or state a principle that opposes the promise of the gospel. In order to sort out the complex argument of the apostle Paul, Calvin insists that we need to distinguish the different ways in which the apostle speaks of the law. Though there is a contrast between the law and the gospel on the question of justification, the law of Moses ultimately serves the ministry of the gospel promise. "I again repeat that if you do not understand that the promise is free, this statement will be quite empty, for the law and the Gospel are not at variance except that, in regard to justification, either the law justifies a man by the merit of works or the promise bestows righteousness freely."⁴³ The law was not given through Moses as a means or instrument of justification, for that, according to Calvin, would "make the promise of none effect."

According to Calvin, when Paul contrasts the law and the Gospel in Galatians 3, he emphasizes only one of the uses of the law, namely, the pedagogical use whereby the law directs its recipients to Christ as the only Mediator. But Calvin hastens to warn against a possible misunderstanding of Paul's comments about the law. "Readers must be put on their guard on this matter; for I see many make the mistake of acknowledging no other use of the law than what is expressed here. But elsewhere Paul himself applies the precepts of the law to teaching and exhortation (2 Tim. 3:16). There this definition of the use of the law is not complete and those who acknowledge nothing else in the law are wrong."⁴⁴ In addition to the pedagogical use of the law as a teacher of sin and a schoolmaster that directs its recipients to

Christ the Mediator, the law of Moses was given to Israel as a comprehensive rule of life. On the one hand, the law of Moses directs the people of Israel to look to Christ, who is the end or fulfillment of the law. Now that Christ has come, this peculiar function of the law is finished. In this way, the law of Moses was preparatory to the coming of Christ in the fullness of time. On the other hand, the law of Moses was given as a comprehensive rule of life, which reveals to the redeemed people of God the manner of life and grateful devotion that pleases the Lord. As a rule of conduct, the law of Moses is given within the context of God's gracious promise, not as an instrument for obtaining life and acceptance with God, but as an instrument for regulating Israel's sincere obedience to him.

[Paul] affirms that under the reign of Christ there is no longer a childhood which needs to be ruled by a schoolmaster, and that consequently the law has finished its task. This is another application of the comparison. He had undertaken to prove two things: that the law is a preparation for Christ, and that it is temporary. But here again it may be asked whether the law is so abolished that it has nothing to do with us. I reply that the law, so far as it is a rule of life, is a bridle which keeps us in the fear of the Lord, a spur to correct the slackness of our flesh, in short, so far as it is profitable for teaching, correcting, reproving, that believers may be instructed in every good work, is as much in force as ever, and remains intact.⁴⁵

For Calvin, Paul's argument does not warrant the conclusion that the Mosaic administration is opposed in any substantial way to the gospel promise. Rather than being at odds with the gospel promise, the Mosaic economy has only "ended in so far as it differs in outward aspect from the covenant of grace."⁴⁶

Though it would be instructive to review how other Reformed theologians in the orthodox period treat Paul's argument in Galatians 3, it is interesting to observe that a more recent Reformed biblical theologian, Herman Ridderbos, offers a strikingly similar interpretation in his magisterial work, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*.⁴⁷

In his interpretation of the apostle Paul's view of the

43. Comm. Gal. 3:17, CNTC 11:59 (CO 50.213).

44. Comm. Gal. 3:19, CNTC 11:61 (CO 50.215).

45. Comm Gal. 3:25, CNTC 11:67 (CO 50.221).

46. Comm. Gal. 3:25, CNTC 11:67 (CO 50.221).

47. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John R. De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975).

law of Moses, Ridderbos acknowledges that there is an apparent inconsistency between the way Paul treats the redemptive-historical function of the law in passages like Galatians 3 and 4, as well as Romans 10, and the “positive purpose” of the law in the Old Testament economy.⁴⁸ In the Old Testament economy, the law was given within the framework of redemption and served to regulate the conduct of the people of God in the land of promise. Within this framework, the law was not intended to serve as the basis for Israel’s justification and life before God. The law was intended to set forth a positive rule of conduct for the people of God. However, in Paul’s references to the law of Moses in Galatians 3 and 4, he speaks negatively of the law as a covenant “that brings forth children of slavery” and sharply contrasts the law with the righteousness of faith. According to Ridderbos, Paul’s characterization of the law’s function in these passages poses “an exceedingly complex problem” that can be put in the form of the question:

[C]an the redemptive-historical significance Paul ascribes to the law be thought to be in harmony with the foundation on which the law was given in the Old Testament (Exod. 20:2), and on which its demand is intended to function, as appears from the whole Old Testament revelation of God?⁴⁹

Since the law was never given to Israel as an instrument for obtaining justification and life, Paul’s contrast between the law and the promise in Galatians 3 seems inconsistent with the purpose and function of the law in the Old Testament economy. In his treatment of this complex problem, Ridderbos offers several general observations that correspond at a number of points with emphases in the writings of Reformed theologians, including Calvin, of the orthodox period.

First, Ridderbos notes that a resolution of the problem of Paul’s negative appraisal of the law of Moses must be consistent with the apostle’s teaching that the Mosaic administration also taught the righteousness of faith. “It should be maintained first that, for Paul the advent of Christ does not mean the great redemptive-historical incision in the sense that it was only with Christ that the possibility of faith had come, and that prior to it righteousness by the law was the only way of salvation assigned to Israel.”⁵⁰ Ridderbos notes that the apostle Paul taught that “the way of faith ... constituted

the essence of the Old Testament economy of redemption,” and that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works (Rom. 4). Remarkably, the apostle Paul even appeals to pronouncements in the law of Moses to confirm the gospel of righteousness by faith (Rom. 10:6ff; Gal. 3:11; 4:21). Unless the apostle Paul contradicts himself, we must assume that his negative assessment of the law of Moses in Galatians 3 does not include a negative assessment of the Mosaic economy as a whole. For Ridderbos, it would be a mistake to conclude from Paul’s argument in Galatians 3 that the apostle regarded the Mosaic economy to be at variance with the gospel promise previously revealed through the Abrahamic covenant. Such a conclusion would imply that the apostle Paul’s view of the Mosaic economy was inconsistent and contradictory at key points.

Second, Ridderbos further argues that, when Paul appeals to the law of Moses in a positive manner to confirm the gospel of salvation by grace through faith, he refers to the law in “the larger sense,” and not the law ““consisting in commandments and ordinances.””⁵¹ In the course of his polemic against the Judaizers, Paul opposes not the Mosaic administration in its entirety, but the failure of his opponents to “see the law in the proper light.” When the law is abstracted from its place within the broader framework of the Old Testament economy, it can be viewed, as was true in the case of Paul’s opponents, “as a means for setting up their own righteousness” before God. By isolating the law from its setting within the broader framework of the Mosaic administration, Paul’s opponents were wresting the law to an inappropriate purpose, namely, as a means for obtaining righteousness and life before God.

Third, Ridderbos maintains that the apostle Paul engages his opponents by proceeding from their standpoint, namely, from the law “as it functioned in the synagogue’s doctrine of redemption.” The negative manner in which Paul describes the righteousness of the law can only be understood in terms of the position of his opponents, whose view of the law was opposed to the gospel of the righteousness of faith through Christ.

Now, it is from this law, as it functioned in the synagogue’s doctrine of redemption opposed by him, that Paul again and again proceeds, the law as he saw it before him in the life of the Jews, the law as he himself had also lived from it (Phil. 3:6), that is, the law before Christ and the law without Christ. That he is able to see the function of the law in another way as well, in the light of grace and of faith, as the rule for the new life, is apparent from the manner in which presently he will

48. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 153.

49. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 153.

50. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 154.

51. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 154.

again connect the life that is from the Spirit with the law (Rom. 8:4, *et al.*). But in the antithesis with Judaism this function of the law does not arise, but the ultimate consequence is drawn from what takes place when the sequence of salvation and law is reversed, and the law itself is made a means of salvation. One can say, therefore, that in combating the Jewish doctrine of the law Paul starts from the Jewish standpoint and from thence makes plain what happens to the law and to man and what from God's side must happen when righteousness and life are anticipated from the law and not from the promise, from human volition and endeavor and not from the power of the Spirit.⁵²

For Ridderbos, Paul's negative appraisal of the law represents a kind of *argumentum ad hominem*, an argument that proceeds from the mistaken standpoint of his opponents in order to prove the impossibility of any attempt to seize upon the law as an instrument of self-justification before God.

Fourth, after these preliminary observations about Paul's argument, Ridderbos identifies the most difficult question regarding Paul's negative evaluation of the law in a passage like Galatians 3. If Paul's argument proceeds from the false standpoint of his opponents, who sought to use the law as an instrument for self-justification, then the apostle "would in essence have taken his point of departure in a false position."⁵³ Moreover, if the apostle proceeds from the false standpoint of opponents, who seized upon the law as a means of self-justification before God, how can we explain Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5? To put the question in the sharpest terms, "[w]ould Paul ... have cited Leviticus 18:5 in support of a false prophecy?"⁵⁴ On the surface, Paul's appeal to this passage seems to assume that the law not only requires obedience, but also that such obedience is in some sense the proper basis for obtaining life and salvation. Rather than opposing the standpoint of the Judaizers, this passage appears to argue that Moses taught the principle that life may be obtained on the basis of works.

