The Promise of the Trinity

The Covenant of Redemption in the Theologies of Witsius, Owen, Dickson, Goodwin, and Cocceius

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Reformed Historical Theology

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B. Hoon Woo

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Chapter 1
Introduction

1.1 Thesis Statement and Introduction to the Problem

The Reformed church and theology acknowledge more clearly than other Christian traditions that the doctrine of the covenant is enormously important, both for theology and for the practice of the Christian life. Following the traditional interpretive patterns of patristic and medieval biblical interpretation, the early modern Reformed theologians assumed continuity between the Old and New Testaments. They argued this continuity with reference both to temporal covenants and to the eternal foundation of these covenants in the covenant of redemption (i.e., the pactum salutis).\(^1\) The doctrine of the pactum salutis, however, has been harshly criticized in various ways since the eighteenth century. It is still criticized and, as I will argue, misunderstood by many modern theologians and has become almost forgotten in modern dogmatics.

In this study, I will demonstrate that the doctrine formulated by Herman Witsius, John Owen, David Dickson, Thomas Goodwin, and Johannes Cocceius can not only overcome modern criticisms, but it can also provide highly practical applications from trinitarian, christological, pneumatological, and soteriological perspectives. According to Witsius, the doctrine is based on a sound biblical

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\(^1\) Richard A. Muller, “Toward the Pactum Salutis: Locating the Origins of a Concept,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 18 (2007): 11–12; Bert Loonstra, *Verkiezing – Versoening – Verbond: Beschrijving en beoordeling van de leer van het pactum salutis in de gereformeerde theologie* (Hague: Boekencentrum, 1990), 80–104; Andrew Alexander Woolsey, “Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly” (Ph.D. diss., University of Glasgow, 1988), I:262. Woolsey’s dissertation was published with minor corrections. Andrew Alexander Woolsey, *Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012). In this study, I will use “the covenant of redemption” and “the pactum salutis” interchangeably. The reason this doctrine was developed particularly in the Reformed tradition, not in other traditions such as Roman Catholic and Lutheran, can be attributed to the Arminian and Antinomian debate that occurred in the Reformed circle.
exegesis that was passed on from the patristic era. His exegesis of the two key texts (i.e., Zechariah 6:13 and Galatians 3:16–20) can still find similar voices among modern biblical scholars and theologians. The doctrine formulated by Owen gives us a deep understanding of the Trinity, particularly regarding the oneness and threeness dimensions in the \textit{ad intra} and \textit{ad extra} works of the Trinity. In the doctrine of the \textit{pactum salutis} Dickson clearly distinguishes between the Son’s natural consubstantiality with the Father and his voluntary subordination to him for the fulfillment of the \textit{pactum salutis}. One can find a meaningful implication for the voluntary obedience of Christ in Dickson’s \textit{pactum} formulation. The Spirit plays a very significant role in the transaction and application of the \textit{pactum} in Goodwin’s theology. The \textit{pactum} doctrine of Goodwin shows that the redemption of Christ cannot be fully understood without due consideration of the pneumatological dimension. Cocceius’s abrogation theory offers a very creative idea for the understanding of freedom in the doctrine of the \textit{pactum salutis}. The doctrine of the \textit{pactum salutis} provides a pretemporal, inviolable foundation of the temporal covenant of grace in Reformed federal theology. The purpose of the present study is to salvage this forgotten doctrine and to present it as a contribution to the modern theological discussion.

1.2 Place of the Doctrine of the \textit{Pactum Salutis} in Reformed Covenant Theology

The doctrine of the \textit{pactum salutis} has a peculiar history in the early modern Reformed theology. Its conception is usually associated with Johannes Cocceius. Wilhelm Gass, for example, suggested that Cocceius had invented the idea of

