Covenant Theology, Baptism, and the Anglican Tradition

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This thesis explores the history, theology and practical application of the Reformed covenantal theological heritage, with both its legacy and future in the Anglican and Episcopal tradition. It will survey both the centrality of covenant in scripture and the development of Covenant Theology in the history of the church, especially in the Reformation period in England of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in which the theology of Covenant grew into maturity.

A survey of the covenant motif in special revelation will argue that though the theology of the covenant matures at a very late stage in church history, its merits are no less valid. It will be demonstrated that the covenant concept is central because God deals with his creatures by way of Covenant. It is an expression of his relationship to the world.

Close attention will then be paid to the organic and providential way in which the ideas of the Reformation moved back and forth from the Continent to the British Isles, along with its polarizing affect during the very contentious days of the Reformation. A close-up on several English Puritan divines will demonstrate the commitment to Reformed theology in the tumultuous days of the English Reformation. Though the Puritan vision did not win the day, nevertheless, its theological distinctives and persuasion made an indelible impression that never went away. Though Covenant Theologians emphasize different aspects of the motif, they all share a common agreement of God’s commitment to redeem by way of covenantal administration.
Further, an examination of the practice of infant baptism as a necessary fruit of
covenant theology, will be argued. The necessity of a covenant framework in the practice
of paedo-baptism will be argued and defended. Covenant nurture will be explored as an
integral aspect of infant baptism as a crucial pedagogical paradigm from scripture, not to be
neglected. We will examine an example of how Covenant nurture was downgraded in
Colonial America, changing the trajectory of ministry emphasis and practice in the church
for decades. The revivalist, conversion paradigm introduced in the American Colonies
served to shift the ministry emphasis in the church from covenant nurture to dramatic
conversion in adulthood. The baptismal rite of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer will be
examined as an expression of a winsome covenantal theology hermeneutic.

Finally, consideration will be made regarding the future of Covenant in the Anglican
and Episcopal tradition. It will be argued, persuasively that covenant theology is right at
home with the expression of the 1979 Prayer Book. The future of Covenant Theology is
unclear, but the need for a winsome covenant theology in the Episcopal tradition has never
been greater. Our current cultural moment and the inter-connectivity create an
opportunity to present a gospel-shaped Anglican ethos that is informed by a winsome
reformed theology, reinforced by the drama of its liturgy, contextualized and delivered for
the sake of a new generation.

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Principal Abbreviations

BCP – The Book Of Common Prayer

ESV – English Standard Version

NRSV – New Revised Standard Version
Introduction
Covenant, Baptism, and the Anglican Tradition

The system of theology that came to prominence during the English Reformation is the subject of this thesis. It traces the convergence of the covenant theological framework, the Anglican tradition and the sacrament of baptism. It argues that the Reformed theological impress is not only a part of the story of the Reformation in general but has a place still in the Anglican tradition. It especially argues that the baptismal covenant rite found in the Episcopal Church’s 1979 Book Of Common Prayer is as much a tribute to the influence and legacy of covenant theology as we could find in any liturgical rite in the Christian tradition. That the Anglican tradition emerged from the period historians describe as the Reformation is an objective reality. That the Anglican ecclesiastical tradition was influenced to varying degrees by that system of Calvinist doctrine, later to be called covenant theology, is a more subjective matter. This thesis argues that Reformed theological distinctives, not always in whole, but in part, were of substantial influence in the Church of England during the time of the Reformation and remain a vibrant component of both the legacy of Anglicanism and, potentially, its fruitful future for mission in ministry in the twenty-first century.

The baptismal rite of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer demonstrates the rich covenantal heritage of the Apostolic age. This Apostolic gospel was the passion of so many Reformers on the Continent and in the British Isles and beyond. In the new era of
accessibility to the Bible and the spirit of *ad fontes*, the Reformers contributed a wealth of theological gains in biblical and systematic studies. Careful new studies in the original languages brought fresh exegesis and deepening sense of gratitude for the richness of the gospel of God. The Reformers asked fundamental questions of established systems and traditions while bringing clarity to the mind and conscience. As the Reformation era ripened, the system of theology that sprung from Wittenberg, was refined in Geneva by Calvin and further refined by Calvin’s heirs, became generally known as Reformed or Covenant theology. This developing theological understanding would find its way onto the British Isles, impacting every level of societal rank. The covenental theological system or hermeneutic, in varying degrees of acceptance, would influence the Church of England in profound and lasting ways. Contemporary expressions of Anglican and Episcopal worship draw from this covenental heritage, through the rites, liturgies, catechism, eucharistic prayers and its overall theological ethos. This is an exploration of that impact and how the covenental framework remains viable and needed in expressions of Anglican worship today.