In his response to this difficult question, Ridderbos identifies two possible explanations of what Paul is doing, each of which poses insuperable problems. The first explanation is that Paul does attribute the view of his opponents to Moses, and in doing so implies that Moses taught a view regarding the way of justification and life before God that was based upon works. According to this explanation, Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 means that he understood Moses to teach the propriety of pursuing a legal righteousness as a means of self-justification before God. In Ridderbos' judgment,

this explanation cannot be correct, since Paul appeals elsewhere to Moses precisely to refute such a legalistic pursuit (e.g. Rom. 10:6).

The second explanation that Ridderbos identifies is especially significant, since it resembles an explanation offered by contemporary defenders of the doctrine of republication. In this explanation, Moses is understood by Paul to have "posited two possibilities, of which the first (righteousness by the law) was intended by him as a way impossible for the sinner."⁵⁵ According to Ridderbos, there are two difficulties with this interpretation of Paul's argument and appeal to Leviticus 18:5. In the first place, Leviticus 18:5 in its original setting and in accordance with "the intention of Moses" communicates a "rule of the covenant," namely, that life and blessing within the covenant require obedience to God's statutes. The point of this text in its original setting is not to invite Israel to obtain life on the basis of her obedience, and to show thereby that such obedience is impossible. The point of the text, as is true of the giving of the law of Moses in general, is to summon Israel to grateful and sincere obedience. In his own understanding of the Christian life as a life of "faith working through love" (Gal. 5:6), the apostle Paul also affirms the positive place of obedience in the life of God's redeemed people. And in the second place, when Paul appeals to Leviticus 18:5 against those who seek to establish their own righteousness before God based upon obedience to the law, he properly reminds his opponents "that he who strives after the righteousness that is by the law is then bound to the word of Moses, that is, to do what the law demands." In Ridderbos' understanding of what Paul is doing, "[t]his is not an appeal to Moses in support of 'a false position,' but a binding of this position to its own point of departure: he who seeks righteousness in the law faces, as appears from the law itself, the requirement of doing (cf. Gal. 3:10, 12)."⁵⁶

52. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 154–55.

53. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 155.

54. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 155.

55. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 156.

56. *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, 156. Moisés Silva offers a very similar interpretation of Paul's argument in Galatians 3. Silva notes that Paul's treatment of the law in Galatians, especially when he opposes the law to the promise, is "colored" by the position of his opponents, who were seizing upon the law as a means of self-justification or as the "source" (not the "manner") of life before God. See Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 187–95; idem, "Abraham, Faith, and Works: Paul's Use of Scripture in Galatians 3:6–14," *Westminster Theological Journal* 63/2 (2001): 251–68; and idem, "Faith Versus Works of Law in Galatians," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 2: *The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D.A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien,

What Paul means to say is this, that he who strives after the righteousness that is by the law is then bound to the word of Moses, that is, to do what the law demands. Likewise the wrong use of the law, to be zealous for the law without understanding, finds in the law itself the standard to which, if it is to have a chance of success, it must measure up. In that sense it can be said that Moses (or the law itself) “defines” the righteousness that is of the law.⁵⁷

Ridderbos’ explanation of Paul’s argument conforms in all important respects with the one we have seen in Calvin and other Reformed covenant theologians. When Paul appeals to Leviticus 18:5, he is not offering a complete account of the nature of the Mosaic administration. Rather, Paul is showing to his opponents the futility of any attempt to make the law an instrument of justification before God. For, if the law is seized upon as an instrument of justification, then it places its recipients under the burden of doing all that the law requires.

An Excursus on Typology in the Mosaic Covenant

One feature of the biblical case for viewing the Mosaic economy as an administration of the covenant of grace, and not a republication of the covenant of works at some level, is the typology of the Mosaic economy.

and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 217–48. Interestingly, Silva rejects Meredith Kline’s interpretation of Paul’s view of the law in the argument of Galatians, noting its similarity with the views of historic Lutheranism and dispensationalism (*Interpreting Galatians*, 190). Silva also shares Ridderbos’ (and Calvin’s) view that, when Paul speaks in Galatians 3 of those who are “of the works of the law,” he means to speak of those who “rely upon” or appeal to the law as an instrument of justification before God. See especially his “Faith Versus Works of Law in Galatians,” 222–26. This view is, as we have seen, strongly criticized by Gordon in his contribution to *The Law is Not of Faith*. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 551–62; and idem, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), “Appendix: Mark Karlberg’s View of the Mosaic Law,” 247–51. Schreiner follows in the trajectory of Ridderbos’ and Silva’s interpretation, and offers a critique of the kind of doctrine of the Mosaic administration that is represented in *The Law is Not of Faith*.

57. Paul: *An Outline of His Theology*, 156.

58. See, e.g., *The Law is Not of Faith*, 36–87, 97–98.

59. T. Norton Street, *How to Understand Your Bible*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 107, offers the following helpful definition of a biblical type: “A type can be defined as a divinely purposed, Old Testament foreshadowing of a New Testament spiritual reality.” For a more fulsome discussion of biblical typology, especially as it relates to the Mosaic economy with its types and ceremonies, see Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 144–82.

60. *Biblical Theology*, 144.

61. *Biblical Theology*, 148.

When contemporary proponents of the doctrine of republication appeal to the typology of the Mosaic administration, they allege that the Mosaic economy repeated the probation of Adam in the garden of Eden and pointed forward to the obedience of Christ, the “last” Adam.⁵⁸ Just as Adam was required to be obedient in order that he might obtain the promise of eschatological life, so Israel was required to be obedient in order that she might maintain tenure and enjoy blessings in the land of Canaan. With respect to Israel’s corporate enjoyment and retention of her covenant inheritance, tenure and blessing in the land of promise, the Mosaic covenant repeated the works inheritance principle of the prelapsarian covenant of works. At the level of Israel’s earthly inheritance, the Mosaic administration functioned typologically to reveal the need for the perfect obedience of Christ, who “merited” the inheritance of eternal life for the elect people of God. By means of the repetition of the works principle, Israel was taught the impossibility of obtaining her ultimate spiritual inheritance of eternal life in God’s kingdom in any other way than through the obedience of Christ.

The claim that the Mosaic economy republished the covenant of works in a typological manner with respect to Israel’s inheritance and blessing in the land of Canaan begs some important questions regarding the nature of biblical typology. Though this is a complicated topic in the history of theology, biblical types may be defined as those features, including events, persons, or institutions, of the Old Testament that prefigure or foreshadow their New Testament realities.⁵⁹ Biblical typology focuses upon those features of the Old Testament economy that typify, symbolize, and foreshadow features of the New Testament economy. As Geerhardus Vos observes, “[a] typical thing is prospective; it relates to what will become real or applicable in the future.”⁶⁰ An obvious and important instance of biblical typology is the Old Testament tabernacle and temple:

The tabernacle affords a clear instance of the coexistence of the symbolical and the typical in one of the principal institutions of the Old Testament religion. It embodies the eminently religious idea of the dwelling of God with His people. This it expresses symbolically so far as the Old Testament state of religion is concerned, and typically as regards the final embodiment of salvation in the Christian state.⁶¹

For our purpose, it is important to observe that biblical typology assumes the essential similarity in meaning and symbolism between the Old Testament type

and the New Testament reality to which it points forward. To use the broad language of “promise” and “fulfillment,” the types of the old covenant economy are promissory of their fulfillment in the new covenant economy.

From the vantage point of this understanding of the nature of biblical typology, it is difficult to make sense of the claim that the Mosaic administration functioned typologically as a kind of covenant of works, at least at the stratum of Israel’s inheritance of temporal blessings. In order for this to be the case, a disjunction has to be posited between Israel’s inheritance of temporal blessings and her inheritance of spiritual blessings. In the usual view of Reformed covenant theology, however, the temporal blessings promised Israel are regarded typologically as a foreshadowing of the full spiritual blessing of fellowship with God in a renewed creation. The promise to Israel of blessing and life in the land of promise represented in the state of her immaturity a picture of the fullness of salvation in the life to come. Canaan was a “type” of the “city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb. 11:10, ESV).

