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RESPONSIBLE MAN IN REFORMED
THEOLOGY: CALVIN VERSUS THE
WESTMINSTER CONFSSION

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THE *Confession of 1967* in the United Presbyterian Church marks the official end of the four-century Presbyterian venture into covenant theology. Now past that milestone, perhaps we have reached a vantage point where we can turn dispassionately to survey that curious but historic route. Seen from its concept of responsible man, we here argue, that route has been a prolonged detour away from the insights of the Reformers.

The *Westminster Confession* remains, of course, the prime confessional document of Presbyterians outside the United Church, for instance in the Scots and British parent churches, or with southern cousins in the Presbyterian Church, U.S. Even in the United Church, the *Westminster Confession* remains in the show-room of creeds. But we have recently seen a breach in the federal scheme so long embraced in Presbyterian confessional statements, a breach that marks the scheme where it yet remains officially as a theological anachronism no longer regarded seriously but to be suffered as historical background. With the hold of federal theology officially broken, we can challenge afresh the assumption that the Calvinism of the *Westminster Confession* is true to the Reformer himself. Indeed, it has seldom been realised by those reared in the Reformed tradition that the two covenant concept which dominates the organisational substructure of all later Reformed dogmatics is totally absent from Calvin. More seriously, its fundamental incompatibility with Calvin's thought has gone all but unnoticed.

In the two generations after the death of Calvin there appeared several variations of a theological format involving dual covenants, a format which matured in the contrasting 'covenant of works' and 'covenant of grace' of the *Westminster Confession*. So marked a characteristic did this become that the central stream of the Reformed faith took its name from the Latin word for covenant, *foedus*, the federal or covenant theology.

The precise historical origin of the twin covenant idea is an interesting and as yet somewhat incompleting study in the now relatively obscure theologians who followed Calvin. We here can but outline its post-Reformation origin.

The notion seems to have entered with the *Loci Communes* (1560) of Wolfgang Musculus (1497-1563), who in contrast with his fellow Reformers, divides the one covenant into two, a 'general covenant' of God with the universe and a 'special covenant' of God with the elect.¹ A little afterward the division of a 'covenant of nature' and a 'covenant of grace' was introduced by Zacharias Ursinus (1534-83), an author of the powerful *Heidelberg Catechism*. *Föderaltheologie* was taught in systematic form in the Dutch universities of the seventeenth century by a notable sequence: Johann Koch or (in Latin) Cocceius (1603-69); his pupil Francis Burmann (1628-79); and Burmann's successor, Herman Witsius (1636-1708).² Covenant theology was established in the Swiss church even earlier than in the Dutch, and later taught just as ably. Amandus Polanus (1561-1610) precedes Cocceius, J. H. Heidegger (1633-98) is his contemporary and friend; then federal theology reaches its full flower in Calvin's own Genevan church in the teaching of Francis Turretin (1623-87), author of the long standard Reformed text known as Turretin's *Institutes*.³

Covenant theology was once assumed to be continental in origin, and doubtless it has continental ancestry. But there is also evidence that as a true theological system it was born and reared on Scots and English soil. Robert Rollock (1555-99), first principal of the University of Edinburgh, wrote of 'God's two covenants, both that of works and that of grace', and in a 1597 *Treatise on Effectual Calling* is found the important term 'covenant of works', a term which earlier had seen little or no

¹ Wolfgang Musculus, *Loci Communes Theologiae Sacrae* (1560, 1564 and Basel, 1599).

² Zacharias Ursinus, *Catechesis, Summa Theologiae* in *Opera Theologica* (Heidelberg, 1612), question 36, p. 15; Johannes Cocceius, *Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamento Dei* (1648 and 1654), II, 1ff and IV, 1ff; Francis Burman, *Synopsis Theologiae* (Amsterdam, 1699); Herman Witsius, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei cum hominibus* (1677), often reprinted with wide circulation in English translation by William Crookshank, 1804, 1837.

³ Amandus Polanus, *Syntagma Theologiae Christianae* (Hanover, 1625); J. H. Heidegger, *Corpus Theologiae* (Zurich, 1700); and Francis Turretin (Turretinius), *Instituto Theologiae elenciae* (1688), and often reprinted. The translations here of covenant writers are sometimes adapted from existing translations but more often are my own, as frequently no translations or only inadequate translations exist.

use.¹ Also early and little noticed is the work of Dudley Fenner (1558?-87), a young English associate of Thomas Cartwright, who while exiled in Holland published his *Sacra Theologia* (1585) utilising a carefully worked out covenant of works set opposite a covenant of grace.²

Whatever its precise origin, within a few decades the covenant scheme becomes something received generally by all. It is a characteristic of English Puritanism, seen, for instance, in Edward Fisher's *Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645) or in William Ames, and in a variant form in John Ball.³ The scheme is given full confessional status for the first time in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* in 1647, although it had earlier appeared in the *Irish Articles*, and in this form it thereafter prevailed in Reformed thought. Rooted so firmly in the confessional standards of the church, the scheme is repeated and elaborated by virtually all subsequent theologians who consider themselves disciples of Calvin. From these old world sources it appears in American Presbyterianism, taught at Princeton for over half a century by the nineteenth century's most esteemed American theologian, Charles Hodge (1797-1878).⁴ It was one of the prime requisites of sound orthodoxy. Where it was recognised that the concept was not in Calvin, this was considered a positive development of his thought, even with occasional criticism of Calvin for not having adequately formulated the concept.⁶

Despite the fact that the first framers of covenant theology were soon forgotten men—partly because but few of their writings survived the transition from Latin to English, partly because Hodge and others who repeated substantially what they had said were nearer at hand—the system they founded long retained not merely wide prevalence in but control of the Presbyterian Churches. Through its confessional status and presence in the catechisms, it remained the official theology of

¹ Robert Rollock, *Treatise on Effectual Calling in Select Works* (Edinburgh, 1849), I, 25.

² See Leonard J. Trinterud, 'The Origin of Puritanism' in *Church History*, xx (March 1951), pp. 48ff.

³ Edward Fisher, *The Marrow of Modern Divinity* (1645), often reprinted. That the work is Fisher's has been disputed. William Ames, *Medulla Theologica* (Amsterdam, 1623); John Ball, *Treatise on the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1645).

⁴ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (New York, 1877), II, 117ff.

⁶ For instance: 'Our own Calvin it is true fails to recall such a covenant (of works) in his eloquence.'—Melchior Leydecker of Utrecht, quoted in Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (London, 1950), p. 333

all major Presbyterian bodies of both Britain and America until the recent adoption of the *Confession of 1967*. Even in churches adhering to the great mid-sixteenth-century Reformed confessions formed before the advent of covenant theology (*Heidelberg Catechism, Belgic Confession, Second Helvetic Confession*), it is the orthodox theology. By way of English Puritanism it is widely dispersed in Baptist churches, and not without considerable influence generally in the Protestant tradition.

