

COVENANT AND JUSTIFICATION IN THE THOUGHT OF JOHN OWEN, 1616-
1683

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Dissertation submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Historical Theology at North-
West University

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2006
Potchefstroom Campus

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with research projects of this size and nature, there were a number of individuals and institutions without whose assistance this thesis could not have been completed. To the following I owe a special debt of gratitude: The University of Toronto which enabled me to conduct much of the research in this thesis. Harvest Community Church (PCA) in Orange City, Iowa which made a significant financial contribution to my studies this year. A special thank-you to the De Haan's, Kroschelle's, Alsum's, and Allen's for the wonderful few months of fellowship. Thank you to John Wycliffe Theological College, its Professors, students, and administrative staff (Pam) for making this study possible. I would not swap my theological education here for any place in the world. The English Reformed Church which God used to mold me spiritually. Thank you for being a true family in the Lord. Cas and Lynne, thank you for allowing us to stay at your house – and sustaining us - where I was able to write much of my thesis. My parents, thank you for your support and encouragement this year. To my co-supervisor, Prof. Callie Coetzee, thank you for your help. I am very grateful that you were able to accommodate me, answer various questions over the year, and give me permission to submit this thesis. My supervisor, Bob, who has been a superb thesis advisor, a great friend and an even better brother in the Lord, without your help this thesis would not have been possible. Thanks also to your family who I treat as family. My wife whose patience, love and endurance over this last year has been immense. This thesis is dedicated to her in appreciation for all that she has given up over the years so that I could pursue my goals. Finally, to the Triune God, who sustained me during this difficult year; praise, honor, and glory to your name, forever.

**For from him and through him and to him are all things.
To him be the glory forever! Amen.**

Romans 11:36

ABSTRACT

This study demonstrates the thesis that John Owen's covenant theology profoundly influences his doctrine of justification by faith. Owen's belief that all true theology is based on a covenant is entirely consistent with his exposition of the Protestant doctrine of *sola fide*. Associated to this thesis were three further objectives. First, in researching Owen, it was important to better understand the sixteenth and seventeenth-century theological contexts; in particular, the place of covenant and justification. Moreover, there was a need to look in detail at his doctrine of justification by faith, since at present there is no detailed exposition of this doctrine in his thought. Last, it is hoped that studying a figure of the stature of Owen will help us to better understand his theological influence not only in the seventeenth-century, but up to and including the twenty-first century theological context.

The covenant, in Scripture, is used as a structural concept for understanding God's redemptive purposes in history. As redemptive history unfolds, so too does the covenant concept. This biblical doctrine finds its fullest clarification in the Reformed theological tradition. Owen is part of this tradition and makes extensive use of the covenant concept in his voluminous writings, particularly in his exposition of the epistle to the Hebrews.

Historically, Reformed theologians have noted three, sometimes four, covenants in Scripture. They are 1) the covenant of grace; 2) the covenant of works; 3) the covenant of redemption; and 4) the Sinaitic covenant. Owen held to the view that there were four basic covenants in Scripture. In the covenant of grace, which is antithetical to the

covenant of works, and is based upon the pre-temporal covenant of redemption, there is a progressive unfolding of God's redemptive purposes that culminate, with the greatest clarity, in the new covenant. The aforementioned covenants all impact his doctrine of justification.

One of the blessings associated with the covenant of grace is the doctrine of justification through faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, to the glory of God alone. Owen upholds the classic Protestant doctrine of justification that emphasizes the remission of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. He expounds this doctrine in the larger context of his theology of the covenant. All four covenants bear decisively on his exposition of justification to such a degree that his exposition would be unintelligible apart from understanding the covenant concept.

This thesis is substantiated *contextually* through Owen's life and theological training; *historiographically* through his sources and influences; and *textually* through his writings. As one of the most eminent theologians in the Christian tradition, this study will seek to make a significant contribution to ongoing Owen studies, especially in the area of covenant and justification.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie demonstreer die stelling dat John Owen se verbonds teologie dramaties sy leerstelling oor regverdiging beïnvloed. Owen se geloofsoortuiging, dat alle ware teologie gegrond is op a verbond, is heeltemal konsekwent met sy uiteensetting van die Protestantse leerstelling van *sola fide*. Geassosieer met hierdie stelling is drie verdere mikpunte. Eerstens, in die navors van Owen, is dit belangrik om die sestiende and sewentiende eeuse teologiese kontekste te verstaan; in die besonder die plek van verbonds en regverdigings leerstellings. Verder was daar 'n behoefte om meer uitvoerig na sy leer van regverdiging deur geloof te kyk, omrede daar tot dusver nog nie 'n ordentlike uiteenstelling van van hierdie leer in sy denke bestaan nie. Laastens, is dit die hoop dat die bestudeering van 'n persoonlikheid soos Owen ons sal help om sy teologiese invloed te verstaan, nie net op die sewentiende eeu nie, maar ook tot en met die een- twintigste eeuse teologiese konteks.

Die verbond, in die Skrif, is gebruik as a strukturele konsep vir die verstaan van God se verlossings doeleindes in die geskiedenis. Soos wat die verlossings geskiedenis ontwikkel, so ontwikkel die verbonds leer. Hierdie Bybelse leerstelling word die beste duidelik gemaak in die Gereformeerde teologiese tradisie. Owen is deel van hierdie tradisie en maak baie gebruik van die verbonds konsep in sy veelvuldige geskrifte, veral in sy uiteenstelling van die brief aan die Hebreërs.

Geskiedkundig het Gereformeerde teoloë drie, partykeer vier, verbonde in die skrif geïdentifiseer. Dit is 1) die verbond van genade; 2) die verbond van werke; 3) die

verbond van verlossing; en die 4) Sinaitiese verbond. Owen het geglo dat daar vier basiese verbonde in die Skrif is. In die verbond van genade, wat 'n antitese is vir die verbond van werke en gebaseer is op pre-temporele verbond van verlossing, is 'n progressiewe uiteensetting van God se verlossings doeleindes wat kulmineer, met meer helderheid, in die nuwe verbond. Die voorafgenoemde verbonde beïnvloed almal sy leer van regverdiging.

Een van die Seëninge geassosieer met die verbond van genade is die leer van regverdiging deur geloof alleen, in Christus alleen, deur genade alleen, ter ere van God alleen. Owen hou by die klassieke Protestantse leer van regverdiging wat die wegneem van sonde en die toerekening van Christus se geregtigheid uitlig. Hy verduidelik die leerstelling in die groter konteks van sy leerstelling van die verbond. Al vier verbonde het 'n so 'n duidelike invloed op sy uiteenstelling van regverdiging dat sy uiteenstelling onverstaanbaar is buiten die verstaan van die verbond konsep.

Die stelling word bewys *kontekstueel* deur Owen se lewende en teologiese opleiding, *geskiedkundig* deur sy bronne en invloede; *tekstueel* deur sy geskrifte. As een van die mees uitstaande teoloë in Christelike tradisie, gaan hierdie studie probeer om 'n bydra te maak tot studies van Owen, veral in die vakgebiede van die verbonds en regverdigingsleer.

INTRODUCTION

COVENANT AND JUSTIFICATION IN THE THOUGHT OF JOHN OWEN

Keywords

John Owen, Covenant, Justification

Introductory Remarks

The Reformed theological tradition has long used the concept of the covenant as the hermeneutical tool for understanding redemptive history in the Old and New Testaments, hence the term “Covenant Theology”. Covenant theology, also referred to as Federalism, is a term distinct to the Reformed theological tradition because it finds its clearest and fullest expression in the writings of those theologians who align themselves in the Reformed tradition. David Weir (1990) draws an untenable line of demarcation between the terms covenant theology and federal theology in an attempt to further buttress the “Calvin against the Calvinists” thesis proposed by R T Kendall’s work *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (1997). Whereas Beza is typically understood as the theologian who strayed from Calvin, Weir argues that it was Ursinus who, by positing a covenant of works, was responsible for the shift from Calvin’s theology of grace. Concerning the terms ‘covenant’ and ‘federal’ McCoy and Baker argue: “the terms ‘federal’ and ‘covenantal’ are closely related, and, when carefully examined, virtually interchangeable. Federal derives from the Latin *foedus*, which means covenant. A covenantal order is federal” (1991:12). As a result, the terms “federal theology/federalism” and “covenant theology” will be used interchangeably throughout depending on the context. Weir’s thesis has been subsequently refuted by Karlberg (2000:111-28) and Kendall’s thesis by Muller (1995:345-75) and Helm (1982). We will see the problem with the Calvin versus the

Calvinist thesis as we consider the basic continuity of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century covenant theology in chapter two.

Covenant theology did influence the Arminian and Lutheran traditions but not nearly to the same extent that it did the Reformed tradition. The use of the concept of covenant, *foedus*, in Protestant orthodox theology is primarily a Reformed phenomenon. Muller writes: “The Lutherans do not deny the importance of the concept to biblical theology and history, but neither do they develop a doctrine of the covenant as such. The Reformed scholastics, by contrast, develop the structure of *pactum salutis*, *foedus operum*, and *foedus gratiae* as one of the central architectonic patterns of their systems. Arminianism retained some of the Reformed covenant structure, but developed it in a synergistic and even semi-Pelagian pattern, with emphasis upon the *foedus naturae*” (1985:119-20). The covenant concept, then, has been especially significant for the Reformed theological tradition to the point that Reformed theology would be unintelligible apart from the concept of the covenant as it has been understood historically.

Others have also highlighted the central significance of the covenant as determinative for Reformed exegetical and theological reflection. According to John Murray (1982, 4:216), “Covenant theology denotes a development of theological thought and construction within the Reformed or Calvinistic tradition.” Geerhardus Vos (1980:234) argues that the “doctrine of the covenants is a peculiarly Reformed doctrine.” “Reformed theology,” writes Meredith Kline, “has long prized the covenant as a structural concept for integrating all that God has so diversely spoken unto men” (1998:13). Furthermore, B.B Warfield (1931:56) argues that the

“architectonic principle” of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), a Reformed and Presbyterian confession, is supplied by the systematic theology surrounding covenant theology. I. John Hesselink lucidly sums up the aforementioned comments by saying that “Reformed theology is covenant theology” (1983:57). To understand covenant theology, therefore, is to understand the essence of Reformed theology and so the importance of one to the other cannot be overstated.

Definition of Terms

Since the Reformed tradition, including the articulation of covenant theology, is by no means monolithic, we should not be surprised that the theology surrounding the covenant will manifest a wide range of expression. A comparison between, for example, the Dutch covenant theologians Gisbertus Voetius, Johannes Cocceius and Herman Witsius attest to this fact. These differences should not be overstated however. There is actually more continuity than discontinuity among Reformed covenant theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as we will show in chapter two.

One is faced, however, with the difficulty of defining “covenant”, “covenant theology” and what constitutes a “covenant theologian”. Defining who constitutes a covenant theologian is particularly difficult since there are many theologians, from differing theological backgrounds, who have used the concept in their writings to varying degrees (Vos, 1980:234-267). Our intended purpose in this thesis is to only deal with those who, first, would have used the covenant concept to structure and integrate all of redemptive history and, second, those who would have influenced John Owen in particular, since he is the subject of our study.

The word covenant (from Hebrew *בְּרִית* , “bond”; e.g., Jeremiah 11:10ff., 32:31-40) and its synonyms (testament, bargain, agreement and promise) occur nearly 300 times in the Bible. The precise meaning of the word has been debated for centuries. Most scholars agree with several basic words to describe “covenant” (e.g. “bond”, “to cut”) but they will also add other terms (e.g. “obligation”, “commitment”) depending upon the context, their theological proclivities, and evolving research into the etymology of the word (See Morris, 1955:62). As O. Palmer Robertson has said, “asking for a definition of ‘covenant’ is something like asking for a definition of ‘mother’” (1980:3). The problem in defining covenant, as we will see, is that the word has varied uses in Scripture. That is to say, the word can mean different things based upon the context (See McCarthy, 1965:219-239). It is hoped that this study will show that while “any definition of the term ‘covenant’ must allow for as broad a latitude as the data of Scripture demands” (Robertson, 1980:3), there is nevertheless an “overarching oneness in the concept of the covenant” (Ibid).

Problem Statement

The subject of our study, John Owen (1616-1683), was a covenant, Trinitarian, Protestant, Calvinist theologian (Trueman, 1998:18). Owen exists as a prime example of one whose theology depended greatly on his understanding of the covenants. Indeed, in the whole of Owen’s literary corpus there are over five thousand references to the word covenant.



While some work has been done on Owen’s covenant theology, there is almost no secondary literature on his *Theologoumena* which is the fullest statement of his covenant theology. This can be explained in part due to the fact that it was only

recently translated (1994) from Latin into English under the title *Biblical Theology*. As a result, this thesis will draw from a work of Owen's that is relatively untouched.

The aim of this thesis centers on Owen's contention, in *Theologoumena*, that "all true theology is based on ... a covenant" (1994, 17:28). As a result, our thesis will show that his covenant theology profoundly influences the key areas in his soteriology; namely, justification by faith alone (*Sola Fide*). Our main concern in this thesis will be to look at how Owen's covenant theology influences his doctrine of justification.

Literature Review

Recently, Owen's covenant theology has received a good deal of treatment in the secondary literature. Ferguson (1979), Bobick (1996), and Wong (1998) have all given extended treatment of Owen's covenant theology. Trueman (1998) and Rehnman (2001) interact with various elements of Owen's covenant theology insofar as they relate to particular strains in his thought (e.g. prolegomena & atonement). Daniels (2004) makes reference to Owen's covenant theology, particularly the covenant of redemption, as it affects Owen's Christology.

Bobick's thesis looks at the role of Ramist logic in the covenant theology of Owen and compares him to Calvin who is supposedly more influenced by the Ciceronian tradition. Bobick spends very little time looking at the dogmatic relationship between covenant and justification. Ferguson's main concern is to show how Owen's covenant theology affects the Christian life. In his brief distillation of Owen's covenant theology, Ferguson touches union with Christ being the goal of the covenant. At times he is extremely critical of Owen because he believes that he

employed a commercial model, a debt owed to the Son, in his covenant theology which ruled out the priority of grace. This criticism, it seems, influenced Bobick and Wong who made similar contentions in their theses. Wong's thesis is an attempt to show, against Perry Miller's thesis that Puritan covenant theology is in disparity with Calvin's theology, the harmony between Calvin's theology and Puritan covenant theology by using Owen as an example to refute Miller. Wong briefly looks at the relationship between covenant and justification in Owen but it is really subsidiary to his overall argument. It is the goal of this work to further elucidate the arguments of Ferguson, Bobick and Wong, by showing how Owen's covenantal formulations had a decisive impact on the soteriological doctrine of justification. Our validation for this study lies in the fact that this thesis will give the fullest exposition of Owen's doctrine of justification as it relates to the various covenants posited by him. It is hoped that this will pave the way for future studies on aspects of Owen's soteriology, particularly the doctrine of sanctification.

Furthermore, unlike Ferguson, Bobick, and Wong, we will be making reference to Owen's recently translated work *Theologoumena Pantopada, sive, De Natura, Ortu, Progressu, et Studio, Verae Theologiae* (1661), now titled *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ* (1994), which has major implications for understanding Owen's covenant theology. It is somewhat surprising that Wong or Bobick do not reference this work. Rehnman's study (2001) relies heavily on Owen's *Theologoumena* in order to show the importance of this work to understanding Owen's approach to theological methodology.

Historical Context

As we have noted, for Owen, all true theology is based on a covenant (1994, 17:28). The covenant was a tool for him in both defending and clarifying orthodox Trinitarianism. For example, the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*) enabled Owen to distinguish between the ontological Trinity and the economic/functional Trinity. The covenant concept was also crucial to his Christology, sacramental theology, ecclesiology, and Sabbath argument. A study of this scope will only allow for passing comments related to these various aspects of Owen's covenant theology. Again, we will focus on how the covenant influences his formulation of justification by faith.

A brief historical sketch of covenant theology will show that most Reformed theologians had developed a theology which included three covenants. They are 1) the *foedus naturale* or *foedus operum* (covenant of works), a pre-fall arrangement whereby Adam's full obedience to God's command (Genesis 2:16-17) would have led to eternal life upon a set period of probation; 2) the *foedus gratiae* (covenant of grace), which includes the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenant and is made between God and the elect with Christ as Mediator; and 3) the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption), which is eternal pact between the Trinity whereby the Father elects a people to eternal life, the Son accomplishes their redemption and the Spirit applies the benefits of Christ's work to the elect.

There are, of course, nuances to these covenantal formulations depending on the theologian. Cocceius, for example, believed in an abrogating covenant of works over the history of redemption which seems to be peculiar to him alone among the

Reformed. Witsius (1990:151-161) is aware of this position but, in his rejection of it, speaks only of Jacob Arminius as espousing some form of abrogation concerning the covenant of works. Moreover, Owen, in contradistinction to Calvin, for example, argued for a fourfold covenant schema, giving the Sinaitic (also called Mosaic) covenant a separate place along the covenant of works, grace and redemption. We will discuss this more at length in chapter three when we look at Owen's covenant theology.

Central Theoretical Argument

We will manifest the above thesis in the following way. In *Chapter One* we will discuss Owen's importance, his academic training, influences, and literary resources which include an auctioned catalogue of his personal library numbering close to three thousand books. This will enable us to locate Owen in the intellectual tradition of his time so that we may better understand where, why and how he may have said what he did. Also, we will note the importance of why we are considering Owen's views on covenant and justification as a worthy subject of study.

In *Chapter Two* we will look at the history of covenant theology starting from Augustine leading up to Owen and his contemporaries in the seventeenth century. Only the major Reformed covenant theologians who would have influenced Owen as well as others from the mediaeval period whom he would have read during his studies at Oxford will be looked at. The purpose of this is to show that Owen's covenantal formulations did not occur in a vacuum. There are significant historical influences on his theology, particularly his soteriology which encompasses, of course, both covenant and justification. Owen's formulations, according to Trueman, are "part of

an ongoing Western theological tradition which has historical roots back beyond the Reformation, beyond even the Middle Ages, and which is closely allied to parallel movements on the continent” (1998:9).

In *Chapter Three* we will set forth, not dogmatically evaluate, Owen’s covenant theology. Recent studies by Ferguson, Wong and Bobick have been highly critical of Owen’s covenant theology. While we believe that some of these criticisms results from a poor reading of Owen, the scope of this thesis will not allow for a detailed interaction with all of their claims. In this chapter we will look at Owen’s fourfold covenant schema and his theological methodology.

We will then be in a position, in *Chapter Four*, to relate Owen’s covenant theology to his doctrine of justification by faith and thus prove that apart from the tool of the covenant this doctrine would be unintelligible in his thought. Our closing chapter will summarize the thesis, draw warranted conclusions, evaluate whether the gap in Owen studies has been filled, consider whether the research objectives have been achieved, and give suggestions for further research on Owen.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 OWEN IN CONTEXT

1.1.2 Owen's Significance

John Owen (1616-1683) has, through his voluminous writings, cemented himself as one of the pre-eminent theologians of the Christian church. Not surprisingly, then, the praise has been capacious, even from those who sharply dissented from some of his theological views. In his own day some of Owen's contemporaries called him the "Calvin of England" (Guelzo, 1976:14). Peter Toon calls Owen "a truly great man" (1971:178). Even Owen's most eclectic theological foe, Richard Baxter, could describe Owen as an "excellent man" of "rare parts and worth" (Orme, 1820:359). C.H. Spurgeon has maintained that Owen was "perhaps, the most profound divine who ever lived" (1998-2001:644). More recently, Roger Nicole has remarked that Owen is "the greatest divine who ever wrote in English" (Guelzo, 1976:14).

The importance of this praise is useful to our study. It shows that Owen is widely recognized to have been one of the most influential Christian theologians of all time. As a result, his views on topics like covenant and justification are important to a proper understanding of historical theology, especially in the seventeenth-century context where he was surely the pre-eminent theologian in England. As we consider how the concept of the covenant influenced his doctrine of justification, we must keep in mind what a significant impact his writings would have had on the Christian church up to and including the twenty-first century.

1.1.3 Owen's Training

Owen, the son of a Reformed Non-conformist minister (Owen, 1850, 13:224)¹, was born in 1616 in Stadham, outside of Oxford. At the age of twelve, in 1628, he entered Oxford having completed his preparatory studies at a grammar school. Seven years later, in 1635, he received his M.A. and began studies for the B.D., but never finished this degree due to his opposition to Laudian theological policy, which quickly gained influence at Oxford at the time (See Toon, 1971; Thomson, 1850; Orme, 1820; Haykin, 2004). Archbishop William Laud, hence 'Laudian', was an Arminian who loved both ceremony and liturgy in worship. These elements were, of course, loathed by the Puritans, including Owen, who equated much of Laud's theology with Roman Catholicism (Tyacke, 1990:266-270). Owen would, in the course of his career, vehemently oppose Laud's theology as destructive to the Christian faith.

Owen studied at the prestigious Queen's College; the place of John Wycliffe's training (c. 1330-1384). According to C.M. Dent (1983:167), Queen's College was famous for producing godly preachers. This is not surprising since the Reformation's emphasis on the centrality of preaching in congregational life had influenced the curriculum at Queen's, though not at the expense of the mediaeval curriculum.

Reformed theology became the dominant theological perspective at Oxford, at least

¹. All references to the *Works of John Owen* are to the standard 1850 William H. Goold edition in 24 volumes, as reprinted by the Banner of Truth (volumes 1-16 & 18-24). The seven-volume set of Owen's *Hebrews* commentary (numbered 1-7) will correspond to volume numbers 18-24. All quotes from Owen's *Theologoumena* will come from Westcott's translation which we have numbered 17 among the 24 volumes. Owen's *Theologoumena* has recently been published under the title *Biblical Theology*, translated by Stephen P. Westcott (1994). Quotes from *Theologoumena* will be taken from Westcott's translation in order for readers to be able to more easily access the quotes. From this point forward Owen's *Works* will be cited according to the volume and page number only, omitting the 1850 date. Volume 17 is dated both 1850 and 1994. These dates will henceforth be omitted. We will also use the titles *Theologoumena* and *Biblical Theology* interchangeably.

until the first quarter of the seventeenth century, due to the demands of radical Protestants (Rehman, 2002:20).

Two prestigious theologians of the seventeenth-century, John Prideaux (1578-1650) and Thomas Barlow (1607-91), both taught at Oxford during the time of Owen's studies. Toon (1971:6) mentions that Owen studied directly under the tutelage of Barlow who, according to William Orme, "was a Calvinist in theology, an Aristotelian in philosophy, and an Episcopalian in church government" (1820:12). Even though Toon does not give a primary source for this fact, we can be reasonably sure that this was indeed the case given the reference in Thomson's "Life of Dr. Owen" where he quotes an epitaph which refers to Owen's studies under Barlow (Owen, 1:23). Owen, in fact, possessed a copy of Barlow's book entitled *Exercitationes aliquot Metaphysicae* (1637) (Millington, 1:2).

Curtis mentions that the college tutor was "the most important influence on a scholar's education" (1959:107). No doubt, Barlow's thorough grounding in Aristotelian philosophy would have influenced Owen who refers to Aristotle 57 times in his writings, 16 of which are in *Theologoumena*. Owen, himself, refers to Prideaux as a man with a "great name among the world of learned men" (11:497).

Barlow's influence in particular should not be understated. He had an "encyclopaedic knowledge of the philosophical and theological learning then current in Oxford" (DNB, 3:927). The same could be said of Owen himself. As a staunch Calvinist, Barlow was an outspoken opponent of Socinianism and Arminianism, theological systems that Owen spent a great deal of time refuting (DNB, 3:928). Interestingly,

when Anglican authors criticized the basic tenets of Calvinism, “Barlow could barely contain his rage” (Ibid, 3:930). In response to another attack by the Anglicans on the teachings of the Synod of Dordt, a synod that upheld orthodox Reformed theology by opposing the teachings of Arminianism, he wrote, “Did not the Church of England, and all her obedient sons till 1626 ... approve the doctrine of that synod?” (Ibid). Since “Calvinism was the sheet anchor of his Christianity”, it is not surprising that he taught the fundamental truths of “justification by faith alone, absolute double decree predestination, the irresistibility of grace, and the perseverance” (Ibid, 3:932). That Owen upheld the aforementioned doctrines, all of which relate to the covenant concept, shows clearly that he was heavily influenced by teachers who were both learned and committed to Reformed theology, especially Thomas Barlow.

1.1.4 Owen’s Sources

Since we are concerned primarily with the topics of covenant and justification, our attempt to understand Owen intellectually will depend more on his theological influences than his philosophical ones. In order to do this we will look at material from his writings and an auction catalogue of his library from 1684, which contained close to three thousand books and contains the major works of authors of patristic, mediaeval, sixteenth century, and contemporary theology. Not surprisingly, given the breadth of learning one finds in Owen’s writings, the library also contains collections on philosophy, history, geography, and linguistics. Dekker (2001:141), commenting on the value of personal libraries, suggests that “Sometimes we are so privileged as to be allowed to take a look in someone’s private theological library. This is, generally, exciting, for it may tell us a few things about the books which the owner of the library finds important, and give us information which is not in all cases available in a more

direct way, by reading the theologian's own writings." Owen's library, then, will help us to locate those who may have influenced him most, especially as it relates to covenant and justification.

As we have said, given Owen's educational background at Oxford, the influence of Reformed theology, which is practically synonymous with covenant theology (Hesselink, 1983:57) and consistent with *Sola Fide*, is obvious. Owen refers approvingly to numerous Reformed covenantal theologians in his *Works*. For example, in volumes 1-16 of his *Works*, he refers to Ames (7 times), Beza (37 times), Calvin (95 times), Junius (16 times), Piscator (11 times), Voetius (9 times), and Zanchius (17 times). His library contained the *Works* of men like John Calvin (1509-1564), Hieronymus Zanchius (1516-1590), Theodore Beza (1519-1605), Johannes Piscator (1546-1626), Gisbert Voetius (1589-1676), William Ames (1576-1633), and Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669). Owen explicitly refers to Bucer, Calvin, Martyr Vermigli, and Beza as the "most eminent" theologians (4:229). Collinson mentions that Bullinger and Vermigli were the most influential in England during Owen's time (1985:214-15).