Moreover, in the republication view of the typology of the Mosaic covenant, two radically opposed inheritance principles are posited, each of which is said to operate at a distinct level of Israel’s life, the earthly and the spiritual. In the case of Israel’s earthly inheritance, the operative principle is one of (meritorious) works; in the case of Israel’s spiritual inheritance, the operative principle is that of grace alone. The problem with this conception is that the typology of Mosaic economy does not foreshadow or prefigure, at least at the level of Israel’s existence as a nation in the land of promise, the blessings that are granted freely and graciously to the new covenant people of God. The blessings are different in kind; and the principles for the inheritance of these blessings are radically different. To put the matter differently, because the Mosaic administration actually consists of two levels of covenant administration, one of works and the other of grace, it cannot function at both levels as a typological promise of the new covenant, which is essentially and exclusively a covenant of grace.⁶²

Consistent with the pattern of biblical typology, the promises and demands of the Mosaic economy are “typical” of the promises and demands of the new covenant economy. The redemption promised in the covenant of grace always requires the response of faith and sincere, albeit imperfect, obedience on the part of the people of the covenant. As it was in the covenant

administration of Moses, so it is in the covenant administration of Christ.⁶³

One of the more remarkable expressions of this typological correlation between the Mosaic economy and the administration of the covenant of grace in its New Testament fullness, is found in the book of Hebrews. One of the main threads of the argument of the book of Hebrews is an appeal to Israel’s history of disobedience, and failure on that account to enter into the rest in the land of Canaan that was promised to her. Rather than citing this failure as an illustration of the different “inheritance principles” of the Mosaic economy and the new covenant economy, the author of Hebrews issues a sobering warning that, should the recipients of his “brief letter” (Heb. 13:22) fall away through unbelief and disobedience, they will experience an even more severe punishment than Israel received (cf. Heb. 2:1–4). Israel’s failure to obtain rest was due to her disobedience to the requirements of the Mosaic economy, just as the new covenant believer’s failure to obtain rest will be the result of unbelieving disobedience to the requirements of the new covenant. What holds true of the Mosaic economy, holds true *mutatis mutandis* for the new covenant economy. If Israel’s failure to enjoy rest illustrates the operation of a covenant of works at the typological level of her tenure in the land, then it would follow that the new covenant member’s failure to enjoy God’s promised rest must likewise illustrate the operation of a covenant of works in the new covenant economy.

62. *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2004), 364–65 n. 6.

63. Cf. Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 127, who states the matter well: “It is plain, then, that law-keeping did not figure at that juncture as the meritorious ground of life-inheritance. The latter is based on grace alone, no less emphatically than Paul himself places salvation on that ground. But, while this is so, it might still be objected that law-observance, if not the ground for receiving, is yet made the ground for the retention of the privileges inherited. Here it can not, of course, be denied that a real connection exists. But the Judaizers went wrong in inferring that the connection must be *meritorious*, that, if Israel keeps the cherished gifts of Jehovah through observance of His law, this must be so, because in strict justice they had earned them. The connection is of a totally different kind. It belongs not to the legal sphere of merit, but to the symbolico-typical sphere of *appropriateness of expression*.” The point Vos is making can be stated more succinctly: Old Testament believers were called to receive the redemptive promises of God by faith alone, but the faith of Old Testament believers, like that of New Testament believers, was a faith “ever accompanied” by a sincere obedience to God’s commandments. Believers are always saved by a faith that works through love in grateful devotion to God. To insist upon this does not raise the fearful specter of “merit” in the relation between believers and their covenant Lord, since the graces of free justification and progressive sanctification are freely granted by God himself to those whom he is pleased to save, namely, the elect.

SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

Even though my case for viewing the Mosaic economy as simply an administration of the covenant of grace offers only an outline of the confessional, historical, and biblical evidence, I believe that it warrants the following summary observations. These observations militate against the claim that the Mosaic economy republished the covenant of works at the typological level of Israel's inheritance of and tenure in the land of promise.

1. The Westminster Confession of Faith, which is the most authoritative statement of the consensus opinion on the doctrine of the covenants in the period of Reformed orthodoxy, only recognizes two covenants. These covenants are the pre-lapsarian covenant of works, which promised Adam and his posterity life and blessedness upon condition of "perfect and personal obedience," and the post-lapsarian covenant of grace, which promises believers life and blessedness through faith in Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the covenant and Savior of the elect.

2. In its presentation of the covenant of grace, the Westminster Confession of Faith affirms that the "various dispensations" of the covenant of grace, including the Mosaic economy, are "one and the same" as to their "substance." The Mosaic economy, in its substance and accidents, administers the gospel of Jesus Christ in the form of its promises, ceremonies, and obligations, and does not administer the covenant of works in a manner that requires obedience to the law as the meritorious basis for Israel's inheritance and tenure in the land of promise.

3. It is particularly instructive that the Westminster Confession of Faith, in its treatment of the law as it was promulgated through Moses, expressly denies that the law was given "as a covenant of works." The law of God, as to its moral content and requirements, is a perpetual rule of righteousness that demands (and can only demand) perfect obedience of all God's image-bearers. According to the Confession, the obligations of obedience in the covenant of grace are substantially the same as the obligations of obedience that ever apply to all human beings (before and after the fall into sin). However, these obligations, as they were given and function within the Mosaic economy, did not require of Israel a "personal, entire, exact, and perpetual obedience" in conjunction with a covenantal promise of "life upon the fulfilling, and ... death upon the breach of it" (WCF 19.1).

4. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith's treatment of the functions of the holy law of God within

the Mosaic economy, the only "uses" of the law are the traditional three that are customarily acknowledged in the history of Reformed theology: 1) as a teacher of sin (pedagogical use); 2) as a restraint upon the evil doer (civil use); and 3) as a rule of gratitude (normative use). While these uses of the law in the Mosaic economy are in harmony with the distinctive features of this economy in the history of redemption, none of them view the law as an instrument for meriting blessing and life as was the case in the pre-lapsarian covenant of works.

5. In the covenant theology of Francis Turretin, all of the features of the "received opinion" on the covenant of works and the covenant of grace in the Westminster Confession of Faith are affirmed. On the question of the nature of the Mosaic economy, Turretin opposes three views: 1) that it was simply a republication or reiteration of the covenant of works; 2) that it was an "admixture" of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace; and 3) that it was a "subserving" covenant whose legal requirements served to prepare the people of Israel for the new covenant in Christ. According to Turretin, the consensus view of Reformed theology is that the Mosaic economy was in its substance and accidents an administration of the covenant of grace.

6. While Turretin affirms that the Mosaic economy included a promulgation of the law of God, which reiterated the requirement of perfect obedience that was stipulated in the covenant of works, he interprets this reiteration of the law's requirement to be, consistent with the nature of the Mosaic economy as a covenant of grace, intended by God to teach Israel to know her sin and need for the saving work of Jesus Christ. In its pedagogical use, the law of Moses was intended to serve the purposes of the covenant of grace by leading Israel to recognize her need for a Mediator who would fulfill the law's obligations and suffer the law's penalties on behalf of his people.

7. Consistent with the teaching of John Calvin and others in the orthodox period, Turretin interprets the apostle Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12 to be shaped by the Judaizers endeavor to seek justification before God upon the basis of their obedience to the law's demands. When the law of God is wrested and abstracted from its proper use within the Mosaic economy, it can only remind sinners of the impossibility of finding favor with God by the works of the law. Abstractly and narrowly considered, the law can only demand perfect obedience and promise blessing to those who do what it requires. In this use, the law invariably reminds sinners that the way back to favor and acceptance with God cannot occur upon the

basis of the works of the law. However, at no point in his interpretation of the Mosaic economy does Turretin acknowledge that the law was given by God's intention as an instrument for Israel's justification before God or inheritance of the land of promise to secure Israel's tenure in the land of promise.

8. In the record of the ministry of Moses and the Mosaic economy in the Old Testament, the undeserved grace of the covenant Lord undergirds and sustains the covenant relationship between God and his people. Again and again throughout this history, in spite of Israel's repeated failures and infidelities, the Lord condescends in steadfast love and resolute faithfulness to maintain the covenant and fulfill its promises. Israel's inheritance of the land, as well as her long history in the land prior to the exile, tells a story of covenant grace and mercy. At no time in this history does the Lord repay Israel simply according to her iniquities, or treat her by a standard of strict justice.

9. When the law of God, particularly the Decalogue of Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, was promulgated through Moses, it was given as a normative rule of conduct for the redeemed people of Israel. The preamble to the Ten Commandments makes clear that the law was not given as a covenant of works, but as a rule of gratitude to a people whose redemption and salvation was grounded upon God's covenant faithfulness and mercy. While the law undoubtedly served within God's purposes to expose Israel's sinfulness and need for the Savior, Jesus Christ, its primary use was as a revelation of the kind of life that pleases the covenant Lord and answers to his grace.

10. In its original Old Testament setting, Leviticus 18:5 was not given in order to reinstitute the covenant of works at the level of Israel's corporate inheritance and tenure in the land of promise. Rather, Leviticus 18:5 was a summons to Israel to enjoy life in the way of obedience to the requirements of God's law. In this passage, Israel is reminded of the "manner" but not the "source" of her life and blessing in communion with God.

11. In the apostle Paul's appeal to Leviticus 18:5 in Romans 10:5 and Galatians 3:12, the requirement of obedience to the law of God in the Mosaic economy is treated narrowly and abstractly. In response to the Judaizers, who sought to base their life and acceptance before God upon their works of obedience to the law, Paul declares that the law's requirement of perfect obedience renders it an impossible instrument for obtaining justification and favor with God. The law, considered formally in terms of its revelation of the kind of obedience that pleases God, can only condemn and expose the futility

of any endeavor to be justified by works. Paul's use of Leviticus 18:5 in these passages is "colored" by his polemic with the Judaizers and, to use theological language, is an illustration of what Reformed theologians have called the "first" or "pedagogical" use of the law.