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item In Reformed orthodoxy, “prettemporal” (or “praetemporal”) does not mean “time before time” but means “prior to all things created” and thus “prior to time.” In this regard, “eternity” is a “prettemporal” or “praetemporal” conception, in which a logical and ontological connotation is contained. If “eternal” means “time before time,” then eternity temporally precedes created time, which leads to deterministic thinking. In this discussion, I do not differentiate between “pretemporal” or “praetemporal” as some other scholars do, such as Gijsbert van den Brink and Mark Jones. Joel R. Beeke and Mark Jones, \textit{A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life} (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 237n1.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
pactum salutis.⁴ Cocceius himself, however, acknowledged that Cloppenburg influenced him on this thought.⁵ The doctrine of the pactum salutis occupied a firm place in sixteenth and seventeenth Reformed covenant theology, even though the locus was implicit sometimes and explicit in other times. One can find foreshadowing of the doctrine of the pactum salutis when Oecolampadius, in 1525, spoke of God’s covenant with his people in Christ as based on a “pactum cum filio suo domino nostro Ihesu Christo.”⁶ According to his larger promises (ampliores promissiones) which were made with his Son, there will be an everlasting covenant (foedus sempiternum) which will be made with his people.⁷

Zwingli also argued a strong implication of the later idea of an eternal pactum salutis based on the authority of divine election, since salvation was a covenantal salvation.⁸ The covenant of grace had its origin in the elective love of God, according to his predetermined purpose.⁹

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⁶ Oecolampadius, In Iesaiam prophetam Hypomnematôn, hoc est, Commentariorum, Ioannis Oecolampadii Libri VI (Basel: Apud Andream Cratandrum, 1525), 265b (Isa 54:9–10). Cited from Woolsey, Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought, 211; David VanDrunen and R. Scott Clark, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” in Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays by the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California, ed. R. Scott Clark (Phillipsburg, NJ; P&R Publishing, 2007), 169n4. It should be noted that Oecolampadius did not consider the idea controversial or novel, and that he appeals to the pactum between the Father and the Son in support of his exposition of the covenant of grace. Loonstra wrongly argues that Arminius used the term pactum to describe the transaction between the Father and the Son. VanDrunen and Clark rightly assert that it was Oecolampadius who first spoke of a pactum between the Father and his Son. Loonstra, Verkiezing – Versoening – Verbond, 27; VanDrunen and Clark, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” 169.

⁷ Oecolampadius, In Iesaiam Prophetam Hypomnematôn, 268a (Isa 55:3). Cited from Woolsey, Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought, 211–12; Muller, “Toward the Pactum Salutis,” 12.

The doctrine of the *pactum salutis* had already been brought to full and clear expression in Olevianus’s *De substantia foederis* (1585).\(^9\) When human beings sinned, argued Olevianus, they corrupted themselves and destroyed the work of God. In order to save the fallen human being, the Son of God was constituted as a mediator of the covenant (*Filius Dei mediator foederis à Patre constitutus spondet*) for two reasons. First, the Son of God became the satisfaction for the sins (*satisfacturum pro peccatis*) of all people to whom the Father had given him (John 17). They are those whom God decreed to adopt as sons through Christ from eternity (Eph 1). Second, the Son of God executed it so that they may enjoy the peace of conscience and renew the image of God.\(^11\) Olevianus was quite conscious of the trinitarian and covenantal link. R. Scott Clark pointedly argues that “Olevian was as much a theologian of the Trinity as he was a federal or covenant theologian.”\(^12\) Olevianus related the doctrine of the Trinity with that of the covenant in his idea of the *pactum salutis*.\(^13\) It is also notable that Olevianus presents the Son as a guarantor. The guarantee of the Son is the root of the application and operation of the *pactum salutis*.\(^14\) As a result of his guarantee, the mediator forms an ideal unity with the elect. Heppe draws the following conclusion from Olevianus’s doctrine of the *pactum salutis*: “From this it appears that the doctrine of redemption in Olevianus has its actual center of gravity in the doctrine of the *pactum* and *consilium salutis* between Father and Son, and in the doctrine which rests upon it, namely, the planting of the elect in Christ, or in the mystical body of Christ. This relationship is one already established in eternity, ...