Owen was also well acquainted with the church fathers. There are references to Ambrose (36 times), Augustine (206 times), Chrysostom (57 times), Clement of Alexandria (50 times), Clement of Rome (33 times), Epiphanius (36 times), Eusebius (94 times), Gregory of Nazianus (16 times), Ignatius (25 times), Irenaeus (30 times), Lactantius (32 times), Origen (55 times), and Tertullian (122 times). Indeed, the references to the church fathers clearly outnumber the references to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century authors. This can be explained "from the convention of

seventeenth-century authors refraining from referring to contemporary authors because those of greater antiquity were more fashionable” (Rehman, 2002:22). The covenant concept, while certainly more dominant in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theologians, is certainly found in many of the early church fathers such as Augustine as we will see in chapter two.

That Owen made extensive use of the church fathers is not surprising. As a Reformed theologian, in the context of seventeenth-century scholarship and debate, Owen depended upon historical theology as a tool which “shaped and influenced which works he read, how he read them, and what ideas he drew from them” (Trueman, 1998:13). Owen used the creeds from the ecumenical councils, formulated by the fathers, as a test for Christian orthodoxy. That is not to say, of course, that the creeds are on par with Scripture; rather, for Owen, the Nicene Creed, for example, faithfully reflects the teaching of Scripture and so safeguards against heresy and error.

The range of Owen’s library shows that he was not part of “an English or even as part of a British movement, but ... part of an international movement” (Ibid). The Savoy Declaration of 1658, which Owen was largely responsible for drafting, is almost identical to the Westminster Confession of Faith except for matters on ecclesiology. Owen originally had Presbyterian convictions when it came to church polity. However, through reading the works of John Cotton he became an Independent (Congregationalist) (Toon, 1971:27). Based on statements in the *Inquiry into Evangelical Churches* (1681) and the posthumously published *True Nature of a Gospel Church* (1689) there is evidence that he may have returned to his Presbyterian convictions (See Owen, 16:2; Oliver, 2002:157-190).

The Savoy Declaration, which best reflects a summation of Owen's theology, shows distinct similarities to the Canons of Dort (1619), Ussher's Irish Articles (1615) and even the Heidelberg Catechism (1562). Owen, then, finds himself firmly entrenched within the developing tradition of European Reformed Orthodoxy. Trueman accurately sums up Owen's basic theological tradition:

[Owen's] theology reflects the broad parameters and concerns of the Reformed tradition: a high view of Scripture as the epistemological basis of theology; an understanding of *salvation rooted in the divine covenants* (emphasis ours); an historical economy of salvation focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ; and a basic concern to bring out the Trinitarian nature of God's creative and saving activity. In all of these areas, Owen's thinking is ... not original but rooted in a tradition which extends back to, and developed out of, the Reformed theology of the middle decades of the sixteenth century (Ibid:18).

Trueman has correctly noted the central place of the covenant in Owen's soteriology and we will seek to expand upon this in chapter three.

1.1.5 Owen's Writings

The literary corpus of Owen is substantial, comprising of twenty-four weighty volumes if we add his *Theologoumena* to the Banner of Truth reprint edition. His commentary on *Hebrews* (seven volumes) has been referred to as "probably the most elaborate and instructive comment on a detached portion of Scripture" (Bridges, 1980:40). In the commentary Owen makes extensive observations on topics like the Sabbath and Christology. However, the most pervasive concept that Owen deals with in the commentary is that of the covenant. It should not, therefore, go unnoticed that Owen chose, of all the books in the Bible, to write a commentary on a book that has the covenant as a dominant theme. The commentary also evinces an obvious mastery

of Hebrew and Greek which is crucial to Owen's understandings of covenant and justification.

Owen's *Theologoumena* (1661) consists of dissertations on the origin, nature and progress of the knowledge of God. Rehnman notes, "Its style is succinct [sic] and concise, but the width of learning it reveals is remarkable, as the treatise compasses nearly all the learning of that time ..." (2002:18). The content in *Theologoumena* shows that Owen made constant reference to his own library, thus showing the obvious relation of his library to his writings. Many of the philosophers referred to in *Theologoumena* can also be found in Owen's library (compare 17:100-141 with Millington 1:19-22). These references do not, however, touch directly on the subject of the divine covenants.

The remaining sixteen volumes, many of which will be referred to in this thesis, contain polemical writings aimed primarily at Papists (volumes 5 & 14), Arminians (volume 10), and Socinians (volume 2). Therefore, it is not surprising that his library indicates that he was well acquainted with authors from the Arminian (e.g. Jacob Arminius) (Millington, 1:4), Roman Catholic (e.g. Robert Bellarmine) (Ibid, 1:13), and Socinian (e.g. Faustus Socinius) (Ibid, 1:7, 12, 18) traditions (cf. Trueman 1998:19-29). Owen's discourse on the Holy Spirit (volume 3), perseverance of the saints (volume 11), justification (volume 5), atonement (volume 10) and Christology (volume 1) show his positive use of "the various strands of Western tradition" (Trueman, 1998:45) in order to express and defend Reformed theology against novel heresies and attacks (Ibid).

There can be little doubt that the one-time vice-Chancellor at Oxford was one of the leading intellectuals of his generation. Rehnman describes Owen as one who had “absorbed the best currents of the Western tradition and Renaissance culture into his Reformed theology” (2001:201). McConica, in his characterization of the Oxford schools during the time of Elizabeth I, may well of spoken of Owen when he says “catholic and eclectic, sensitive to the whole of tradition of learning in the past including medieval achievement, widely read in contemporary continental thought, yet staunchly protestant and if anything Calvinist” (1986:713).

1.1.6 Conclusion

What is clear from the foregoing is that we are dealing with one of the great intellectual lights of the seventeenth century; indeed, one of the most influential men of his generation. His training, personal library and *Works* reveal a “mind steeped in patristic, medieval, and Reformation theology, and phenomenally well-versed in contemporary literature, Protestant, Catholic, and heretical” (Trueman, 1998:1). Owen’s influences are not to be under-appreciated if we are to understand why he said the things he did. Certainly, Barlow was a formative influence, at least in introducing, as Tutors do, Owen to the various works that would equip him for the life of scholarship. And the authors of these works that influenced him, found, it seems, principally in his library, would be often cited as Owen developed his theological arguments. These arguments, with their particular reference to the seventeenth century context, would cement Owen as the pre-eminent Protestant apologist in England as he countered the claims of Catholicism, Socinianism, and Arminianism that threatened to undermine the Reformed Protestant faith.

Furthermore, in light of Owen's sources, training and writings it is clear that Owen's theology of the covenant and justification is of great importance to understanding not only the seventeenth century context and historical theology but also to our present-day understanding of these doctrines which continue to create a firestorm of activity in the both the scholarly and ecclesiastical settings.

CHAPTER TWO

2.1 THE HISTORY OF COVENANT THEOLOGY

2.1.1 Introduction

Historically, scholars have identified the emergence of covenant theology in the context of the Reformation, particularly with the Swiss Reformers (Bierma, 2005:31; Vos, 1980:234; Berkhof, 2003:262; Clark 2001). Covenant theology “emerged on Swiss soil, particularly in Geneva in John Calvin’s thought and in Zurich in the writings of Huldreich Zwingli” (Reymond, 1998:503). However, the manifestation of covenant theology did not originate in the sixteenth-century. Many of the elements which made up Reformed covenant theology existed inchoately in previous eras (Duncan, 1995:passim; Baker, 1980:19-22; Clark, 2001). As a result, we will focus only on a few key theologians in the pre-Reformation era; theologians who would have influenced Owen insofar as we can deduce from his library, references in his *Works* and his theological training. Greater detail will, however, be paid to theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries when covenant theology becomes the decisive hermeneutical tool for understanding redemptive history and soteriology.

In part, historical theology is concerned with questions of why things are said. Owen, as we have noted, was very conscious of the Christian theological tradition. The purpose of this short history of covenant theology is to look at those who would have most influenced him so that we can better discern why he said the things he did. We will also note that the covenant concept, as worked out in the Reformed tradition, has soteriological implications that are decisive for Owen in relating the covenant concept to justification by faith alone. Moreover, it is hoped that this chapter will further

show the line of continuity between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed theologians; a continuity that has recently been better understood through the writings of Richard Muller, Heiko Oberman, David Steinmetz, Carl Trueman, R. Scott Clark and Jill Raitt.

2.2 Early to Medieval Covenant Theology

2.2.1 Augustine

Of all the early church fathers, Augustine (354-430 AD) most influenced Owen. Owen makes reference to Augustine 206 times in his *Works*. Moreover, in the library catalogue there is the *opera omnia* of Augustine (5 volumes) which certainly would have included, among other things, Augustine's thoughts on the covenant (Millington, 1:1). More specifically, related to our thesis, Owen does use Augustine in his defense of justification by faith (5:36).

Augustine depended upon, and gave expression to, covenant theology during his theological confrontation with the British monk Pelagius, to support his theological position concerning Adamic transmission of sin.

But even the infants, not personally in their own life, but according to the common origin of the human race, have all broken God's covenant in that one in whom all have sinned. Now there are many things called God's covenants besides those two great ones, the old and the new, which any one who pleases may read and know. For the first covenant, which was made with the first man, is just this: "In the day ye eat thereof, ye shall surely die." Whence it is written in the book called Ecclesiasticus, "All flesh waxeth old as doth a garment. For the covenant from the beginning is, Thou shall die the death" (1995:326-7).

That Owen was aware of this debate can be deduced from his "Discourse on the Holy Spirit" where we read: "Had not Pelagius vented his corrupt opinions concerning the

grace of God, it is like the church had never had the learned and excellent writings of Augustine in defense thereof” (4:353).

J Wayne Baker, in his study of Heinrich Bullinger’s use of the covenant, argues that Augustine held to a unilateral view of the covenant as opposed to Bullinger’s unique contribution, to Reformed covenant theology, of a bilateral conditional covenant (Baker, 1980:20). The evidence, however, will not support Baker’s contention. For example, Augustine defines *pactum* simply as: *Pactum est quod inter aliquos convenit* (a covenant is that which is agreed upon among persons) (Lenfant, 1963:34). Mutuality, therefore, has a definite place in Augustine’s covenant scheme (See Lillback, 2001:38-41).

Above we note that an embryonic prelapsarian covenant was extant in Augustine’s writings over a millennium before Calvin. This prelapsarian covenant would become an integral part of Owen’s covenant theology. Moreover, Augustine and Owen both have in common a definite bilateral understanding of the covenant. It should also be noted that the doctrine of the covenant, especially the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, was first articulated by Irenaeus, whom Owen refers to in his writings, who was the major apologist of the second century. Irenaeus defended Christian theology against the teachings of Marcion who denied the unity of the two Testaments (Clark, 2001).

2.2.2 William Ockham & Gabriel Biel

Owen was acquainted with theologians of the medieval period such as Albert the Great; Rupert of Deutz (10:498,501); Anselm (10:466); Bernard of Clairvaux, whom

Owen held in high regard, and Duns Scotus (10:501). Scotus is referred to negatively, along with Ockham, as Owen sets forth his argument for the *necessity* of the atonement in *A Dissertation on Divine Justice*. Owen, not surprisingly, views the semi-Pelagian nominalists, Ockham and Biel, negatively (3:309). These two medieval theologians used the covenant concept, and so were partly responsible for the full-grown manifestation of sacramentalism and synergism in the Western (Latin) church that resulted in a type of covenant theology that is hardly recognizable to the covenant theology that emerged centuries later.

Both Ockham and Biel argued that in order for God to call someone righteous, they must be inherently righteous. The forensic element to justification, which would be the hallmark of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century formulations on justification, was conspicuously missing.² This development in Franciscan theology grew out of Augustine's sacramental theology which emphasized the *ex opera operato* character of the sacraments. The idea of the covenant, therefore, was intimately tied to the church as the dispenser of the sacraments and covenant blessings associated with them (Lillback, 2001:45). Biel, for example, argued that the sacraments were efficacious because of Christ's *pactum* with the church.

Let it not seem bad-sounding and fictitious to any one that God in the New Law has celebrated this sort of *pacta* with the faithful, since you can read that he did the same thing in the Old Law. For He says: "This is my *pactum* which you shall observe: every male of yours shall be circumcised." And further on: "Any man the flesh of whose foreskin has not been circumcised, his soul shall be wiped out from the people." Where, in the converse sense, it can be argued: if he has been circumcised, he shall be saved. And on the basis of the establishment of this *pactum* God assists this circumcision by remitting original sin,

² *Facientibus quod in se est, Deus non denegat gratiam* ("to those who do what is in them, God does not deny grace") is characteristic of the medieval approach to justification.

and he causes grace, which is the means of leading man to salvation (Preus, 1969:130-2).

Like most Reformed covenant theologians, though applied differently, Biel's understanding of the *pactum* is essential in shaping his views on justification. "God," says Biel, "has established the rule [covenant] that whoever turns to him and does what he can will receive forgiveness of sins from God" (*Quoted in Oberman, 1966:173*).

Justification is, therefore, a matter of cooperation with divine grace which results in a synergistic view of salvation. Biel, like Ockham before him, taught that God rewards sinners, meritoriously, upon their turning from "love of self" to "love of God" and fulfilling, according to their ability, the Law of God. God, consequently, overlooks their sins and treats them as if they had fulfilled the terms of the covenant (Oberman, 1963:147-57). Moreover, as Biel emphasizes, the link between doing *quod in se est* (that which is in yourself) and the remission of sin is provided by the covenant, rather than by the nature of entities themselves. McGrath (2005:114) echoes similar thoughts in his assessment of Biel's theology of the covenant: "Gabriel Biel interprets the axiom *facienti quod in se est* to mean that God is under obligation to give the first grace to the person who desists from sin. However, this does not mean that humans are capable of remitting their own sin. For, as we have already noted, the link between doing *quod in se est* and the remission of sin is provided by the covenant, rather than by the nature of the entities themselves." Biel's teaching, known as Franciscan *Pactum* theology, was in sharp contradistinction to the teaching that would emerge later in the teachings of Luther, Calvin, and Owen.

However, even though there is some discontinuity, there is a clear connection between the covenant and justification in the medieval theologians, a connection that, no doubt, will not have been lost to Owen.

2.3 Sixteenth-Century Covenant Theology

Sixteenth-century Reformed orthodoxy turned to covenant theology to give redemptive historical expression to their exegetical, biblical and systematic theology. Orthodox Lutheranism came to reject Reformed covenant theology because they saw in it a confusion between Law and Gospel. However, while orthodox Lutheranism basically rejected Reformed covenant theology, Luther did make positive use of the covenant concept in both his earlier (1513) and later (post-1517) writings (Lillback, 2001:58-80).

The major Reformed theologians used the concept of the covenant, in varying degrees, as a polemical tool against the Anabaptists, Catholics, and Lutherans. While many Reformed theologians contributed to the development of covenant theology, we will limit ourselves to those most likely to have influenced the subject of our study, John Owen.

2.3.1 Ulrich Zwingli

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) is, according to scholarly consensus, looked at as the founder of Reformed covenant theology (Reymond, 1998:503). While there are no references to Zwingli in Owen's writings or are there any of Zwingli's works in Owen's library, the importance of Zwingli to covenant theology cannot go unnoticed

since Owen stands in the same tradition as Zwingli and echoes many of the same views on the covenant, particularly the unity of the two testaments.

While some (Karlberg, 2000:20) have argued that Zwingli developed his covenant theology in response to the Anabaptists, Cottrell has argued convincingly that Zwingli was using covenant language well before his debates with the Anabaptists over the place of children in the new covenant church (1971:81). Similar to Owen, as we shall see, Zwingli argued for the inclusion of infants in the Christian church on the grounds that there has been one covenant of grace between God and his people. Starting from Adam, the recipient of the *protoevangelium* in Genesis 3:15, and clarified with Noah, Abraham and Moses, the covenant was confirmed with the death of Jesus Christ (Ibid:173, 243). Zwingli argues that since there is one people of God, because of the continuity of salvific history, throughout redemptive history, children, who were included in the old covenant church, remain in the new covenant church. New Testament baptism replaces Old Testament circumcision. Williams (1962:131) argues that “Zwingli based his assimilation of New Covenantal baptism and Old Covenantal circumcision on Tertullian and Lactantius.” Bullinger, it seems, first pointed out to Zwingli these patristic texts demonstrating the unity of the Old and New Covenants and consequently the equivalence of circumcision and baptism (Ibid).

The covenant of grace, as formulated by Zwingli, was decisive in properly understanding the Reformation doctrine of *Sola Fide* which Zwingli claimed to have developed before Luther. Requisite to Zwingli’s theology was the Pauline doctrine of the representative headship of Adam. Zwingli maintained that in Adam all, descending by ordinary generation, stand guilty before God. But, that which is lost in

the First Adam, through his transgression in the garden, is restored in the Second Adam, Jesus Christ, because of his perfect obedience to the law of God. Christ's obedience is imputed to the believing sinner as the ground of justification (Zwingli, 1922, 2:41).

The nature of the covenant, according to Zwingli, was both bilateral and conditional. Trinterud alleges that this approach makes salvation contingent upon human fulfillment of conditions (1951:45). By contrast, Bierma has rightly contended that for Zwingli "the distribution of divine covenant favor is based solely on God's eternal decision, his free election... The faith by which they finally do respond is a gift of God bestowed on His elect, and works of obedience are the natural outgrowth of that faith" (1996:34-5). This, as we will noted, is very much in line with how Owen formulates aspects of the covenant regarding continuity, discontinuity, conditionality and the soteriological place of justification in relation to sanctification.

2.3.2 Heinrich Bullinger

Heinrich Bullinger (1504-1575) was among the pre-eminent Reformed theologians of the sixteenth century. His influence was such that Wallace (1965:37) has argued that the writings of Bullinger and Calvin were most influential in England during Owen's time. Similarly, Collinson (1985:214-15) argues that Bullinger and Vermigli were the most important (cf. Von Rohr, 1986:2, 31). Owen possessed two of Bullinger's works (Millington, 1:10, 12) but not *De Testamento Sue Foedere Dei Unico et Aeterno*, which represents the fullest exposition of covenant theology among the Swiss Reformers. Of the three references to Bullinger, which are positive, in Owen's works, none of them relate directly to Bullinger's covenant theology. However, given

Bullinger's importance to Reformed covenant theology and the strong likelihood that Owen would have been familiar with Bullinger's covenant theology, we will briefly delineate the important aspects of his covenantal thought.

Like Zwingli, Bullinger insisted upon the essential unity of the one covenant of grace that manifested itself in varying degrees through the history of biblical revelation. The changes in the various administrations of the covenant, culminating in the new covenant, did not cause substantial differences to doctrines like the church, the faith, the Spirit, or the recipients of the sacraments (Bullinger, 1849-52, 3.8:283). These changes in the covenant of grace, according to Bullinger, relate to the "manner of administration ... a few accidents, and certain circumstances.... In the substantial and chiefest points, ye can find nothing altered or changed" (Ibid, 3.8:294; cf. 3.6:170). The covenant of grace acts as the umbrella in which there is one message of salvation in Christ by faith (Ibid; 3.8:236, 284-5). These views essentially mirror Owen's and thus shows the continuity between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century covenant theology.

Bullinger argues that the most explicit – and perspicuous – example of the covenant between God and man is found in Genesis 17. The two parties involved are God and Abraham and his seed. The conditional character of the covenant is found in the terms laid down by God to Abraham. God will be to Abraham and his seed their God while Abraham and his seed must fulfill the conditions of the covenant by walking perfectly before God, thus making the covenant bilateral. Walking before God is, however, the result of the spiritual blessings bestowed by God on the elect who are the beneficiaries of the one and eternal covenant of grace. The faith, which justifies,

is a gift of God bestowed on his elect. It is “neither of our own nature, nor of our own merits, but it is by the grace of God poured into us through the Holy Spirit, which is given into our hearts” (Bullinger, 2, 3.8:251). This teaching, as we will see, is firmly in line with the teaching of Owen as he relates justification to the covenant.

In light of what we have so far argued, it should be noted that covenant bilateralism is not necessarily co-extensive with Arminianism or Pelagianism. Based on an analysis of Bullinger’s *Compendium*, Muller writes: “Duopleuric language describes not man’s entrance into the covenant but his life under the covenant ... the larger systematic context of Bullinger’s *Compendium* makes clear that this view of covenant does not conflict with the *sola gratia*” (1986:41). In Bullinger’s case, a monergistic soteriology is upheld when he defines justification as given *gratis* by the grace of Christ. Synergism is rejected because faith, as the condition of justification and the source from which all good works flow, is the gift of God (Ibid).

2.3.4 John Calvin

If the question over whether Calvin believed in a “limited atonement” is the most vexing for scholars today (See Peterson, 1999), the question over whether he was a covenant theologian comes a close second. Remarkably, Perry Miller makes the contention that the covenant idea is absent from Calvin’s theology. According to Miller, seventeenth-century Puritans added to their theology the concept of the covenant of grace to counter the problems of Arminianism and Antinomianism (Miller, 1939:366-7). In relating seventeenth century Puritans to Calvin, Miller writes “... their imposition of the covenant doctrine upon the system of Calvin produced at last in the New England theology an altogether different philosophy from any propounded in Geneva” (Ibid:374). Holding with Miller is the dispensational writer

Charles Ryrie who argues that Johannes Cocceius first produced covenant theology in reaction to Calvin's rigid predestinarianism (Ryrie, 1965:179-80). McCoy (1956) fails to mention Calvin as one of the founders of covenant theology. George Marsden criticizes Miller's overstatement, but candidly admits that "the covenant is not prominent in the *Institutes*" (1970:91-105). Lillback (2001) and Anthony A. Hoekema (1962) argue that "Calvin develops an Extensive if Incomplete Covenant Theology" (Lillback, 2001:23). Lillback's work goes a long way in rectifying the "Calvin versus the Calvinists" error propounded by Miller.

It is worth mentioning that of all the Reformers Calvin appears to have most influenced Owen. Owen owned many of Calvin's works (Millington, 1:2) and translated Calvin's commentary on Jeremiah, a commentary that gives unique insight into Calvin's views on the covenant. Of all the sixteenth-century Reformers it was Calvin whom Owen referred to most in his writings (95 times); almost always positively (4:229). That Owen read Calvin is without question. However, whether Owen's covenant theology was influenced by Calvin is another question which depends, of course, on whether Calvin can be considered a "Covenant Theologian".

The 1559 edition of Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* make plain that the covenant concept was certainly present in Calvin's thought. For example, the term *pactum* and related words (*paciscor* and *pactio*) occur 35 times. *Foedus* and related terms occur 154 times and *testamentum* occurs 84 times. The concept of the covenant, therefore, is mentioned at least 273 times and this excludes the vast amount

of writing Calvin did in his commentaries.³ That Calvin used these words does not, of course, mean that he was a covenant theologian in the mould of, say, Johannes Cocceius or Herman Witsius. However, when we look at how Calvin applied these words to his theology, it becomes obvious that Calvin was in some sense a covenant theologian.

Calvin, like Bullinger and Zwingli, insists upon the unity and eternity of the covenant in several places. For example, he writes, “The covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in the mode of dispensation” (Calvin, 1960, 1:429).

Furthermore, “The spiritual covenant was also common to the patriarchs Adam, Abel, Noah, Abraham, and other spiritual patriarchs cleaved to God by such illumination of the Word” (Ibid:434).

In maintaining the unity of the covenant Calvin is careful to place the mosaic covenant not in tension with but harmoniously along the Abrahamic covenant so that there is only one covenant. Sinclair Ferguson (1995:28), when comparing Calvin and Owen on their application of the covenant made at Sinai, argues that other Puritans, though not all, adopted Calvin’s view that it was part of the covenant of grace, since it was given during the post-Adamic administration. More of this will be discussed in chapter three as we look specifically at Owen’s application of the Sinaitic covenant.

Concerning the unity between the covenant of grace and the Sinaitic covenant, Calvin writes: “God has never made any other covenant than that which he made freely with

³ These figures are made possible because of Ford Lewis Battles’ *Concordance to Calvin’s Corpus Reformation Edition of the Institutes of 1559* which was prepared by computer for Battles’ translation.

Abraham, and at length confirmed by the hand of Moses” (Calvin, 1979:127). This is, perhaps, the most significant difference between the Genevan Reformer and Owen who did not hold to the view that the Sinaitic covenant was part of the covenant of grace. Calvin here parts with Luther’s “law and gospel” distinction in favor of his concept of *distinctio sed non separatio* (distinct but not separate). McGrath argues that this is Calvin’s basic theological principle (McGrath, 1988:183). While Owen does not share Calvin’s view on Sinai, he does hold to this same theological principle.

Certainly, then, Calvin vigorously insisted upon the essential unity of the Old and New Covenants. Yet, he is conscious that the two covenants are different in their administration. He writes, “What then? You will ask: will not difference remain between the Old and New Testaments? What is to become of the many passages of Scripture wherein they are contrasted as utterly different? I freely admit the differences in Scripture, to which attention is called, but in such a way as not to detract from its established unity” (Calvin, 1960:449).

He then subsequently enumerates five differences between the Old and New Covenants; differences that show, beyond doubt, that Calvin was very aware of the covenant motif in Scripture. Moreover, these differences show the carefully nuanced covenant theology of the Reformer who has been accused of not even using the covenant concept (See Miller, 1939:366). Lillback provides a useful diagram showing that the differences between the old and new testaments relate only to the externals and not to the substance of the covenant (2001:151).