12. The claims of contemporary proponents of the republication view of the Mosaic economy do not seem consistent with a proper understanding of biblical typology. In its substance and accidents, the Mosaic economy typologically symbolizes and pre-figures the fulfillment of the covenant of grace in the person and work of Christ. The ceremonial law with its provisions for the priesthood and the presentation of atoning sacrifices constitutes a typological foreshadowing of the perfect priesthood and sacrifice of Christ. The moral law (given in the form of the Decalogue) summons Israel to grateful obedience, and anticipates the obligations of obedience that continue, albeit in new forms, in the new covenant economy. The moral law also serves as a pedagogue, reminding Israel of her sinfulness and need for a Mediator whose perfect obedience and once-for-all sacrifice fulfills all the obligations of the law (perceptive and penal). All of these uses of the law in the Mosaic economy serve the gracious purposes of the covenant of grace, and find their fulfillment in the new covenant economy. Furthermore, even in the new covenant economy, the law of God continues to serve the purposes of teaching the people of God to know their sin and need of the Savior, and to instruct them in the kind of life that pleases the covenant Lord.

13. The misunderstanding of biblical typology in the republication view is especially evident in its explanation of the reason for Israel's eventual exile in Babylon under the Lord's judgment. In the biblical account of the history of redemption, Israel's eventual (only after a lengthy history of remarkable patience and grace on the Lord's part) exile is attributed to her persistent unbelief and disobedience to the covenant of grace. Remarkably, this history serves the new covenant community as an abiding warning of similar, albeit even more severe, consequences in the context of the administration of the new covenant in Christ. Israel's exile for her persistent unbelief does not typify her failure to fulfill a republished covenant of works at the level of her corporate inheritance of the land—as contemporary proponents of the republication view maintain. Rather, it represents a failure to live in faith and obedience before the Lord within the administration of the covenant of grace.

14. Undoubtedly, the biblical testimony does warrant the stipulation of differences and contrasts between the Mosaic economy in the covenant of grace and the new

covenant in Christ. But these differences do not reflect the presence of two kinds of covenants at different levels or strata in the Mosaic economy. They are differences that can better be explained in terms of the contrast between “shadow” and “reality,” “prefiguration/promise” and “fulfillment,” “type” and “anti-type.” Since the Mosaic economy in its totality is promissory and not consummatory, it could never succeed in granting believers what they need and ultimately only find in Christ, who is the “end” of the law and the one in whom all of God’s gracious promises are fulfilled. Only through and upon the basis of the person and work of Christ, foreshadowed and promised in the Mosaic economy, can believers be justified before God and sanctified in the way of new obedience. Compared to the fulfillment of the promises of the covenant in Christ, the Mosaic economy must always remain weak, inadequate, and preparatory. However, the Mosaic economy serves, precisely in this manner, the gracious purposes of the covenant of grace, all of which find their end in Christ.

THE ACCOMMODATED SCRIPTURES:
A RESPONSE TO CORNELIS VENEMA
By J. V. Fesko

INTRODUCTION

I am grateful to the editors of *The Confessional Presbyterian* to be able to contribute a response to Dr. Venema’s essay, “The Mosaic Economy and the Covenant of Grace.” My response has five sections where I offer comments and arguments surrounding: (1) general observations, (2) history, (3) exegesis, (4) typology, and (5) theology. I conclude my response with a few summary remarks about the importance of the idea of republication as well as the need for continuing discussion and debate. Important to note at the outset is that Venema and I agree that the Mosaic covenant is part of the Covenant of Grace but that I maintain that the former republishes, not re-administers, the covenant of works. Also, there are a number of issues that I leave off to the side for another time—such as the proper reading of

Calvin’s views.¹ I want to focus on what I believe are key issues of disagreement, in order to assist interested parties in understanding our respective views.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

In any theological debate, one of the desired outcomes is to have iron sharpen iron (Prov. 27:17). In a disagreement, questions and challenges can provide the opportunity for sharpened expressions, definitions, and arguments. Unfortunately, this has not been the case with Venema’s essay for several reasons. First, Venema reuses a large section of his essay from an earlier 75-page review of *The Law is Not of Faith*. This review was written before my own essay appeared in last year’s *The Confessional Presbyterian*. By repeating old arguments, Venema bypasses issues that I raised in my essay—such as on what grounds I appeal to Turretin as a proponent of republication.

I specifically state that Turretin, among others, appeals “to the covenant of works to explain the nature of the Mosaic covenant.”² Venema goes to great lengths to argue that Turretin holds the common Reformed view, which is not republication. Yet, he never explains the apparent theological log in Turretin’s eye. If, as Venema maintains, the Mosaic covenant is not in any sense a republication of the covenant of works, then why does Turretin appeal to the covenant of works to explain its legal dimension? Moreover, Turretin specifically states, “A twofold relation (*schesis*) ought always to obtain: the one legal, more severe, through which by a new promulgation of the law and of the covenant of works, with an intolerable yoke of ceremonies, he wished to set forth what men owed and in what was to be expected by them on account of duty unperformed.” According to this twofold relation, the administration of the covenant of grace, according to Turretin, “can be viewed either as to the external economy of legal teaching or as to the internal truth of the gospel promise lying under it.”³ Rather than merely cutting and pasting old material that pre-dates arguments that I have previously offered, it would have been more helpful to have Venema explain why Turretin appeals to the “new promulgation of the law and of the covenant of works” and why this is nevertheless not, in any sense, the republication of the covenant of works.

Second, if he was disinterested in continuing this doctrinal discussion, why did he engage the issue so vigorously at the outset? At first he endorsed *The Law Is Not of Faith* as a “volume that deserves the careful attention of anyone who prizes the biblical teaching that the believer’s justification rests not on any works of his own, but solely on the full obedience of Christ.” He registered the fact

1. See, e.g., David Inks’ refutation of Venema’s interpretation of Calvin in, “What John Calvin Really Said,” in Mark A. Collingridge and Brett A. McNeill, “Republication: A Biblical, Confessional and Historical Defense,” a paper presented at the Presbytery of the Northwest, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, 27–28 Sept 2013, 133–46.

2. J. V. Fesko, “The Republication of the Covenant of Works,” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 198.

3. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison, Jr. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1992–97), XII.vii.31.

that he was not “persuaded by every formulation,” which is fine.⁴ But I suffered whiplash by how quickly he turned around and published a 75–page critical review of the book he had just endorsed where he accused the book of misusing historical sources and creating “instability with respect to the Reformed view of the third use of the law.” Moreover, he claimed: “The implication of the republication thesis, as it is stated by some of the authors, seems to undermine the positive function of the law within the administration of the covenant of grace.”⁵ My colleague, David VanDrunen, responded to a number of Venema’s unfair allegations and, to date, Venema has not yet publicly reckoned with VanDrunen’s observations.⁶ We can bypass the question as to why he endorsed the book in the first place when it was supposedly historically and theologically irresponsible. I want to know, however, why he would yell out, “Fire!”, spray water in every direction, and then wander away from the blaze.

Third, Dr. Venema’s theological fatigue surfaces in both his response to my initial essay as well as in his own. In several places he makes the claim that I have a position “remarkably similar” to Meredith Kline’s view.⁷ He claims: “There is little evidence that the recent version of republication, which owes a great deal to the formulations of Meredith Kline, represents a rediscovery of a forgotten piece of Reformed covenant theology.”⁸ He invokes the views of Kline through Moisés Silva and draws a connection to Lutheranism and Dispensationalism (*MECG*, 174, n. 56). If Venema wants to make these claims, he certainly may do so, but to say that a view is “remarkably similar” to Kline’s, Lutheranism, or Dispensationalism, and then fail to show precisely how, is not precision scholarship. He never cites, quotes, or explains Kline’s view, let alone Lutheran or Dispensationalist views.

Venema repeatedly claims that the whole republication thesis is the grand occasion for presenting the views of Kline under a thinly veiled garb of misused historical sources. In my own explanation of republication, I have never invoked the name of Meredith Kline to support it. As important as Kline is for twentieth-century Reformed biblical theology, I first encountered the idea of republication in the works of Charles Hodge, James Buchanan, and Robert Shaw. I quote the latter two because I engage the former at length in my initial essay. Buchanan writes:

The Law—considered as a national covenant, by which their continued possession of the land of Canaan, and of all their privileges under the Theocracy, was left to depend on their external obedience to it,—might be called

a national Covenant of Works, since their temporal welfare was suspended on the condition of their continued adherence to it; but in that aspect of it, it had no relation to the spiritual salvation of individuals, otherwise than as this might be affected by their retaining, or forfeiting, their outward privileges and means of grace. It may be considered, however, in another light, as a re-exhibition of the original Covenant of Works, for the instruction of individual Jews in the principles of divine truth.⁹

Robert Shaw offers a very similar explanation when he writes:

It may be remarked, that the law of the ten commandments was promulgated to Israel from Sinai in the form of a covenant of works. Not that it was the design of God to renew a covenant of works with Israel, or to put them upon seeking life by their own obedience to the law; but the law was published to them as a covenant of works, to show them that without a perfect righteousness, answering to all the demands of the law, they could not be justified before God; and that, finding themselves wholly destitute of that righteousness, they might be excited to take hold of the covenant of grace, in which a perfect righteousness for their justification is graciously provided.¹⁰

These nineteenth-century works (note that Shaw’s book is a commentary on the Westminster Confession) gave me my first exposure to the idea of republication. I have read Kline’s books but I cannot explain the specifics of his view. In other words, how many ways does a person have to say, “I am not pushing Kline’s views!” before critics such as Venema will take me at my word? On the other hand, if he believes I am engaging in duplicitous

4. *The Law is not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, ed. Bryan D. Estelle, J. V. Fesko, and David VanDrunen (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2009), back cover.