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11 Caspar Olevianus, *De substantia foederis* (Geneva: Eustache Vignon, 1585), 23, 63, 106. Olevianus writes at p. 23, “Prout autem homo duplex malum commiserat: nam & inobedientia Deum offenderat, & peccando semetipsum corruperat siue opus Dei destruerat: ita & *Filius Dei mediator foederis à Patre constitutus spondet* pro duabus rebus, primò se satisfactur pro peccatis omnium quos Pater ei dedit Ioà. 17:8 & ab æterno per Christum in filios adoptare decreuit Ephes. I. Secundò, se etiam effecturum vt sibi insiti pace conscientiae fruantur atque indices renouentur ad Dei imaginem, quò Deus scopum prime creationis in ipsis consequatur, & in æternum pro infinita sua bonitate & in Christo exhibita misericordia celebrentur: atque sic ipsis fore perfectum Iesum, id est saluatorum, qui merito & efficacia saluet populum suum à peccatis ipsorum Matth. I” (bolds mine).
14 Olevianus, *De substantia foederis*, 2.
and of such a nature that from eternity the Father looks upon the Son in no other way than as the Word to be made flesh, and then in union with the elect, believers, who form his mystical body.”

According to Witsius’ comment, Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) “does not carelessly discourse on this covenant, in his oration for the degree of doctor.” Arminius’s doctoral oration of July 1603 deals with the relationship between the Father and the Son.

William Ames (1576–1633), mentioned also by Witsius, formulated the doctrine of the covenant of redemption to refute the Remonstrants. He rejected the Remonstrant distinction between the accomplishment and the application of redemption (distinctio inter impetrationem et applicationem). For him the distinction made powerless and weak the decree of God in which he ordained Christ as a Savior of human beings (Consilium & decreatum Dei, quo Christum posuit in Salvatorem hominum, frustrabile facit & plane infirmum). The conception of the pactum salutis served here as a higher unity between the accomplishment and the application of salvation.

David Dickson (1583–1662) also developed a Trinitarian doctrine of the pactum salutis and made explicit use of the doctrine for the refutation of Arminianism. He formulated the doctrine from elenctic, doctrinal, exegetical, and

16 Herman Witsius, De oeconomia foederum Dei cum hominibus, libri quatuor (Leeuwarden: J. Hagenaar, 1677), II.2.16. Loonstra places the first mention of a covenant between the Father and Son concerning the Son’s priesthood in Arminius’s writing, with three particular developments later by Cloppenburg, Cocceius and Dickson. Loonstra, Verkiezing – Versoening – Verbond, 381.
17 Jacob Arminius, Oratio de Sacerdotio Christi, in Opera theologica (Leiden, 1629), 9–26; translated as The Priesthood of Christ, in The Works of James Arminius, trans. James Nichols and William Nichols, 3 vols. (London, 1825, 1828, 1875; repr. with an intro. by Carl Bangs. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986), I:416–17. The theme of a covenant between the Father and the Son also appears in Arminius’s oration De objecto theologiae (Opera; Works, I:334–335, 343–344). Cited from Muller, “Toward the Pactum Salutis,” 12–13n14. It seems that Arminius does not explicitly argue the doctrine of the pactum salutis any longer in his later theology. As far as I can determine, the doctrine is not found in the later works of Arminius such as Epistola Ad Helypolytum A Collibus… Nec Non Articuli Diligenti Examine Perpendendi (1608); Disputationes Publicae & Privatae (1610); Orationes Itemque Tractatus Aliquot Insigniores (1611); De Vero & Genuino Sensu Cap. VII. Epistolae Ad Romanos (1612); Examens Libelli Perkinsiani De Praedestinationis Ordine & Modo (1612); and Amica cum D. Francisco Iunio De Praedestinatione Collatio (1613).
18 Vos, Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, 250; Muller, “Toward the Pactum Salutis,” 13.
20 Muller, “Toward the Pactum Salutis,” 16. Loonstra argues that the pactum salutis was de-
practical perspectives. Dickson’s “Speech to the General Assembly” (1638) endorses the doctrine to refute the errors of Arminianism. He clearly mentioned “the Covenant of redemption betwixt God and Christ” in the speech. In his various works, Dickson harmonized the doctrine of the covenant of redemption with other doctrines such as Trinitology and Christology along with the basic tenets of Reformed theology, and in so doing he developed Reformed theology more deeply. The Summe of Saving Knowledge (1649), a companion piece to the Westminster Confession of Faith and a collaborative work with James Durham, clearly sets forth the threefold covenant scheme—the covenant of works, the covenant of redemption, and the covenant of grace. Therapeutica Sacra, which treats the doctrine of regeneration, also presents the doctrine of the covenant of redemption in detail. Dickson’s commentaries on Hebrews, the New Testament letters, Matthew, and Psalms persuasively offer biblical foundations for the doctrine. Most of all, Dickson practically applied the doctrine in his Therapeutica Sacra to the life of believers to provide them with a vivid dynamic for sanctification as well as a full assurance of salvation. Although Dickson’s doctrine of the pactum salutis stood in the early stages of its development, it comprised important elements of the doctrine.

Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) published a book which addresses the doctrine of the covenant of redemption in 1646, two years prior to the publication of Cocceius’s Summa doctrina de foedere et testamento Dei. His doctrine of pactum salutis between the Father and the Son not only removes the Arminian problem but also stands against an Antinomian position. He carefully delineates the developed as a response to Arminian universalism. Loonstra, Verkiezing – Versoening – Verbond, 28–31. Trueman also maintains that “Owen’s discussion of the covenant structure is understood against the background of debates with Arminianism,” and that “Owen … regards the covenant of redemption also as the ultimate basis for the rejection of universal ransom theories.” Carl R. Trueman, The Claims of Truth: John Owen’s Trinitarian Theology (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1998), 134–35, 138.

21 David Dickson, “Speech before the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland, Session 11, December 3, 1638,” in In Records of the kirk of Scotland, containing the acts and proceedings of the general assemblies, from the year 1638 downwards, as authenticated by the clerks of assembly; with notes and historical illustrations by Alexander Peterkin, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: John Sutherland, 1838), 158 (italics mine).

22 David Dickson, Therapeutica sacra; shewing briefly the method of healing the diseases of the conscience, concerning regeneration: written first in Latine by David Dickson, professor of divinity in the collledge of Edinburgh, and thereafter translated by him (Edinburgh: Evan Taylor, 1664), pp. 23, 25, 30; David Dickson, The Summe of Saving Knowledge: With the Practical Use Thereof (Edinburgh: George Swintoun and Thomas Brown, 1671), I4–I6v. See chapter 4 of this study.

23 Muller, “Toward the Pactum Salutis,” 19.

respective commitments between Father and Son in the arrangement of the pactum salutis. The Father appoints the Son as mediator for the redemption of human beings. He commands his Son to offer himself as a sacrifice. He makes the Son a fivefold promise: he will give the Holy Spirit abundantly to him; he will provide full assistance in his work; he will guarantee ultimate success in bringing the elect to faith; he will grant rule and dominion; he will lift him to final glory. The Son promises to accept the office. He will depend upon the Father and submit himself to the Father’s will. He can expect the final glory for himself.\textsuperscript{25}

Johann Cloppenburg (1592–1652), Dutch Reformed theologian, worked out very precisely the doctrine of the pactum salutis. He chose the doctrine as a starting point for his polemic against the Remonstrants. In his comment on Luke 22:29, Cloppenburg argues that there is a twofold \textit{diatheke} or dispensation of the new covenant of Christ: 1) the one which the Father covenantally ordains the guarantor; 2) the one in which the Son as the Father’s guarantor ordains the promise of life and heavenly glory for our sake. Claims Cloppenburg, “As for the first arrangement, the covenant is said to be previously ratified by God in Him, Gal 3:17. Here the full covenant concept remains, namely a two-sided agreement of mutual trust. As for the second arrangement, the covenant is called a testament established for us by the dying Testator, Heb 9:14–17.”\textsuperscript{26} Cloppenburg dealt with the covenant arrangement between God the Father and the Son as guarantor in detail.

Thomas Blake (c.1596–1657) acknowledges the existence of the covenant of redemption. He admits that federal transactions took place between the Father and the Son, and that this happened for our sake.\textsuperscript{27} He writes, “there is such a