*A Summary of Calvin's View of the Differences
between the Old and New Covenants:
They Are Distinct in Administration*

<i>Old Covenant – Before Christ</i>	<i>New Covenant – After Christ</i>
1. Material and temporal blessings	1. Direct mediation upon spiritual blessings
2. Images and ceremonies as types of Christ	2. Full revelation of Christ in His incarnation
3. The OT law is letter that kills	3. The NT gospel is spirit that makes alive
a. The OT law in the narrow sense condemns because it is the demand of law without the Holy Spirit's aid	a. In the New Covenant the law is written upon the heart by the Spirit in the gospel and is accompanied by the forgiveness of sins
b. The OT law in the broad sense includes the gospel by borrowing from it the promises of Christ	b. The gospel of the New Covenant has been the experience of God's children since the beginning of the world
4. The Old Covenant was characterized by bondage and fear	4. The New Covenant is characterized by freedom and trust
5. The Old Covenant was limited to Israel	5. The New Covenant is extended to all nations (Ibid:151).

This diagram, when compared with Owen's covenant theology, shows remarkable similarity between the Genevan Reformer and Owen.

Most of this discussion of the covenant, in Calvin, so far has dealt with the continuity of the covenant of grace. Nevertheless, Clark (2001) argues that Calvin taught three covenants. They are the substance of what became classic Reformed federal theology: the covenant of redemption in eternity (*pactum salutis*), the covenant of works before the fall and the covenant of grace after the fall (Ibid).

Concerning the *pactum salutis* we may adduce the following to support Clark's contention. Regarding the pre-temporality of the covenant, Calvin writes: "We call predestination God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man" (1960, 1:927-8). Moreover, he teaches, in line with Witsius and Cocceius, that the covenant was made with Christ. "Now it is useful to know this, for we are taught that God is ever so consistent with himself, that his covenant, which he has made with Christ and with all his members, never fails" (1979:127). Though it is clear Calvin does not use the term "covenant of redemption" (*pactum salutis*), he does implicitly hint at such an idea and may have understood it, like Turretin, as an extension of the covenant of grace.

According to Lillback (2001:178-79), there are salvific benefits that emanate from the covenant of grace for Calvin. The saving benefits found in the covenant include: "Christ as Redeemer, salvation, eternal life, adoption, redemption, gospel, union with God, eternal salvation, life, blessedness, inheritance, privilege, access to God, ... forgiveness of sins ... and eternal happiness, all of which is due to God's covenantal mercy and grace." Though there are many blessings, essentially the double benefits (*duplex beneficium*) of justification and sanctification are essential to a proper understanding of Calvin's covenant theology (Ibid, 181-82). Calvin often used the term *beneficium* to describe general benefits, especially the benefit of redemption. Clark (2005:xix) notes that Peter Martyr also used the term in both senses, but not the expression *duplex beneficium*. While Clark is correct in saying that "the expression does not seem to have captured the imagination of the rest of the tradition" (Ibid), with the exception of Olevian, who is the object of his study, it is certainly true that the concept is present in later writers like Owen, and Perkins for example.

2.3.5 Wolfgang Musculus

Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563), reformer of Augsburg, was among the eminent theologians of the Reformation period. We know his influence extended to England because Owen possessed a copy of Musculus' *Opera omnia* and seven volumes of his *loci communes* (Millington, 1:2) and references him five times in his writings, referring to him as one of the "mighty names" (10:488) along with Calvin, Augustine, Twisse and Vossius whom Owen differed with on the necessity of the atonement.

Musculus made several important contributions to the Reformed doctrine of the covenant (Bierma, 1996:49-50). But, at the same time, much of his theology of the covenant remained consistent with those who had gone before him. One particular new insight of Musculus is the differentiation between a *foedus generale* (Genesis 8:21-22) and a *foedus speciale*; the general being temporary, the special being everlasting. As Bierma notes, concerning the *foedus generale*, "it is clear that [Musculus] has in mind here God's postdiluvian promise to preserve the regular cycles of day and night, summer and winter, and seedtime and harvest and never again to destroy every living creature" (1996:50). The *foedus speciale* has reference only to the elect and believing. In other words, it refers to Abraham, the father of all believers and his seed (Musculus, 1578:285-86). Musculus believed, consistent with Reformed covenant theologians of the sixteenth-century, that the *foedus speciale* was bilateral. Again, this is not to posit a synergistic view of salvation but merely to say that those in covenant with God respond as his partners by being upright and holy (Musculus, 1578:288).

One of the hallmarks of Reformed covenant theology, as we have seen, has been the insistence upon the essential unity of the Old and New Testaments concerning the salvation of the elect who all placed their faith in Christ. Musculus, as well, posits no substantial differences in the *ordo salutis* before and after Christ. For Musculus there is “one God of all There is one Lord Savior and redeemer of all, Christ Jesus; there is only holy spirit ... *there is one faith* (emphasis ours), ... one people, and one Catholic Church of the elect, which comprehendeth all the elect and faithful from the beginning of the world until the end; and there is one only and perpetual covenant of God, made and confirmed with all his elect” (Ibid:291). The covenantal unity posited by Musculus so that salvation is by faith in both the old and new testaments bears distinct similarity to formulations that would come from the pen of Owen a century later.

2.3.6 Zacharias Ursinus

Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583) is famous for authoring, along with Casper Olevianus, the *Heidelberg Catechism*. Ursinus’ influence on Reformed federal-theological dogmatics has not gone unnoticed. He has been the subject of much recent debate concerning whether he was the first to introduce a covenant of works into the Reformed theological tradition and for what reasons he did so (Bierma, 1999:96-110). It is safe to say that it was Ursinus who first introduced the term *foedus naturale* (“natural covenant”, later known as the covenant of works) into Reformed theology, though the idea of a pre-fall administration based upon law-keeping, with the hope of eternal life, is clearly present in Calvin and, perhaps, even Bullinger.

The importance, then, of Ursinus to our study cannot be understated; for, the covenant of works is vital to Owen's covenant theology and formulation of justification. Owen possessed Ursinus' *Corpus doctrinae Christianae sive catechismus* (Hanover, 1639) (Millington, 1:12) which would have contained much of Ursinus' writings on the covenant.

The controversy that surrounds Ursinus centers on his concept of the *foedus naturale* which, according to Karl Barth, shifted the emphasis in Reformed theology from grace to law (1956, 4.1:155). According to Barth, Ursinus' introduction of a covenant of works was responsible for a somewhat legalistic emphasis that later Reformed theologians, like Johannes Cocceius, would never overcome (Ibid, 4.1:61-64). Holmes Rolston III in 1972 in *John Calvin Versus The Westminster Confession* argues along similar lines to Barth. His Calvin versus the Calvinists thesis posits that Reformed orthodoxy had fallen into a type of legalism that was thoroughly uncharacteristic of the Genevan Reformer (1972:36). Bierma (1999:96-110) deals well with the false dichotomy between "Calvin versus the Calvinists" thesis regarding the *foedus naturale* by arguing that the law-gospel antithesis, resulting from the *foedus naturale*, actually preserves the gracious nature of the *foedus gratiae* and guards against antinomianism.

The three references in the *Catachesis maior* clearly teach a covenant of works extant in the writings of Ursinus:

Q. 10 *What does the divine law teach?*

A. It teaches the kind of covenant God established with human beings in creation [*quale in creatione foedus cum homine Deus iniverit*] ...

Q. 36 *What is the difference between the law and the gospel?*

A. The law contains the natural covenant established by God with humanity in creation [*foedus naturale, in creatione a Deo cum hominibus initum*], that is, it is known by human beings by nature, it requires perfect obedience from us to God, and promises eternal life to those who keep it but threatens eternal punishment to those who do not ...

Q. 135 *Why is it necessary that the satisfaction and righteousness of Christ be imputed to us for us to be righteous before God?*

A. Because God, who is immutably righteous and true, wants to receive us into the covenant of grace in such a way that he nevertheless does nothing against the covenant established in creation [*foedus in creatione initum*] (Quoted in Ward, 2003:5)⁴

According to Ursinus, the institution of the *foedus gratiae*, as opposed to the *foedus naturale*, does not change the terms of the covenant obligations however. In order for God, in any covenant, to reward eternal life, there must be perfect conformity to the stipulations of God's law. The difference, however, in the *foedus gratiae*, is that Christ fulfills the terms of the *foedus naturale* on behalf of the elect (Ursinus, 1954:20).

The role of the Holy Spirit is given a prominent role in Ursinus' covenant schema. The roles of the Triune God-head are distinguished so that the Father initiates the covenant, the Son mediates on behalf of the elect, and the Spirit applies the benefits of justification and sanctification (*duplex beneficium*) (Ibid:29-31). Bierma notes that "Zwingli, Bullinger, Musculus, and especially Calvin also perceived these as operations of the Holy Spirit but not as explicitly *covenantal* functions" like Ursinus (1996:60).

⁴ This English translation is based upon an unpublished translation from the Latin by Fred H. Klooster and John Medendorp.

Sixteenth-century Reformed interpretation of the covenant had several key elements which have been discussed above. From Zwingli to Ursinus we see a marked emphasis on the essential unity of the Old and New Testaments because of the nature of the covenant of grace which begins with the *protoevangelium* and is fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of Christ. While the *foedus gratiae* (covenant of grace) is distinguished from the *foedus operum* or *foedus naturale* (covenant of works) by Ursinus, even in Calvin we see elements similar to the formulations posited by Ursinus. The third covenant which we find implicit in many of the sixteenth-century Reformed theologians, the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption), would find its clearest and fullest expression in the Reformed covenant theologians of the seventeenth century to whom we now turn to.

2.4 Seventeenth-Century Covenant Theology

2.4.1 William Ames

William Ames (1576-1633), professor of theology at Franeker in the Netherlands, was one of the most influential theologians in the early seventeenth century. He was educated at Christ College, Cambridge under the great Puritan, William Perkins (1558-1602). His learnedness earned him the title “the learned Dr. Ames.” John Eusden, in the introduction to Ames’ *Marrow of Theology*, comments that “No previous thinker in the Calvinist-Puritan tradition analyzed the covenant of grace with an acuteness comparable to that of the Franeker professor” (1997:52). It is certain, therefore, that Ames would have had a significant theological influence in seventeenth-century England. Not surprisingly, therefore, we find in Owen’s library a copy of Ames’ most influential work, *Medulla theologica (The Marrow of Theology)* (Millington, 1:16).

In *The Marrow of Theology* Ames treats the subject of the covenant using a method that Owen would later adopt. Ames speaks of a covenant of works in this manner: “In this covenant the moral deeds of the intelligent creature lead either to happiness as a reward or to unhappiness as a punishment. The latter is deserved, the former not” (1997:111). He spends far more time, however, on an exposition of the covenant of grace which ended up being his most significant contribution to the development of covenant theology.

That the covenant of grace is one and the same from the beginning (Genesis 3:15) is a basic presupposition that guides Ames’ thinking. He notes, however, that the application and administration has differed in each particular administration. There is a progression from the imperfect to the perfect, which means, for him, that the “manner of administration of the covenant is twofold: One points to the Christ who will appear (imperfect) and the other to the Christ who has appeared (perfect)” (Ibid:202). In the history of salvation, he divides up the covenant of grace into periods from Adam to Abraham, Abraham to Moses, and Moses to Christ. These divisions, identical to Owen’s in *Theologoumena*, represent a biblico-theological approach to the unfolding nature of God’s redemptive purposes. But, even in this approach Ames is concerned to speak about Christian doctrines, common to systematic theology, like election, justification, sanctification and glorification. In each redemptive period there are, however, different applications of the aforementioned doctrines.

In the period from Adam to Abraham, Ames notes the following doctrines in relation to the covenant of grace:

“From Adam to Abraham it should be noted, first, that redemption by Christ and the application of Christ was promised in general. It was to be carried out by the seed of the woman in order to banish the works of the devil, or sin and death. Gen 3.15; Rom. 16:20 ...

Second, calling was evident in the distinction between the seed of the woman and the seed of the devil, and between the sons of God and the sons of men, Gen. 6:2.

Third, the way of justification was set forth by expiatory sacrifices offered and accepted for sins.

Fourth, adoption was indicated both by the title of sons, common to all the faithful at that time, and by the translation of Enoch into the heavenly inheritance.

Fifth, sanctification was expressly taught by the prophets and foreshadowed by typical oblations and rites of sacrifice, Jude 14; Rom. 12:1.

Sixth, glorification was publicly sealed by the example of Enoch and the saving of Noah and his family from the flood. 1 Peter 3:20, 21” (Ibid:203).

We can only fully appreciate the nuances of Ames’ approach to the covenant when we compare the period from Adam to Abraham with the period from Moses to Christ.

For example, Ames speaks of doctrines like justification and sanctification, but with a different application of each doctrine because of history of revelation had progressed further.

“From the time of Moses to Christ, these same things were further adumbrated by extraordinary and ordinary means.

Redemption and its application were extraordinary. They were signified, first, in the deliverance from Egypt through the ministry of Moses, who was a type of Christ, Matt. 2:15, and by the entrance into the land of Canaan through the ministry of Joshua, another type of Christ. Second, in the brass serpent, by looking at which men who were about to die were restored to health, John 3:14; 12:32. (Ibid:204).

In the ordinary sense Christ and redemption were foreshadowed by the high priest, the altars, and sacrifices for sins.

Justification was shown in many sacrifices and ablutions and in the sacrament of the Passover.

Adoption was shown in the dedication of the firstborn to God.

Sanctification was set forth in all the offerings and gifts as well as in the observances which had anything to do with cleanliness.

Glorification was shown in the inheritance of the promised land and the communion which they had with God in the holy of holies” (Ibid:205).

Ames next speaks of the administration of the covenant from the coming of Christ to the end of the world. Christ’s coming ushered in a new administration that would continue until the end of the world, hence the New Testament (Ibid:205-6). The New Testament differs from the former administration in quality and quantity. For example, its difference in quality is in clarity and freedom.

“Clarity occurs, first in the more distinct expression than heretofore of the doctrine of grace and salvation through Christ and through faith in him (together with other kindred points of the doctrine). Second, it is expressed not in types and shadows, but in a most manifest fashion (Ibid:206).

Freedom comes, first, in doing away with government by law, or the intermixture of the covenant of works, which held the ancient people in a certain bondage. The spirit of adoption, though never wholly denied to believers, is also most properly said to be communicated under the New Testament, in which the perfect state for believers most clearly shines forth Second, the yoke of ceremonial law is taken away in that it was a mortgage bond held against sinners, forbade the use of some things in the nature indifferent, commanded many burdensome observances of other things of the same nature, and veiled the truth itself with many carnal ceremonies” (Ibid).

Ames further elaborates the difference between the Old and New Testaments by speaking of how the new differs from the former *intensively* and *extensively* (Ibid:207). It differs intensively in terms of the application of the Spirit; the new

administration produces a more spiritual life (2 Corinthians 3:18) (Ibid). The administration differs extensively insofar as the Gentiles are now heirs of the promises that were once confined to Israel (Ibid).

As we have seen, Ames' formulation of the covenant of grace, in starting with Genesis 3:15, shares many similarities with his predecessors. But, in speaking of various Christian doctrines, justification for example, as they relate to each successive period of revelation, he breaks new and important ground, ground that would no doubt influence Owen's understanding of redemptive history in light of the covenant and justification.

2.4.2 Johannes Cocceius

Johannes Cocceius (1603-1669) is one of the most distinguished covenant theologians of the seventeenth century (Van Asselt, 2001:2ff). Cocceius studied at Franeker in the Netherlands where he studied under Ames. Van Asselt writes, of his time at Franeker, "he became so accomplished that even the great philologist Sixtinus Amama ... could benefit from his scholarship" (2001:25-26). He spent the rest of his academic career teaching theology and philology at Bremen, Franeker and Leiden (Ibid:23-31).

Owen possessed several of Cocceius' writings (Millington, 1684, 1:2, 5, 15, 17) including his most famous work on the covenants *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (1648). In Owen's treatise on justification he makes a reference that implies he was familiar with Cocceius' writings when he argues that the covenant of grace is "not a reformation of the dispensation of the old, or a reduction of it ...(as

some imagine it to be)” (5:276). Here he seems to reject Cocceius’ doctrine of the progressive abrogation of the covenant of works. Regarding this novel theological construction, Van Asselt writes: “One of the most remarkable constructs in the theological system of Johannes Cocceius is the doctrine of the so-called abrogations or annulments. This doctrine, closely related to the doctrines of the covenant of works and covenant of grace, is found in both of Cocceius’ major systematic works, the *Summa Doctrinae* of 1648 and the *Summa Theologiae* of 1662. Briefly stated, this doctrine depicts five stages (*gradus*) through which God leads humanity to eternal life, and in which the consequences of the violation of the covenant of works through sin are gradually nullified” (2001:271).

Like Owen who believed that “all theology is ... based on a covenant” (17:28), the covenant held constitutive significance for Cocceius. Van Asselt correctly notes that the covenant is not “merely one topic among the many *loci* of the theological system; rather it is the hub upon which the whole wheel of dogmatics turns” (2001:1). Bierma noted the same of Olevianus (2005:22). We note therefore the significance of the covenant concept for some of the major theologians in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.

Some have argued that the doctrine known as the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption) finds its origin in Cocceius (Ibid:227). However, Clark (2005:177-80) marshals evidence that the idea (*pactum salutis*) was explicit in Olevianus well before Cocceius. Notwithstanding this fact, this doctrine in particular was very carefully worked out by Cocceius, perhaps more so than any other theologian leading up to Owen. For Cocceius, the *pactum salutis* was not a covenant made with fallen

humanity. Rather it is a pact between the Father and the Son where the Son assumes the role of Mediator in submission to the will of the Father. The Son, acting as Head and Redeemer of the elect, those whom the Father had foreknown from eternity, willingly offers himself to procure their salvation (Cocceius, 1648:88).⁵ The Holy Spirit effectually applies the benefits of redemption to those whom the Father had given to the Son (Ibid:89).⁶

The *pactum salutis* has an obvious relation to the covenant of grace. In the covenant of grace Christ reconciles, as Mediator, two parties; sinful man and God. Christ is not himself a party in the covenant but acts the representative of sinful man. Van Asselt is right to suggest that it is a mistake to identify the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption and the *foedus gratiae* (covenant of grace) (2001:242).

The covenant of grace, as well as the covenant of works, is defined, by Cocceius, as a “treaty of peace and friendship” wherein there are obligations, promises and rights (eternal life). This is a covenant made, by God, with sinners and it is gracious. That is to say that the law of faith (*lex fidei*) now supersedes the law of works (*lex operum*). Christ, however, rather than humanity, is obedient to the law of works (Cocceius, 1648:71). As a result, believers’ justification is not apart from the fulfillment of the law’s demands.

⁵ “Inest tamen in hoc Testamento divino *pactum*, quo nititur eius firmitas. Pactum scilicet non cum homine lapso, sed cum Mediatore. Scilicet voluntas Patris Filium dantis caput et *Redemptorem* populi praecogniti, et voluntas Filii, sese ad hanc salutem procurandam sistens, habet rationem conventionis.”

⁶ Spiritus Sanctus potentiam Deitatis exercet in regenerandis nobis, & charitatem in uniendis nobis Deo, & ad haereditatem obsignandis. Per quem et Pater et Filius in nobis habitare dicitur.

The third covenant that Cocceius gives expression to is what is commonly understood as the covenant of works (*foedus operum*). Other various terms have been used historically to define this pre-fall arrangement between Adam and God. Matthias Martini, Cocceius' teacher, uses the term *foedus naturae* (covenant of nature); Ursinus, as we noted earlier, used the term *foedus naturale*; Olevianus uses the term *foedus creationis* (covenant of creation) to designate the covenant with Adam; and *foedus legale* has also been used in an attempt to centralize the place of the law in the pre-fall arrangement. Cocceius does use the term *foedus legale*, but, as noted above, much more prevalent is the term "friendship with God" (*amicitia cum Deo*) (1648:12). To obtain righteousness before God there are, spoken of in Scripture, two ways; the one of works and the one of faith. In the covenant of works God gives the law to Adam with the requirement that Adam fulfills that law. But, Adam's acts are still contingent upon the goodness of God (the *bonitas Dei*). This, however, does not mean that the covenant of works is gracious. Van Asselt explains, "Nevertheless, the relationship that obtains in the covenant of works is not one of grace. The entire existence of humanity in the covenant of works is grounded in the good-pleasure of God, manifested as the goodness of God The covenant of works arises from and is based in, the *bonitas Dei*" (2001:260-61).

Furthermore, Cocceius believed that man, particularly Adam, was created *for* a covenant relationship, not created *in* a covenant relationship. Creation and the covenant of works are not co-extensive for Cocceius. Moreover, the covenant of works is monopleuric in its origin, but dipleuric in its operation.

While much more could be said of Cocceius' fascinating theological constructs, we are content to show an explicit threefold covenantal pattern that guides his soteriology; understood as the covenants of grace, works and redemption. This threefold pattern is explicit in Owen and shows the consistency between English and Continental Reformed covenant theology.

2.4.3 English Covenant Theology

The seventeenth-century Reformed theological context was dominated by the covenant concept. The Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), according to Warfield (1931:56), has, as its "architectonic principle", the doctrine of the covenant that guides the systematic theology of the Confession. This importance of this document to Owen can be, as Trueman puts it, "scarcely overestimated" (1998:17). Trueman continues, [Owen's] substantial agreement with the Westminster Confession of Faith is clear from the Savoy Declaration of 1658, for the drafting of which he was largely responsible" (1998:18). The doctrine of the covenant, then, was a pervasive concept in seventeenth century creeds and confessions.

However, it should be noted that there are few references to English theologians, apart from Ames and Baxter, in Owen's writings. Owen's library does contain much Puritan literature, but we note in his *Works* that he only refers in passing to English Puritans such as Perkins, Greenham, Preston, Sibbes, and Whitaker (11:487). As Rehman notes, "On the surface of his writings the influence of English theology appears to be small ..." (2002:23). As a result, extensive overviews of English covenant theology in the seventeenth century is not in our purview. However, that is not to say that the English influence is non-existent. So we will examine those who

would have most likely influenced Owen so far as we can tell. Also, we will seek to show that Owen's theology is consistent with seventeenth-century English covenant theology.

Owen's concept, as seen in *Theologoumena*, of an organic concept of revelation that grows by degrees seems to be developed, as we have seen, especially by the influence of Cocceius. But, we also note this similar concept in the likes of John Cameron (1579-1625) and John Ball (1585-1640). Rehnman notes that in 1608 Cameron "delivered his theses on federal theology at Heidelberg, which posthumously published as *De triplici Dei cum homine foedere*, where the obscurity of revelation was said to be made clearer historically by various degrees (*varii gradus*)" (2002:164). This method, then, of unfolding revelation is characteristic of Owen's approach to biblical theology.

Owen owned several of Ball's works, most notably his *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace* (1645) (Millington, 2:4) and *Of Faith and of the Covenant of Grace* (1637) (Ibid, 2:9). In Ball's work, *A Treatise on the Covenant of Grace* he contends that revelation developed from obscurity to clarity and takes place by degrees (*gradus*). This revelation, from obscurity to clarity, is threefold: from Adam to Abraham, Abraham to Moses, and Moses to Christ (1645:56). Echoing Cameron, Ball's method is very similar, as we will note in chapter three, to Owen's concept of unfolding revelation where God's redemptive purposes in time are gradually unfolded in the covenant of grace.

As we have noted the Westminster Confession of Faith and Savoy Declaration contain similar teaching on the covenants. The teaching of these two documents reflects the Reformed orthodoxy of the day. Both documents set up a twofold covenantal structure, common to Reformed theology in the sixteenth century, of works and grace (chapter seven in both). In 7.2 of the Westminster Confession we read “The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience.” In contradistinction to this covenant there is the covenant of grace which is described in 7.3 as: “Man by his fall having made himself incapable of life by that covenant, the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace: wherein he freely offered 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 life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.” There is, however, no mention in either of the covenant of redemption which was clearly articulated by Owen in his commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews. Moreover, unlike Owen, the Westminster Confessions do not separate the Sinai covenant from the covenant of grace. However, what we do see in both the Westminster Confession and the Savoy Declaration is a two-fold covenant schema of works and grace, covenants that were both an integral part of Owen’s theology.

The Westminster Confession of Faith’s “architectonic principle” means, of course, that other doctrines are developed in light of this governing motif. Warfield expresses this well,

The [Confession] is distributed into thirty-three comprehensive chapters. After an opening chapter “Of the Holy Scripture” as the source of divine truth ... there are successively taken up the topics of God and the Trinity, the Divine Decree, Creation, Providence, the Fall and Sin, and then God’s covenant with Man, and Christ the Mediator of the Covenant, while subsequent treatment is given to the states in the *ordo salutis* in the order first of the benefits conferred under the Covenant (Vocation, Justification, Adoption, Sanctification) and then the duties required under the Covenant (Faith, Repentance, Good Works, Perseverance, Assurance) (1931:57).

Similarly, Ferguson (1982:38) notes how the covenant theology of the Westminster Confession has similar implications. He argues that covenant theology inevitably influenced the Confession’s teaching on theological loci’s such as God, the condition of man in sin, the work of Christ as Savior, and the pattern of spiritual experience, which is thoroughly evangelical, in which men are brought from *under* the covenant of works *into* the covenant of grace.

We note here, what we will argue for Owen, that the doctrine of justification fits into the larger context of the blessings conferred by the covenant. This similarity represents the significance for how covenant theology was framed in the seventeenth century among Reformed theologians.

Owen wrote two prefaces to works on covenant theology in the seventeenth century. They are his preface to Patrick Gillespie’s work *The Ark of the Covenant Opened; or A Treatise of the Covenant of Redemption Between God and Christ as the Foundation of the Covenant of Grace* (1677) and Samuel Petto’s *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained: With an Exposition of the Covenant of Grace in the Principal Concernments of It* (1674).