5. Cornelis Venema, “The Mosaic Covenant: A ‘Republication’ of the Covenant of Works? A Review Article: *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*,” *MJT* 21 (2010): 100–01.

6. David VanDrunen, “Israel’s Recapitulation of Adam’s Probation under the Law of Moses,” *WTJ* 73/2 (2011): 303–24.

7. Cornelis Venema, “The Law of Moses: Not a Disguised Covenant of Works. A Response to F. V. [sic] Fesko’s ‘The Republication of the Covenant of Works,’” *The Confessional Presbyterian* 8 (2012): 221.

8. Cornelis Venema, “The Mosaic Economy and the Covenant of Grace,” 159. Hereafter, *MECG*.

9. James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of Its History in the church and of its Exposition from Scripture* (1867; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 38–39.

10. Robert Shaw, *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith* (1845; Fearn: Christian Focus, 1998), 243.

scholarship, then the onus lies on him to prove from Kline's writings how my views are "remarkably similar." He needs either to prove the claim or withdraw it.

HISTORY

These general observations aside, I want to turn attention to matters pertaining to historical theology. One of Venema's repeated claims is that republication was represented in Reformed Orthodoxy but was a minority view.¹¹ Of course, like a person driving too quickly over speed bumps in a Wal-Mart parking lot, Venema never slows down and wrestles with the issue of why, if the Mosaic covenant in no sense republishes the covenant of works, do so many Reformed theologians invoke the covenant of works to explain it. Venema even notes Turretin's observation that there were at least four different views on the matter of the relationship between the covenant of works and the Mosaic covenant.¹² Yet Venema makes the unsupported claim that Turretin's rejection of the Amyraldian view in the Formula Consensus Helvetica (1675) was the "consensus opinion of Reformed theologians in the period of Reformed orthodoxy" (*MECG*, 164 n. 21). He cites no evidence whatsoever that the Formula's rejection was the consensus opinion of the period. Even if Venema is correct, since I hold a two-covenant view (covenants of works and grace), and not Amyraut's three-covenant view, I fail to see the relevance of his point. The fact that the Formula Consensus was never adopted outside of Switzerland and only served about fifty years casts further doubt upon Venema's claims.¹³ At most, this document proves that Turretin and other Swiss Reformed theologians rejected the view of Moises Amyraut—not republication in every variant.

While I admit in my original essay that republication was a minority view, this does not necessarily mean that the position was somehow a marginal aberration. The fact that there were at least four or more views present at the Westminster Assembly, which I document in my

essay, should signal that things are not as neat and tidy as Venema would like. The simple fact is, 49% is a minority, but yet such a percentage hardly means that a view would be uncommon or marginal. To be clear, I am not claiming that the idea of republication constituted 49% of views in Reformed Orthodoxy. Rather, I merely point out that a minority view does not necessitate its marginality. Case in point, the *Statenvertaling*, the Dutch translation of the Scriptures commissioned by the Synod of Dort (1618–19), and published by the States General in 1637, gives a simple statement of the idea of republication in its preface to the New Testament:

By this (that is, by the word *berith*) the covenant itself is to be understood, which God made with men to give them, under certain *conditions*, eternal life. . . . The old covenant is the one God made with the first man before the fall, in which eternal life was promised with the *condition* of a complete obedience . . . and is therefore called the covenant of the law [*Verbond der Wet*]. God again presented it to the Israelites [*Godt den Israëlitien wederom voor-gehouden heeft*], in order that they would learn to understand that they had to seek their salvation in another covenant which is called the new covenant and consists of this, that God has ordained His Son to be a Mediator, and promises eternal life under the *condition* that we believe in Him.¹⁴

The States General of the Netherlands believed there was nothing controversial about republication, or that "God again presented it [the covenant of law] to the Israelites." The *Statenvertaling* was supposed to be in churches of the Netherlands for people in the pew to read the Bible in their native tongue. And here, for all to see, is the idea that the covenant of works is presented again in the Mosaic covenant. Additionally, the States General apparently did not believe this statement conflicted with the Three Forms of Unity.

Venema claims that I and others are accommodating the historical sources. I believe this is a faulty presupposition. He seems to assume that, in order for contemporary versions of republication to be legitimate, they must repositinate earlier views. In one sense, I am very comfortable with Turretin's explanation of the Mosaic covenant and viewing it under "two relations" with its "external economy of legal teaching or as to the internal truth of the gospel promise lying under it." Why? Because Turretin claims that the Mosaic covenant contained a "new promulgation of the law and of the covenant of works."¹⁵

On the other hand, is it legitimate to lay hold of an

11. Venema, "Review Article: *The Law Is Not of Faith*," 98; idem, "The Law of Moses," 216–20; *MECG*, "The Mosaic Economy," 159.

12. Venema, *MECG*, 164; cf. Turretin, *Institutes*, XII.xii.1.

13. See Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, Sixth ed., ed. Philip Schaff, David S. Schaff, 3 vols. (1931; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), I.485–89.

14. Translated by Klaas Schilder, *Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger* (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1996), 76, and compared against the original, "Inhoudt des Nieuwen Testaments," in *Het Nieuwe Testament, Ofte Alle Boecken des Nieuwen Verbonds onses Heeren Jesu Christi. Nu Eerst, Door Laet vande Hoog: Mog: Heeren Staten Generael Der Vereenighde Nederlanden, ende volgens 't besluyt vande Synode Nationael, gehouden tot Dordrecht, in de Jaeren 1618 ende 1619* (Leiden: Staten Generael, 1637).

15. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, XII.vii.31.

old idea—what many these days are calling *resource-ment*, or doctrinal retrieval—and modify elements of it?¹⁶ Can I take a number of historical ideas surrounding the various expressions of republication and put them together in a manner that I believe is more consistent with the biblical witness? Can I take what Charles Hodge calls “Israel’s national covenant of works” and refine it (in my mind) to say that Israel, as a nation, typifies the person and work of Christ?¹⁷ From his numerous claims of accommodating the sources, I suppose this is illegitimate according to Venema. And while one may hold such an opinion, Venema has yet to explain why refining earlier doctrinal expressions to align them more closely with the Scriptures is illegitimate.

Far from accommodating the historical sources, I only claim that they state that the covenant of works “in some sense” reappears in the Mosaic covenant. I have never maintained that any one view from the early modern Reformed tradition is my view. Claims of source-accommodation, in my judgment, miss the mark. My hope would be that Venema would broaden his reading on the subject and engage other third-party works—such as those by Mark Jones and Sebastian Rehnman—and explore what other primary sources have to say on the subject, rather than merely invoking Calvin and Turretin—as if their historical voices alone exhaust the tradition.¹⁸

One such work is John Colquhoun’s (1748–1827) *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel*.¹⁹ For example, he writes: “The violated covenant of works, as I observed above, was not, and could not be, made or renewed with the Israelites at Sinai; for it was a broken covenant, and besides, it was a covenant between God and man as friends, whereas now man has become the enemy of God. But though it was not renewed with them, yet it was, on that solemn occasion, repeated and displayed to them” (Colquhoun, 55).

Colquhoun affirms the twofold covenant structure of works and grace, but nevertheless writes: “That the law in the form of a covenant of works was displayed on Mount Sinai appears, likewise, from the opposition between the law and grace often mentioned and inculcated in the New Testament.” Colquhoun then cites John 1:17 and Galatians 3:12 (Colquhoun, 60). He recognizes that both covenants appear at Sinai, “the law of Christ, or the law as a rule of life to believers, and the law as it is the matter of a covenant of works to unregenerate sinners” (Colquhoun, 62). And in particular, Colquhoun argues that the Mosaic covenant was a “national covenant,” and as such there is another dimension beyond soteriological matters. Colquhoun writes: “As the Israelites, even

in their civil capacity, were a typical people, and their obedience a typical obedience, so their obedience was to be so connected with their temporal privileges as to resemble the obedience of God’s spiritual Israel in its connection with their spiritual privileges under the gospel” (Colquhoun, 68). I would not draw the connections between Israel and “spiritual Israel” precisely in this manner, but I do believe Colquhoun has a point in identifying Israel’s obedience as typical. Colquhoun recognizes that the Mosaic covenant is like an onion and has many layers: “Thus the law of God was promulgated from Mount Sinai in its threefold character: as a rule of life to believers, as a covenant of works, and as the matter of a national covenant between God and the Israelites” (Colquhoun, 69).