\textsuperscript{27} Thomas Blake, Samuel Shaw, and Anthony Burgess, \textit{Vindiciae Foederis; Or, A Treatise of the Covenant of God Entered with Man-kinde: In the Several Kindes and Degrees of It, in which the Agreement and Respective Differences of the Covenant of Works and the Covenant of Grace, of the Old and New Covenant are Discust. The Conditions of the Covenant of Grace on Mans Part, are Assigned and Asserted. The Just Latitude and Extent Clearly Held Forth, and Fully Vindicated. Several Corollaries Containing Many Heads of Divinity, Now Controverted, and Practical Points Singularly Useful, Inferred. In Particular the Necessity of a Constant Settled Ministry (to Bring Men Into Covenant, and to Bring Them Up to the Terms of It,) and of Schooles, and Nurseries of Learning, and an Orderly Call in Tendency to It. Infant Baptisme in that Latitude, as Now in Use in Reformed Churches Maintained. Newly Corrected and Much Enlarged, & in Many Places Cleared by Its Author. Thomas Blake, Late Minister of the Gospel, at Tamworth in the Counties of Stafford and Warwick. Whereunto is Annexed, a Sermon Preached at His Funeral by Mr. Anthony Burgessse, and a Funeral Oration Made at His Death
covenant … which was entered between God and Christ, containing the transactions which passe between the Father and the Sonne, the tenor of which covenant we find laid down by the Prophet, *Esaie* 53.10, & c. and commented upon by the Apostle, *Phil.* 2.6.\(^{28}\) For Blake, the economy of the covenant of grace and our being in it is founded on the covenant of redemption.

Samuel Rutherford (1600–1661) wrote a work on the covenant entitled *The Covenant of Life Opened*. He distinguished between the covenant of grace and the covenant of redemption according to the parties of the covenant. He called the covenant of redemption the “covenant of suretyship.”\(^{29}\) Rutherford wrote, “In this covenant of suretyship, the parties are Jehovah God as common to all the three on the one part, and on the other the only Son of God the second person undertaking the work of redemption. In the covenant of reconciliation, the parties are God the Father, Son and Spirit, out of free love pitying us, and lost sinners who had broken the covenant of works. Hence the covenant of suretyship is the cause of the stability and firmness of the covenant of grace.”\(^{30}\) Thus, for Rutherford, the covenant of redemption was a trinitarian covenant.

Johannes Cocceius (1603–1669) appealed to the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* as artillery against the Socinians, the Remonstrants, the Jesuits, and the Tridentine theologians. He repudiated the (Semi-)Pelagian notion of free will in those theologies as well as any hint of universalism in them. The doctrine of the *pactum salutis* was useful to Cocceius in that it could teach the limitedness of the elect and the sovereign act of the Godhead. Through the accomplishment of the *pactum*, humans regained true freedom to do good works.\(^{31}\) The sovereignty of God and human responsibility concur in the *pactum* doctrine of Cocceius.

Thomas Goodwin (1600–1680) developed a nuanced doctrine of the *pactum salutis* in his christological and pneumatological works. He explained particularly the role of the Holy Spirit from various viewpoints. The Holy Spirit is identified as a legal partner who equally participated in the agreement of the *pactum*. The Spirit is portrayed as essential in the execution of the *pactum* in time, since he concurred with every redemptive work of Christ and effectually applied the result of the work to the believer.\(^{32}\)

\(^{28}\) Thomas Blake, Samuel Shaw, and Anthony Burgess, *Vindiciae Foederis*, 14.
\(^{29}\) The term of suretyship has its origin in the Latin word “*spondere*” (to give surety) as is seen in Olevianus’ work. See note 11 of this chapter.
\(^{31}\) See chapter 6 of this study.
\(^{32}\) See chapter 5 of this study.
Richard Baxter (1615–1691) acknowledges, “Divines use to mention a Covenanting between the Father and the Son about the work of Redemption.” He prefers the language of “decree” over “covenant,” but he definitely thinks that there is a pre-temporal agreement between the Father and the Son, “concerning Christ’s Incarnation, his work, and his sufferings, and the success of these, and what God will further do thereupon.”

John Owen’s (1616–1683) formulation of the pactum salutis is deeply trinitarian at its center. It clearly grants the reality that the three persons of the Trinity work distinguishably but inseparably. For Owen, the doctrine of the pactum is in basic continuity with the Augustinian-Thomistic doctrine of the Trinity. Owen appropriates theological conceptions such as inseparable operations, terminus operationis, voluntariness of the will, habitude, and in-being. In his trinitarian theology the pactum salutis imputes the ad extra relations back into pretemporal ad intra transaction, in which the Father promises to make the provision, the Son undertakes the redemptive work, and the Holy Spirit cooperates with the Son and perfects the redemption.