In the case of Petto we note several important points of agreement between him and Owen. Like Owen, Petto speaks of the “oneness” of the covenant in both testaments, thus highlighting that salvation is to be found in Christ alone both for Jews and Gentiles (1674:16). The unity of the two testaments, as a result of the one covenant of grace, is a useful tool, for both Petto and Owen, in defending infant baptism (Petto, 1687:passim & Owen, 16:258-63; 19:256ff.). While Petto holds to a covenant of works and grace, his chief concern was to look at the relationship of the Sinaitic covenant, which he called the old covenant, to the covenant of grace (1674:passim). He, like Owen, did not take the view expressed by Calvin that the covenant made at Sinai was an administration of the covenant of grace. It was a different covenant altogether because the “Sinai Covenant is denied to be made before Israel’s coming out of Egypt; and therefore must be distinct, or another Covenant from that which promised special blessings in Christ” (Ibid:87). However, he argues, “I grant that the Sinai Covenant had a special relation to the Covenant of Grace, and was of great use” (Ibid:85). But, the covenant of grace is referred to as a better covenant and so it must be a different covenant than the old (Ibid:90). This view is particularly interesting in its seventeenth-century context because it tells us that Owen’s view, as we will see, that the Sinaitic covenant is *not* part of the administration of the covenant of grace, *contra* Calvin, is not without its supporters.

2.4.4 Conclusion

The goal, so far, of this chapter has been to set out a brief history of covenant theology. The importance of this is twofold. First, it is important that Owen is understood as a theologian who was very conscious of the Christian theological tradition; particularly the Western tradition and even more so the Reformed tradition.

As a result, the history of the covenant concept among certain thinkers, those whom we suspect would have most influenced Owen, is crucial if we are to understand why Owen said the things he did. Second, as a Reformed covenant theologian, Owen was not espousing something radically new in the seventeenth-century context. His formulation of the covenants of grace, works and redemption had been argued by various thinkers such as Calvin, Witsius, and Cocceius. These correlations are important, for they show us the “Calvin versus the Calvinists” thesis cannot stand up to the facts in light of the strong continuity between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed covenant theology.

Notwithstanding this fact, however, we will note that Owen does make some important contributions to the development of federal thought, especially as it concerns the place of the Mosaic covenant in the history of redemption and his concept of the nature of revelation as organic and progressive along covenantal lines. Moreover, we have noted that the covenant concept has constitutive significance for the doctrine of justification by faith. Our goal, then, in chapter three is to set forth Owen’s teachings on the covenant so that, in chapter four, we are able to relate his teachings on the covenants to the doctrine of justification and thus show the importance of the one to the other.

CHAPTER THREE

3.1 OWEN'S COVENANT THEOLOGY: A FOURFOLD SCHEMA

3.1.1 Introduction

John Owen's importance as a seventeenth-century Puritan theologian has been largely neglected when one compares him with his eclectic contemporary Richard Baxter. This fact is all the more remarkable as we consider his career as chaplain to Oliver Cromwell, Chancellor of Oxford University, preacher to Parliament, and by common consent the greatest theologian of the English speaking Puritans. Having said that, Owen has not been immune from criticism of varying degrees, which is, perhaps, to be expected given the massive literary output that emanated from his pen (See Clifford, 1990:96ff; Boersma, 1993:211-12). Some of these criticisms are aimed specifically at Owen's doctrine of the covenant and especially his formulation of the covenant of redemption.

While our primary concern will be to show how Owen's covenant theology impacts his soteriology, specifically justification by faith, we will also interact with some of those who have been critical of Owen's work on the covenants. This chapter will allow us to develop his statement, that all theology is based on a covenant (17:28), so that we can, in chapter four, examine this contention in light of the doctrine of *Sola Fide*.

Organization of Theology – A Covenantal Model

Unlike Francis Turretin, Johannes Wollebius and William James, for example, Owen did not write a systematic theology. Rehnman argues that Owen “wanted to liberate theology from human thinking and regarded systematization as illegitimate” (2002:156). The structure of Owen’s *Theologoumena* seems to buttress Rehman’s point, but, as we will see, there is a definite systematical order to his arguments, especially his work on justification in volume five of his *Works*.

Owen wrote one work of particular significance which embraced the whole of theology which in Latin reads: *Theologoumena Pantopada, sive, De Natura, Ortu Progressu, et Studio, Verae Theologiae (1661)* (*Works*, 17; recently translated and titled *Biblical Theology*). In it Owen follows the historical-economical method of federal theology. That is, the economy of salvation in its varying degrees unfolding, smaller to greater, over the course of history. There is very little secondary literature on this particular work of Owen’s, but as it is his most comprehensive statement of theology, it is of great importance to any understanding of his thought, particularly his covenant theology (Trueman, 1998:49).

Owen does not, however, wholly reject systematization in theology and sees some value in it. He writes: “The Holy Spirit hath not in the Scripture reduced and disposed its doctrines or supernatural truths into any system, order, or method. Into such a method are the principle of them disposed in our catechisms and systems of divinity, creeds, and confessions of faith; for whereas the doctrinal truths of Scripture have a mutual respect unto and dependence on one another, they may be disposed into such an order, to help the understandings and the memories of men” (4:188).

However, in wanting to mirror the principle of organization God used in the Bible, Owen chooses, first, to define theology and then discuss the progressive history of supernatural revelation framed by the various epochs of biblical history. His *Biblical Theology (Theologoumena)* is made up of six books: 1) Natural Theology; 2) Theology from Adam to Noah; 3) Theology from Noah to Abraham; 4) Theology from Abraham to Moses; 5) Theology from Moses to Christ; and 6) Evangelical Theology. Concerning this organization of theology, Trueman writes, “Owen’s fundamental belief [is] that theology is relational” (1998:49). This means that theology is covenantal insofar as the progressive unfolding of God’s revelation in the biblical record is really the unfolding of the covenant of grace as it sets forth a divine-human relationship between Christ and his elect.

In attempting to understand Owen as a covenant theologian we must be certain to understand the implications of his contention that theology should follow the order of Scripture as far as possible. These implications will be clearly seen as we look more closely at Owen’s formulation of the covenant of grace in contradistinction to the covenant of redemption.

Given Owen’s organization of theology it is not surprising that this historical method is also found in late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed covenant theologians as we have seen in the previous chapter (e.g. Ames and Cocceius) (See Van Asselt, 1994:101-16). The order of supernatural revelation is based on the various covenants in Scripture. Owen’s preface to Samuel Petto’s work, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained* (1674), highlights the importance of the covenant to a proper understanding of God’s

supernatural revelation. He says, “For the Doctrine, hereof, or the truth herein, is the very Center wherein all the lines concerning the grace of God and our own duty, do meet; wherein the whole of Religion doth consist (Petto, 1674:iv). It is not surprising, then, that Ferguson (1995:20-36), Trueman (1998: passim) Rehnman (2002:163) and Lloyd (1942:252) all note that the doctrine of the covenant occupies a central position in Owen’s theology.

3.1.3 Owen’s Interpreters

That Owen used the covenant concept is not disputed. What is disputed, however, is the legitimacy of Owen’s covenantal formulations. Bass, for example, inaccurately attributes the pervasiveness of the covenant in Owen’s thought to the influence of Platonic emanationism “involving him in a hierarchy of some kind” (1958:109). Bobick, in comparing Owen and Calvin as covenant theologians says, “Whether one is a friend, foe or disinterested party in relation to seventeenth century federal theology, all hands must candidly admit that John Owen’s covenant formulations are no mere duplications of Calvin’s thought. We could go even further and say that the Reformer’s profound simplicity of the priority of grace tends to get lost in Owen’s maze of complex bifurcations” (1996:43). Ferguson has argued that Owen “compromised his understanding of the gracious relationship posited in Scripture with that of a ‘contract’ [which left] a marked impression upon the reformed and evangelical heritage” (1979:484). Wong makes several criticisms of Owen’s covenant theology, some of which tell us more about Wong’s own theological proclivities than Owen’s. For example, in his third criticism, “Overemphasis on the Continuity of the O.T and the N.T” (1998:377), he writes,

In order to refute the Pelagians and the Arminians, Owen makes a tight analogy and continuity of the Old and New Testament, and asserts that the grace of regeneration by the Holy Spirit is also extant in the Old Testament time as well ...Owen equates this grace of regeneration with the promises recorded in Jeremiah 31:33-34 and Ezekiel 36:26-27 ... However, we find ... that this great promise of grace of regeneration is clearly pertained to the “new covenant” There is no exegetical evidence to support the grace of regeneration extant in the Old Testament. If the grace of regeneration is also found in the Old Testament, then the distinctiveness of the new covenant in contrast to the Old Testament recorded in Jer 31 and Heb 8 will all be destroyed. I think Owen’s error is due to his overemphasis on the continuity of the Old Testament and New Testament.

There is, then, no shortage of criticisms regarding Owen’s covenant theology. Our interaction with some of these criticisms will only occur insofar as they relate to our thesis. As we have said, our method in this thesis is more descriptive than prescriptive.

3.1.4 Owen on the Covenants

Theology for Owen is relational and because it is relational it is also covenantal. This is similar to Ames’ statement in the *The Marrow of Theology* that theology is “the doctrine of teaching [*doctrina*] of living to God”, also known as *theozoia* (1997:77). Regarding the relational aspect, Ferguson (1995:21) contends that the great premise of covenant theology is that God’s relationship with men is principally understood in terms of a covenant. As a result, man’s responsibility to God must also be understood in covenant terms. What, then, according to Owen, is a covenant? Besides Owen’s *Theologoumena*, his seven-volume commentary on Hebrews is the fullest treatment of covenant theology found in his corpus. In his commentary on Hebrews he defines a covenant as a “voluntary convention, pact, or agreement, between distinct persons, about the ordering and disposal of things in their power, unto their mutual concern and advantage” (19:82; cf. 6:470; 10:210; 19:77-82; 23:55). The nature and ends of a

covenant are defined by Owen in *An Exposition of Psalm CXXX*: “In its own nature it is a convention, compact, and agreement for some certain ends and purposes between the holy Creator and his poor creatures Now, these [the ends] are no other than that man might serve him aright, be blessed by him, and be brought unto the everlasting enjoyment of him; - all unto his glory” (19:337). The glory of God is teleological goal of the both the covenant and justification as we will note in chapter four.

Concerning the covenant between the Father and the Son (covenant of redemption), which must be differentiated between the covenant made with the Son and men (covenant of grace), Owen adds a more specific subset of elements: a proposal of service; a promise of reward; and an acceptance of the proposal (19:82-3). Owen makes further qualifications regarding the covenant of redemption because “covenant” can have different meanings in Scripture.

For example, the classical Greek word for covenant, $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\eta$, appears to be the most natural equivalent. However, Owen was fully aware that the Septuagint did not employ it as a translation of the Hebrew בְּרִית . (covenant). That is because בְּרִית conveys something more than $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\eta$ (mutual agreement). As a result, the New Testament authors use $\delta\iota\alpha\theta\eta\kappa\eta$ (last will or testament) instead of $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\eta$. Owen correctly recognizes that $\sigma\upsilon\lambda\lambda\alpha\chi\eta$ may be connotative of conditionality regarding the covenants of God. According to Ferguson (1995:21), “Owen opposed this view when it appeared in John Goodwin’s *Redemption Redeemed* (1651). Owen writes:

“The word ‘berith’ is sometimes used for a single promise without a condition, Genesis 6:18, 9:9; whence the apostle, handling this very promise, changeth the terms and calleth it a ‘testament.’ In a *testamentary dispensation* there is not in the nature of it any mutual stipulation required, but only a mere single favor and grant or concession (11:218).

It is therefore certain that where God speaks of his covenant, we cannot conclude that whatever belongs unto a perfect, complete covenant is intended. And they do not but deceive themselves who, from the name of a covenant between God and man, do conclude always unto the nature and conditions of it; for the word is used in great variety, and what is intended by it must be learned from the subject matter treated of, seeing there is no precept or promise of God but may be so called” (19:81).

This is not to say that Owen did not believe in conditionality, he certainly did. But he rejected conditionality insofar as it allowed for human merit in the salvation process. Conditionality is found in the sinner’s response by faith, but even this faith is a gift of God and in no way attributed to man’s natural ability. Moreover, Owen understood perfectly well that it would be theologically naïve to give the word “covenant” a strict definition and then impose that definition on the various covenants in Scripture. For Owen, biblical covenants do not always contain the same elements; rather, they must be interpreted in their biblical context.

In our analysis of Owen we are going to look at four covenants that he dealt with in detail and how these four covenants apply to his understanding of justification by faith alone. The four covenants are: the covenant of works; the covenant of grace; the covenant of redemption; and the covenant at Sinai. There is the perplexing question over whether Owen viewed the covenant at Sinai as a distinct covenant from the covenant of grace or whether, like Calvin, he viewed it as part of the covenant of

grace because it was given during the post-Adamic administration. This issue will be addressed in detail when we look at the Sinaitic covenant.

3.1.5 The Covenant of Works

In commenting upon Hebrews 8:6 Owen makes the following comments in reference to the covenant of works, “And because this is a subject wrapped up in much obscurity, and attended with many difficulties, it will be necessary that we use the best of our diligence, both in the investigation of the truth and in the declaration of it, so as that it may be distinctly apprehended” (23:60). He saw clearly that this subject is not as simple as some make it to be.

For Owen the covenant of works as a theological doctrine is not merely established upon an aggregate of isolated proof texts (e.g. Hosea 6:7). Rather, the doctrine results from its ontological necessity because of the nature of God, namely his justice, his relation to his creatures, and exegetical considerations. For Owen, the covenant of works is therefore perfectly harmonious with - some would argue the consistent application of - the Creator-creature distinction maintained by so many of the Reformed.

Owen divides up the entire theology of the human race into the natural word of God’s creation and the written and transmitted word, which was absolutely necessary for saving knowledge after the inroad of sin. Man was created in purity and so theology, for Adam, was both natural and God-given. However, because of the Creator-creature distinction, Adam did not possess complete revelation and so his knowledge was subject to increase and clarification through further revelation. Notwithstanding

this fact, however, the “light given to Adam was sufficient and beneficial for his recognition of God as Creator, Lawgiver, and Rewarder” (17:20). Adam was capable of attaining further knowledge and growing in strength by following the precepts of the divine will through prayerful meditation upon the works of the Creator. In establishing this context in which Adam operated, Owen is able then to justify his formulation of the covenant of works.

Owen is fully aware that the term “covenant of works” is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture. However, he says, “The rule of obedience and reward that was between God and him was not expressly called a covenant, but it contained the express nature of a covenant; for it was the agreement of God and man concerning obedience and disobedience, rewards and punishments” (23:60). Owen is here expressing the idea of “good and necessary inference” that was a hallmark of Reformed interpretation in the seventeenth century (See WCF 1.6).

This covenant could be considered as a) a law only; and as b) a covenant (Ibid). By “law only” Owen makes reference to the Creator-creature relationship: “God being considered as the creator, governor, and benefactor of man; and man as an intellectual creature, capable of moral obedience; this law was necessary, and is eternally indispensable” (Ibid). It was a covenant because it depended upon the will and good pleasure of God who annexed promises and threatenings of reward and punishment; first, the promise of grace and, second, the threatening of justice (Ibid). These promises and threatenings were expressed through external signs; “the first in the tree of life, the latter in that of the knowledge of good and evil” (Ibid). Furthermore, it was by these signs that God established the original law of creation as a covenant and

gave it the nature of a covenant. The bilateralism of the covenant meant that man was required to accept the terms of this law as the rule of the covenant which God made with him (Ibid). The law, then, given to Adam was given in the form of a covenant for his good.

Man's nature contained innate principles of obedience and so he naturally assented to God's law as it had been proposed with the promises and threatenings (Ibid:61). Moreover, it was a covenant because man accepted the terms of the covenant. These terms were the commands concerning the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. These trees, the former being sacramental, acted as the signs and pledges of the covenant of works, absolutely the old covenant, as Owen also called it. It was the first covenant that God made with men, the second being the covenant of grace (Ibid). Elsewhere, speaking of the first covenant, Owen writes:

Man in his creation, with respect unto the ends of God therein, was *constituted under* a covenant. That is the law of his obedience was attended with promises and threatenings, rewards and punishments, suited unto the goodness and holiness of God; for every law with rewards and recompenses annexed has the nature of a covenant. And in this case, although the promise wherewith man was encouraged unto obedience, which was that of eternal life with God, did in strict justice exceed the worth of the obedience required, and so was a superadded effect of goodness and grace, yet was it suited unto the constitution of a covenant meet for man to serve God in unto his glory; and, on the other side, the punishment threatened unto disobedience, in death and an everlasting separation from God, was such as the righteousness and holiness of God, as his supreme governor, and Lord of him and the covenant, did require. Now, this covenant belonged unto the law of creation ..." (19:337).

For Owen the first covenant, the covenant of works, involved a promise of God that carried with it a gracious element. Moreover, when God chooses to make a covenant it necessarily involves an act of sovereign condescension (6:471-2). In other words,

the covenant of works was not without grace even though it was not formally the covenant of grace. The distinction between condescending grace and saving grace is maintained by Owen: “There is infinite grace in every divine covenant, inasmuch as it is established on promises. Infinite condescension it is in God, that he will enter into covenant with dust and ashes, with poor worms of the earth” (23:68; cf. 6:472; 19:337; 23:116).

There has not been unanimous consent over whether the covenant of works had a gracious element to it. Holding with Owen that the covenant of works had a gracious element is William Ames, Francis Turretin, Thomas Boston, R. L. Dabney, John Murray, Louis Berkhof, and Anthony Hoekema. Opposing this view are Herman Witsius, Johannes Heidegger, Charles Hodge, and Meredith Kline. Those agreeing with Owen all make the important distinction between condescending grace (operative in the covenant of works) and saving grace (non-operative in the covenant of works) (cf. Clark, 2001).

There are, however, some differences between the covenant of works and grace that Owen was careful to point out. First, though the covenant of works was still gracious, there did not contain the grace of perseverance that existed in the covenant of grace (9:419). “There was a great deal of glory and beauty in the first covenant; but there was no order taken about sin: [so] that if any sin came in, the first covenant was gone and broken, and of no use any more” (Ibid).

The covenant of works, made with Adam, did not have the stability of the covenant of grace because of the defectability of our own nature that rendered the covenant

breakable. Second, the promises of the covenant of works concerned “things future; eternal life and blessedness upon the accomplishment of perfect obedience But in the covenant of grace all things are founded in promises of present mercy, and continual supplies of grace, as well as of future blessedness” (23:68). Third, the covenant of works, like the covenant of grace, had its promises. However, in the covenant of works, the promises were all remunerative, contingent upon an antecedent obedience in us unlike the covenant of redemption which is contingent upon obedience in Christ (Ibid:69).

Crucial to Owen’s theology is how the covenant of works functions after the inroad of sin. What part of the covenant of works remains and what part of it is abolished is a question Owen was careful to address. Rollock, for example, argued that the “first and proper end and use of the covenant of works is, that man by it may be justified and saved, or otherwise condemned ... After the fall it hath the same use in the unregenerate, elect or reprobate, to wit, to justify and save them, or to condemn them” (1849, 1:47). Further, he maintains that Christ’s redemptive work is best understood in terms of Christ willingly subjecting himself under the covenant of works (Ibid, 1:52).

Owen eschews a more nuanced position by arguing that the covenant of works is abrogated only insofar as it served as a covenant in its saving efficacy (23:61). The “covenant itself remained, but man had forfeited all ability to respond to it and to meet God in it” (17:28). He goes on, “The fall made no changes in God’s absolute dominion over man, or in man’s obligations to God, but henceforth this was a

dominion of power and righteous law, and no longer a relationship of unbroken and covenanted friendship” (5:243).

So Owen can argue that the covenant of works was never abrogated formally (23:62), which means that all unbelievers remain guilty under the law in contradistinction to believers who have perfectly fulfilled the law “not in their own persons, but in the person of their surety” (Ibid). The perpetuity of the covenant of works does not remain as a potentially salvific covenant, but the perpetuity of the moral law, which was fundamental to the covenant of works, still remains and holds both unbelievers and believers accountable before God. The “threatenings” innate to the covenant of works remain, but the promises do not.

Rollock and Perkins held that the covenant of works and the covenant of grace both concurrently operated after the fall where God would act on “dual” principles so that even believers can be under both covenants. However, Owen’s formulation of the covenant of works, where there was “a relationship of unbroken and covenanted fellowship” (17:28), does not allow for the covenant of works to continue as a covenantal agreement between God the offended and man the offender with potentially salvific rewards. This necessary qualification has important ramifications for how Owen understands the Mosaic covenant in relation to the covenant of grace. In short, the Mosaic covenant is not a “revival” of the covenant of works, as some have understood it, but rather the moral law is renewed *declaratively* and not *covenantally*. Owen writes, “God did never formally and absolutely renew or give again this law as a covenant a second time. Nor was there any need that so he should do, unless it were declaratively only, for so it was renewed at Sinai; for the whole of it

being *an emanation of eternal right and truth*, it abides, and must abide, in full force forever” (5:42).

Owen’s formulation of the covenant of works is, as we have shown, not a matter of finding a text somewhere that explicitly or implicitly hints at such an idea. Rather, it is the careful outworking of his understanding of natural and supernatural theology; the attributes of God as Creator, lawmaker, sustainer, ruler, and rewarder; and his relational understanding of theology where “All theology is, as we have shown, based on a covenant” (17:28). We feel that Bobick has understated the case when he writes: “It is fair to say that in this bare outline, nothing is original about Owen’s covenant of works” (1996:51). Owen’s careful distinction about what is abrogated and what is perpetual in the covenant of works is unmatched anywhere in the literature of his time.

3.1.6 Theology After the Fall

The collapse of the first covenant ushered in the necessity of supernatural revelation in Christ for salvation and the inadequacy of natural revelation for a saving knowledge of God. The inborn light, natural to Adam before the Fall, was extinguished as a result of sin. Owen highlights the effects of the Fall:

From that period on, all men were by nature blind and had no more enduring nature than mere shadows Human nature suffered an indescribable disaster in the fall, so much that we might rather say that what we call “human nature” is really all that we know of the remnants of human nature as it was intended to be (17:30-1).

This fact notwithstanding, men still possess the rudiments of the first theology and “cannot escape from the knowledge that God *is* men cannot avoid the awareness

of God that exists and must be worshipped” (*sensus divinitatis*) (Ibid:31).⁷ Springing from Owen’s understanding of natural theology before and after the Fall is his anthropology which has important ramifications for his soteriology. For example, after the Fall, man not only needs God as Creator, but also as Redeemer which inevitably, for Owen, leads to the revelation of God in Christ. The context is set for Owen who undertakes to show how revelation progressively developed by degrees with a distinctive Christological focus. Because the post-lapsarian context is sinful man, the revelation of God’s salvific purposes in Christ is entirely gracious since God’s self-disclosure is not merited. The covenant of grace, therefore, became the basis for all post-lapsarian theology in the salvation of man because the first covenant made no provision for the remission of sin (6:474).

3.1.7 Covenant of Grace

The covenant of grace, during Owen’s time, was well established in the theological tradition known as federalism (Von Rohr, 1986; Vos, 1980). Owen’s massive literary output on the covenant of grace is actually quite startling. That Bobick (1996:52) has argued Owen does not spend a great deal of time expounding it is rather remarkable. Indeed, Owen’s *Theologoumena* is principally a treatise on the covenant of grace as it unfolds progressively throughout the history of revelation.

Owen remarks that the covenant of grace, that which God “made *with men concerning Christ*”, must be distinguished from the covenant of redemption, “the covenant that he made *with his Son concerning men*” (19:78). For Owen, the covenant of grace is

⁷ Owen adduces Psalm 145:15; Job 12:7-9; Job chapters 37-39; Isaiah 40:12; Matthew 6:26; Acts 17:26-28; Romans 1:19; 2:14-15 in support of this contention.

different in essence, substance, and nature from the covenant of works for two reasons:

First, It is of *grace*, which wholly excludes works; that is, so of grace, as that our own works are not the means of justification before God; as in the places before alleged. Secondly, It has a *mediator and surety*; which is built alone on this supposition, that what we cannot do in ourselves which was originally required of us, and what the law of the first covenant cannot enable us to perform, that should be performed for us by our mediator and surety (5:276).

In the covenant of grace Jesus Christ fulfills that role of mediator and surety inasmuch as he is the principal subject-matter of this covenant. As the surety of the covenant, Christ undertook, in obedience to God, the terms of the covenant of the covenant on man's behalf. Christ accomplished it in his own person, and "whatever was to be done *in* and *by* man, to effect it by his own Spirit and grace; that so the covenant on every side might be firm and stable, and the ends of it fulfilled" (19:78).

Christ is, therefore, placed under a covenant of works on behalf of man. Going back to Owen's formulation of the covenant of works we see the propriety in what he is now promulgating. Man is unable to keep the covenant of works because of the inroad of sin and so he is no longer under the covenant of works as Adam was.

However, what remains from the covenant of works is man's responsibility to fulfill the terms of God's law. Since he cannot do this, Christ interposes himself on man's behalf as his Redeemer and Savior by fulfill the terms of the covenant.

Sinclair Ferguson has rightly observed that the great issue which covenant theology raised, as it developed over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was

whether the *foedus gratiae* (covenant of grace) had conditions (1995:24; cf. Murray, 1982, 4:229-34). How, then, can the covenant of grace be gracious if there are conditions? As we have seen above the conditions of the covenant of grace fall upon God, in Christ, who has “undertaken the whole” (11:210). There are also conditions placed upon man in the covenant of grace according to Owen. As he argues for the superiority of the promises in the covenant of grace against any other covenant, he makes the following qualification:

I do not say the covenant of grace is absolutely without conditions, if by conditions we intend the duties of obedience which God requireth of us in and by virtue of that covenant; but this I say, the principal promises thereof are not in the first place *remunerative* of our obedience in the covenant, but *efficaciously assumptive* of us in the covenant, and establishing or confirming the covenant (23:68-9).

The promises of the pardon of sin and the writing of the law in our hearts are apprehended by faith which is required, yet “that faith [is] itself wrought in us by the grace of the promise” (Ibid:69). The faith that is a necessary condition of the covenant of grace is a free gift so, in one sense, the covenant is without conditions, but in another sense it carries the condition of faith.

The basic elements of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace have been laid out in an attempt to help the reader understand some of the guiding presuppositions behind Owen’s understanding of the history of salvation rooted in the divine covenants. How, then, does the progressive unfolding of revelation fit in with the covenant of grace?