EXEGESIS

One of the more disappointing features of Venema’s essay is his lack of exegesis. I expected him to offer a close engagement of the biblical text in the primary languages. I offered this type of exegesis in my own essay where, based upon specific Hebrew terminology and subsequent intra-canonical exegesis of texts such as Leviticus 18:5, I explain why my interpretation of the text supports the idea of republication. Yet in offering his interpretation of Leviticus 18:5, Venema never engages the text in any great detail. He never explains why, for example, a covenantal text that purports to disclose the third use of the law is binding upon sojourners, aliens to the covenants (Lev. 18:26). He also fails to explain how Israel is given the same warning as the Gentile nations who previously occupied the land but were cast out because of their sexual immorality (Lev. 18:24–30). Instead, he offers a few quotations, makes some theological statements, and then repeatedly says, “Calvin explains...,” “According to Calvin...,” “As Calvin remarks...,” or, “Murray argues...,” and, “Ridderbos notes....” All I find in his essay is a thin history of

16. See, e.g., John Webster, “Theologies of Retrieval,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, Iain Torrance (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 583–99.

17. Charles Hodge, *1 and 2 Corinthians* (1857; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1994), 433–34; idem, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (1875; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), II.375.

18. Mark Jones, “The ‘Old’ Covenant,” in *Drawn into Controversy: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, eds. Michael A. G. Haykin, Mark Jones (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011), 183–203; Sebastian Rehnman, “Is the Narrative of Redemptive History Trichotomous or Dichotomous? A Problem for Federal Theology,” *Nederlands archief voor kerkgeschiedenis* 80 (2000): 296–308.

19. John Colquhoun, *A Treatise on the Law and the Gospel* (1835; Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2009).

exegesis—the views of Calvin, Murray, and Ridderbos. He never wrestles with and disproves other historic explanations of the text to prove the superiority of his own position. One may certainly appeal to Reformed fathers in the exegetical endeavor, but quotations from Calvin are no substitute for exegesis of the biblical text.

Moreover, it does strike me as odd that Venema would appeal to Calvin and Murray. The former never speaks of the covenant of works because it was a doctrinal refinement that appeared after his death. The latter explicitly rejects the covenant of works itself (though he maintains key elements of it in his theology).

In addition to this, Venema only partially engages the text of Leviticus 18:5, because he never deals with Christ's quotation of this text (Luke 10:25–28). Why not refer readers to his earlier review and offer fresh exegesis of the biblical text? The inherent problem with Venema's exegesis, something he also never addresses, is why the tradition appeals to Leviticus 18:5 (Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:12) as a proof text for the covenant of works. Murray would not align Leviticus 18:5 with the covenant of works because, according to him, there is no pre-fall covenant. Does Venema therefore suggest that the Reformed tradition has appealed to Leviticus 18:5 based upon the Judaizer's misinterpretation of the law? Or does he implicitly propose that the tradition has erroneously appealed to Leviticus 18:5 as a proof text for the covenant of works?²⁰

TYPOLOGY

Another area of disagreement between Venema and me is our respective understandings of typology. In the big picture I agree with Venema's definition of typology: "Those features, including events, persons, or institutions, of the Old Testament that prefigure or foreshadow their New Testament realities" (*MECG*, 174). But Venema nevertheless avers, "From the vantage point of this understanding of the nature of biblical typology, it is difficult to make sense of the claim that the Mosaic

administration functioned typologically as a kind of covenant of works, at least at the stratum of Israel's inheritance of temporal blessings." He further contends that the Mosaic covenant does not foreshadow or prefigure blessings secured by obedience that are "granted freely and graciously to the new covenant people of God" (*MECG*, 175). In perhaps one of the most telling statements, Venema makes the following claim: "Consistent with the pattern of biblical typology, the promises and demands of the Mosaic economy are 'typical' of the promises and demands of the new covenant economy. The redemption promised in the covenant of grace always requires the response of faith and sincere, albeit imperfect, obedience on the part of the people of the covenant" (175). What accounts for our differences?

First, Venema appears to bypass one of the more fundamental differences between Old and New Testament believers because his view of soteriology (the *ordo salutis*) so dominates his reading of the Old Testament. Venema cannot conceive of how any Old Testament saint could earn, in any sense, his place in the land because he only looks through the *ordo salutis*. But one of the biggest differences between Old and New Testament believers is that the former functioned in the divine plan as God-ordained revelation. Moses, for example, was not merely a believer but was also a type of Christ (e.g., Heb. 3:1–6). David, likewise, was both a believer, and a divinely ordained type of the Messiah (e.g., cf. 1 Sam. 21:1–14; Luke 6:1–5). Venema and I share with David and Moses the same soteriological blessings of the covenant of grace, but we do not share their unique revelatory function. We are not divinely ordained types of Christ.

Second, we must ask the fundamental question: what, or who, is the focus of Scripture?²¹ This is where Venema's understanding of typology leads him astray: it leads him away from the focal point of God's revelation. The whole Old Testament was building towards the supreme self-disclosure of God in Christ, not merely foreshadowing parallel events in the New Testament. Venema's own words make it appear that he takes the latter view. If so, this stands in contrast to how I understand the function of typology. To quote him again: "Consistent with the pattern of biblical typology, the promises and demands of the Mosaic economy are 'typical' of the promises and demands of the new covenant economy. The redemption promised in the covenant of grace always requires the response of faith and sincere, albeit imperfect, obedience on the part of the people of the covenant" (*MECG*, 175).

My simple question is, where is Christ? Venema would undoubtedly state that Christ is the one who

20. The Original Westminster Standards cite Gal 3:12 and Rom 10:5, which both quote Lev 18:5, as proof-texts for the covenant of works (Larger Catechism, q. 20; Shorter Catechism, q. 12; WCF VII. ii) (*The Westminster Standards* [1648; Audubon: Old Paths Publications, 1997]). The contemporary version of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church cites the same texts under Larger Catechism q. 20 and WCF VII.ii (*The Confession of Faith and Catechisms of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church with Proof Texts* [Willow Grove: The Committee on Christian Education of the OPC, 2005]).

21. For the explanation on the concept of the scope of Scripture, see Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 488–501.

enables New Testament believers to offer the proper response to the demands of the covenant. But is this not the same function of Christ under the Old Testament? In what way, then, are New Testament demands antitypical of Old Testament typical demands? They look quite similar in Venema's formulation. For Venema:

OT DEMANDS → NT DEMANDS.

I construct it differently:

OT DEMANDS → CHRIST'S FULFILLMENT OF THE LAW
→ CHRIST JUSTIFIES HIS PEOPLE AND SANCTIFIES
THEM UNTO ADHERENCE TO HIS DEMANDS.

The Old Testament first culminates in the supreme self-disclosure of God in Christ. The Old Testament, therefore, is first and foremost about Jesus. Only when we first consider what the Old Testament says about Christ can we begin then to understand its implications and application to believers and matters such as the third use of the law—a scriptural and confessional teaching I embrace wholeheartedly.

Third, I can illustrate this point from several Old Testament examples. Moses, as Scripture tells us, is a type of Christ—the leader of the first exodus who foreshadows the one true mediator between God and man. We also know that Moses was redeemed and justified just like Abraham. So, then, if Moses was a justified saint, why was he precluded from entering into the Promised Land? Why did he suffer the curse of the covenant? He certainly was not recalcitrant. He was, as Scripture states, the humblest of people (Num. 12:3). Why, then, would he be excluded from the typical manifestation of heaven and eternal life for his disobedience along with the unbelieving generation, those who rebelled in the wilderness (cf. Heb. 3–4)? Why did Moses suffer the curse along with those who did not believe? We know from Scripture that Daniel was a righteous man (Ezek. 14:14, 20). So if he was a righteous man, why was he exiled from God's presence? Why did he suffer the curse of the covenant, namely, exile (Deut. 28:58–68)?

The short answer is that Moses and Daniel served as types of Christ and foreshadowed Christ's obedience as well as his curse-bearing work. As types, their salvation was never in jeopardy, but their saved state did not dictate how they functioned as divine revelation. In other words, Moses's salvation does not directly correlate to his function as a divinely ordained type of Christ. Recall Buchanan's comment that the national covenant of works "had no relation to the spiritual salvation of

individuals." (Buchanan, *Justification*, 38–39). Moses typifies Christ's role as mediator by his obedience, such as his intercession on Israel's behalf (Exo. 32:32). But Moses, as all types are, is imperfect, indeed, sinful—his mediatory role is flawed in contrast to Christ's perfect obedience. When Moses sins he reveals that his role is typical and that the true mediator is yet to come. Daniel's righteous intercession on Israel's behalf highlights the perfect intercession of Christ on behalf of the elect (cf. Dan. 9:1–19; John 17) but he also suffers the curse of exile. When these types suffer the covenant curse, they foreshadow that Christ himself would suffer the curses of the covenant on behalf of the elect. In short, when Venema looks into the Old Testament he sees the church whereas I first see Christ and then the church.