In the twentieth century, despite its official presence in the confessional standards, Reformed theology as characteristically preached came to give less and less formal allegiance to the doctrine of the covenants. But the reason was never primarily a dissatisfaction with the scheme as such. It broke up in the turbulence of theological thinking in this century when concepts of the origin of man radically altered so that the idea of a divine covenant with all men in Adam no longer had force. The doctrine of the covenants is now bypassed as an innocuous relic not really affecting the *Confession's* system of doctrine. But that the doctrine of the covenants was discredited from without, and never really from within the Church, has not been an altogether unmixed blessing. It has meant that the formal expression of a covenant of works was abandoned, often to leave the Church unaware of a remaining legacy of implications running through the understanding of God, man, sin, and responsibility. When the broadening authority of science forbade the chronology and historicity of a first covenant, it did not touch the central motif of that covenant: law. On the contrary, the notion of law was amenable to scientific and philosophical thought. Reformed theology easily accommodated itself to this way of thinking by replacing the continuing historical default of a primal covenant by all peoples with a continuing internal default by every man and race of a moral law. So there has remained a sort of anonymous presence of the doctrine of the covenants which matches its official presence, even where the confessional presence was admitted to be anachronistic. It has had a longer reach across Reformed theology than is generally supposed.

1. *The covenant of works and the covenant of grace*

God made with Adam—so orthodoxy maintained—a cove-

nant of works, and in Adam the covenant was made with all mankind. The *Westminster Confession* is terse and precise: '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, personal obedience.'¹ The *Institutes* of Turretin contains the mature system:

This double covenant is proposed to us in Scripture: of nature and of grace, of works and faith, legal and evangelical. The foundation of this distinction rests both on the different relation of God contracting, who can be considered now as Creator and Lord, then as Redeemer and Father, and on the diverse condition of man, who may be viewed either as perfect or as a fallen creature; and on the diverse mode of obtaining life and happiness, either by proper obedience, or by another's imputed, and on the diverse duties prescribed to man, to wit, works or faith.

For in the former, God as Creator demands perfect obedience from innocent man with the promise of eternal happiness and life; but in the latter, God as Father promises salvation in Christ to the fallen man, under the condition of faith. The former rests upon the work of man, the latter upon the grace of God alone; the former upon a just Creator, the latter upon a merciful Redeemer; the former was made with innocent man without a Mediator; the latter with fallen man, by the intervention of a Mediator.²

The covenant is based on divine *law* and *justice*; it is a *legal* in contrast to an *evangelical* covenant. This is a covenant of *works*, the emphasis on works being all the greater when set in opposition to the later covenant of grace. The 'condition' of the covenant, man's duty, according to Turretin, is *not faith, but works*. It is concerned with the merit and ability of man. A reward is promised to man, if he earns it by his own good works.

The idea for this covenant was drawn from the Mosaic law. Removed from its Old Testament setting, the promise of life on condition of obedience has been pushed back to creation and made the basic relationship between God and man. An idea which does in a limited way belong to God's dealings with Israel becomes the divine order instituted at creation. Covenant theologians discuss at length the relation between the Mosaic covenant and the covenant of works. They find some differences, but the two are closely connected, at times virtually identical. Scriptural citations to support the covenant of works, as they could not be found in Genesis 1-2, are freely taken from the Mosaic code. 'If a man do these statutes, he shall live in them' (Lev. 18.5).

¹ *Westminster Confession*, VII, ii.

² Turretin, *op. cit.*, VIII, iii, 4.

The covenant of works, it is true, is set within the framework of a 'condescension on God's part' (*Westminster Confession*).¹ Reformed thought usually and often carefully recognised that Adam needed and received some 'aid of grace'.² Nor were these works exclusively thought of as works of merit. Rollock could call them 'pledges of thankfulness'.³ It is always recognised that any merit of man could not be 'intrinsic', but would be on the basis of covenant, *ex pacto*, a term Calvin had used to refer only to the Mosaic covenant but which is here transferred to the universal covenant of works made with all in Adam. But federal theology could not take these influences seriously. The overall emphasis was that God did not come to primal man in a relationship of grace, for man did not yet need that grace, but stood by his works. All too typical is the teaching in a Scots Bible class handbook: 'By the creature's own natural strength is the covenant to be fulfilled. Grace may have been shown in the condescension that entered into a covenant, but the covenant in its terms is not of grace but of works.'⁴

This is a covenant of nature, a term which becomes (despite variations in Ursinus and other pre-federal writers) but an alternate name for the covenant of works. Again, the term is guarded so that this natural relationship is not intrinsic. The nature which God has given to man, instituted at creation, is described in this covenant. 'It is called natural, not from natural obligation, which God has not towards man; but because it is founded on the nature of man, as it was first created by God, and on his integrity or powers' (Turretin).⁵ It is connected, moreover, with the law of nature written on man's heart so that man naturally and apart from revelation can know this covenant. The exact relationship between the covenant of works and the law of nature was variously conceived, but there was always a partial equation of the two. 'It may also be recognised naturally that there is a covenant intervening between God and man. Man's conscience keeps asserting that to God the Creator and Lord of man obedience on his part as a creature is bound to be enjoined. ... Man is not naturally

¹ *Westminster Confession*, VII, i

² Heppe, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

³ Rollock, *op. cit.*, I, 25.

⁴ John Macpherson, *The Westminster Confession of Faith*, in the *Handbooks for Bible Classes* series, ed. Marcus Dodds and Alexander Whyte (Edinburgh, 1881), p. 66.

⁵ Turretin, *op. cit.*, VIII, iii, 5.

ignorant of the promise of God in promising good to the obedient' (Heidegger).¹

Of the various terms employed, *covenant of life* is the most promising, and unfortunately the least employed. It might have been used to lessen the strong emphasis on man's works and to redress the balance with the covenanting grace of God. The 'condition of obedience' would not have been a meritorious consideration but simply the *sine qua non* without which the gift could not be conferred. But it is indicative of the mood of covenant theology that the term was not extensively employed. The *Westminster Confession* does not use it, though interestingly the *Catechisms* show a certain preference for it. No difference in emphasis is involved, however. It is 'called a covenant of life, because life was promised as the reward of obedience' (Hodge).²

Man—mankind in Adam—soon broke the covenant of works. Sin is fundamentally a transgression of the first covenant. But is the covenant also broken by God, after it is broken by man? The federal theologians explore this question at length. Cocceius described everything to follow as a series of progressively greater abrogations of the first covenant. But the consensus of orthodoxy is that there are most important ways in which neither sin nor the coming of the covenant of grace abrogates the legal covenant. Hodge has a section in his *Systematic Theology* entitled the 'Perpetuity of the Covenant of Works', and argues that if man could fulfil the covenant of works he could now be saved in this way. This conception of the covenant as unbroken from the side of God is the basis of the eternal principles of justice, instituted by God, which he still holds in force. God still deals with mankind in general on this basis. He binds all to the performance of this covenant; duty and responsibility are so determined; and for this man is held accountable. Even after the establishing of the covenant of grace and for those embraced by the new covenant, the old covenant has force. Though saved by the evangelical covenant, man is 'born under' the legal covenant. His nature is so determined and his need of salvation uncovered by it.