3.1.8 Theology from Adam to Noah

All true post-lapsarian theology, for Owen, comes from the same root, the *protoevangelium* (Genesis 3:15), and is, in itself, complete. However, this completeness is strengthened and illuminated by successive stages of divine revelation and illumination (17:169). Owen begins by looking at the various stages of supernatural revelation which made up this renewed theology (Ibid:170). The *protoevangelium* was the first element of supernatural theology in the post-lapsarian dispensation (Ibid). *Berith* can connote divine promise and thus holds out something good or a reward for service or the joy of a good conscience towards God (Jeremiah 31:33). Concerning the promissory nature of this covenant, Owen attests,

For this reason, if we say that God entered into a new covenant with fallen Adam, still we understand by that His instituting a new phase of His covenant, with its own special commands and requirements, backed up by gracious promises This, we say, is a covenant of grace, and that because it is graciously grounded in the person of another – the mediator of the covenant This covenant was then a matter of pure grace alone, and was founded upon one who bound himself to take on all its conditions (Ibid:170-1).

One of the hallmarks of covenant theology is its emphasis upon the unity of the two testaments with Christ providing the reference point of salvation to the saints in both the Old and New Testaments (Karlberg, 2000:20). The base of the covenant of grace was laid in the *protoevangelium*, “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15, KJV). “By this word of revealed promise”, writes Owen, “Christ was prefigured” (Ibid:171). Thus, the marrow of theology is found within this covenantal promise wherein man is able to find gracious acceptance with God. Owen writes, “Now, the substance of the *first promise*, wherein the whole covenant of grace was

virtually comprised, directly respected and expressed the giving of him for the recovery of mankind from sin and misery by his death, Gen iii. 15” (5:192). Elsewhere, he argues that it “would not be hard to show that all of our ‘soteriology,’ our doctrine concerning the Savior and Mediator and His appointed work, along with justification by grace, evangelical repentance, eternal rewards, and the resurrection of the body is all embraced (however obscurely) ... out of this first promise” (17:172-3). Genesis 3:15 was the essence of post-lapsarian theology. In it lay “in embryo the whole doctrine of salvation for sinners” which included the doctrine of justification (Ibid:183). Here justification is explicitly related to the covenant promise. Given Owen’s theological method in his *Theologoumena*, clarifications would all be matters of degree and so the unfolding of God’s redemptive purposes would find their starting point in the *protoevangelium*.

3.1.9 Theology from Noah to Abraham

Revealed to Adam was the covenant of grace through the promised seed of the woman, Jesus Christ. Christ was revealed and made effectual to those saved by grace through faith as displayed in the cases of Adam, Abel and Seth for example (Ibid:178-97). Owen, in proving his point that all such saving faith looks to the Mediator, now looks to Noah, “a just man and perfect in his generation” (Genesis 6:9). The eleventh chapter in the Epistle to the Hebrews proves, for Owen, that Noah obtained righteousness by faith and “all such saving faith looks upon the promised seed” (Ibid:204).

With Noah there is the first express mention of a covenant (Genesis 6:18; 9:9) even though God “had already established with Adam ... that famous promise of a coming

seed ... to be a Mediator, which had all the needed factors for the establishment of a divine Covenant” (Ibid:205). This covenant was the first stage of the progressive unfolding of a post-diluvian theology (Ibid:209). Nehemiah Coxe, a contemporary of Owen, admits that the Noahic covenant, at first view, “seems to convey no more than an outward and temporal favor” (2005:65) and some have gone so far as to say that the Noahic covenant does not belong to the covenant of grace. However, Owen will have none of that. God, for the first time, established a bow in the clouds as a visible sign of the covenant (Genesis 9:11, 13). The promise attached to this sign is “covenantal” according to Owen (17:209-10) and though it is true that this covenant refers primarily to the material things of the world and, thus, carries with it temporal blessings, it is

nevertheless, spiritual grace, or the love of God freely given to the faithful, is chiefly intended; for such was the economy of that period until Christ was manifested in the flesh, that all these things should be “a shadow of good things to come” (Hebrews 10:1), of which Christ is the “high priest” (Hebrews 9:11). The eternal covenant subsists, as we have seen, only in Christ, and some temporal blessings emanated from it to all men. Yet the inner essence of the covenant is spiritual, and pertains only to Christ, and has reference through Him to his elect (Ibid:210)

The faith of believers was confirmed by the sign of the rainbow which was evidence of God’s sovereignty over nature. This, coupled with the introduction of divine commands like we see in Genesis 9:5-6, gave strength to the faithful who put their faith in the Messiah (Ibid:217-8). As a result, the Noahic covenant belonged to the covenant of grace.

3.1.10 Theology from Abraham to Moses

The covenant of grace would receive such clarification in the time of Abraham that Owen argued that “hardly a richer harvest of truth would be granted within any revelatory period up to the advent of [Christ] for whom all was preparing” (Ibid:365). A number of revelations, related to the covenant of grace, were manifested to Abraham according to Owen. First, the ancient promises, given to Adam, for example, were far clearer and more complete now.⁸ Second, not only is the doctrine of justification clarified, but also the doctrine of sanctification.

In conversing with Abraham about obedience, not only does the Lord make mention of His covenant, but explains it by directly linking His own name and attributes with His unshakable undertaking of His covenant. “I am Almighty God: walk before Me, and be thou perfect” (Genesis 17:1); In all of this, the very title of GOD ALMIGHTY is directly linked with covenant promise, that all would be eternally well with Abraham and his seed through the promised covenant seed, Christ. The promise of that seed is the foundation of all grace (Ibid:366).

The promise given to Adam, confirmed with Noah, is now “graciously renewed” to Abraham that God would be a “merciful, sanctifying, and saving God” requiring from his people “faith and obedience” (Ibid).

It is interesting that Owen seems to define the new covenant in terms that place faith and obedience in apposition. For example, in his “Greater Catechism” we read:

Q. 13. *What is this new covenant?*

A. The gracious, free, immutable promise of God, made unto all his elect fallen in Adam, to give them Jesus Christ, and in him mercy,

⁸ Owen adduces Genesis 12:3,7; 13:15-16; 15:1,5,6; 17:1,2,9; and 22:17-18 in support of this.

pardon, grace, and glory, with a re-stipulation of faith from them unto this promise, and new obedience (1:482).⁹

Bobick (1996:44) and Ferguson (1979:484) argue that Owen seems to compromise *Sola Gratia* and *Sola Fide* with such statements as we find in his answer to “What is the new covenant?” However, Owen’s writings, taken as a whole, shows that justification and sanctification are both blessings believers receive under the covenant of grace. He is careful not to equate justification and sanctification with each other (1:487-88). If the doctrine of *Sola Fide* is alone co-extensive with the covenant of grace, then perhaps Owen is compromising the gracious element in *Sola Fide* when he speaks of “new obedience” (1:482). However, Owen does not to make the covenant of grace co-extensive with justification by faith alone. God revealed to Abraham that in the covenant of grace he would be a “merciful, *sanctifying, justifying, and saving God*” (emphasis ours) (17:366). Sanctification, as part of the blessings (*duplex beneficium*) apprehended by believers, accounts for Owen’s emphasis on “new obedience.”

Returning to the revelations given to Abraham, Owen notes, thirdly, that the covenant of grace was restricted to Abraham and his family “in such a way that no one could obtain eternal blessedness unless connected with that family” (Ibid). Fourthly, circumcision, not merely a national badge containing earthly privileges only, became the sign of the covenant (11:206). Stemming from this, Owen’s fifth point has important ramifications for his ecclesiology. He argues that “the privileges of the covenant, that is, of the Church, are so communicated onwards through the infant seed of believers, who are the especial concern of God’s covenant grace, so that *it would*

⁹ Owen adduces Genesis 3:15; Jeremiah 31:31-34, 32:40; Hebrews 8:10-12. Galatians 3:8, 16; Genesis 12:3. Romans 8:32; Ephesians 1:3, 4. Mark 16:16; and John 1:12, 10:27, 28 in answering Q.13.

never be suffered to die out completely” (emphasis ours) (Ibid:366-7). The covenant of grace, then, is determinative for his ecclesiology, an ecclesiology that sees infants as members of the church in both the old and new testaments.

Besides the aforementioned blessings and revelations, Abraham became more familiar with God so that he became upright, just and pious; he was, as it were, sanctified under the blessing of being in covenant with God through Christ. Moreover, the church was reformed through Abraham insofar as he “most earnestly enjoined it on his entire household – wives, children and slaves – as a task required of him by God” (Ibid:368-9). Abraham was, like Adam, the proto-Christ; he was the federal head of the church in that particular dispensation of the covenant of grace.

3.1.11 The Theology of Moses and the Sinaitic Covenant

Whether the covenant made at Sinai falls under the covenant of grace has long been disputed in Reformed covenant theology (Karlberg, 2000:17-57). While we will resist the temptation to give a lengthy overview of the various interpretations, it is prudent to briefly sketch the history of interpretation concerning what is known as the Sinaitic or Mosaic covenant so that we are better able to appreciate the differences between Owen and other covenant theologians.

There are, of course, a number of variant understandings concerning the role the Mosaic covenant played in the history of redemption. Some have oversimplified the issue by determining categories and placing various Federalists in those categories without fully appreciating the nuances of their position. While there are a few who have explicitly argued that the Mosaic covenant does not belong to the covenant of

grace (e.g. Moses Amyraut, Amandus Polanus, and Samuel Petto), most Reformed covenant theologians have placed the Mosaic covenant in the covenant of grace but not without certain qualifications. One of those qualifications is found in the view adopted by Calvin and Bullinger which argues that the covenant made at Sinai was part of the covenant of grace but it was administered legally and served a pedagogical function (Karlberg, 2002:23). Turretin, writing in the seventeenth century, echoes similar thoughts to those of Calvin and Bullinger: “It pleased God to administer the covenant of grace in this period [from Moses to Christ] under a rigid legal economy - both on account of the condition of the people still in infancy and on account of the putting off of the advent of Christ and the satisfaction to be rendered by him” (1997, 2:227).

Thomas Boston promulgates a slightly different view by arguing that at Sinai God delivered two distinct covenants to the Israelites.

“Wherefore I conceive the two covenants to have been both delivered on Mount Sinai to the Israelites. *First*, the covenant of grace made with Abraham, contained in the preface, repeated and promulgated there unto Israel, to be believed and embraced by faith, that they might be saved; to which were annexed the ten commandments, given by the Mediator Christ, the head of the covenant, as a rule of life to his covenant people.

Secondly, the covenant of works made with Adam, contained in the same ten commands, delivered with thunderings and lightnings, the meaning of which was afterwards cleared by Moses, describing the righteousness of the law and the sanctions thereof, repeated and promulgated to the Israelites there, as the original perfect rule of righteousness, to be obeyed” (*Quoted in Fisher, 1991:56*).

Notwithstanding this dual covenant administration, Boston is careful to point out that the Israelites were not bound to the re-administered covenant of works as a means of

justification. He argues: “They were no more bound thereby to seek righteousness by the law than the young man was by our Savior’s saying to him, Matt. xix.17, 18, ‘If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments - Thou shalt do no murder,’ etc. ... Thus there is no confounding of the two covenants of grace and works; but the latter was added to the former as subservient unto it, to turn their eyes towards the promise, or covenant of grace” (*Quoted in Fisher, 1991:56*).

Witsius, similar to Boston’s dichotomy, distinguishes without separating the “typical” Mosaic covenant from the Abrahamic covenant of grace.

As the covenant of grace, under which the ancients were, is not to be confounded with, so neither is it to be separated from, the Sinaitic covenant: neither are we to think that believers were without all those things which were not promised by the Sinaitic covenant, and which *the typical covenant*, because of its weakness and unprofitableness, could not bestow; as they were likewise partakers of the Abrahamic covenant, *which was a pure covenant of grace*: and hence were derived the spiritual and saving benefits of the Israelites (1990, 2:336-37).

As we noted in chapter two, Petto, whose work on the covenants was commended by Owen, argues that the Mosaic covenant, while distinct from the covenant of grace, acted pedagogically as it *typically* revealed mercy for sinful men; it was not, therefore, a covenant of works (1674:107). He adds, moreover, that the Sinaitic covenant was a covenant of works not for Israel but for Christ to fulfill (Ibid:102, 124). How, then, does Owen fit into this stream of thought regarding the Mosaic covenant as it pertains to the history of redemption?

Ferguson correctly notes that Owen saw four covenants in Scripture (1995:22). The covenant of grace is, for the most part, antithetical to the covenant of works, which, for Owen, is the ‘old covenant’. However, as Ferguson notes: “when the rest of

Scripture is reviewed this presents a problem of harmonization, since Sinai seems to be referred to as the ‘old covenant’” (Ibid:27). How these covenants relate to one another is all the more pressing considering the legal character of the Sinaitic covenant (Ibid:27-8).

There has been much debate concerning Owen’s position on how the Mosaic covenant relates to the covenant of works and grace (See Coxe & Owen, 2005:317-34). Certain portions of Owen’s writings, taken on their own, can be misleading if not considered in their wider context and the overall scope of Owen’s thought.

Owen’s fullest exposition of the relation of the Mosaic covenant to that of the New Covenant is found in his exposition of Hebrews 8:6ff. The covenants spoken of in Hebrews 8:6 are, according to Owen, the covenant made at Sinai, also known as the Mosaic covenant, and the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31 (Bobick, 1996:57-8). Owen is careful to point out from the outset (23:64) of his exposition that the covenant of grace, beginning with Genesis 3:15 and finding clearer expression in Genesis 17, is not interrupted by the giving of the law (Galatians 3:17). However, Owen asks whether Paul, whom he considers to be the author of Hebrews (18:65-92), referred to two distinct covenants in Hebrews 8:6 (23:69). He continues by asking whether they are different “as to the essence and substance of them, or only different ways of the dispensation and administration of the same covenant” (Ibid). Owen is perhaps most explicit regarding the role of the Mosaic covenant in relation to the covenant of grace when he argues:

1. That either the covenant of grace was in force under the old testament; or, 2. That the church was saved without it, or any benefit by Jesus Christ, who is the mediator of it alone; or, 3. That they all perished everlastingly. And neither of the two latter can be admitted (23:70).

The logical result of this is that “no man was ever saved but by the virtue of the new covenant, and the mediation of Christ therein” (Ibid). Given this, Owen asks “how could it be that there should at the same time be another covenant between God and [the church], of a different nature from this, accompanied with other promises, and other effects?”(Ibid)

As we have already noted, the prevailing opinion amongst Owen’s contemporaries at this time argued that the two covenants mentioned, the old and the new, were not two distinct covenants in substance and essence but were different administrations of the same covenant. However, Hebrews 8:6 and other similar passages (e.g. Hebrews 7:22; 2 Corinthians 3:6ff; Galatians 4:24-26) force Owen to enquire further whether there are “two distinct covenants, or only a twofold administration of the same covenant” (Ibid:70-1).

Owen’s argument first considers the popular opinion of the divines on this much-vexed issue. Among the Reformed it is agreed that in the Old Testament “none was ever justified or saved but by the new covenant”; that the Old Testament contains the doctrine of justification; that by the covenant of Sinai none was ever eternally saved; and the institutions of the old covenant were administered with a view to directing the church to Jesus Christ (Ibid:71). Owen then highlights the differences the divines usually adduce to the two covenants by considering them under five different heads.

First, the work of God in Christ; namely, with reference to the particulars of redemption, especially concerning justification by faith, excel in clarity in the new dispensation than under the law (2 Corinthians 3:18; Mark 8:23-25). Second, there is a more “plentiful communication of grace” in the new covenant not in its individual efficacy but in its extent. That is to say that Pentecost is not concerned primarily with the *ordo salutis* but the *historia salutis*. Third, our access to God is now “immediate, by Jesus Christ, with liberty” whereas those under the law were “immediately conversant about outward, typical things” and did not possess the boldness we now have. Fourth, worship under the two different dispensations was different. In the old covenant God appointed “a great number of outward rites, ceremonies, and observances”; all of which were “dark in their signification” whereas worship under the gospel is both spiritual and rational so that the “use, ends, benefits, and advantages of it are evident unto all.” Fifth, the old is different from the new in “the extent of the dispensation of the grace of God” since under the old testament grace was confined to Abraham’s posterity, according to the flesh, whereas in the new testament it extends itself to all nations under heaven (Ibid:73).

Owen remains convinced that Scripture speaks and testifies in such a way that the two covenants “can hardly be accommodated unto a *twofold administration* of the same covenant” (Ibid:76). As a result, there must be “*two distinct covenants*, rather than a twofold administration of the same covenant merely, to be intended” (Ibid).

However, this must be maintained alongside the truth that the way of salvation was the same under both. Here Owen is eschewing the classical “distinct but not separate” (*distinctio sed non separatio*) view held by previous covenant theologians such as Zwingli and Calvin.

Owen anticipates that some will object that if salvation is by faith in Christ under both then both covenants are substantially the same and may be said to be one. This would only be so, according to Owen, if “reconciliation and salvation by Christ were to be obtained not only under the old covenant, *but by virtue thereof*” (emphasis mine) (Ibid:77). However, this is not so, since reconciliation with God and salvation could not be obtained through the Sinaitic covenant because it did not belong to the covenant of grace. Notwithstanding this fact, however, believers were reconciled, *justified*, and saved, by virtue of the promise, specific to the covenant of grace, while they were under the Sinaitic covenant (Ibid). Owen then gives several lines of evidence in order to prove that the Mosaic covenant is a distinct covenant, and not an administration of the covenant of grace (Ibid).

He does this by highlighting the many similarities between the covenant of works and the covenant made at Sinai in an attempt to show how the Mosaic covenant does not belong to the covenant of grace. For example, the covenant at Sinai “revived, declared, and expressed *all the commands of* [the covenant of works] *in the decalogue*” because it is a divine summary of the law which was written on Adam’s heart at his creation (Ibid). Moreover, the penalty of death for transgressors of the covenant at Sinai (Deuteronomy 27:26) mirrored the threat made to Adam (Genesis 2:16-17). Although, like the covenant of works, there was revived the promise of eternal life upon perfect obedience (Ibid:78). For example, he writes: “So the apostle tells us that Moses thus describeth the righteousness of the law, ‘That the man which doeth those things shall life by them,’ Rom. X.5; as he doth, Lev.xviii.5” (23:78).

The promise in Genesis 3:15 was not, however, abrogated with the introduction of the law and the words found in Deuteronomy 5:3. Owen adduces Galatians 3:17-22 in order to maintain that there is but one way of salvation. The point of the covenant made at Sinai, then, was to declare “the *impossibility of obtaining reconciliation and peace with God* any other way but by the promise” (Ibid:79). He adds, albeit similarly to those who view the Sinaitic covenant as part of the *foedus gratiae*, that in “representing the commands of the covenant of works, requiring perfect, sinless, obedience, under the penalty of the curse, it convinced men that this was no way for sinners to seek for life and salvation ... (Ibid).

If, as Owen argues, the covenant made at Sinai did not abrogate the covenant of works or disannul the promise made to Abraham, first found in Genesis 3:15, then what benefit did the church receive from the Mosaic covenant? Galatians 3:19-24 answers this question for Owen. The covenant at Sinai was added because of transgressions; “some order must be taken about sin and transgression” (Ibid:81). Through reviving the commands that were axiomatic to the covenant of works, with the sanction of death, God established “awe on the minds of men, and set bounds unto their lusts, that they should not dare to run forth into that excess which they were naturally inclined unto” (Ibid).

Furthermore, the revived covenant of works was confined to temporal things (23:85). God, by granting his people such privileges as the land of Canaan, was pleased to impose on them “laws, rules, and terms of obedience, whereon they should hold and enjoy the land” (Ibid). The covenant of works aspect of the Mosaic covenant

operated on the temporal level of Israel's retention of the land, not on the antitypical level of eternal salvation or damnation.

Israel, as the posterity of Abraham, received the covenant at Sinai so that they could live apart from other nations in order to fulfill God's promises. God's redemptive purposes are channeled through the nation of Israel hence the reason for the law. For, as Ferguson says, "To this people God prescribed rules for life, to subdue the pride of their spirits, and to make them long for deliverance. It was, in short, a temporary preserving measure, 'until the seed should come'" (1995:30).

In conclusion, it seems that the whole point of Owen's exegesis of Hebrews 8:6ff is to demonstrate how the Mosaic covenant functions within the history of redemption while at the same time not acting co-extensively with the covenant of grace as a means of salvation. When one compares Owen's thoughts on the Sinaitic covenant with, say, Calvin's, it is fair to say that there is actually a large degree of similarity (e.g. Sinai acting pedagogically) even though both differ on whether the Sinaitic covenant belongs to the covenant of grace.

3.1.12 The New Covenant and Evangelical Theology

The promise of Genesis 3:15, clarified in the promise to Abraham, and shown to be the only way of salvation in light of the covenant given to Moses which had the power only to condemn rather than give life, is now brought into full light in the New Testament. Rehnman writes:

The last degree of revelation, the New Testament, is the crown and glory of the divine disclosure of grace in history and the treasure of Owen's heart. For here the fullness of grace and revelation is to be found. He asserts that with the coming of Christ, the Old Testament vanished and was succeeded by the New and, stresses how the progressive movement of revelation culminated in Jesus Christ because the whole mind and will of God was revealed in him (2002:174).

Owen summarizes, in his exegesis of Hebrews 8:6ff, the glory of the new covenant revelation; glory due to the resurrection of Christ.

That which before lay hid in promises, in many things obscure, the principle mysteries of it being a secret hid in God himself, was now brought to light; and that covenant which had invisibly, in the way of a promise, put forth its efficacy under types and shadows, was now solemnly sealed, ratified, and confirmed, in the death and resurrection of Christ (23:64).

An important question arises, one which Owen is careful to answer, as to whether the covenant of grace is coextensive with the new covenant. In the context of Hebrews 8:6ff and the "new covenant" language associated with that passage, Owen argues that the covenant of grace is coextensive with the new covenant in their substance (23:74). The covenant of grace and the new covenant are the same with regards to their substance. When considered absolutely, both contained the promise of grace through Jesus Christ and so both are, therefore, the means whereby salvation is communicated to the church after the inroad of sin. They are, then, one and the same thing (Ibid).

However, they differ insofar as the covenant of grace, unlike the new covenant, is not a biblical term and so, like the term "Trinity", is derived from theological considerations of biblical and systematic theology. Before the dawn of the new

covenant, the covenant of grace “consisted only in a promise” (Ibid). The covenant of grace only formally became a covenant for the church (the new covenant) in the New Testament dispensation. The new covenant was confirmed and established only in the death of Christ and so did not have “the formal nature of a covenant or a testament, as our apostle proves, Heb. ix 15-23” (Ibid).

The blessings emanating from the formal establishment of the new covenant through the death of Christ are numerous according to Owen. The glory of the new covenant lies in the liberty believers possess. These liberties consist in 1) freedom from the law as a means to justification before God even though we are still subject to its commands; 2) “*freedom from the condemning power of the law*” because of Christ who was “made a curse for us” (Ibid:93); 3) freedom from conscience of sin; 4) freedom from the ceremonies, rites, and ordinances of Mosaical worship; and 5) freedom from the laws of men concerning the worship of God (Ibid).

These liberties, communicated to new covenant believers by the Spirit of the Son, provide the framework in which Owen highlights the differences in understanding between believers in the Old Testament and believers in the New Testament. For example, there is greater liberty for the new covenant Christian in terms of their understanding of justification by faith. According to Owen, “... men were greatly in the dark” in the Old Testament, but justification, for new covenant believers, is “now fully revealed and made manifest” and so it has a “great influence into spiritual liberty and boldness”(Ibid:94). Here again we see the important relation of covenant theology to justification by faith.

It is clear, then, that Owen, while maintaining the unity between the Old and New Testaments, is careful to highlight some of the important differences between the two. Wong (1998:377) criticizes Owen for overemphasizing the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. His criticism centers on the doctrine of regeneration. Owen, in dealing with the Pelagians, Socinians, and Arminians, argues: “Although the work of regeneration by the Holy Spirit was wrought under the Old Testament, even from the foundation of the world ... yet the revelation of it was but obscure in comparison of that light and evidence which is brought forth into by the gospel (3:210).¹⁰

However, Wong argues that the promise of regeneration is peculiar to the new covenant.

There is no exegetical evidence to support the grace of regeneration extant in the Old Testament. If the grace of regeneration is also found in the Old Testament, then the distinctiveness of the new covenant in contrast to the Old Testament recorded in Jer 31 and Heb 8 will all be destroyed. I think Owen’s error is due to his overemphasis on the continuity of the Old Testament and New Testament (1998:378).

Wong, as we noted earlier, seems to muddle the waters by bringing in his own theological views into his interpretation of Owen; namely, that there “is not exegetical evidence to support the grace of regeneration extant in the Old Testament” (Ibid).

Several observations are in order as we consider Wong’s evaluations.

First, Owen as we have seen is careful to highlight the distinctive character of the new covenant from the Old. But Owen, like other Federalists, is careful to argue that the

¹⁰ See also: 3:125-51, 3:211-12, 23:95, 23:147. Owen’s uses the example of Nicodemus in John 3 as evidence that the doctrine of regeneration is not peculiar to New Covenant believers (3:210).

new covenant is not distinct from the covenant of grace but the final outworking of it. That is to say, with regards to the substance of the covenant, being Christ's redemptive work on behalf of the elect, it is one and the same throughout the history of supernatural revelation. Second, while Owen believes that the *ordo salutis* remains one and the same there is a definite change in the outpouring of the Spirit in the New Testament which has implications for the *historia salutis*. Ferguson, commenting on Owen's doctrine of the Holy Spirit, writes: "[Evangelical theology] has often ignored the significance of the being and activity of God in favor of subjective experience of God, bypassing *historia salutis* in favour of an interest in *ordo salutis*. Owen manfully resisted that tendency" (Oliver, 2002:107). Speaking of the distinction between the *ordo salutis* and the *historia salutis* Owen writes:

It is certain that God did grant the gift of the Holy Spirit under the old testament ... but it is no less certain, that there was always a promise of his more signal effusion upon the confirmation and establishment of the new covenant Yea, so sparing was the communication of the Holy Ghost under the old testament, compared with his effusion under the new, as that the evangelist affirms that "the Holy Ghost was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified," John vii. 39; that is, he was not yet given in that manner as he was to be given upon the confirmation of the new covenant (23:95).