In his 1675 article “Paradise Opened,” Thomas Brooks (1608–1680) differentiated the covenant of grace from the covenant of redemption. He included an extended exposition of the covenant of redemption in this treatise in a trinitarian way. He explicitly explained the role of the Holy Spirit in the pactum salutis. In the end of the exposition, he mentioned that the Spirit of God is involved in the covenant as a “legal witness.” He argued that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, do all agree to the articles of the covenant, and are all witnesses to the same covenant.

33 Richard Baxter, Aphorismes of Justification, With their explication annexed. Wherein also is opened the nature of the Covenants, Satisfaction, Righteousnesse, Faith, Works, &c. (London: Francis Tyton, 1649), 8.
35 See chapter 3 of this study.
The most extensive work on the *pactum salutis* was Patrick Gillespie’s *The Ark of the Covenant Opened* (1677). Gillespie suggested the covenant of redemption as the foundation of the covenant of grace. He declared the biblical validity of the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* on the first page of the book, saying that “there is a Covenant betwixt God and Christ; though the name of this mysterious transactions, which we call the Covenant of Redemption and Suretiship, be not found in Scripture, in so many words (which may be among the reason why most Writers have been silent about the thing); yet the thing it self being so evidently held forth in the Scripture.” Gillespie argued that the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* was fully biblical.

Herman Witsius (1636–1708) repudiated Antinomianism and used the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* in defense of his view. Some of Witsius’ works played an important role in the English Antinomian Controversy of the 1690s. He thoroughly documented the biblical foundation of the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* and appropriated peculiar biblical hermeneutics to formulate the doctrine.

The doctrine of the *pactum salutis* was included in a Reformed confession as well. It is true that the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* is not explicitly mentioned in the Westminster Confession or Catechisms. However, the Savoy Declaration 8.1, which was formulated according to the Westminster Confession 8.1, added eight words (bold in the citation) to the article to explicitly indicate the doctrine of the *pactum salutis*.

It pleased God, in his eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus his only begotten Son, according to a covenant made between them both, to be the Mediator between God and man; the Prophet, Priest, and King; the Head and Saviour of his Church, the Heir of all things and Judge of the world; unto whom he did from all eternity give a people to be his seed, and to be by him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

To recapitulate briefly, the doctrine of the *pactum salutis* was present in the Reformed theology of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in continental

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38 For the authorship of this work, see Trueman, “The Harvest of Reformation Mythology?”
39 Patrick Gillespie, *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* (London: Tho. Parkhurst at the Bible and three Crowns in Cheapside, near Mercers Chappel, 1677), 1.
Europe, England, and Scotland. It also took its place in a Reformed confession. The doctrine was developed in the Reformed covenant theology by four routes: (1) debate with Arminians, Socinians, and the Tridentine theologians (e.g., Dickson, Ames, Owen, and Cocceius); (2) refutation of Antinomians (e.g., Bulkeley and Witsius); (3) doctrinal expansion (e.g., Olevianus, Patrick Gillespie, and Goodwin); and exegetical development (e.g., Oecolampadius, Dickson, Cocceius, Goodwin, Owen, and Witsius).

1.3 Present Status of the Problem

The doctrine of the pactum salutis, which occupied a fixed locus in many Reformed dogmatics of the high orthodoxy era (ca. 1640–1725), has been harshly opposed in various ways by eighteenth-century theologians such as Deurhof and Wesselius, and has gradually lost its previously solid position. In many modern Reformed dogmatics the doctrine of the pactum salutis is simply ignored, very briefly touched upon, or harshly criticized. For example, Hendrikus Berkhof never mentions the doctrine in his Christian Faith. In more recent dogmatics, Gijsbert van den Brink and Cornelis van der Kooi allow only seven lines for the doctrine of the pactum salutis. Based on Ephesians 1:4 and 1 Peter 1:20, they argue that this covenant was concluded between the Father and the Son and aimed to redeem the elect, and that since the covenant of grace necessarily has the same scope as that of redemption, the covenant of grace is limited to the elect. They do not give more explanation about the implications of the pactum salutis. By contrast, Michael Horton points to the doctrine in many places of The Christian Faith in relation to the divine decree, union with Christ, covenant and

42 For other theologians’ doctrine of the pactum salutis, who are not mentioned in this study, see F. Junius, Theses theologicae, in Opuscula theologica selecta, ed. Abraham Kuyper (Amsterdam: Muller, 1882), c. 25, th. 21; F. Gomarus, Opera theologica omnia (Amsterdam: J. Jansson, 1664), on Matt. 3:13; Luke 2:21; 19:1; G. Voetius, Selectae disputationes theologicae, 5 vols. (Utrecht, 1648–69), II, 266; A. Essenius, Dissertationes de subjectione Christi ad legem divinam (Utrecht: Antonii Smytegelt, 1666), X, 2. Cited from Bavinck, Reformed Dogmatics, 3:212n39.