Over against the general covenant of works there stands the

¹ Heidegger, op. cit., IX, 12.

² *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 12; *Larger Catechism*, questions 20 and 30; Hodge, op. cit., II, 218.

special covenant of grace, where God freely gives what he had before promised on condition of perfect obedience. The *Confession* states:

Man by his fall, having made himself incapable of life by that covenant (of works), the Lord was pleased to make a second, commonly called the covenant of grace; whereby he freely offereth to sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him, that they may be saved, and promising unto all those that are ordained unto life, his Holy Spirit, to make them willing and able to believe.¹

This covenant is made too with Adam and is administered under different 'dispensations' which culminate in Christ. In some writers it rests on a universalistic basis, but it is characteristically narrowed to include only the elect. The covenant of grace is God's way of dealing with some men, but not with all men. The rest are dealt with on the basis of the covenant of works.

The whole theological enterprise remains coloured by the primal covenant. The covenant of grace does not replace the covenant of works but is worked out and established within it. 'This covenant of grace was not so much set up in room of the covenant of works, as added to it.'² It is a careless reading of federal theology to assume that the covenant of works is no longer important because man no longer lives in a state of integrity or because it has been replaced by the covenant of grace. The first covenant remains as the necessary pre-condition and framework of the second covenant. Chronologically and logically for covenant theology grace came and comes only after sin. God demonstrates his grace to man only after man is unable to provide his own works. The important thing is that the whole understanding of divine grace has to be worked out as a second covenant introduced with the failure of the first. There is no real cause to speak of the grace of God until after man sins. Grace is a remedy and second resort, however wonderful that remedy may be.

The covenant of grace, moreover, has no bearing on the essential nature of man. The new covenant does not alter or negate the nature of man's existence, responsibility, or sin. Man may be saved by the grace of God, but he is saved because he could not and cannot save himself. Originally and

¹ *Westminster Confession*, VII, iii.

² Heppe, *op. cit.*, p. 316.

ideally man lives in a relationship to God where he by his own works justifies his own existence. This is paradise as it was intended to be.

2. *The order of grace*

Of all this Calvin knew nothing. He is not in this technical sense a covenant theologian at all, for while Calvin gives prominence to the covenant of God with Abraham, fulfilled in the coming of Christ, the covenant theme does not for him form the same kind of substructure as it did for the Calvinists. The concept of *order* as established by God's grace is a fundamental one in Calvin. On it is carried much of his thought, and from this standpoint much of his theology may best be understood. This original divine order and its subsequent inversion by sin are concepts which are parallel to the later concepts of a covenant of works and the breaking of that covenant. The will and purpose of God was incorporated or instituted into the universe at creation. All things are ordered according to the movement of God's grace in creation and purpose in redemption. Calvin speaks of this 'genuine order of nature' early in the opening chapters of the *Institutes* and as well repeatedly in his *Commentary on Genesis*, chapters 1-8. An *order of creation* gives to the creature and particularly to man his destiny and reason for existence. In this order man lives in *rectitude* (*rectitudo*) or *integrity* (*integritas*). Men ought to follow the 'law of their creation' and live in the 'genuine order'.¹

Existence in such order involves a twofold relation between God and man. On the one side God has given and continues to give to man a good world. All creation is for man's benefit and designed to bring him to felicity. God is to be Father to man. In the *Commentary on Genesis*, paralleled in the *Institutes*, Calvin writes:

In the very *order of creation* the paternal solicitude of God for man is conspicuous, because he has furnished the world with all things needful, and even with an immense profusion of wealth before he formed man. Thus man was rich before he was born.

¹ I, 3.3; II, 6.1; I, 2.1; *Com. on Gen. 1-8, passim*. Translations here from Calvin's better known works follow for the most part the standard translations, e.g. the Allen edition of the *Institutes* and the Calvin Translation Society series of the commentaries. But I adapt these to the definitive *Corpus Reformatorum* text. Translations of the sermons are my own.

God himself has demonstrated, by the very *order of creation*, that he made all things for the sake of man. . . . Whenever we call God the Creator of heaven and earth, let us at the same time reflect, that the dispensation of those things which he has made is in his own power, and that we are his children, whom he has received into his charge and custody, to be supported and educated; so that we may expect every blessing from him, and cherish a certain hope that he will never suffer us to want those things which are necessary to our well-being, that our hope may depend on no other; that, whatever we need or desire, our prayers may be directed to him, and that, from whatever quarter we receive any advantage, we may acknowledge it to be his benefit, and confess it with thanksgiving; that, being allured with such great sweetness of goodness and beneficence, we may study to love and worship him with all our hearts.¹

The theme is a recurring one, as in a passage in the *Commentary on Psalms*:

Generally the whole *order* of this world is arranged and established for the purpose of conducing to the comfort of men. . . . But the integrity of order which God had established in the world at the beginning is now thrown into confusion.²

These gifts are of two kinds: *natural gifts*, man's mental and physical faculties, the comforts of life, and ordered society, etc., and *spiritual gifts*, faith and righteousness which lead to eternal felicity. We are not to think of this statically. The creatures live by 'continued inspiration'; creation 'subsists only by a secret virtue derived from God'. This is especially true of man; his life is borrowed from God. 'Communication with God was the source of life to Adam.'³ Man's being is a dynamic existence grounded in God's continual communication of his own graciousness.

The second aspect of this twofold process of life in integrity is man's response. Man is to respond in fidelity to depend on God alone, in obedience, in belief in God's goodness and solicitude, in motion away from self and towards God, and in gratitude. He faithfully, obediently, and thankfully acknowledges the gifts and so returns glory to God who so graciously maintains his existence.

At first man was formed in the image and resemblance of God in order that man might admire his Author in the adornments with which he had been nobly vested by God and honor him with proper gratitude.

¹*Com. on Gen.* 1.26; I, 14.22.

²*Com. on Ps.* 8.6.

³*Com. on Gen.* 3.22; *Com. on Ps.* 104.29; *Com. on Rom.* 4.21.

The Latin *gratitudo* is here an interesting change in Calvin's own translation of the French of 1537 in the paragraph on *Man* in the *Instruction in Faith*, which reads *recoissance*, 'acknowledgment'. Man is co-respondent to God.