The handling of the *historia salutis* and the *ordo salutis* come to the forefront in any discussion on the new covenant especially in the handling of Hebrews 8:10ff.¹¹

¹¹ Hebrews 8:10-13 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people: 11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest. 12 For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more. 13 In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Owen's treatment of Hebrews 8:10ff still has in mind the dichotomy between the old (Mosaic) and new covenant, not the covenant of works or grace and the new covenant.

In handling Hebrews 8:10ff Owen speaks of two common objections regarding the newness of the new covenant. First, the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah 31, also found in Hebrews 8, is future; hence, "after those days" (Jer. 31:33). But, as most Federalists object, "the things here mentioned, the grace and mercy expressed, were really communicated unto many both before and after the giving of the law" (Ibid:147). Owen does not deny the merits of this objection since he affirms elsewhere that the grace of regeneration was extent in the Old Testament. Owen's point, however, is that the blessings associated with the new covenant spoken of in Jeremiah find their confirmation in the death of Christ. Consequently, the new covenant is promised, in Jeremiah 31, not in opposition to the covenant of grace and the resultant blessings emanating from it, but in opposition to the Sinaitic covenant (Ibid).

The second objection has ecclesiastical implications insofar as the blessings spoken of in the new covenant are salvific and so those "with whom this covenant is made must be really and effectually made partakers of them" (Ibid). But, so the objection goes, "this is not so; they are not all actually sanctified, pardoned, and saved, which are the things here promised" (Ibid). Owen's answer, again, does not refute the merit of the aforementioned objection. But he differentiates between two common understandings of the benefits of the new covenant.

Some would have it extend unto all persons, in its tender and conditional proposition; but not unto all things, as unto its efficacy in the reparation of our natures. Others assert [the blessings of the new covenant] to extend unto all the effects of sin, in the removal of them, and the cure of our natures thereby; but as unto persons, it is really extended unto none but those in whom these effects are produced, whatever be its outward administration, which was also always limited: unto whom I do subscribe (Ibid:148).

Owen, here, implicitly, speaks of the salvific benefits of the new covenant being effectual only inwardly so that one may be visibly part of the new covenant church and yet not possess the saving benefits of the new covenant promises and so the line of demarcation between the visible and invisible church is here drawn. His exegesis of Hebrews 6:4ff and Hebrews 10:16ff is helpful on this point (See 22:61-91). He argues, essentially, that there are real blessings, associated with the dawn of the new covenant, which are not salvific but can be experienced by the unregenerate who, by virtue of their baptism, are members of the new covenant community (22:89). The history of supernatural revelation, from Adam to Christ, is understood as covenantal by Owen. That is to say, the history of supernatural revelation is the history of the covenant of grace which finds its first expression in Genesis 3:15 and further clarifications through Noah, Abraham and Moses. The promise in Genesis 3:15, secured in and through the death and resurrection of Christ, ushers in the new covenant. The new covenant, as we have seen, is the outworking of the covenant of grace; it is the final expression of God's redemptive purposes in Christ for his people. However, even in this scheme, Owen brings into contrast the covenant made at Sinai (the old covenant), and the new covenant. As a result, Ferguson, appreciating the nuances of Owen's approach, correctly argues that Owen's exposition of the covenants "suggests that four covenants appear in Scripture" (1995:22). So far we have considered the covenant of works, the Mosaic covenant, and the covenant of

grace. The fourth covenant, and perhaps most complex, is the covenant of redemption, which we will now consider.

3.1.13 The Covenant of Redemption

The covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), in Owen's thought, has received wide scholarly attention and much debate in recent years (See Daniels, 2004:157-77; Bobick, 1996:61-68; Trueman, 1998:133-40; Clifford, 1990). Our concern is not to interact with the debate but, rather, to give a distillation of Owen's thoughts on the covenant of redemption in order to help us with the next chapter on the place of justification in the *pactum salutis*.

The covenant of redemption has significant implications for Owen's theology, most notably his understanding of the atonement and justification. Owen's Christology is also best understood in light of the covenant of redemption where he distinguishes between the economic/functional Trinity and the ontological Trinity (See Daniels, 2004:157-77).

In the previous chapter we noticed that the covenant of redemption is either implicitly (Calvin) or explicitly (Cocceius) taught as a pre-temporal covenant that orders the history of redemption and, therefore, stands, logically and temporally, behind the covenant of works and covenant of grace. Owen does not deviate from this model. The federal transactions between the Father and the Son were carried on "by way of covenant" (19:77). The covenant between the Father and the Son is the covenant of redemption. This covenant is also sometimes called the covenant of the Mediator or

Redeemer (19:78; 22:230). Owen also refers to the covenant of redemption as the “counsel of peace” (12:500).

In his exegetical work on Hebrews 13:20, determines whether the covenant of grace or the covenant of redemption is intended. Whether Owen’s exegesis is correct is not our intention; what we are concerned to show is Owen’s line of demarcation between the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption.

This *covenant* may be the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son about the redemption of the church, by his undertaking on its behalf. The nature hereof hath been fully declared in our Exercitations. But this covenant needed no confirmation or ratification by blood, as consisting only in the eternal counsels of Father and Son. Wherefore it is the covenant of grace, which is a transcript and effect of that covenant of redemption, which is intended (24:475).

The covenant of grace is “the covenant that God made *with men concerning Christ*” whereas the covenant of redemption is “the covenant that he made *with his Son concerning men*” (19:78). The covenant of redemption “falls into the overall covenant pattern, with conditions and promises, and contains ‘a prescription of personal services, with a promise of reward’” (Ferguson, 1995:25-6).

Owen appeals to various texts in Scripture to validate the pre-temporal covenant of redemption. As we noted earlier, the covenant of redemption is also crucial to Owen’s Christology and his Trinitarian theology. For example, there are passages in Scripture which refer to the subordination of the Son to the Father, especially where the Son calls the Father “God” or “Lord” that are to be explained covenantally. In dealing with texts like Psalm 15:2; 22:1; Micah 5:4; John 20:17; Revelation 3:12; and John 14:28 Owen writes:

That these were federal, or had in them the nature of a covenant, is now further to be manifested. And in general this is that which the Scripture intends, where God, that is the Father, is called by the Son his God, and where he says that he will be unto him a God and a Father; for this expression of being a God unto any one is declarative of a covenant, and is the word whereby God constantly declares his relation unto any in a way of covenant, Jer. Xxxi. 33, xxxii.38; Hos. ii. 23 (19:84; cf. 20:185; 1:249).

When Christ says, in John 14:28, “the Father is greater than I”, he “speaks with respect unto the covenant engagement that was between the Father and himself as to the work which he had to do ...” (19:84-5). Daniels correctly notes that “Owen makes it clear that the Son is not subordinate to the Father by his eternal generation, but is so only in and by the covenant of redemption” (2004:158). Not only, then, is Owen’s doctrine of justification shaped by the covenant concept, but so too is his Christology.

The specifics of the covenant of redemption are then laid out by Owen. In the covenant of redemption the Father was the “prescriber, the promiser and lawgiver; and the Son was the undertaker upon his prescription, law, and promises” (19:85). As we noted earlier, a covenant involves distinct persons; it is voluntary (12:497); the parties must be able to fulfill the terms of the covenant; and the parties must be mutually satisfied. Regarding the covenant of redemption there is a more specific subset of elements delineated by Owen. There is a proposal of service; a promise of reward; and an acceptance of proposal (19:83-4). As a result, the Father appoints Christ as the Mediator and promises to “protect and assist him” in the accomplishment of his mediatorial work; that, because of the Father’s assistance, Christ would be successful in achieving the designed ends intended; and the Son would voluntarily accept the role as Mediator (10:168-71). Owen’s exegetical basis

for the covenant of redemption is elucidated in the conditions required of the mediator. They fall under three heads. First, that Christ should “assume ... the nature of those whom, according unto the terms of this covenant, he was to bring unto God” (19:94).

This was prescribed unto him, Hebrews 2:9, 10:5; which, by an act of infinite grace and condescension, he complied withal, Philippians 2:6-8, Hebrews 2:14 And this condescension, which was the foundation of all his obedience, gave the nature of merit and purchase unto what he did. This he did upon the prescription of the Father; who is therefore said to “send forth his Son, made of a woman,” Galatians 4:4; and to “send forth his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh,” Romans 8:3, in answer unto which act of the will of the Father he saith, “Lo, I come to do thy will,” Hebrews 10:7. And this assumption of our nature was indispensably necessary unto the work which he had to do. He could no otherwise have exalted the glory of God in the salvation of sinners, nor been himself in our nature exalted unto his mediatory kingdom, which are the principal ends of this covenant” (Ibid:94-5).

Second, because Christ assumed human nature, it was requisite that

he should be the *servant of the Father*, and yield universal obedience unto him, both according to the *general law* of God obliging all mankind, and according unto the *especial law* of the church under which he was born and made, and according unto the *singular law* of that compact or agreement which we have described, Isaiah 42:1, 49:5; Philippians 2:7. He came to do, to answer and fulfill, the whole will of God, all that on any account was required of him. This he calls the “commandment” of his Father, the commands which he received of him, which extend themselves to all the prescriptions of this covenant (Ibid).

And third, because of God’s wrath against his elect whom he had foreordained to glory, Christ “should, as the servant of the Father unto the ends of this covenant, make an atonement for sin in and by our nature assumed, and answer the justice of God by suffering and undergoing what was due unto them; without which it was not possible they should be delivered or saved, unto the glory of God, Isaiah 53:11, 12” (Ibid).

The covenant of redemption has obvious ramifications for Owen's doctrine of the atonement. Because there is a unity and purpose in the will of the Father and the Son to "bring many sons to glory", it would be nonsensical for the Father to give a people (the elect) to his Son only for the Son to die for those the Father had not given to him (the elect and the non-elect). John 17 is where Owen buttresses his exegetical case for the particularity of the atonement. Verse 4 speaks of the work which the Father had given the Son to do; a work which is best understood in light of the covenant of redemption. Because Christ fulfilled the terms of the covenant to the mutual satisfaction of the Father, he speaks in verse 5 of the promised glory that would be his. The glory given to Christ involves the Father bestowing upon the elect faith, sanctification, and glory.

God gave them unto him, and he sanctified himself to be a sacrifice for their sake, praying for their sanctification, John 17:17-19; their preservation in peace, or communion one with another, and union with God, John 17:20, 21 and lastly, their glory, John 17:24 ... All which several postulata are no doubt grounded upon the fore-cited promises which by his Father were made unto him. *And in this, not one word concerning all and every one, but expressly the contrary, verse 9.* (emphasis ours) (10:171).

Other passages which manifest the evidence and nature of the covenant of redemption are Hebrews 2:9-10, 10:7; Psalms 16:2, 22:1, 40:8, 45:7, 60:7-8; Zechariah 6:13; Micah 5:4; John 20:27; Revelation 3:13 (12:498-508). Commenting on Hebrews 10:7ff (Ps. 40:7-8) Owen writes:

Now, this convention or agreement, as elsewhere, so it is most clearly expressed Hebrews 10:7, from Psalm 40:7, 8, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." And what will? Verse 10, "The will by which we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." The will of God was that Jesus should be offered; and to this end, that we might be sanctified and saved. It is called "The offering of the

body of Jesus Christ,” in answer to what was said before, “A body hast thou prepared me,” or a human nature, by a synecdoche. “My will,” says God the Father, “is, that thou have a body, and that that body be offered up; and that to this end, that the children, the elect, might be sanctified.” Says the Son to this, “Lo, I come to do thy will;” — “I accept of the condition, and give up myself to the performance of thy will” (12:498).

It is clear, then, that the covenant of redemption is a “compact” or “agreement” made between the Father and the Son before the world began. It is the foundation for the covenant of grace which God will do in time as He redeems his church for himself (12:496-7). The “agreement” is contingent upon the Son’s obedience. The execution of the agreement between the Son and the Father is effected positively in the Son’s offices of prophet, priest, and king. Owen’s description of the pact between the Father and the Son are based on the supposition that each will fulfill his duty to the other. The Scriptural warrant for this is found in Isaiah 42:4, 42:6, Psalm 16:10; 89:28, and Isaiah 50:5-9. Pertaining to the work itself; namely, Christ as the High Priest, Owen cites Hebrews 12:2, Isaiah 42:1-4 and Hebrews 7:28 (12:501-8).

This formulation, by Owen draws criticism from Wong (1998:372) who argues that Owen’s strong contractualism in the *pactum salutis* (covenant of redemption) makes the salvation of the elect not as an outcome of the “love” of the Father, but, rather, as a “debt” to be paid to the Son. He claims, “The pure, immediate love of the Father for the salvation of man is replaced by a mediate transaction between the Father and the Son. The picture of a loving and merciful Father is replaced by a commercial merchant God, who primarily honors the contract with His Son” (Ibid).

Wong, here, fails to appreciate Owen’s doctrine of God. Owen’s *Dissertation on Divine Justice* (10:480-624; cf. Trueman, 1999:87-103) sets forth the argument that

God's vindicatory justice necessitated that sin is atoned for. The atonement, therefore, is demanded by the attributes of God; attributes that consist not only of love but also of justice. God the Father, in purposing the salvation of the elect out of love, cannot be divorced from the fact that God the Father's vindicatory justice demands that Christ atone for the sins of his people.¹² Consequently, the contractual nature, inherent in the covenant of redemption, springs from the very attributes of God. Love is not replaced by "a mediate transaction between the Father and the Son" (Wong, 1998:372), but coexists with God's demand that sin be atoned for through the mediatorial work of the Son on behalf of the elect. Owen writes: "For the accomplishment of this work, the Father, who is principal in the covenant, the promiser, whose love 'sets all on work,' as is frequently expressed in the Scripture, requires of the Lord Jesus Christ, his Son, that *he shall do* that which, *upon consideration of his justice, glory, and honor*, was necessary to be done for the bringing about the end proposed, prescribing to him a law for the performance thereof; which is called his "will" so often in Scripture" (12:501). The necessity of Christ's satisfaction is here highlighted as well as the Father's love in sending the Lord Jesus.

We have noted already that Owen is careful to distinguish between the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption; the latter being the foundation of the former. But, the question remains: If election is established in the pre-temporal covenant of redemption and applied to the covenant grace in time, does that make the covenant of grace solely internal? The answer, for Owen, is an emphatic "No". The covenant of

¹² Some might argue this tension reminds one of Peter Abelard's work *Sic et Non*, an influential scholastic collection of apparently contradictory excerpts from the Fathers and Scripture. Many Protestants used Abelard as a symbol of all that was wrong with medieval theology.

grace, unlike the covenant of redemption, has an external nature to it. In an attempt to distinguish between the internal and external nature of the covenant, Owen uses the example of Abraham in Genesis 17:7

This is that which God engageth himself unto in this covenant of grace, that he will for everlasting be a God to him and his faithful seed. Though the external administration of the covenant was given to Abraham and his carnal seed, yet the effectual dispensation of the grace of the covenant is peculiar to them only who are the children of the promise, the remnant of Abraham according to election, with all that in all nations were to be blessed in him and in his seed, Christ Jesus. Ishmael, though circumcised, was to be put out, and not to be heir with Isaac, nor to abide in the house for ever, as the son of the promise was, Galatians 4:22, 23, 30 (11:205-6).

Owen's insistence that all covenants in Scripture are conditional is important if we are to recognize the difference between the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption. Since the covenant of grace has an internal and an external aspect, even in the new covenant, men are required to meet the requirements of the law in order to be saved. This is a result of Owen's doctrine of the covenant of works which remains binding on men not with reference to salvation but obligation to their Creator. Since men cannot fulfill God's law perfectly, God must "take up both sides". The significance of the covenant of redemption is found in Christ, as Mediator, dying for those whom the Father had given to him. Men, as a result of Christ's work, are graciously saved by grace through faith. However, that does not mean that the regenerate alone are externally part of the covenant of grace. But, by Owen's definition, only the elect participate in the fruits of the covenant of redemption. The threats, mentioned in Hebrews 6 and 10, are understood in light of the covenant of grace being both internal and external. Certainly, the covenant of redemption cannot be broken (12:497-508) since the Father and the Son has both immutably fulfilled it.

Moreover, the covenant of grace, for the elect, cannot be broken because it is tied to the covenant of redemption. There are, however, those “covenanted” with God, who are not regenerate who will break the covenant and receive the threatenings held in the sign (i.e. baptism) placed upon them (16:258ff).

3.1.14 Conclusion

The whole of Owen’s literary corpus suggests that four covenants exist in Scripture; the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of redemption which are revealed, in Scripture, throughout the history of supernatural revelation. Because Owen defines covenant as a “compact” or “agreement” there is a definite bilateral, conditional aspect to the aforementioned covenants. The doctrine of a bilateral, conditional covenant is the centerpiece of Owen’s theology because, as we have seen, theology, for Owen, is relational. Trueman sums up this concept well:

... the progressive nature of the covenant scheme serves to take account of the fact that theology requires a divine-human relationship, and that the biblical record shows that relationship has itself not been static but subject to historical movement, a movement which can be articulated by setting forth in order the key points at which God has explicitly defined his relationship with humanity: the various covenants which are found within the Bible (1998:49).

Supernatural revelation, given by God to sinful man, is closely bound up with the concept of the covenant and so, for Owen, “all true theology is based on a covenant”. This, of course, affects Owen’s soteriology as we have noted. Our goal in the next chapter is to relate Owen’s teaching on the covenants to the doctrine of justification by faith. It is our contention, hitherto nowhere else discussed in any secondary literature, that Owen’s doctrine of justification by faith alone is profoundly influenced by his understanding of the covenants.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.1 JUSTIFICATION: THE PRINCIPAL BENEFIT OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE

4.1.1 Introduction

Since the time of the Reformation, the doctrine of justification by faith alone (*Sola Fide*) has been recognized as the *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*, the doctrine of a standing or falling church (5:65). This Pauline doctrine caused a firestorm of activity between Protestant and Catholic theologians, but it was also a cause of disputation between the Protestants themselves. For example, three prominent members of the Westminster Assembly (William Twisse [Prolocutor of the Assembly], Thomas Gataker, and Richard Vines) did not subscribe to the imputation of active obedience of Christ, but only his passive obedience. It is, therefore, not surprising that much of the literature on justification was, and still is, polemical in nature (see Luther, 1979; Buchanan, 1991; Turretin, 1997). A basic presupposition of our study is the strong continuity, between the English Puritans (seventeenth century) and the Reformers on the continent (sixteenth century) regarding the doctrine of justification, particularly its forensic character and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ (see McGrath, 2005:286).

John Owen is no exception to this trend. Volume five of his *Works*, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith*, where he devotes over four hundred pages to the subject, shows him to be a polemical theologian *par excellence*. The importance of this subject, therefore, was not lost to Owen. He writes, “I shall take the boldness, therefore, to say, whoever be offended at it, that *if we lose the ancient doctrine of justification through faith in the blood of Christ*, and the imputation of his righteousness unto us,

public profession of religion will quickly issue in Popery or Atheism ... (5:206-7).

Elsewhere, he writes, “In my judgment, Luther spake the truth when he said, ‘*Amisso articulo justificationis, simul amissa est tota doctrina Christiana*’” (5:67), the loss of the article of Justification, involves the loss of the whole Christian doctrine. If, as Owen says, all true theology is based on a covenant and the loss of the article of justification by faith means the loss of the whole of Christian doctrine, there must certainly be a dogmatic relationship between the two.

It should be noted that the work on justification was written in the later years of Owen’s life. The work was published in 1677 and, therefore, represents his most mature thought on the subject. This is important because there is incontrovertible evidence that Owen changed his theological position on a number of issues. The most notable are his views on ecclesiology and the necessity of the atonement.¹³ There is, however, no evidence that Owen underwent any sort of change regarding his views on justification.

At present there is no definitive study of Owen’s doctrine of justification by faith.

Alan Clifford, in an attempt to buttress the Calvin versus the Calvinists thesis devotes a third of this study to showing unsuccessfully how John Wesley’s doctrine of

¹³ Regarding the change in his ecclesiology, Owen writes: “I professed myself of the Presbyterian judgment, in opposition to democratical confusion Of the congregational way I was not acquainted with any one person But sundry books being published on either side, I perused and compared them with the Scripture and one another, according as I received ability from God. After a general view of them ... I fixed on one to take under peculiar consideration and examination, which seemed most methodically and strongly to maintain that which was contrary, as I thought, to my present persuasion. This was Mr Cotton’s book of the Keys. In the pursuit and management of this work, quite beside and contrary to my expectation, at a time and season wherein I could expect nothing on that account but ruin in this world ... I was prevailed on to receive that and those principles which I had thought to have set myself in an opposition unto ...” (13:223; cf. Oliver, 2000:157-90).

On his change concerning the necessity of the atonement, compare Owen’s 1647 treatise on the atonement, *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (10:205-8) with his 1652 work, *Dissertation on Divine Justice* (10:486:624; cf. Trueman, 1999:87-103).

justification is closer to Calvin's than Owen's is to Calvin (Clifford, 1990:169-244). Our goal in this chapter is to give a detailed synopsis of Owen's doctrine of justification with the intention that this will show the reader how Owen's covenant theology plays a crucial role in his exposition of *Sola Fide*. There will, however, be critical interaction with some of Clifford's conclusions insofar as they relate to our study.

The idea that there is a strong correlation to the doctrine of the covenant and justification is not, of course, novel. Both John Calvin (Lillback, 2001:176-93) and Caspar Olevian (Clark, 2005:137-80), related the blessing of justification to the doctrine of the covenant. Owen's treatment of the doctrine of justification in relation to the covenant is not, therefore, new, but it does represent continuity, as well as advancement, with some of the major covenant theologians of the sixteenth century.

4.1.2 Covenant and Justification

Whether Owen relates the covenant and justification is the primary issue that must be addressed. According to Owen, even in the protoevangelium (Genesis 3:15), the beginning of the covenant of grace, it "would not be hard to show that all of our 'soteriology,' our doctrine concerning the Savior and Mediator and His appointed work, *along with justification by grace*, evangelical repentance, eternal rewards, and the resurrection of the body is all embraced (however obscurely) ... out of this first promise" (emphasis ours) (17:173). Moreover, speaking of the covenant made with Abraham (Genesis 17:7), Owen says:

... the very title of GOD ALMIGHTY is directly linked with covenant promise, that all would be eternally well with Abraham and his seed through the promised covenant seed, Christ. The promise of that seed is the foundation of all grace. Having already been promised, it was now specifically and graciously renewed to Abraham that, in and by his seed, God would show himself to be a merciful, sanctifying, *justifying*, and saving God, and that freely and unchangeably, requiring in return faith and obedience (17:366; cf. 17:204, 210; 1:482).

The question remains, however, what does Owen mean by “justifying” and how, specifically, does it relate to the covenant?

Justification, for Owen, is, according to chapter 19 of the *Greater Catechism*, “the gracious free *act* of God, *imputing the righteousness of Christ* to a believing sinner and for that speaking peace unto his conscience, in the pardon of his sin, - pronouncing him to be just and accepted before him” (emphasis ours) (1:487).¹⁴ It is also, as we will note, by faith alone (5:290-95). Owen’s doctrine of justification reflects historic Protestant orthodoxy on how a sinner is justified before God (See Calvin, 1960, 2:753; Turretin, 1997, 2:445, 647; Witsius, 1990, 1:190-91).

Having briefly established two important facts; namely, that Owen posits a relationship between covenant and justification and his doctrine of justification is thoroughly Protestant, finding similarity with the sixteenth century Reformers, such as Luther and Calvin, we will now look at Owen’s most explicit treatment of

¹⁴ The Westminster Larger Catechism (Q. 70) similarly defines justification as “... an act of God's free grace unto sinners, in which he pardons all their sins, accepts and accounts their persons righteous in his sight; not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them, but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them, and received by faith alone.” Similarly, Heidelberg Catechism, Q: 60, says: “How are you righteous before God? A: Only by true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, although my conscience accuse me, that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and am still prone always to all evil; yet God without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and *imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me*; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart (*Heidelberg Catechism*) (emphasis ours).

justification by faith alone and note the important place given to the covenant, whether it be the covenant of works, covenant of grace, or covenant of redemption.

4.1.3 Preliminary Considerations

The goal of Owen's study, no less, is the "glory of God in Christ" whereby a sinner finds "acceptance before God, with a right and title unto a heavenly inheritance" (5:7). The glory of God is contingent upon whether one believes justification is "wrought in and by us" or "not inherent in us ... yet imputed to us" (5:9); the latter, for Owen, being axiomatic to a true understanding of the grace and glory of God whilst the former being the hallmark of all false religion and philosophy. It should be remembered that there is a deep pastoral strain in Owen's writings, especially on the issue of justification. His practical application of this doctrine is evident in the following:

And small hope is there to bring such men to value the righteousness of Christ, as *imputed* to them, who are so unacquainted with their own unrighteousness *inherent* in them. Until men know themselves better, they will care very little to know Christ at all (5:21) Those who are pricked unto the heart for sin, and cry out, 'What shall we do to be saved?' will understand what we have to say (5:23).

The only hope for sinners, as they face the question, "What shall we do to be saved", is "laid in the first promise; wherein the destruction of the work of the devil by the suffering of the seed of the woman is proposed as the only relief for sinners, and only means of the recovery of the favor of God. 'It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,' Gen. iii. 15" (5:27). Here Owen ties the protoevangelium, the beginning of the covenant of grace, to how a sinner may find favor with God.

Stemming from the above considerations is the place of grace in justification. The Christian's whole relation to God, with regards to obedience, is entirely of grace. This finds its antithesis in the covenant of works where there was no mystery of grace; where the principal of man's "sole rule of [his] relation to God" was "Do this, and live" (5:44). What is at stake in this study is a proper understanding of the two contrasting covenants ("Works" and "Grace") that is most properly expressed in the Protestant doctrine of "Law" and "Gospel." Without understanding this law-gospel antithesis, Owen's doctrine of justification and his teaching on the covenants of works and grace are unintelligible.