Fourth, I affirm that Israel also serves as a type of the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 10:1–10), but they are first and foremost, a type of Christ. Concerning Israel's typological role, one of a cornucopia of texts is Matthew 2:15, "This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (cf. Hos. 11:1). Matthew specifically states that Israel's entry and exodus from Egypt prefigured Christ's similar journey—Christ's actions *fulfilled* Hosea 11:1. Matthew quotes Hosea 11:1 at this juncture in his gospel to show that Israel was a type of Christ. G. K. Beale offers a summary of this text:

Therefore, Matthew contrasts Jesus as the 'son' (2:15) with Hosea's 'son' (11:1). The latter who came out of Egypt was not obedient, and was judged but would be restored (11:2–11), while the former did what Israel should have done: Jesus came out of Egypt, was perfectly obedient, did not deserve judgment but suffered it anyway for guilty Israel and the world in order to restore them to God. Matthew portrays Jesus to be recapitulating the history of Israel because he sums up Israel in himself. Since Israel disobeyed, Jesus has come to do what they should have, so he must retrace Israel's steps up to the point they failed, and then continue to obey and succeed in the mission Israel should have carried out.²²

If Israel prefigures Christ, then by necessity there must be a typological works-principle embedded in the Mosaic covenant. Israel, of course, fails and disobeys God's law. Given that God made the Mosaic covenant with the entire nation, it could not have operated on the same principle as the covenant of works. That is, immediate

22. G. K. Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: One More Time," *JETS* 55/4 (2012): 710.

expulsion after one violation. God was not dealing with one individual, such as Adam, but an entire nation. This is, to use Hodge and Buchanan's term, Israel's national covenant of works. This national covenant of works certainly has implications for our soteriology—it shows us our inability to fulfill the law. But in terms of redemptive history and Israel's function as a revelatory body, they imperfectly typify the perfect obedience that Jesus, God's only begotten son, renders to the Father. The typological connection between Israel and Christ colors entire swaths of the gospels. Does Venema really want to deny that Israel's baptism in the Red Sea and Spirit-led disobedient forty-year wilderness wanderings has no typological connection to Christ's baptism and obedient Spirit-led forty day wilderness wanderings?²³

THEOLOGY

I think the most significant differences of opinion surround three particular issues: (1) Venema's understanding of the Westminster Standards, (2) his relating the covenant curses to the gospel, and (3) articulation of the importance and necessity of the active obedience of Christ.

First, in his response to my original essay Venema claims that I omit to acknowledge what the Confession states about the moral law as it was given to Israel: "On two occasions (19:6), the WCF explicitly denies that the moral law was given to believers in the covenant of grace 'as a covenant of works'" (Venema, "The Law of Moses," 220). But Venema fails to consider how the law functions for unbelievers. The WCF specifically states: "True believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned" (XIX.vi). The inverse of this statement is surely implied, namely, that for unbelievers the law is a covenant of works, whereby they are to be justified or condemned. What law serves as a covenant of works? The moral law revealed at Sinai. The same pattern appears in the Larger Catechism: "Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works ..." (q. 97).

If believers are delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, then that means that prior to their regeneration they are subject to the moral law as a covenant of works. Again, where is the moral law revealed?

In the Decalogue, revealed in the Mosaic covenant. What is the covenant of works? God's original covenant with Adam. In this respect it appears that Venema contradicts the Westminster Standards when he asserts that the covenant of works is abrogated: "Though abrogated as a means to inherit life in perfected and indefectible communion with God, this covenant of works constitutes the background for the biblical story of God's work of redemption through Christ, the last Adam" (MECG, 157). Moreover, by his denial that the Mosaic covenant, in any sense, is a covenant of works, he eliminates the very point maintained by the Standards: for unbelievers the moral law is a covenant of works.

Simply stated, Venema believes the covenant of works is abrogated, and I do not. The promise of the law still stands and functions, and has been unchanged by the entrance of sin into the world. That is, if you perfectly obey the law of God you will live and have eternal life. The law has not changed, and neither has the promise appended to it. Rather, what has changed is that humanity has fallen and is unable to fulfill the requirements of the law. The defect, therefore, is with man, not with the law (Rom. 7:12; 8:3). To say, then, that the covenant of works is abrogated, fails to consider that its promises and curses still hang over humanity, and the only way to be delivered from them is through faith alone in Christ. Jesus delivers sinners from the moral law as a covenant of works. This state of affairs is true now and was also true for believers in the Old Testament.

Israel, as Paul clearly states (Rom. 9:6–12), was a mixed body. Hence, though some might have been part of the covenant people, they nevertheless looked upon the moral law as the covenant of works *unless* Christ delivered them from it. If, on the other hand, Venema's position is true, then the Westminster Standards are wrong: the Mosaic covenant, which contains the moral law, is not in any sense a covenant of works. If the covenant of works is abrogated, then no unbeliever looks upon the moral law as a covenant of works or lies under its curse *qua* the covenant of works. At face value, then, Venema misunderstands the Westminster Standards regarding the post-fall function, nature, and role of the covenant of works. If, for example, the "covenant of works has been wholly abrogated as an instrument for obtaining life," as Venema maintains (MECG, 165), then what did Christ come to fulfill in order to obtain eternal life for the elect? Was not Christ born under the law to fulfill it (Gal. 4:4; Matt. 5:17)? Did Christ not fulfill the broken covenant of works? Is he not the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45)?

Contrary to Venema's position, I believe that after the fall God did not change Adam's vocation under the

23. See, e.g., Willard Myers Swartley, "A Study in Markan Structure: The Influence of Israel's Holy History Upon the Structure of the Gospel of Mark," Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1973; William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 50–51; Augustine Stock, *The Way in the Wilderness: Exodus, Wilderness, and Moses Themes in Old Testament and New* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1969), 69–71.

covenant of works or abrogate its promises. Rather, he sent the faithful last Adam to fulfill the same vocation and covenant obligations (Rom. 5:12–21). Venema, however, sees things quite differently. He argues: “That the typology of redemptive history parallels the typology of pre-redemptive history may only remind us that redemption entails ultimately the ‘regaining’ of Paradise (and more)” (Venema, “The Law of Moses,” 221). The Adam/Christ parallel *only* reminds us that we regain paradise through Christ? On the contrary, typology is not merely analogy or parallel. Paul attaches much greater significance to the parallel and identifies Adam as a *type* of the one to come, namely, Christ (Rom. 5:14). According to Hodge, “A type, therefore, in the religious sense of the term, is not a mere historical parallel or incidental resemblance between persons or events, but a designed resemblance—the one being intended to prefigure or to commemorate the other.”²⁴ Paul consequently contrasts the disobedience and obedience of the two Adams as well as the diverse and contrasting effects of the actions of each federal head. Adam’s (dis)obedience foreshadows Christ’s obedience—this is a negative contrast that divinely reveals the nature and work of Christ. Adam is a living incarnate revelation of Christ to come—Adam’s work foreshadows Christ’s. Venema does not appear to see Christ in the Old Testament in places where he should. Consequently, he claims that the doctrine of republication hinges upon one verse, Lev 18:5. To the contrary: republication rests upon a very different reading of the entire Old Testament (Venema, “The Law of Moses,” 222).

I think the most problematic aspect of Venema’s case is how he relates the covenant curses to the gospel. When he argues that the “demands of the Mosaic economy are ‘typical’ of the promises and demands of the new covenant economy,” one must ask an important question about the curses of the Mosaic covenant (MECG, 175). On this point Venema writes:

God’s unconditional grace undergirds and enables fulfillments of the covenant’s requirements, to be sure. But this takes away nothing so far as the administration of the covenant is concerned. It is simply not true, from the standpoint of the administration of the new covenant in Christ, that it does not include warnings of judgment and curse to those who treat with contempt the privileges that they have enjoyed as members of the visible church (Venema, “The Law of Moses,” 220).

Again, Venema writes: “Israel’s (temporary) exile under the curse of the covenant during the Old Testament

economy was a judgment/discipline *for her disobedience under the covenant of grace, not under the covenant of works in a narrowly typological sense*” (Ibid., 220 n. 12). In a word, Venema believes that the curses of the Mosaic covenant foreshadow the curses of the new covenant.

At one level I agree with Venema: the curse and penalty of temporal death in the Old Testament point forward to the heightened antitypical reality of eternal death in the New Testament. In a nutshell, the curses of the covenant typify hell.

But here is where Venema forces the Scriptures into his own understanding of the covenant of grace rather than allow the Scriptures to shape its true nature. It is plainly evident from the Old Testament that a number of justified saints, such as Moses and Daniel, suffered the curses of the covenant in spite of their justified state. As noted above, Moses was kept from entering the Promised Land; he was barred along with the unbelieving generation. And Daniel, though righteous, was carried away into exile, which was the curse of the covenant. Yet, these same possibilities do not at all exist for New Testament believers.