If we do not begin with this point: calling upon our God, it is to pervert all *order*. So then let us learn that the principal exercise and study that the faithful ought to have in this world is to run to their God, and, while acknowledging that he is the fountain of all blessings, seek good in him.¹

Here is Calvin's measured statement in the *Commentary on Genesis*, chapter 2:

Adam was admonished that he could claim nothing for himself as if it were his own, in order that he might depend wholly on the Son of God, and might not seek life anywhere but in him. He at the time when he possessed his life in safety had it only as deposited in the Word of God, and could not otherwise retain it than by acknowledging that it was received from him ...²

This is clearly an *order of grace*. Although Calvin does not use just that term, he speaks often of both the order and of the divine grace first instituted. The part given to man is reflexive of grace. From the start Calvin transcends the concept of order as primarily moral and legal and places this under the higher order of grace. What is paramount is that God is gracious and requires acknowledgment of his grace.

Sin disorders the divine order of grace. Calvin explains. 'In the defection of the first man . . . the whole order of creation was everted', a statement which illustrates a recurring theme in his writings. 'The order that he instituted at the creation of the world is troubled when he does not deal with us as a father.'³ We live in an *inverted order of creation*. But this never means for Calvin that God's purposes have altered. If it were not for the barrier of sin, God's original goodness would yet be showered upon us. Evils arise as man inverts and shuts off the God given order. 'Although we have for a time annihilated as much as is in us the graces of God, yet all the while he on his side does not wish that they should perish but he wishes to make them prosper'.⁴

Calvin's position on natural theology has to be understood in terms of this original order of grace which God maintains while

¹ *Ser. on Job* 22.23-30.

² *Com. on Gen.* 2.9.

³ *Ser. on Job* 5.17-18; *Com. on Gen.* 3.9.

⁴ *Ser. on Gal.* 3.3-5.

man perverts. An adequate investigation of this is outside the scope of this article, but what is of importance for our purposes is to see that though our perversity and unbelief cut off and disrupt both natural and spiritual gifts, God's original gracious order has not been rescinded.

God deals very bountifully with the unbelieving, but they are blind, and therefore he pours forth his grace without any benefit, as though he rained on flint or on arid rocks. However bountifully then God bestows his grace on the unbelieving, they yet render his favour useless, for they are like stones.¹

Man from his side manufactures sin out of God's grace. God's blessing a 'through accident' (*per accidens*) turn to our harm. As man refuses to acknowledge in response the gifts of God's grace, but rather arrogates them to his own use, they are prostituted, or transmuted to evil. The following passages are typical of Calvin:

God has *ordered* his creatures for our service, and these ought to be a help to guide us to him so that we should be more incited to love him because he shows himself a good and loving father to us, yet we take occasion at this to stumble. It is as though he should set up a ladder for us, or make stairs to come up on; and we happen to hurt ourselves by bumping against them. Stairs are made to help us, but if a man happens to fling himself against the stairs, he may happen to break his leg and hurt himself, and he shall rather be hindered than helped by them. So it is with us. God wishes to draw us to him by his creatures, and we happen to fling ourselves against them rashly and as it were in spite.²

In all things and by every means he causes us now to taste his fatherly love with the intent that we might be confirmed in that which he declares to us in the gospel, to know that he has reserved a better heritage for us, as for children whom he has adopted. All the creatures then ought to point us heavenward. Yet in fact we put everything in reverse, because we apply the creatures of God to our own lust in such a way that we are held down here below. In short, as many helps as God has given us to draw us to himself, these are to us so many hindrances to hold us back in this world.³

Redemption reveals that God has always willed to be gracious, still so wills, and is not finally going to let sin stand in his way. When God can no longer give life to man in nature, he does not break the order but reaffirms it in a new way as he enters history in his redemptive covenant. 'As the whole world gained nothing in instruction from the fact that God had

¹ *Com. on Zech.* 12.10.

² *Ser. on Deut.* 4.19-24.

³ *Ser. on Gal.* 3.15-18.

exhibited his wisdom in the creatures, he then resorted to another method for instructing man'.¹ 'Whereas the Lord invites

us to himself by means of the creatures with no effect . . . he has added, as was necessary, a new remedy or rather a new aid to assist our inept capacity.'² It is important to see that when God's particular revelation in Israel and in Christ comes, this is a reaffirming of God's original order, and not— as later Reformed dogmatics interpreted it—the establishment of new and different kind of order.

Though Calvin speaks extensively of the 'special grace' involved in redemption, which has to be contrasted with a first, general grace, and though man immutably established in the new creation is more blessed than he was in the first mutable paradise, the second creation is always essentially the same kind of order: the flowing out of God's grace to grateful man. Parallel to the two 'orders' or covenants—works and grace—in covenant theology, there is for Calvin but one order, order inverted, and order re-established. This involves a 'new aid' or 'another method' yet it is certainly not a new and contrasting order, but God's new way to establish and complete what He first instituted at creation. There is not the slightest suggestion in Calvin that God's grace appears in covenant with Abraham fulfilled in Christ so as to contrast with and negate His earlier non-gracious or semi-gracious ways, that grace is then first-showered upon a world previously and generally the realm of law. Calvin's covenant of grace is in reflection of and in restoration of, not in contrast with, the original order. Calvin uses rarely the term 'covenant of life' but this must not be confused with the 'covenant of life' of federal thought.³ For him the covenant of life is synonymous with the one, gracious, redemptive covenant of God.

It would be misleading to maintain that Calvin has no thought of law in his concept of the original relation between God and man. On the contrary, law has a vital place in God's ordering of his world; order can be maintained only as man is obedient to divine law. But it would be inaccurate to set forth Calvin's concept principally along these lines. The principal thing in the primal order, the principle of it, is God's grace.

¹ *Ser. on Isa.* 53.1-4.

² Argument to the *Com. on Gen.*

³ III, 21.1; cf. 'legal covenant' in III, 17.15.

It would be similarly inaccurate to maintain that covenant theology has no thought of grace in its concept of the primal legal covenant. Cocceius speaks of the 'spiritual grace given him (Adam) at creation.'¹ When thinking carefully at this point, Calvinism has always remembered to say that grace was needed by Adam. Such a statement is dutifully included almost as if covenant theologians were uneasy about the legal covenant. A. A. Hodge makes this promising statement:

This [legal] covenant was also in its essence a covenant of grace, in that it graciously promised life in the society of God as the freely-granted reward of an obedience already unconditionally due. Nevertheless it was a covenant of works and of law with respect to its demands and conditions.²

In this respect the treatment of R. L. Dabney is among the most satisfying; he speaks somewhat antithetically of a 'gracious covenant of works.'³

But it is of serious consequence that such careful disclaimers and apologies have to be made. Having reserved theoretically sufficient place for God to be gracious and erected supposedly adequate safeguards, covenant theology always in fact returned by way of a 'nevertheless' (Hodge) to expound and operate with the legal demands of this half-gracious God of the first covenant. Very soon the principle of it is no longer grace, but law. This succinct statement closes Fisher's chapter on the covenant of works:

The law was Adam's lease when God made him tenant of Eden; the conditions of which bond when he kept not, he forfeited himself and all for us. God read a lecture of the law to him before he fell, to be a hedge to keep him in paradise; but when Adam would not keep within compass, this law is now become as the flaming sword at Eden's gate, to keep him and his posterity out.⁴

Therefore at a vital point Calvin and covenant theology are not just different; they are as opposed as grace and law. With the twin covenants, there has now crept into Reformed theology a concept of the primal relationship between God and man, and a corresponding statement of the ability and merit of man that is not only absent from Calvin, it is alien to his thought. The

¹ Cocceius, *op. cit.*, III, 63.