4.1.4 Nature and Use of Faith

Owen takes the proposition that the "means of justification on our part is faith" as granted, even by the Romanists and Socinians (5:70-71). Owen's main concern, however, is to consider what is meant by "faith". He considers "faith" under two heads; first, its nature and, second, its use in our justification (5:71). Regarding its nature, Owen distinguishes between true saving faith and spurious faith.

For there is a faith whereby we are justified, which he who has shall be assuredly saved; which purifies the heart and works by love. And there is a faith or believing, which does nothing of all this; which who has, and has no more, is not justified, nor can be saved Thus it is said of Simon the magician, that he "believed," Acts viii.13, when he was in the gall of bitterness and bond of iniquity;" (Ibid).

The nature of true faith consists in the "*opening of the eyes* of the sinner, to see the filth and guilt of sin in the sentence and curse of the law applied unto his conscience, Rom vii. 9, 10" (5:79). This results in the sinner being "sensible of his guilt before God" which is a condition that comes about by the *act of sovereign grace*. This sense

of guilt does not merely consist in the assent (*assensus*) of the mind because believing is an “*act of the heart*” (5:81). But if it is “*assentia* alone”, then Owen rejects such a faith (5:83). This assenting faith is coupled with a “*fiducial* trust in the grace of God by Christ declared in the promises ...” (5:84). While most Reformed theologians spoke of justifying faith involving three elements: knowledge (*notitia*), assent (*assensus*), and trust (*fiducia*), Owen seems to have placed knowledge and assent together.

Not surprisingly Owen identifies Christ as the *object* of justifying faith (5:86). Christ as the object of our faith has a significant relation to the covenant of redemption. Notwithstanding this fact, however, Owen argues that not only Christ but the Father also is the proper object. He argues this because Christ is not the object of our faith absolutely but as “the *ordinance of God*, even the Father ... who is also the immediate object of faith as justifying ‘He that believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life’ ...” (Ibid). Relating to the covenant of redemption, we are to understand “God the Father as *sending*, and the Son as *sent*, - that is, Jesus Christ in the work of his mediation, as the ordinance of God for the recovery and salvation of lost sinners” as the object of faith (Ibid). Owen includes, along with this, “the grace of God, which is the cause; the pardon of sin, which is the effect; and the promises of the gospel, which are the means, of communicating Christ and the benefits of his mediation unto us” (5:87).

The nature of justifying faith, then, consists in the “*heart’s approbation of the way of justification and salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ proposed in the gospel, as proceeding from the grace, wisdom, and love of God ...*” (5:93). This includes a

renunciation of attaining righteousness and salvation by any other means except through Christ (5:100). Because the nature of saving faith is not merely *assensus* for Owen, he makes an important distinction regarding obedience in relation to faith.

Wherefore we say, the faith whereby we are justified, is such as is not found in any but those who are made-partakers of the Holy Ghost, and by him united unto Christ, whose nature is renewed, and in whom there is a principle of all grace, and purpose of obedience. Only we say, it is not any other grace, as *charity* and the like, nor any *obedience*, that gives life and form unto this faith; but it is this faith that gives life and efficacy unto all other graces, and form unto all evangelical obedience (5:104).

This brings up another important issue, of which Owen was aware of. According to Owen, some maintain, wrongly, that whatever is a necessary condition of the new covenant is, therefore, also a necessary condition of justification (5:105). However, Owen answers that perseverance to the end, for example, is a condition of the covenant of grace. As a result, if perseverance, because it is a condition of the covenant, is a condition of justification, then no man can be justified while he is in this world. “For”, says Owen, “a condition doth suspend that whereof it is a condition from existence until it be accomplished” (Ibid).

Owen, then, does not equate the new covenant with justification. Perseverance is also a blessing of the covenant of grace. That is, those who are effectually made partakers of the covenant of grace will surely persevere to the end (11:passim). However, justification in this present world, then, is not contingent upon final perseverance to the end. The Westminster Confession states, similarly, concerning faith, that “Faith justifies a sinner in the sight of God, not because of those other graces which do always accompany it, or of good works that are the fruits of it, nor as if the grace of

faith, or any act thereof, were imputed to him for his justification; but only as it is an instrument by which he receiveth and applieth Christ and his righteousness” (WLC, 73). Justification, then, as a blessing of the covenant of grace, is distinct from other graces such as sanctification and perseverance.

The use of faith in our justification is next considered by Owen. Here he affirms, as did the Reformers and Westminster divines,¹⁵ faith to be “the *instrumental cause* of our justification” (5:108). This is derived from Paul’s teaching in Romans 3:28 where he speaks of the righteousness of God that is through faith (*dia. pi, stewj*). Owen adds, “It follows, therefore, that where ... we are said to be justified ... “by faith,” an instrumental efficiency is intended” (5:109). Owen, aware that some argue “faith is the condition of our justification,” allows that faith may also be called the condition of our justification so long as *no more is intended* than God requires faith from us so that we may be justified (emphasis ours) (5:113). He warns, however, regarding faith and obedience, that

...if it be intended that they are such a condition of the covenant as to be by us performed *antecedently* unto the participation of any grace, mercy, or privilege of it, so as that they should be the consideration and procuring cause of them, - that they should be all of them, as some speak, the *reward of our faith and obedience*, - it is most false, and not only contrary to express testimonies of Scripture, but destructive of the nature of the covenant itself.

Here Owen speaks of the nature of both the covenant and justification. The covenant is conditional insofar as it is understood that faith is required on our part to apprehend

¹⁵ WCF 11.2 states: “Faith, thus receiving and resting on Christ and his righteousness, is the alone instrument of justification...” The WLC explains that justification is “received by faith alone” (70; see also WSC 33) and that God requires “nothing of them for their justification but faith...” (WLC, 71).

the blessings of the covenant. However, this faith, which is the gift of God, brings forth obedience so that the grace, mercies and privileges of the covenant are not dependent upon obedience but obedience flows from the grace, mercies and privileges of the covenant. As we noted in the previous chapter, the covenant of grace, for Owen, is conditional (11:210; 23:68-9); that is to say, the conditions are faith but even this condition is the gift of God making the covenant, in a sense, unconditional.

4.1.5 The Meaning of Justification

The etymological meaning of the word “justification”, for Owen, has significant implications for his covenant theology and doctrine of justification. The meaning of the word is crucial to Owen’s argument as a whole and is thus necessary for us if we want to fully understand Owen’s soteriology.

Owen was aware that the Latin word for justification, *justificatio*, denotes an internal change, from inherent unrighteousness to inherent righteousness. However, he argues that “*Justificatio*” and “*justifico*” do not belong to the Latin tongue, “nor can any good author be produced who ever used them, for the *making of him inherently righteous* ...” (5:124). So, he says, “Heron, in the whole Roman school, justification is taken for *justifaction*, or the making of a man to be *inherently* righteous ...” (5:124).

Because of this, some of the “ancients”, as Owen put it, confused justification with sanctification (Ibid). The Reformation “cry” of *ad fontes*, borrowed from the Renaissance, which would become a hallmark of Protestant exegesis, meant for Owen that the meaning of the word justification must be determined by scriptural use (Ibid).

Owen argues, “All Protestants ... affirm that the use and signification of these words is *forensic*” because in the Hebrew justification comes from $q\delta\alpha x$; (tsadaq).

And the sense may be taken from any one of them, as Job xiii.18, $f\grave{p};v]mi\ yTiK]r\grave{a}[:\ an;AhNehi\ qD;x]a,\ ynia\}AyKi\ yTi[[]d\grave{a}y;$ — “Behold, now I have ordered my cause; I know that I shall be justified.” The ordering of his cause (his judgment), his cause to be judged on, is his preparation for a sentence, either of absolution or condemnation: and hereon his confidence was, that he should be justified; that is, *absolved, acquitted, pronounced righteous*. And the sense is no less pregnant in the other places.

Furthermore, all of these verses use the term $q\delta\alpha x$; in the *hiphil* and are translated by $dikaio\upsilon, n$ in the Septuagint (LXX). In defending the forensic sense of the term and, therefore, imputation, Owen argues that $q\delta\alpha x$ is not used on any occasion but to “absolve, acquit, esteem, declare, pronounce righteous, or to *impute righteousness*; which is the *forensic sense* of the word we plead for ... so vain is the pretence of some, that justification consists only in the pardon of sin, which is not signified by the word in any one place of Scripture (5:125-6). Owen does note, “Wherefore, although $q\delta\alpha x$; in *Kal* signifies ‘*justum esse*’, and sometimes ‘*juste agere*,’ which may relate unto *inherent righteousness*, yet where any action towards another is denoted, this word signifies nothing but to *esteem, declare, pronounce, and adjudge* any one absolved, acquitted, cleared, justified: there is, therefore, no other kind of justification once mentioned in the Old Testament” (5:128).

The New Testament use of the word justification bears similar results for Owen where the word, and that alone, $Dikaio\omega,$ is used. Owen writes (5:128), “Neither is this word used in any good author whatever to signify the making of a *man righteous* by

any applications to produce internal righteousness in him; but either to absolve and acquit, to judge, esteem, and pronounce righteous; or, on the contrary, to condemn.”

Owen’s primary goal is to establish the forensic sense of the term because of the obvious implications this has for the doctrine of justification. If it can be established that the term is primarily used in a forensic sense, to declare righteous, and thus carries a more significant connotation than mere forgiveness, then the Reformed doctrine of justification will be maintained.

4.1.6 Double Justification

Owen’s chief polemic against Rome consists primarily in proving their distinction of a double justification to be false. The first justification, according to Rome, is the infusion of grace, through baptism which effects grace automatically *ex opere operato*, whereby original sin is extinguished and the habits of sin are expelled (5:137). The second justification is the formal cause of their good works (5:138).

Paul, they say, treats of the *first justification* only, whence he excludes all works ... but James treats of the *second justification*; which is by good works Sanctification is turned into a justification The whole nature of *evangelical justification*, consisting in the gratuitous pardon of sin and the imputation of righteousness ... is utterly defeated by it (Ibid).

Elsewhere, Owen argues that the distinction of *two justifications*, as defended and articulated by the Catholic Church leaves us with no justification at all (5:141).

There are only two ways by which a man may be justified according to Owen. The first justification is “By the works of the law” (5:157), wherein sinners are to fulfill *all*

the terms of the law, like Christ, and the second is “by grace”, wherein Christ has fulfilled all the terms of the law on behalf of the elect (5:139). Justification is a work of God, “by grace”, that is once completed “in all the causes and the whole effect of it, though not as unto the full possession of all that it give right and title unto”(5:143). What Owen means is that a man is fully declared righteous as soon as he, by grace, puts his faith in Christ. However, the full benefits of justification like heaven, for example, are a future possession. Moreover, by believing with justifying faith, Christians become “sons of God” and have a right to all the benefits of his mediation which leaves any other justification unnecessary. Moreover, through faith in Christ believers sins are forgiven so that no one can lay charge against God’s elect, for “he that believeth hath everlasting life” (5:144-5). If justification is not at once complete, that is, in need of a second justification, “no man can be justified in this world” (5:145).

For no time can be assigned, nor measure of obedience be limited, whereon it may be supposed that any one comes to be justified before God, who is not so on his first believing; for the Scripture does nowhere assign any such time or measure. And to say that *no man is completely justified* in the sight of God in this life, is at once to overthrow all that is taught in the Scriptures concerning justification, and wherewithal all peace with God and comfort of believers. But a man acquitted upon his legal trial is at *once discharged* of all that the law has against him (Ibid).

For these reasons Owen rejects the Catholic doctrine of a twofold justification (cf. 5:159-60). Moreover, the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms do not speak of a second justification but of an open acknowledgement and acquittal on the Day of Judgment. “What shall be done to the righteous at the day of judgment? A. At the day of judgment, the righteous, being caught up to Christ in the clouds, shall be set on his right hand, and there openly acknowledged and acquitted”(WLC 90).

Regarding the place of justified sinners in the covenant Owen makes several pertinent comments. The justified sinner is forgiven for all future sins, unless, however, “they should fall into such sins as should, *ipso facto*, forfeit their justified estate, and transfer them from the covenant of grace into the covenant of works; which we believe God, in his faithfulness, will preserve them from” (5:146). Here Owen is speaking of apostatized believers who then become subject to the full demands of God’s law but because of his doctrine of perseverance elect believers will not fall away (11:passim). He continues by arguing that because sin cannot be pardoned before it is committed, the obligations of the curse of the law are nullified in justified sinners which are “consistent with a justified estate, or the terms of the covenant of grace” (Ibid). Believers derive their security in justification from the fact that “It is God that justifieth;” And this depends on “*the unchangeableness of the everlasting covenant* (emphasis ours), which is ‘ordered in all things, and sure’...” (5:147).

4.1.7 Imputation and Surety

In defending the doctrine of imputation, especially the imputation of Christ’s active obedience (6:164-80), Owen is standing squarely within the Reformed theological tradition (cf. WCF, 6.3). For example, the Westminster Confession of Faith explains (11.1) that God freely justifies believers “not by infusing righteousness into them, but by pardoning their sins, and by accounting and accepting their persons as righteous; not for anything wrought in them, or done by them, but for Christ’s sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to them, as their righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them....”

Clifford, wrongly, posits a sharp dichotomy between Owen's formulation of justification and Calvin's by arguing that Owen's emphasis on the active obedience of Christ, "reflects the high orthodoxy of a later generation" (1990:170). Interestingly, while Owen uses the classical Reformed terminology of "active obedience", he regards the expression of "passive obedience" in reference to Christ's work as improper since obedience, by its very nature, could never be merely passive (2:163,159). Central to Clifford's argument is the contention that Calvin's doctrine of justification speaks only of the remission of sins, not the imputation of Christ's active obedience (Ibid, 173). "Clearly, then," Clifford alleges, "the high Calvinists of Owen's generation departed significantly from the Reformers" (Ibid). This, however, is a misreading of the Reformer. Calvin says,

From this we infer that we must seek from Christ what the law would give if anyone could fulfill it; or, what is the same thing, that we obtain through Christ's grace what God promised in the law for our works: 'He who will do these things, will live in them' [Lev. 18:5, cf. Comm.]. This is no less clearly confirmed in the sermon delivered at Antioch, which asserts that by believing in Christ 'we are justified from everything from which we could not be justified by the law of Moses' [Acts 13:39; cf. Vg., ch. 13:38]. For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us when, by taking that burden upon himself, *he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law?* ... Hence, that *imputation of righteousness* without works which Paul discusses [Rom., ch.4]. For the righteousness found in Christ alone is reckoned as ours" (emphasis ours) (1960:533).

Justification for Calvin means something more than just the forgiveness of sins. And so it was for Owen. Imputation is "*an act of God ... whereby ... he makes an effectual grant and donation of a true, real, perfect righteousness, even that of Christ himself, unto all that do believe; and accounting it as theirs, on his own gracious act, both absolves them from and granteth them right and title unto eternal life*" (5:173).

The issue of imputation is, of course, not merely Christ's righteousness, both active and passive, being imputed to believers, but the sins of believers are imputed to Christ (5:175).

The foundation of imputation is grounded in the union between Christ and his church. They are one mystical person. This means, for Owen, that both Christ and his church coalesce into one mystical person through the uniting efficacy of the Holy Spirit (5:176). Because of this mystical union, wherein Christ is the head and believers are the body, whatever merit he accomplished is imputed to his elect, as if what he did was done by them. This also means, of course, that what his elect deserved on the account of sin was imputed to Christ, hence his atoning sacrifice (Ibid).

There exists an intimate relation of this union in the covenant of redemption. For, the cause of this union lies in the "eternal compact that was between the Father and the Son concerning the recovery and salvation of fallen mankind" (5:179). Wanting to put forth a distinctly Trinitarian theology, Owen also speaks of the Holy Spirit who makes effectual this union between Christ and the church (Ibid).

The covenant of redemption meant that Christ was to be "the *surety of the new covenant*" as the final administration of the covenant of grace on behalf of the elect (5:181). Owen adds,

We, on all accounts, *stand in need of a surety* for us, or our behalf. Neither, without the interposition of such a surety, could any covenant between God and us be firm and stable, or an *everlasting covenant*, ordered in all things, and sure. In the first covenant made with Adam there was no surety, but God and men were the immediate covenanters; and although we were then in a state and condition able to perform and

answer all the terms of the covenant, yet it was broken and disannulled ... It was *man alone* who failed and broke that covenant: wherefore it was necessary, that upon the making of the *new covenant* ... we should have a *surety* and undertaker for us ..." (5:186).

The Lord Christ was, as the voluntary surety of the covenant, was able to "perform all that is required on our part, that we may enjoy the benefits of the covenant" (5:187).

Owen refutes those who deny "that the *grace of the covenant* ... *the remission of sins, sanctification, justification, adoption*, and the like, are the effects or procurements of the death of Christ," because Christ's work is the "*principal promise* of the covenant" (5:194). The "sole cause" of the covenant of grace, through the mediatorial work of Christ, as the surety, lies behind the goodness, grace and love of God (5:193, 195).

Wong criticizes Owen's stress on contractualism in the covenant of redemption, since it makes the salvation of man a result of a "debt" to be paid to the Son rather than out of "pure, immediate love" (1998:372). While Owen focused on the necessity of salvation for the elect, he saw God's love as the basis of Christ's suretyship. Wong also fails to speak of the emphasis Owen puts on the Son's love for the elect in becoming Mediator on their behalf. The whole of Owen's writings on the covenant and justification show that the salvation of the elect is ultimately dependent upon the love of God with the foundation for the "contract" in the covenant of redemption an ontological necessity that emanates from the necessary justice of God (5:195).

4.1.8 Formal Cause of Justification

Owen possessed awareness of the diverse opinions on the formal cause of justification (5:207). He himself taught that the formal cause of justification was the imputation of the righteousness of Christ which includes "his whole obedience unto God ..." (Ibid:209).

Owen's most famous theological opponent, Richard Baxter, in his *Aphorisms of Justification*, argued that the formal cause of justification was the faith of the believing individual, imputed or reputed as righteousness on account of the righteousness of Christ (1676:29, 88, 129-30). Behind this doctrine Baxter makes a distinction between the old and new covenants. By this he meant, essentially, the difference between the old and new testaments. This distinction is based upon Christ fulfilling the old covenant and therefore making it possible for a man to be justified on the basis of the more lenient terms of the moral law (Ibid:30), hence the term "neonomianism". In Baxter's theology, the righteousness of Christ in fulfilling the old covenant becomes the *meritorious* cause of justification which in turn allows the faith of the believer to be the *formal* cause of justification under the new covenant. Referring, it seems, to Baxter's neonomianism, Owen dismisses the view that there can be a "*relaxation* of the law ... for if there be, it respects the whole being of the law, and consists either in the suspension of its whole obligation, at least for a season, or the substitution of another person to answer its demands, who was not in the original obligation, in the room of them that were" (5:248).

Imputation, as the formal cause of justification, is crucial to Owen's argument as a whole. For a sinner to stand before God two things are required. First, his iniquities are forgiven and, second, he must possess a righteousness that will meet the requirements of God's justice. Our own inherent righteousness does not meet the demands of God's law (5:235). In his doctrine of sanctification Owen does speak of an "inherent righteousness". However, this righteousness must not be confused, of course, with the righteousness that comes from God, is imputed and received by faith alone that is peculiar to justification. Owen says, the "Scripture plainly affirms that

there is such an inherent righteousness in all that believe That it is the *condition of our justification*, and so antecedent unto it, is expressly contrary unto that of the apostle Nor is it the condition of the covenant itself ..." (5:232). The condition of justification is, therefore, not our personal righteousness and neither is our righteousness the condition of the covenant itself. Rather, the covenant effects righteousness because both justification and sanctification are by grace alone. The distinction, then, between our own personal righteousness which does not justify and the righteousness of Christ which does justify is an all too important distinction made by Owen.

4.1.9 The Law's Demands

The argument for *Sola Fide* is buttressed by the nature of the obedience God requires and the unchangeableness of his law that obliges all men (5:240-1). And the law is in no way abrogated or changed over the course of redemptive history (Ibid:242). As we have noted in the previous chapter, while the covenant of works is formally abrogated the law still remains in effect with the inroad of sin. The debate, for Owen, is not about the "*federal adjunct* of the law, but about its *moral nature* only" (Ibid:243). The law continues in its efficacy so that it obliges mankind to respond in perfect obedience under the original penalty of death, as was stipulated in the covenant of works. Therefore, it necessarily follows that unless God's law is perfectly obeyed and fulfilled, the penalty of death will fall on all that transgress it (Ibid).

But even if someone, who is once a sinner, "should afterward yield all that perfect obedience unto God that the law requires, [he] could not thereby obtain the benefit of the promise of the covenant ... because he is *antecedently a sinner*, and so obnoxious

unto the curse of the law ...” (Ibid). Because, then, it is impossible for man to keep the law perfectly, God never renewed the law “*as a covenant a second time*” (emphasis ours) (5:244). Owen argues this because of his doctrine of original sin which makes all humans guilty before God at the time of conception.

The law, then, abides and is not “relaxed” in any way. Moreover, its very nature, springing forth from the nature of God, demands perfect obedience in all its parts. As a result, there is no other way whereby the immutable law of God may be “established and fulfilled with respect unto us, but by the imputation of the perfect obedience and righteousness of Christ, who is the end of the law for righteousness unto all that do believe” (5:250). The law, then, is not abrogated but continues as it did before the fall. However, it has no salvific value, hence Christ’s work, as the covenant mediator, secures the justification of those for whom he died.

4.1.10 Justification Proved from the Two Covenants

Owen’s doctrine of justification is shaped by his use of the covenants. Owen speaks of the “two covenants” and the difference between them in his argument. By the two covenants he means both the covenant of works, the law of creation as it was given to man, with promises and threatenings, and the covenant of grace, revealed and proposed in the *protoevangelium* (5:275). Justification is proved from the difference of the covenants not vice versa. That is, indeed, a significant part of our thesis; namely, that Owen’s doctrine of justification is shaped by his use of the covenants. The covenant of works, for Owen, consists in this – “that upon our personal obedience ... we should be accepted with God, and rewarded with him” (Ibid). Because there was no mediator in this covenant all “*things were transacted immediately between*

God and man" (5:276) so that the blessings of the covenant depended not upon a Mediator but on personal obedience (Ibid). Stemming from this, Owen argues, "nothing but perfect, sinless, obedience would be accepted with God ..." (Ibid). There could be no new covenant made "unless the *essential form of it* were of another nature, - namely, that our *own personal obedience* be not the rule and cause of our acceptation and justification before God ..." (Ibid).

The importance of what Owen is arguing here cannot be overemphasized. Whatever grace is introduced into the covenant of works, namely, condescending grace as opposed to salvific grace, it must not be introduced with the result that our works are "excluded from being the cause of our justification." However, "if a new covenant be made, such grace must be provided as is absolutely inconsistent with any works of ours, as unto the first ends of the covenant; ..." (Ibid). The important line of demarcation between the two covenants, works and grace, is set up by Owen to prove that justification takes on a decidedly different character with reference to our works in each respective covenant. This law-gospel dichotomy is used to preserve the gracious nature of justification in the new covenant that is of *grace*, which wholly excludes works (Ibid). Owen continues,

... that is, so of grace, as that our own works are not the means of justification before God; It hath a *mediator and surety*; which alone is built on this supposition, that what we cannot do in ourselves which was originally required of us, and what the law of the first covenant cannot enable us to perform, that should be performed for us by our mediator and surety (Ibid).

The essence of the Christian religion consists in Christ being given to the elect as Mediator on their behalf, to do what they could not do, with the result being this:

... instead of our own righteousness, we have the 'righteousness of God;' instead of being righteous in ourselves before God, he is 'The LORD our Righteousness. And nothing but a righteousness of another kind and nature, unto justification before God, could constitute another covenant. Wherefore, the righteousness whereby we are justified is the righteousness of Christ imputed unto us, or we are still under the law, under the covenant of works (5:277).

4.1.11 Faith Alone

That sinners are justified by faith *alone* is a key aspect of the biblical Reformed doctrine of justification (McGrath, 2005:213). The term "faith alone" originated with Luther it seems. Luther's German translation of the New Testament added the word *allein* (*alone*) to Romans 3:28 rendering "...is justified by faith..." as "...is justified by faith *alone*..." (emphasis ours). It reads: "So halten wir nun dafür, daß der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werke, allein durch den Glauben" (Luther Bible, 1545). This is hardly surprising, given the other constitutive elements that make up the doctrine of justification, as we consider Owen's argument as a whole. Thus, his doctrine of justification by faith *alone* finds its basis not in isolated proof-texts, but in the totality of Scripture concerning the nature of salvation, the covenants, and man's utter inability to save himself.

The argument made by Owen thus far is that the righteousness of God is imputed to those who believe. Specifically, the righteousness of Christ; his active and passive obedience makes sinners righteous. Second, Owen "pleads",

That it is *faith alone* which on our part is required to interest us in that righteousness, or whereby we comply with God's grant and communication of it, or receive it unto our use and benefit; for although this faith is in itself the radical principle of all obedience, ... yet, as we are justified by it, its act and duty is such, or of that nature, as that no other grace, duty, or work, can be associated with it, or be of any consideration (5:291).

Owen's argument for faith *alone* is fivefold. Not surprisingly, it has a definite Christocentric emphasis. First, the New Testament expresses the faith, whereby sinners are justified, as something *received*. Only faith can receive Christ; "and what it receives is the cause of our justification" (John 1:12) (5:292). Moreover, even the grace of God and righteousness itself, "as the efficient and material cause of our justification, are received also" (Ibid). Second, "Faith is expressed by *looking*" (John 3:14-15) (Ibid). By looking upon Christ alone "the nature of faith is expressed" (5:293). Third, faith denotes coming to Christ (Matthew 11:28). "To come unto Christ for life and salvation, is to believe on him unto the justification of life; but no other grace or duty is a coming unto Christ: and therefore have they no place in justification" (Ibid). Fourth, faith is expressed by "*fleeing* for refuge" (Hebrews 6:18) (5:294).