44 Hendrikus Berkhof, Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith, Rev. ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1999). It seems that H. Berkhof never seriously treats the doctrine of the pactum salutis in other works as well.

45 Gijsbert van den Brink and Cornelis van der Kooi, Christelijke dogmatiek: een inleiding (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2012), 633.
conditionality, the covenant of grace, the priesthood of Christ, and the certainty of the salvation of the elect. Horton underscores the importance of the covenant of redemption. It is the basis for all of God’s purpose in nature and history and the foundation of the covenant of grace. For Horton, the covenant of redemption is at least assumed in chapter 8 of the Westminster Confession. He, however, neither discusses the doctrine of the pactum salutis as a separate locus nor gives specific biblical evidence of the doctrine. More recently John Fesko published a monograph on the pactum salutis. His book is very helpful for the understanding of the doctrine and its history and has many common grounds with my present work. As a broad survey of the doctrine, however, the book does not deal with many detailed points that the present work offers.

Although there are some exceptions in which the doctrine of the pactum salutis is favorably explained, the doctrine has been criticized by many theologians since the eighteenth century. Johannes Wesselius (1671–1745), a professor of Leiden University, criticized the doctrine in his preface to a Dutch translation of the French theologian Bénédict Pictet’s (1655–1724) De Christelyke


49 Horton simply relates the doctrine with John 16:14–15 and 17 but does not offer an exegesis of the text. Horton, The Christian Faith, 558, 644. For Horton’s positive development of the doctrine, see 7.2 of this study.


God-geleertheid, en kennis der zaligheid. Wessselius draws four points of criticism: first, the doctrine of the pactum salutis lacks biblical evidence. The texts which the proponents of the doctrine offer do not point to the eternal covenant between the Father and the Son but are related to the promise or representation of the eternal will of God in time. Second, the doctrine involves tritheism inasmuch as it presupposes two or more substantially different wills in the Godhead. Third, the doctrine also comprises a form of subordinationism. The divine pact between the Father and Christ was concluded as an unequal alliance between master and servant. The will of the Father is a commandment which he compulsorily imposes upon the Son. Lastly, Wessselius tries to change the doctrine of the pactum salutis into a counsel of peace in which the will of the Father and the human will of the incarnate Son coincide. In so doing, he regards the pertinent biblical texts to the doctrine as prophesying or describing the relationship between the Father and the incarnate Christ in time.

In these similar lines, Thomas Boston (1676–1732) and Alexander Comrie (1706–1774) assumed a critical attitude toward the doctrine of the pactum salutis. Comrie translated and introduced Boston’s View of the Covenant of Grace in the Netherlands. Instead of assigning the pactum as a separate covenant, Boston preferred to count it as the same covenant as the covenant of grace.

Modern scholarly criticisms of the doctrine of the pactum salutis have similarly followed the lines of old critiques and can be classified in five points. The first point of criticism is a lack of biblical evidence of the doctrine (O. P. Robertson, G. H. Kersten, and Proponents of the “New Covenant Theology”). Second, the doctrine of the pactum salutis incurs suspicion of tritheism (Robert Letham, Kersten, and Karl Barth). Third, some critics argue that this divine

56 The assertion of VanDrunen and Clark that “the leader of the so-called Marrow men, Thomas Boston, taught the pactum salutis” is not quite right because Boston identified the pactum salutis with the covenant of grace. VanDrunen and Clark, “The Covenant Before the Covenants,” 170. It seems that Boston absorbs the covenant of grace into the pactum so that although he calls it the covenant of grace, he has actually removed the temporal covenant and identified the eternal covenant as the covenant of grace.
57 See 2.1 of this study.
58 See 3.1 of this study.