² A. A. Hodge, *A Commentary on the Confession of Faith* (Philadelphia, 1869 and 1923), p. 170.

³ R. L. Dabney, *Systematic and Polemic Theology* (Richmond, 1927), p. 302.

⁴ Fisher, *op. cit.*, (Part 1), I, 4.

double covenant fabric not only modifies; it reverses much of Calvin's thought about man's primal relation to his God.

3. *Duty*

In Calvin what man is to do is reflexive of grace, but soon in Calvinism what man is to do becomes reflexive of law. There are extremely important differences in these two conceptions of the duty of man, differences which affect the whole course of theology, and—here is the insidious legacy—differences which tend to remain even when formal adherence to the covenant of works becomes archaic.

Calvin's outworking of man's duty is essentially in terms of four elements: faith, obedience, love, and gratitude. Though he is not particularly systematic in listing these elements, similar expositions do recur with interesting regularity. We may take as typical one of the opening questions of the *Geneva Catechism* of 1541:

Q. What is the way to honour God aright?

A. To honour God aright is to put our whole trust in him, to study to serve him in obeying his will, to invoke him in all our necessities, seeking our salvation and all good things at his hand, and finally to acknowledge both with heart and mouth that he is the lively fountain of all goodness.¹

Adam was to live by 'faith'.² And the trees in the garden were calculated to develop faith. Presumably the faith of man in integrity would have been somewhat different; but in Calvin's description of Adam's obligation to his God all these elements are conspicuously present: trust in the goodness of God, a depending wholly upon the word of God (or Son of God), obedience, and gratitude. In short, Adam no less than redeemed man had more to let God do for him than to do for God; as he lived so, he was a man of faith. The duty of primal man and of man generically is not different in essence from that of the elect in the Church.

If the question is raised, of course, Calvin does not hesitate to teach that Adam was given a law. In his *Commentary on Genesis*, he defends this point against the contention that there was no law for Adam. Calvin is no antinomian regarding man's duty in integrity; neither is he a legalist. Adam's duty was to a divine *law*, even though in expounding Genesis Calvin

¹ *Geneva Catechism*, 1541, question 7.

² II, 1.4.

prefers, as he states, to speak of the ordering of life according to the will of God.¹ It is obedience to the law, but not of the law; It is an obedience of faith. It flows from faith, is born of love and gratitude, and keeps the law in praise of a beneficent and paternal God.

But this is not a meritorious obedience. The commandment to partake of the tree of life does not mean that life is achieved through its proper use. 'He gave the tree of life its name, not because it could confer on man that life with which he had been previously endued, but in order that it might be a symbol and memorial of the life which he had received from God.'² Calvin thought of this obedience in a certain sense as a *condition* of man's continuing to receive grace. The commandment respecting the tree of knowledge of good and evil is a 'test of obedience'. Life is given only as, but not because, man obeys. Calvin explains:

The promise which authorised him to expect eternal life, as long as he should eat of the tree of life, and, on the other hand, the dreadful denunciation of death, as soon as he should taste of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, were calculated for the probation and exercise of faith.³

The authorised expectation of life for eating from the one tree, or the judgment of death for eating from the other, could be isolated as an incipient covenant of works. But the full statement makes it clear that life was not conditional upon obedience in any meritorious way. The tree of life was a figure of Christ to come, a sacrament to lead man to 'the knowledge of divine grace', so designed ...

... that man, as often as he tasted of the fruit of that tree, should remember whence he received his life, in order that he might acknowledge that he lives not by his own power, but by the kindness of God alone; and that life is not (as they commonly speak) an intrinsic good, but proceeds from God.⁴

It subsequently becomes apparent that the slightest hint to the contrary, permitting man in some part to earn his salvation, is resisted by Calvin as the beginning of degeneration into sin.

The *Westminster Shorter Catechism* begins in the spirit of Calvin (if not actually borrowing from him) with a memorable answer to its opening question:

¹ *Com. on Gm.* 2.16; cf. *on Gen.* 2.9.

³ II, 1-4.

² *Com. on Gen.* 2.9.

⁴ *Com. on Gen.* 2.9.

Q. What is the chief end of man?

A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.

Such a beginning promises a close following of Calvin in answer to the question about the duty of man. But instead the Westminster divines made normative for all subsequent Presbyterians a concept of duty radically different from that which Calvin had given the Reformed Church. A little later in the *Catechism* the task assigned man is stated another way:

When God had created man, he entered into a covenant of life with him, upon condition of perfect obedience; forbidding him to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, upon pain of death.¹

The shifting mood is yet too subtle for the catechumen to catch, for had not Calvin said that Adam was placed in Eden 'on this condition, that he should continue in obedience to God'?

The radical difference is soon apparent, however. Compare Calvin's statement, cited earlier, from the *Instruction in Faith*:

At first man was formed in the image and resemblance of God in order that man might admire his Author in the adornments with which he had been nobly vested by God and honour him with proper gratitude.

with the calculated and formal assertion of the *Westminster Confession*:

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works, by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience; promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it; and endued him with power and ability to keep it.²

Faith is the subsequent duty of the elect; but works is man's universal duty. The covenant of works and the covenant of grace differ in 'the diverse duties prescribed to man, to wit, works or faith' (Turretin). If faith is preserved nominally also as Adam's duty it is re-interpreted as a work. Turretin deals with this at length:

In the first covenant faith was required as a work and a part of the inherent righteousness to which life was promised. But in the second it is demanded, not as a work on account of which life is given, but as a mere instrument apprehending the righteousness of Christ... In the one, faith was a theological virtue from the strength of nature, terminating on God, the

¹ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 12.

² *Westminster Confession*, XXI, i (originally chapter XIX).

Creator; in the other faith is an evangelical condition, after the manner of supernatural grace, terminating on God, the Redeemer.

The first [covenant] gave matter for glorying to man when he observed it but the second excludes all glorying of man because founded upon the grace of God alone.¹

Far from being a faithfulness to depend on God alone, as in Calvin, this faith is an index of man's strength, a meritorious theological virtue.