Unlike Old Testament believers who were irrefragably linked to the nation of Israel and the Mosaic covenant, New Testament believers, as Gentiles, are neither citizens of the nation of Israel nor participants in the Mosaic covenant. They did not stand at the foot of Sinai and receive the sprinkled blood upon their bodies (Exo 19, 24), nor did they stand at the foot of Mts. Ebal and Gerazim and swear self-maledictory oaths upon their own heads should they fail to keep the terms of the covenant (Deut 27:11–26). “Christ,” writes Paul, “redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). For elect New Testament believers, there is zero possibility of falling under the curses of the covenant because Christ bore them. When elect New Testament believers, therefore, make a profession of faith, they *never* swear a self-maledictory oath upon themselves. I, as a New Testament believer, *never* have to fear being carted off into exile or suffer death by stoning for violating the law. Yes, I might fall under God’s fatherly displeasure, discipline, and even suffer excommunication (WCF XVII.iii; XXX.i–iv). But even then, church discipline is not covenant curse for the elect but fatherly correction, and the goal of excommunication is not permanent death, as with the curses of the Mosaic covenant, but restoration of the offending but elect sinner (WCF XXX.iii). Ministers do not, for example, fear

24. Charles Hodge, *Romans* (1835; Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 162.

immediate death if they fail to take a shower or wear a slightly soiled shirt when they preach and administer the sacraments. The same was not true for Old Testament priests (Lev 16:4).

Under the Mosaic covenant death and curse constantly loomed over Israel at every turn. While members of the visible church must hear of the dangers of hell, apostasy, and curse, the elect are never subject to covenant curse because of Christ's work on their behalf. It is one thing to address the whole church, a mixed body, and speak of curses, and another to talk about elect individuals who are never subject to them, unlike their Old Testament counterparts. If someone ultimately and finally apostatizes from the church, they demonstrate they were never truly part of the covenant of grace—they were never actually united to Christ, and they suffer the curses of the covenant of works, not the covenant of grace of which they were never a part.

The elect New Testament believer's relationship to the curses of the law is something for which Venema has difficulty accounting. He is so insistent upon the idea that the Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace that he overlooks elements that are unique to it. This point is especially evident when Venema writes: "Though I will sometimes use the language of 'Mosaic covenant' in what follows, I will do so to reflect Fesko's usage and not the usage I prefer. Consistent with the confessional distinction between 'diverse administrations' of the covenant of grace and its 'substance,' I would prefer to speak of the 'Mosaic economy.' An 'economy' is a distinct kind of administration, but it is not a distinct kind of covenant" (Venema, "The Law of Moses," 215, n. 2). I have no problem calling the Mosaic covenant an *economy*. However, Venema displays discomfort with using the very language of Scripture to discuss Israel's covenant with Yahweh.

Contrary to Venema's position, and with the Scriptures, I do affirm that the Mosaic economy is a distinct covenant (e.g., Gal. 4). It is distinct, for example, from the new covenant. This is a prime example of where Venema forces the Scriptures into his own peculiar understanding of the covenant of grace. I agree with the Westminster Standards—there are only two covenants: works and grace. Within the covenant of grace, however, there are a number of distinct covenants: the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New. Within the all-encompassing

covenant of grace they each have unique features and functions. Just because all of my organs are part of my one body, for example, does not mean that they all have the same function within my body.

The uniqueness of the Mosaic covenant is especially evident in how Scripture itself compares it with the new covenant: "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, *not like the covenant that I made with their fathers* on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke" (Jer 31:31–32a; emphasis added). This text implies that the new covenant cannot be broken. When the author of Hebrews exegetes this text, he does so chiefly by explaining the superiority of the new covenant to the Mosaic covenant. Indeed, the author states: "In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away" (Heb 8:13). Yes, the Mosaic covenant is part of the covenant of grace. However, it has a unique function within the covenant of grace unlike the other covenants—especially the Abrahamic and New covenants (cf. Deut 5:3–5). It is part of the covenant of grace, heralds the gospel and redemption in Christ, but also contains (to use Turretin's language) "a new promulgation"—or republication—"of the law and covenant of works."

The fact that Venema rejects any works principle whatsoever in the Mosaic covenant and relegates Lev 18:5 to the third use of the law, causes him overlook and accommodate the Scriptures in such a manner so as to remove the unique elements of the Mosaic covenant. Every occurrence of the embedded works principle in the Mosaic covenant cannot be explained either by appeal to the Jewish misinterpretation of the law or the third use of the law.

When the lawyer asked Jesus, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answered, "What is written in the law? How do you read it?" The lawyer responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself." What was Jesus's response? "You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live" (Luke 10:25–28; Lev 18:5). Jesus' response neither fits the third use of the law nor the Jewish misinterpretation theory. Jesus specifically tells the lawyer, "You have answered correctly," to his response that obedience to the law secures eternal life. Jesus appealed to the still abiding terms of the covenant of works.²⁵ What Jesus does not say is whether the lawyer is able to fulfill the law.

25. One should ask the pertinent question of how the republished covenant of works functions with respect either to (1) soteriology or (2) redemptive history. Here Christ presses the republished covenant of works in soteriology, not redemptive history (or, e.g., the national covenant of works which typifies Christ's obedience).

When Paul calls the Mosaic Law a “ministry of death, carved in letters on stone” and compares it to the “ministry of the Spirit” he does not have the third use of the law or the Jewish misinterpretation theory in view (2 Cor 3:6–7). Apart from Christ the moral law is the covenant of works, and only in Christ does the law become a ministry of life. Likewise, Paul contrasts Sinai with Zion and states that they are two distinct covenants: “One is from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery; she is Hagar. Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia; she corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother” (Gal 4:24–25). If Paul engaged the misinterpretation theory, then why would he say the Jerusalem above is “our mother”? Would it not be more accurate to say that Paul’s fellow countrymen had twisted Mt. Sinai into something it was not, and that we are the true children of Sinai?

I do not believe the misinterpretation theory adequately explains this text or others like it, such as Paul’s quotation of Lev 18:5 in Rom 10:5 and Gal 3:12. I believe the Judaizers correctly understood the law: perfect obedience yields eternal life. I also believe, however, the Judaizers had a faulty anthropology (they believed they could obey the law) and a defective Christology (they failed to see Christ’s fulfillment of the Old Testament).

The New Testament goes to great lengths to distinguish between the Mosaic and New Covenants even though they are part of the same covenant of grace. The author of Hebrews tells us: “For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned’ (Heb 12:18–20). Moses was terrified and trembled with fear (Heb 12:21). Instead, we have come to Mount Zion and to Jesus, who is the mediator of a new covenant (Heb 12:22–24).

While Christ was the mediator of the Mosaic covenant insofar as it administered redemptive grace, in another important respect Moses rather than Christ was the mediator of the Mosaic covenant. It is in this latter respect (Moses as mediator) that the Mosaic covenant exhibits the covenant of works and ultimately serves as a ministry of death. This is the point that the author of Hebrews presses (Heb 3:1–6). Paul also raises the same point (Gal 3:19).

In his explanation of the covenant of grace, Venema suppresses and accommodates many of these elements in the effort to convince us that the Mosaic covenant is

just like the new covenant. He confuses its *place* in the covenant of grace with its unique *function*. In Venema’s understanding, the smoke, fire, lightning, and thunder roll back over the clear skies of Mt. Zion because the curses of the Old Testament are typical of the curses in the New Testament and still hang over the elect. According to Venema, the Mosaic covenant is simply a distinct economy, but not a unique covenant in any respect. In technical terms, he fails to recognize the periodicity of Mosaic-era revelation and conflates it with Gospel-era revelation.

The last significant issue deserves mention because it is such a crucial element of biblical Christology and soteriology, namely, the active obedience of Christ. From the outset in his endorsement of *The Law Is Not of Faith*, Venema acknowledged that a key contention of the idea of republication was the affirmation of the active obedience of Christ. Yet, when given the opportunity to explain where the active obedience of Christ appears in the Old Testament, Venema is silent. Perhaps this is an example of not being able to say everything about the work of Christ in an essay. I know from reading other works by Venema that he affirms the doctrine.²⁶ But in his own essay he never mentions the concept. It is a bit disappointing that he fails to cover this key issue in over 100 pages of material on this subject. Even when he talks about the work of Christ, he merely mentions the that “blood alone perfectly cleanses his people from their sins” (*MECG*, 167). As important as the blood of Christ is, his imputed active obedience is equally necessary. Prick the finger of an adherent to the idea of republication, and it will bleed the active obedience of Christ, among other doctrines. This is so because one of the key elements of republication is the concept that Israel corporately prefigures Christ’s obedience in its own national (or typical) covenant of works. For Venema, on the other hand, I have yet to see where he would see the active obedience of Christ typified in the Old Testament, and in over 100 pages of material, he has yet to demonstrate an interest in doing so. This is not to say that if one denies republication he cannot affirm the imputed active obedience of Christ. However, it would be helpful to see how a republication critic can demonstrate it from the Old Testament.

CONCLUSION

I do not relish debate, nor do I enjoy crossing swords

Continued on Page 285.

26. Cornelis Venema, *Getting the Gospel Right: Assessing the Reformation and New Perspectives on Paul* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2006), 246–49.