For herein it is supposed that he who believeth is antecedently thereunto convinced of his lost condition, and that if he abide therein he must perish eternally; that he hath nothing of himself whereby he may be delivered from it; that he must retake himself unto somewhat else for relief; that unto this end he considers Christ as set before him, and proposed unto him in the promise of the gospel; that he judges this to be a holy, a safe way, for his deliverance and acceptance with God ... (Ibid).

Finally, the terms by which faith is expressed in the Old Testament are "*leaning on* God ... or Christ, *resting* on God *cleaving* unto the Lord, as also by trusting, hoping, and waiting (Ibid). Those who acted on this type of faith "declare themselves to be lost, hopeless, helpless, desolate, poor, orphans; whereon they place all their hope and expectation on God *alone*" (emphasis ours) (Ibid).

Owen is aware that the Scriptures do not explicitly say “justification is by faith alone” (5:311). However, Owen points out there “faith alone” is implied in the words “By faith in his blood;” for “faith respecting the blood of Christ as that whereby propitiation was made for sin, - in which respect alone the apostle affirms that we are justified through faith, - admits of no association with any other graces or duties” (5:311-12). The chief theme manifesting itself throughout Owen’s writings is that of upholding the doctrine of justification apart from any consideration of human merit. The “alone”, therefore, attached to justification is simply the outworking of Owen’s overall emphasis to uphold *Soli Deo Gloria*.

4.1.12 Christ and Adam

Historically, the exegetical battlefield of justification centers on the book of Romans, especially chapters three, four, five and ten. Other key texts include 1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 3:8-9; Jeremiah 23:6; and Ephesians 2:8-10 for example. Owen expounds parts of Paul’s argument in Romans in an attempt to defend the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Fide*.

Owen is careful to highlight that Paul’s first consideration in setting forth the doctrine of justification is to show that all men are sinners and guilty before God so that the “righteousness whereby we are justified is the righteousness of God, in opposition unto any righteousness of our own, chap. i. 17, iii. 21, 22” (5:307). The righteousness of God Paul speaks of in Romans 3:21ff is *χωρις νομου*, - “without the law”; that is, it excludes the works of obedience to the law. Moreover, the law and the prophets bore witness to this righteousness. It was promised, as we have noted already, in “*the first promise* of the blessed seed ... for he alone was ‘to make an end

of sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness,” (5:308). This righteousness of God is promised only to those who have faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Christ Jesus, according to Owen, is so the only way and means whereby this righteousness of God is conferred to his people (Ibid).

Further to this, Owen argues that the principal efficient cause is expressed with the emphasis “dikaiou, menoi dwrea.n th/| auvtou/ ca, riti” (Being justified freely by his grace ...). This means that because God is the principal efficient cause of our justification, his grace, not our works, are the only moving cause (5:309). Stemming from this, *Sola Fide* is proved because human sufficiency is eliminated: Pou/ ou=n h` kau, chsijÈ VExeklei, sqh (Rom. 3:27, Where is boasting then? It is excluded). In evangelical justification, pride is prohibited because no place for human effort is admitted; indeed, if there is a place for works, then boasting must be admitted.

The parallel between Christ and Adam (Romans 5:12-21) is also crucial to Owen’s argument as a whole and carries with it significant implications for Owen’s doctrine of the covenants as well. Owen recognizes that historically theologians have found Romans 5:12-21, because of its “ellipses, antapodota, hyperbata, and other figures of speech” (5:322), particularly hard to understand. However, those “acquainted with the common principles of Christian religion” (Ibid) can see that the apostle is showing that “as the sin of Adam was imputed unto all men unto condemnation, so the righteousness or obedience of Christ is imputed unto all that believe unto the justification of life” (Ibid). Indeed, even Socinus acknowledges this passage to be the

clearest statement of what the Reformed hold to be true concerning double imputation.

For Owen, there is, in Romans 5:12-21, a comparison between the two Adams.

Through the first Adam sin was brought into the world. Through the second Adam, Christ, sin is taken away. Because sin entered the world through Adam, so too did death as the consequence for that sin. This death, on its entrance, passed on all, -

“that is, all men became liable and obnoxious unto it, as the punishment due to sin”

(5:323). Owen continues,

All men that ever were, are, or shall be, were not then existent in their own persons; but yet were they all of them then, upon the first entrance of sin, made subject to death, or liable unto punishment. They were so by virtue of divine constitution, upon *their federal existence* in the one man that sinned. And actually they became obnoxious in their own persons unto the sentence of it upon their first natural existence, being born children of wrath (Ibid).

The specific sin of Adam’s that is imputed to all humanity is the *guilt* of Adam’s sin as opposed to natural propagation.¹⁶ The phrase *evfV w-| pa,ntej h[marton* (“in whom all have sinned”) is used by Paul to declare “how all men universally became liable unto [the punishment of death]” (5:324). All are accountable to the curse of death not because of their own actual sin, for “the apostle, in the next verses, affirms that death passed on them also who never sinned actually, or as Adam did,

¹⁶ Owen is here expounding what is called “Representationalism”. This is the view favored by those Reformed theologians who are also federal theologians. It states that Adam is the federal head of humanity and the representative of the race. That is, Adam acts on behalf of humanity. It is also referred to as “immediate imputation” in contradistinction to “mediate imputation”. Mediate imputation is the notion that God “imputes” sin via natural generation. That is, original sin is passed down the generations “mediately”. This was the view of the French Saumur School of theology, following Joshua Placcæus.

whose sin was actual” (5:325). In his argument for immediate imputation Owen argues that “if the actual sins of men ... were intended, then should men be made liable to death before they had sinned; for death, upon its first entrance into the world, passed on all men, before any one man had actually sinned but Adam only” (Ibid).

But that men should be liable unto death, which is nothing but the punishment of sin, when they have not sinned, is an open contradiction. For although God, by his sovereign power, might inflict death on an innocent creature, yet that an innocent creature should be guilty of death is impossible: for to be guilty of death, is to have sinned. Wherefore this expression, “Inasmuch as all have sinned,” expressing the desert and guilt of death then when sin and death first entered into the world, no sin can be intended in it but the sin of Adam, and our interest therein: “Eramus enim omnes ille unus homo;” and this can be no otherwise but by the imputation of the guilt of that sin unto us (Ibid).

The argument for Adamic imputation, seen in Romans 5:12ff, to all his posterity, buttresses, for Owen, the argument for the forensic imputation of the righteousness of Christ to all who believe (5:326). He considers this argument based on Romans 5:15-16 where the apostle explains the comparison between Adam and Christ by way of a dissimilitude, between *paraptwma, twn* and *ca, risma* (5:327). By comparing the obedience of Christ with the disobedience of Adam, the *federal* nature of sin and salvation are most clearly delineated by the Apostle (5:327). This federal structure posited by Owen also means that when Adam was in a state of acceptance before God, so, too, was his posterity. The covenant was coeval with humanity, but voluntary obedience, on Adam’s part, was a means of signing and sealing (17:25). Adam’s obedience would have consisted in the eternal enjoyment of God due to the law’s voice “Do this and live”.

Romans 5:19 is further evidence of what Owen has been arguing. The words “by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous” are determinative for Owen because it allows Owen to press the dissimilitude between Adam and Christ further. The words *dia. th/j u`pakoh/j* speak of Christ’s actual obedience to the whole law of God in comparison to Adam’s transgression that was against the whole law of God. For Owen, then, the words “many are made righteous” are a result of the *whole* obedience of Christ; that is, his active and passive obedience (5:334).

4.1.13 Union with Christ

The doctrine of justification in relation to the covenant is only fully understood in Owen’s thought as it relates to the doctrine of union with Christ. The primary function of the covenant is to bring sinners into union with Jesus Christ whereby they are then partakers of the blessings of the covenant promises. The union is effected by the Spirit who is given according to the economy of salvation based upon the eternal covenant of redemption (1:330; cf. 11:123; 21:147). “Union with Christ”, says Owen, “is the principle and measure of all spiritual enjoyments and expectations” (21:146; cf. 3:516). He continues,

And hence is our *justification*: for ... being united unto Christ, we are interested in that *acquittal* from the condemning sentence of the law which was granted unto himself when he satisfied it to the utmost Our union with him is the ground of the *actual imputation* of his righteousness unto us; for he covers only the members of his own body ... (21:150).

The Holy Spirit, for Owen, is given in accordance with the promise Christ received in his ascension (Acts 2:33) and only acts consistently with the purpose of Christ and the Father. One of the obvious implications of this is that the Spirit does not work in the

lives of all without exception because Christ did not die for all without exception. There is, then, a unity of purpose and application in the Trinity on the basis of the covenant of redemption. The Spirit becomes “the cause of all other graces that we are made partakers of; they are all communicated unto us by virtue of our union with Christ. Hence is our adoption, our justification, our fruitfulness, our perseverance, our resurrection, our glory” (21:150; cf. 4:385; 23:327). Effectual calling establishes this union and involves regeneration (9:291) and produces a twofold blessing (*duplex beneficium*); namely justification and sanctification. Ferguson (1995:36) correctly notes that union with Christ and all aspects of the *ordo salutis* are contingent upon the application and fruit of the covenant of grace. A Christian is someone who has been taken into covenant with God in Christ, by the Holy Spirit.

4.1.14 Conclusion

The importance of justification by faith alone to Christian doctrine was fully appreciated by Owen. For him, as well as Luther, it was the *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*. Moreover, his contention that “all true theology is ... based on a covenant” (17:28) is entirely consistent with his formulation of justification by faith alone. Indeed, the relation of the two is clearly formulated by Owen (17:366).

The chief aim of Owen’s study on justification is the “glory of God in Christ” whereby a sinner finds “acceptance before God, with a right and title unto a heavenly inheritance” (5:7). As a result, there is a consistent motif, running throughout the work, of man’s total dependence, apart from works, on God’s grace for justification. The means of justification on the part of believers is faith. But this faith is not only a mere assent to the truths of Christ’s work on behalf of sinners, though it does include

that. Rather, true, saving faith is both *assensus* coupled with a “*fiducial trust*” (5:84). This type of faith results in the “*heart’s approbation of the way of justification and salvation of sinners by Jesus Christ proposed in the gospel, as proceeding from the grace, wisdom, and love of God ...*” (5:93). As a result, the object of our faith is both Christ *and* the Father. This faith, then, is “the *instrumental cause* of our justification” (5:108). The covenant of grace is conditional because faith, as the instrument, is required to apprehend the blessings of the covenant. But, wanting to preserve the graciousness of the covenant, Owen holds that the faith whereby sinners are justified is the gift of God.

The doctrine of imputation is crucial to Owen’s argument. Christ fulfilled the demands of the law, on the part of the elect, so that they may enjoy benefits of the covenant” (5:187). His active and passive obedience, his righteousness, is imputed to believers and their sins are imputed to him. Christ’s work is the principal promise of the covenant. The formal cause of justification, therefore, is the imputation of Christ’s righteousness. Imputation, then, means that believers fulfill the law’s demands

The two covenants, covenant of works and grace, set up a law-gospel dichotomy. The way of eternal life in the old covenant (covenant of works) is by perfect law-keeping. However, in the new covenant (covenant of grace) the way of life is a result of grace. As a result, justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ’s work alone, is proved from the difference between the two covenants. The parallel of Christ and Adam, as federal heads, relates to this law-gospel dichotomy. Christ performed, in the covenant of grace, on behalf of his people, what Adam could not do, in the

covenant of works, on behalf of his people. Thus, the soteriological goal of the covenant for Owen is to bring sinners into union with Christ. This enables them to enjoy the blessing of justification.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 OWEN, COVENANT AND JUSTIFICATION: THE CONCLUSION

5.1.1 Summary

The church has been blessed through its history with many theological giants whose writings remain with us even though they do not. Among the illustrious names of Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin and Edwards we can place the name of John Owen. His twenty-four volume corpus has left an indelible imprint upon the Christian church, particularly Reformed Protestants who, to this day, find much value, both theological and practical, in his writings. Consequently, the warrant for this thesis lies in the fact that his writings are of immense importance to understanding historical theology.

Our goal in this thesis has been to show that Owen's theology is profoundly influenced by the covenant concept. Indeed, his statement that all true theology is based on a covenant (17:28) has had constitutive significance for our study. The covenant, then, because of its significance, influences many important doctrines in Owen's theology, particularly justification by faith alone. It has been our contention that apart from the covenant concept, his doctrine of justification would be unintelligible.

We showed the above thesis in the following way. In *Chapter One* we discussed Owen's significance, his academic training, influences, and literary resources. This enabled us to locate Owen in the intellectual tradition of his time with the purpose that

we better understand where and why he may have said what he did. What we noted from this chapter is that Owen was a man whose mind was steeped in patristic, medieval, and Reformation theology. Moreover, he was extremely well-versed in contemporary literature, Socinian, Protestant, and Catholic. We saw that the tradition and academic context influenced much of what Owen said, including the subjects of covenant theology and justification by faith. Because, then, of Owen's importance as a seventeenth-century intellectual figure, the subject of our study has been valuable in understanding the Reformed theological context of that time.

In *Chapter Two*, from the brief history of covenant theology we manifested, starting from Augustine leading up to Owen and his contemporaries in the seventeenth-century, that Owen's thoughts on the covenant did not occur in a vacuum. He was part of an ongoing Western tradition that valued the covenant concept as a Scriptural tool that integrated redemptive history beginning from Adam to Christ. Moreover, we noted that the Calvin versus the Calvinists argument is a specious one since much of what Owen said on the covenants bore distinct similarity to Calvin's covenant theology. Much of what was discussed in this chapter concerning covenant theology, as it pertained to certain theologians, can be found in Owen's writings. His formulations are, then, "part of an ongoing Western theological tradition which has historical roots back beyond the Reformation, beyond even the Middle Ages, and which is closely allied to parallel movements on the continent" (Trueman, 1998:9). This tradition, to which Owen belonged, has maintained the close relationship between covenant theology and justification by faith.

In *Chapter Three* we set forth Owen's covenant theology. In this chapter we noted that Owen organized his theology in *Theologoumena* along a covenantal model (17:passim). That is, he structured redemptive history, the covenant of grace, along the lines of God's purposes as they unfolded progressively from Adam through to Christ. In Owen's writings, particularly his commentary on Hebrews and *Theologoumena*, we note that four covenants appear in Scripture. They are 1) the covenant of works; 2) the covenant at Sinai; 3) the covenant of grace; and 4) the covenant of redemption. All of these covenants had a decisive impact on Owen's doctrine of justification.

In *Chapter Four* we related Owen's covenant theology to his doctrine of justification by faith alone as a case study proving that apart from his overarching theology of the covenant, this doctrine would be unintelligible in his thought. It was shown that Owen's doctrine of justification by faith alone is inextricably intertwined with his covenant theology.

5.1.2 Warranted Conclusions

Having set out the summary of our thesis and how we showed that Owen's doctrine of justification is shaped by his use of the covenant concept, we will explore more in depth the support given to prove this thesis.

We noted that Owen explicitly relates justification to the covenant of grace (17:173, 366). For Owen, justification is through faith alone, by grace alone, in Christ alone, to the glory of God alone. That is to say, the Christian's whole relation to God is entirely of grace, which is mediated through the covenant of grace. The covenant of

grace, whereby a sinner is justified before God, finds its antithesis in the covenant of works where there was no mystery of grace; where the principal of man's "sole rule of [his] relation to God" was "Do this, and live" (5:44). We saw that Owen uses the two contrasting covenants of "Works" and "Grace", also known as the law-gospel antithesis, to show that justification, in the covenant of grace, is entirely of grace and not of works. Owen uses this difference between the two covenants to prove and formulate his doctrine of justification (5:275-6).

The relationship between covenant and justification centers on the conditionality of the covenant of grace. Owen, against the antinomians, argues that the covenant of grace *is* conditional. By this he means, the partakers of the covenant of grace are only those who have faith, a justifying faith. But, as we have noted, this faith is the gift of God and, therefore, entirely of grace. As a result, the covenant of grace is conditional, but the condition that is required is still the free gift of God. We noted that Owen established an intimate relationship between the covenant of grace and justification.

Another way in which covenant and justification are related is based on the *pactum salutis*, the covenant of redemption. Because of the terms of the covenant of redemption, Christ becomes the "the *surety of the new covenant*" as the final administration of the covenant of grace on behalf of the elect (5:181, 186). Christ, as the *voluntary* surety of the covenant, performed all that is required on the part of the elect, that they may enjoy the benefits of the covenant (5:187). One of those benefits of the covenant is, of course, being justified before God (5:194). The covenant of redemption, made in eternity between the Persons of the God-head, results in the covenant of grace, performed in time, with Christ as the Mediator on behalf of the

elect, for whom expiation is accomplished and to whom the righteousness of Christ is granted in justification.

The connection Owen made between the covenants made with the two Adams also proves our thesis that justification depends upon the covenant concept. As the sin of Adam was imputed to men resulting in condemnation, so the righteousness or obedience of Christ is imputed to all that believe resulting in justification. This comparison between the two Adams is based upon their federal existence, hence the term Federal theology. The justification of sinners is based upon the obedience of the second Adam. The forensic imputation of the righteousness of the second Adam, Christ, to all who believe that results in our justification (5:326). This federal structure posited by Owen also means that when the first Adam was in a state of acceptance before God, so, too, was his posterity. The covenant was “coeval with mankind, but voluntary obedience was a means of signing and sealing it on Adam’s part” (17:25). Adam’s obedience would have consisted in the eternal enjoyment of God due to the law’s voice “Do this and live”.

Owen knew, however, that redemptive history shows that the first Adam failed to obey the commands of God’s law in the covenant of works and so justification can only be through Christ to those who are in covenant with God. This comparison between the Adams was crucial in proving our thesis.

Our final argument rests on the relation of covenant and justification to the doctrine of union with Christ. We noted that the primary function of the covenant is to bring sinners into union with Jesus Christ whereby they are then partakers of the blessings of the covenant promises. Union with Christ is made possible by the third Person of

the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who is given according to the economy of salvation based upon the eternal covenant of redemption (1:330). There is a unity of purpose and application in the Trinity on the basis of the covenant of redemption. The Spirit is the cause of all other graces that we are made partakers of, like our justification (21:150).

Based upon the above arguments, it is undeniable that Owen's doctrine of justification is thoroughly dependent upon his covenant theology. Without his formulation of the covenant of works, grace and redemption, it is fair to say that his doctrine of justification would look very different to the one we see laid out in volume five of his *Works*. Only when we understand his covenant theology are we able to appreciate his doctrine of justification by faith alone.

5.1.3 The Gap in Owen Studies

Owen's covenant theology has received a good deal of treatment in the secondary literature. We have noted especially the work of Ferguson (1979), Bobick (1996), Wong (1998), Trueman (1998) Rehnman (2001), and Daniels (2004). However, only Ferguson, Bobick and Wong give extended treatment to Owen's covenant theology.

Bobick's thesis attempts to prove the influence of Ramist logic in Owen's theology, especially in his covenant theology. Bobick spends, however, very little time looking at the dogmatic relationship between covenant and justification. Ferguson's main concern is to show how Owen's covenant theology affects the Christian life. He only deals with the doctrine of justification in passing as it relates to union with Christ. Wong aims to show the harmony between Calvin's theology and Puritan covenant theology by using Owen as an example. Wong briefly looks at the relationship

between covenant and justification in Owen but it is really subsidiary to his overall argument.

The goal of this work has been to further elucidate the arguments of Ferguson, Bobick and Wong, by showing how Owen's covenantal formulations had a decisive impact on the soteriological doctrine of justification. Ferguson's work is helpful in being the first to show that Owen saw four distinct covenants in Scripture. Wong's thesis, while it has its shortcomings in terms of overly subjective disagreements with Owen, is useful in helping refute the "Calvin versus the Calvinists" thesis proposed by Perry Miller. Bobick's thesis was to demonstrate that Owen's polemics are structured in a way that seems to show the influence of Ramist logic. Bobick's conclusions do not have a decisive impact upon the conclusions reached in this thesis.

This study is the fullest exposition of Owen's doctrine of justification as it relates to the various covenants posited by him. It is also the fullest treatment of his doctrine of justification by faith.¹⁷ Moreover, unlike Ferguson, Bobick, and Wong, we have made reference to Owen's recently translated work *Theologoumena Pantopada, sive, De Natura, Ortu, Progressu, et Studio, Verae Theologiae* (1661), now titled *Biblical Theology: The History of Theology from Adam to Christ*. This work has significant implications for understanding Owen's covenant theology and so it is surprising that Wong, Bobick and Ferguson do not make use of this work. It is our contention, then, that this study is not only the fullest treatment of Owen's doctrine of justification as it relates to his covenant theology, but this study also breaks new and important ground by using Owen's *Theologoumena*; a work that has, until this time, not been consulted in any serious manner.

¹⁷ There is a book due to be released in 2007 by Carl Trueman that will look at Owen's doctrine of justification by faith (See Trueman, 2007).

5.1.4 Research Objectives

Ancillary to our stated thesis come three related research objectives. Our thesis was to set forth the argument that Owen's doctrine of justification by faith is largely dependent upon his thoroughgoing covenant theology. Related to this thesis were three research objectives.

First, in researching Owen, it was important, in light of his influences, to better understand the medieval and, particularly, the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theological context, especially as they relate to covenant theology and justification by faith. In locating Owen's influences and giving a brief distillation of what they said in relation to what Owen said, this objective was also reached. Second, there was a need to look in detail at his doctrine of justification by faith, since at present there is no detailed exposition of this doctrine in the thought of John Owen. In showing the relation of this doctrine to the covenant, we were better able to understand Owen's formulation of the article by which the church stands or falls (5:65). Third, it was hoped that in studying a figure of the stature of John Owen we would better understand the influence his theology would have on not only the seventeenth-century context, but the theological context leading up to, and including, the twenty-first century. Owen's *Works* are today to be found throughout the English-speaking world; they are reprinted and re-read. His influence on the Christian Church has been particularly significant in the last fifty years, due in large part to the Banner of Truth Trust which has made his works easily accessible. The present-day Reformed

theological context has been shaped decisively by the writings of a seventeenth-century theologian whose chief goal was to promote the glory of Christ.

5.1.5 Further Research

There is a great deal of research that remains to be done on this seventeenth-century thinker. There is, at present, no definitive study on Owen's ecclesiology. Much debate exists over whether Owen, the famed Congregationalist, returned to his Presbyterian beliefs (Oliver, 2000:159-190). How Owen's Congregationalism relates to his covenant theology would prove to be a valuable study. Further, Owen's exposition on the Sabbath has received very little attention in the secondary literature. Considering the fact that he spends well over two hundred pages in his defense of the Sabbath as normative for the Christian, this would be a fruitful study. Again, there are definite covenantal implications for Owen's doctrine of the Sabbath as Ferguson has briefly alluded to in his study on Owen (1995:29).

Another area that needs to be addressed is Owen's doctrine of God, especially as it relates to the divine attributes. This would also fill an important gap in Owen studies since a study on the divine attributes, both incommunicable and communicable, would have obvious implications for Owen's polemical debates with the Socinians, another area where there is almost no work done. Related to this study, it would be interesting to see what attributes of God are communicated to the Christian by virtue of the covenant of grace. The covenant of redemption would also have reference to the divine attributes in terms of what Christ, as Mediator, possessed and did not possess.

Again, related to this thesis, another pressing need in Owen studies would look at the doctrine of sanctification in relation to the covenant. Ferguson briefly deals with Owen's doctrine of sanctification, but he does not relate it in any significant way to Owen's covenant theology (1995:54-66). Our goal has been to show the relation of justification to the covenant. The scope of this thesis has not allowed for an in depth study on sanctification. But, clearly, there is an obvious relationship between sanctification and the covenant. The covenant of grace, as we have seen, is filled with blessings to those who believe. A chief benefit of the covenant of grace is that Christ is the foundation of all grace. In the covenant of grace, "God would show himself to be a merciful, *sanctifying, justifying*, and saving God ... (emphasis ours) (17:366). How God shows himself to be a sanctifying God in relation to the covenant of grace would be a worthwhile study and it would fill an important gap in Owen studies.

5.1.6 Concluding Remarks

Owen wrote at a time of intense theological debate; a time when Reformed orthodoxy was taking shape by way of the apologetic and polemical writings of the Puritans who were standing on the shoulders of the Reformers of the sixteenth-century who themselves had stood on the shoulders of the Early Church fathers. Owen faced opposition from Arminian, Socinian and Catholic apologists who sought to undo much of the teaching that emanated from the Reformation theologians; namely, Luther, Calvin, Vermigli, Melancthon, and, his contemporary, Turretin to name just a few. Owen, standing in line with the aforementioned, sought to articulate, defend and clarify certain doctrines that were of paramount importance to Reformed orthodoxy. Two of these doctrines, the covenant and justification, have been discussed in this thesis with the contention proven that the doctrine of *Sola Fide* is based upon a

carefully worked out covenant theology. This, we have seen, was as much true for Owen as it was for the Reformers; indeed, it is as much true for us today as it was for the Reformers and Owen.

It is our contention that the present debate concerning justification is the result of differing views regarding covenant theology. As a result, it is hardly surprising that the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone has come under serious revision, especially as it is being formulated by those who adhere to the New Perspective on Paul (See Waters, 2004; Westerholm, 2004). Owen's views on covenant and justification serve as a useful corrective to much of the teaching being espoused today in both the academy and the church. It is hoped this study has shown that Owen was perhaps the most astute theologian of his generation when it came to setting forth Reformed covenant theology and the Protestant doctrine of *Sola Fide*. Moreover, as we consider the history of theology, there were few who gave as much detailed attention to the covenant concept as Owen did and certainly there are few who related so well the doctrine of the covenant to the article by which the church stands or falls. If the church is going to stand, it is imperative that Owen's doctrine of justification is upheld alongside his covenant theology, a theology of sovereign grace as expressed in the covenant of grace.

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