It is not difficult to find in the federal writers eloquent discussions of how innocent man was to delight in God's law and goodness, though mention of the grace or beneficence of God is typically absent at this stage. Supposedly there is a certain high happiness in this legal obedience. But all this becomes peculiarly unsatisfying when we are told that this enjoying of God to which the *Shorter Catechism* refers is a formal, contractual duty of works. At once there is a twofold shift. First, there is little thought of God's goodness as putting man under obligation; duty is now defined in terms of law, because duty is derived from law:

Q. What is the duty which God requireth of man ?

A. The duty which God requireth of man is obedience to his revealed will. . . . The moral law is the declaration of the will of God to mankind, directing and binding everyone to personal, perfect, and perpetual conformity and obedience thereunto. . . .² (*Larger Catechism*)

Secondly, duty shifts to focus on man's initiative. The man who was in Calvin's thought to seek and receive all good from the hand of God, and thankfully to acknowledge it, has now to do for himself. The burden of achieving life is laid squarely on his own shoulders.

Such a perfect observance of the laws of the covenant . . . had given man a right to the reward. . . . He could say, I have fulfilled the conditions of the covenant, I have constantly and perfectly done what was commanded; now I claim and expect that thou, O my God, wilt grant me the promised happiness.³ (*Witsius*)

Such duty of man, remember, is not merely given Adam. In him it is given us all. It is a duty each is born under.

¹ Turretin, op. cit., XII, iv, 7 and 12; VIII, iii, 4.

² *Westminster Larger Catechism*, questions 91 and 93.

³ Witsius, op. cit., I, iii, 25.

4. *Sin*

According to Calvin, in sin man dis-graces himself. The order of dependence on divine goodness is dis-ordered as man turns to depend on himself. In this, man is a sinner not only as he is immoral or fails to conform to law. Rather he takes the rectitude with which he was blessed and ascribes it to himself, thereby making it a curse. By contrast, Reformed tradition since, having put little emphasis on the grace of God to man at creation, has not understood sin as having this character. Instead, it was too often restricted to an exposition of sin in legal and moral terms, in correspondence to the legal covenant which God had at first instituted. Calvin and the Calvinists, despite superficial similarities, have fundamentally different ways of describing the fundamental sin.

Calvin analyses the sin of Adam from four basic viewpoints, in each case recognising that man has done precisely the opposite of his duty. Calvin's most specific answer to the inquiry about the root defection is infidelity or faithlessness (*infidelitas*). He writes in the *Commentary on Genesis*, paralleled in the *Institutes*, 'infidelity was the root of the defection, just as faith alone unites us to God'.¹ In the paragraph on *Man* in the *Instruction in Faith* duty and sin are clear opposites. Man was formed to honour God with proper gratitude. 'But, having trusted such a great excellence of his nature and having forgotten from whom it had come and by whom it subsisted, man strove to raise himself up apart from the Lord.' A closely related category is that of unbelief (*incredulitas*):

'This is the source of all evils: that we are not fully convinced that in God is everything that can be desired for our salvation.' 'All evils arise from unbelief and distrust.'² (*Commentary on Isaiah*)

From this rises disobedience, which is for Calvin a second way of stating the root sin. 'It is evident that the fall commenced in disobedience.'³ This disobedience, upon analysis, is driven by man's concupiscence, which Calvin finds a further category of primal sin. 'Concupiscence . . . (is not) just any kind of evil affection, but that which is the fountain of all evil affections.'⁴

¹ *Com. on Gen.* 3.6; II, 1.4

² *Com. on Isa.* 10.21 and *on Isa.* 57.13.

³ II, 1.4.

⁴ *Com. on James* 1.15.

Paul finds it to be the source of his sin in the struggle recounted in Romans 7. Contemporary use of the term *self-will* reflects best what Calvin has in mind here. It is the opposite of loving God, the *ἀταξία* or disorder which enters when man does not depend on the goodness of God. Paul had formally and sincerely kept the law, so he thought at least. Yet he was the concupiscent chief of sinners because of all men he most believed himself to have attained his own eternal life. Paul's trouble was that 'being puffed up with confidence in his own righteousness, he expected salvation by his works'.¹ Of all man's desires, the original and worst is 'this *cupiditas* to desire to have something of our own which may reside in ourselves rather than in God'.²

A final, most basic way of describing the primal sin is in terms of ingratitude. When God had enriched Adam with bounteous gifts, he lost all through ingratitude. This theme underlies the opening paragraph of a significant chapter in the *Institutes*, II, 2, and it is developed in several sermons, notably on Deuteronomy and on Job:

God was not niggardly in his blessings, but poured them out bountifully, just as he who is the fountain of all liberality. He showed himself more than liberal toward mankind in the person of Adam. But we lost those blessings, God had to curtail his blessings which he had given us, because Adam through his ingratitude became corrupted.³

Adam could not abide all that, and by his ingratitude he alienated himself from God.⁴

This theme is found in Paul's opening chapters in *Romans*. Though all have not had the felicity of Adam, yet all have had or ignored blessings in abundance, and from this their sin arises. 'The nature of man contains the seed of all evils . . . Thus Paul in Romans I lists many different kinds of vices and crimes which arise out of the ignorance of God and that ingratitude of which he had shown all unbelievers to be guilty'.⁵ In each of these ways of thinking about the primal sin—in-fidelity, disobedience, concupiscence and self-will, and ingratitude—Calvin keeps in constant focus the breaking of the original relationship of grace. Sin has to be set opposite the love of God as man's refusal to be loved by God and his desire to love himself.

¹ *Com. on Exod.* 20.17.

² II, 2. 10.

³ *Ser. on Job* 3.2-10.

⁴ *Ser. on Dmt.* 28.46-50.

⁵ *Com. on 1 Cor.* 6.11.

When one lays aside Calvin to search the Calvinists for the nature of sin, he comes into a very much smaller world. The simple, almost exclusive definition is that sin is breaking the law. Covenant theology can rise no further than the classic answer of the *Westminster Shorter Catechism*: 'Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God'.¹ This definition represents the settled consensus of orthodoxy, never subsequently much to change. One wonders that the covenant theologians could speak at all of a 'fall from grace', for there is little concept of any fall from any grace in their analysis of sin. Exclusively now it is a development of the breaking of the covenant of works. Adam's sin is in essence a legal transgression.

This act of his was a wilful transgression of a law, under the precepts whereof he was most justly created; and under the malediction whereof he was necessarily and righteously subject. . . . Though at first glance it seems to be a small offence, yet, if we look more wistfully upon the matter it will appear to be an exceeding great offense. . . . Nay, how could there a greater sin committed than that, when Adam, at that one clap, broke all ten commandments?² (Fisher)

Many writers prove that Adam broke both tables of the law; some demonstrate how he broke each of the ten commandments. . .

The *locus classicus* in Scripture is John 3:4: 'Sin is lawlessness'. The Greek word which appears here is *ἀνομία*, a combi-

nation of *a* (without) and *νόμος* (law). In his commentary here Calvin had noticed, somewhat incidentally, John's 'defining sin as the transgression of the law', though it is significant that reference to I John 3:4 does not occur in the *Institutes*. Now lawlessness becomes the definitive concept. The word *ἀνομία* is taken over intact, often untranslated, and employed in virtually every federal definition of sin.

Its [sin's] nature is clearly shown by the apostle, when he says, 'Sin is the transgression of the law.' . . . The essence of sin therefore consists in a contrariety to the divine law, and it is therefore the absence of that rectitude, which ought to be in a rational creature according to the requirement of that law. Hence in order to ascertain whether any thing is sinful, we must examine whether it is contrary to the law; for nothing else is required.³

¹ *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, question 14; cf. *Confession*, VI, vi.

² Fisher, op. cit. (Part 1), I, 2-3.

³ Benedict Pictet, *Theologica Christiana* (Geneva 1696), IV, iii. Pictet was professor of theology at Geneva after Turretin, his uncle. Pictet's *Christian Theology* was reprinted in English in Philadelphia in 1845.

Wider categories, such as those Calvin had used, may still be present, though they are conspicuously absent from many writers. Turretin's answer to the question about the first sin of man is, in a superficial way, much like Calvin's. Adam's sin was an aggregate of many. Turretin makes a place for pride, disobedience, concupiscence, unbelief, distrust, and even –which is rare in the covenant theologians–ingratitude. But everything now falls under the shadow of the covenant of works. Most fundamentally, Adam broke the law, both tables of it. For all the similarities to Calvin, there is in Turretin a pronounced emphasis on law foreign to Calvin's thought.

It is certain that we must not regard that fall as any particular sin, such as theft, or adultery, but as a general apostasy and defection from God, a violation not only of the special positive law about the not eating the forbidden fruit, but also of the whole moral law, included in it, and so also of the obedience, which man owed to God, his Creator, especially by reason of the covenant entered into with him; so that here is, as it were, a complicated disease, and a total aggregate of various acts, both internal and external, impinging against both tables of the law.¹

The most radical consequence of the now legalised doctrine of sin is that covenant theology does not, for indeed it cannot, describe sin in what is for Calvin the most basic way of all: man's faithless rejection of the goodness of God in favour of his own self-willed efforts to seek his own happiness elsewhere. Here Calvin and the Calvinists come at length to a parting of the ways. When Calvin describes sin as that faithlessness which cuts off God's grace, he has gone where covenant theology could not follow. It could only go further along its own way of describing sin as lawlessness, because, with the intervention of the covenant of works, it knows nothing about man's first duty as that of faithfulness to depend on the divine goodness. And before the end of the way is reached, these paths of Calvin and his followers are not simply parted; they are opposed. Repeatedly, and at significant points in his writings, where Calvin is putting the whole thing in perspective (*Institutes*, II, 2.1; *Commentary on Genesis*, chapter 2; *Instruction in Faith*), we have heard Calvin warn against 'this cupidity to desire to have something of our own which may reside in ourselves rather than in God', this failure of man to be grateful for grace and

¹ Turretin, *op. cit.*, IX, vi, cf, esp. 9.

this seeking of man 'to raise himself up apart from the Lord'. For man this desire for recognition, for something in which to boast, is the beginning of the end.

The coming of the covenant of works permits what Calvin forbids. It prescribes for man just what Calvin proscribes: the attempt to rely on something of man's own and not to seek life as a gift at the hand of God. The very thing which we have heard Calvin say in his exposition of Genesis 2 that Adam is told he cannot do—

Adam was admonished that he could claim nothing for himself as if it were his own, in order that he might depend wholly on the Son of God, and might not seek life anywhere but in him. . . . He at the time when he possessed his life in safety had it only as deposited in the Word of God, and could not otherwise retain it than by acknowledging that it was received from him—

is the very thing that covenant theology now encourages man to do. Witsius explains that under the general, universal covenant a place is allotted and permitted for man to have a 'boasting' and 'glorying' of his own.

In the covenant of works, man is considered as working, and the reward to be given as of debt; and therefore, man's glorying is not excluded, but he may glory, as a faithful servant may do, upon the right discharge of his duty, and may claim the reward promised to his working.¹

Here, at the end of the way, federal theology is walking a path alien to Calvin. It does not know that in the very positing of such a boasting for man sin is latent; indeed here is the chief sin of man.

5. *Responsibility*

The word *responsibility* does not occur in Calvin's writings, nor in the earlier covenant writers. There was no corresponding word in the Latin or French of Calvin's time, and *responsible* in its modern usage has developed since. But Calvin has parallel language: that of obligation, duty, accountability, and culpability. The lines along which his concept of obligation is developed, in contrast to the federal writers, may be judged from what we have already said about duty. Similarly with culpability, both for Calvin and the Calvinists the concept develops from the understanding of sin. That development,

¹ Witsius, *op. cit.*, I, i, 15.

though, is more complex than we can trace here, particularly with regard to the natural man. Our thesis here, however, can be profitably brought to focus with a look in closing at the contrasting concepts of accountability in the two schools of thought. Calvin uses the adjective *accountable*, in French, *comptable* or *comptable*, though apparently not the noun *accountability*. Involved here is a notion of the *account* man is to render and of the *ability* he has so to do.

Calvin thinks of man as accountable only under the governing principle of God's grace. Man does not present an account of his accomplishments and look for felicity on grounds of the profit, fruition, or increase of his talents. He does not achieve but receives felicity, and he receives it by proper acknowledgment. Only in this secondary sense of retaining or receiving life can we say that men are accountable. Initially man is not put on his own account. But the federal writers posit for man accountability in a primary sense. Is not this the kind of accountability the *Westminster Confession* asks of a race of men who at the start are established in 'a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience', and who at the end, with this covenant in many ways valid still, are called 'to give an account of their thoughts, words, and deeds . . . to receive according to what they have done in the body'.¹ This is the only accountability possible in a covenant in which, according to Turretin, life 'rests upon the work of man'.²

Had these two paragraphs from Calvin's *Sermons on Ephesians* and *Sermons on Job* been heeded by second and third generation Calvinists, there never would have been a covenant of works, with its novel notion of man's accountability, and the course of Reformed theology would have been far more faithful to the mind of Calvin :

Let us put the case that we were in the integrity in which our father Adam was at the first. Should we then presume it was of ourselves under the illusion that God had ennobled us in this way? Now we hold everything from him. . . . Would we have it through our own dexterity? Would we have got it by our own strength? [*vertu = power*] No! But we would have it because God had given it to us through his own free goodness.³

¹ *Westminster Confession*, VII, ii, and XXXV, i.

² Turretin, op. cit., VIII, iii, 4.

³ *Ser. on Job* 33.1-7.

Let us recognise then that the praise is due to him that we may not defraud him of that which belongs to him. For if we should live as perfectly as angels and yet have the foolish idea that this came from our own free will and of our own movement, then we would miss the principal thing. To what end serve all our good works lest it be that God in them is glorified? But if we think ourselves the author of them, we see that they are corrupted in so doing, and are converted into vices, so that they are nothing more than ambition.¹

Far from being God's original plan for man, this notion of a man able to render account for himself is that which natural man assumes in sin. The sin of man is ever his thinking himself able to do this and that with his own wisdom, free will, and virtue. The pagan faiths acknowledge a Creator God, 'but they said that attaining to heaven was the ability of man. . . . We can co-operate, so they say, so that when it comes to the reckoning [*conte=compte*], the principal part will be found in us'.²

The part that is given to man, according to Calvin, is a dependent, subordinate accountability. Man is called to account for his acknowledging or not acknowledging the blessing of God. On this basis he forfeits or retains life. From literally hundreds of passages that well illustrate Calvin's thought here, the following must suffice as typical:

Our Lord calls us gently to him, he wishes to win us by such kindness, and therefore if we do not deign to come to him that which we receive at his hand will cost us right dearly. It is true that God asks no payment from us, for we can bring him nothing. But yet as our duty he would have us render an expression of thanksgiving to him. If we do not do this, the sacrilege must be laid to our charge that we have ravaged the blessing of God, for being in no way his children. For what right do we have to enjoy them unless it is that he is our father? . . . What remains but that our Lord enter into account [*entrer en conte*] with us, if we on our part do not desire to serve him, and if the ease and rest which he has given us is not applied to the end that we truly show that we hold him for our father, inasmuch as he treats us as his children. If, I say, we do not acknowledge this, then our ingratitude will not go unpunished.³ (*Sermons on Deuteronomy*)

Etymologically, *ability* is part of the word *accountability*, and an understanding of man's ability is part of a concept of accountability. Calvin writes, sometimes at length about human

¹ *Ser. on Eph.* 1.4-6.

² *Ser. on Eph.* 1.17-18.

³ *Ser. on Deut.* 6.10-13.

ability. His terms are those of faculty (*faculté, facultas*) and virtue or strength (*virtus, vertu*), and closely related is the whole argument about the will (*voluntas*, etc.) of man. But because he sees all ability as a gracious gift from God, he is inclined, especially when not drawn into controversy, to speak more of man's gifts than of his abilities.

When pressed by critics in argument, Calvin is willing to grant that man in integrity had a 'faculty of choosing' or 'the power of his own determination', an ability which he does not now have. 'In this integrity man was endued with free will, by which, if he had chosen, he might have obtained eternal life'. But Calvin is always uncomfortable with such concessions, lest the conclusion follow that this primitive endowment was such that should man have chosen the good he would have cause for self-congratulation. He is never content to terminate such argument without a warning to the critics lest they 'design to teach man to seek within himself a power (*facultas*) to attain salvation'.¹ Any 'faculty of choosing' is not a *power in himself* but a *power from God, a power in grace*.

But what is understood when the *Westminster Confession* teaches for Calvinism a century later that 'Man, in his state of innocency, had freedom and power to will and to do that which is good and well-pleasing to God'? What must we conclude about the kind of ability Adam once had when the *Confession* proceeds to the statement that man has 'lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation', and 'is not able by his own strength' to work good works? He once was so able; under the first covenant the *Confession* posits for man 'power and ability to keep it'.² With due allowance for the reservation and recognition that man is not intrinsically independent of his God, but has a God-given endowment or deposit of powers, covenant theology knows a point where man, ideally at least, needs no further grace beyond this minimum or habitual endowment, but is to proceed alone on his own strength of will to a higher good. In the words of the *Confession* the man and the woman are 'left to the liberty of their own will'.³ This must be so, because in some sense man and not God must be the responsible author of good works. We cannot avoid the con-

¹ II, 5.18.

² *Westminster Confession*, XI, II f and XXI, i.

³ *ibid.*, IV, ii.

clusion that, should this man whom God has 'left' to the liberty of his own will succeed with these powers on deposit, he primarily and not the God who left him so, is the responsible one. If the God who once left him to the exercise of his own abilities re- turns at length to establish a covenant of grace additionally to the covenant of works, this does not alter the fundamental conception of what it means to be a responsible man.

When the literalism of the first covenant was refined away, under the pressure of criticism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, this concept of a responsible man tended nonetheless to remain. Man finds himself with a . deposit of abilities and under divine law; these determine his self-understanding and his responsibilities, The historical covenant is replaced by timeless divine-natural truths. The man who is now infected with sin cannot save himself, but this in no way affects the ideal (if no longer primal or original) concept of responsibility. Consider for instance how subtly the long shadow of the covenant of works reaches across the doctrine of man in the brief statement of faith which served the Presbyterian Church, U.S. from 1913 to 1962 :

He made man in his own image; male and female created he them, with immortal souls, endowed with knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, having the law of God in their hearts and power to fulfill it, and yet under a possibility of transgression, being left to the freedom of their own will.¹

And it is a deeply rooted persuasion that one of the 'particular accents' of the Reformed witness is the responsibility of man under law. A recent statement is revealing, redeemed only by the caution which links obedience with gratitude in the closing sentence:

In a world which is confused as to manner of life and which has lost a compelling sense of responsibility, we affirm our faith that God's will for human life has been made known in his law. The validity of that law has in no way been abrogated by the Gospel. This law which is written into the structure of creation has been clearly revealed in the law of the Old Testament and supremely in the law of Christ. We affirm that the meaning of life is to be found when men, in thanksgiving for God's mercy and forgiveness, daily increase in obedience to His revealed will.²

¹ 'A Brief Statement of Belief', for years printed and bound with the Presbyterian Church, U.S., edition of the *Westminster Confession*.

² 'The Witness of the Reformed Churches', a paper presented to the 1964 General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, U.S., in conversations concerning union with the Reformed Church in America.

To the extent to which man is responsible on the basis of a divine law written into creation and which has a certain permanence and priority over the Gospel, we maintain that this witness is yet accented more by the Calvinists than by Calvin.

Perhaps it is only now, as evidenced by recent confessional changes in the United Presbyterian Church, that Reformed theology is prepared to reverse the federal order of law and grace and to return to Calvin's grace and law. With that return, the law-keeping man of the *Westminster Confession* can again become the grace-receiving man of the Reformer himself. If God insists on answerability to his law, as Calvin maintains not less than the Calvinists, man does not discover in such morality his fullest responsibility. We know ourselves as responsible men only when we encounter a God of love and become answerable to his grace. Responsibility is not an obligation, but an invitation; not a task, but a gift; not a command to work and choose, but a call to love and be loved; not so much God's precept as His promise.

The danger that has beset Reformed thought throughout its venture into covenant theology is that in its use of covenant, nature, law, and grace, it makes of the Christian faith something which comes in where human powers fail. Religion becomes synonymous with redemption, and man needs God only for the mending of life's wrongness, to rescue him from his irresponsibility. The authentic Reformed witness makes place for this, but goes beyond. Religion belongs not to the weakness of life, but to its strength. Man must have faith not just because he is a sinner, but because he is human. Man's fundamental need for communion with a gracious God springs not merely from his redemption, but more basically from his dignity as a creature formed for grace. Grace belongs before sin, not less than after. In grace God made and makes a responsible man.