The understanding and application of covenant theology, while based in scripture, has grown considerably in the last five hundred years of church history. Covenant as meta-theme, as a gathering principle for Biblical interpretation, has historically been the position of those within the Reformed Protestant tradition. Covenant Theology, or the application of the covenental understanding in redemption, requires an acknowledgement of a series of thorny doctrines such as election, predestination and theories of the atonement. It also creates necessary discussion regarding the different types of covenants found in the
scriptures and various administrative epochs of teaching. The study of Biblical covenants also demands a consideration of the pre-temporal, inter-Trinitarian relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The motivation for this thesis is the hope that a greater understanding of Biblical Covenantal theology and Reformed doctrine within the Anglican tradition will be achieved for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Although controversial in many academic circles, Biblical theology has seen a recent resurgence, particularly in various evangelical churches. The attempt to harmonize the Bible as a coherent, unified narrative from Genesis to Revelation is gaining more and more attention in this context. Discovering the meta-themes in scripture is key to the Biblical-theological task. Covenant is the central gathering theme of scripture. The concept of covenant prevails both in the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew word for covenant, berit, appears in the Old Testament two-hundred and eighty-six times. The Greek term for covenant, diatheke, appears thirty-three times in the New Testament. In effect, covenant, as a gathering principle throughout the scriptures, is a type of hermeneutic. In other words, through the lens of covenant, we may come to understand the contours of redemptive history in a more complete way. In the scriptures, covenant is the principal means by which the Kingdom of God appears and is recovered and comes in fullness at the end of the age.

In order to unfold these claims, particular attention will need to focus on the historical development of Covenant Theology. Covenantal terminology, awareness and understanding can be detected in the patristic period of church history, if only in germinal form. As New Covenant signs and seals, Baptism and Eucharist in the Anglican tradition
are practiced and understood in light of covenantal language and in the legacy of Covenant Theology. The emphasis of the covenant, it will be seen, has had its highs (sixteenth through the nineteenth century) and lows (from the publication of the Latin Vulgate in the early fifth century until the Reformation).

The development of Covenant Theology was impeded in the Middle Ages and re-emerges during the time of the Reformation. Though we are witnessing a resurgence of a kind of "Neo-Calvinism" within the evangelical tradition, covenant theology remains somewhat obscured in the broader church. Mainline Protestant churches practicing the sacrament of baptism with infants, while using the language of covenant present, do not typically unpack a robust covenantal theology. The Anglican baptismal rite is dressed in covenantal language, but this is rarely expounded, defined or defended in contemporary settings. Given the prominence of the Episcopal practice of infant baptism and the corresponding Baptismal Covenant (which serves as the frame of discipleship for its members), it is remarkable how little the concept of covenant is explored.

It is the claim of this thesis that sound biblical theology rests on an understanding of covenant. Further, it is the claim of this thesis that any Christian tradition holding to paedo-baptism would do well to explore the baptismal rite as subsumed in a broader Biblical, covenantal theology. Of particular interest will be the impact of covenant theology within the Anglican tradition. The practice of infant baptism demands a rigorous theological justification. The practice of paedo-baptism finds its grounding through a covenantal approach to Biblical theology. There may be other theological arguments for paedo-baptism, but it is the argument of this thesis that the practice of infant baptism finds
its true grounding and coherence through a covenantal understanding of redemption. Therefore, it is the intent of this thesis to provide a brief summary of the development of covenantal theology, including the significant contributions from Anglican theologians.

The desire to focus this thesis on Covenant Theology is rooted in a desire to serve the practical needs of God’s covenant people. Bringing clarity to the truths, depths and beauties of God’s dealings with his creation through covenantal means will serve to strengthen the faith of Christ’s church and help make possible the advancement of the Kingdom of God toward its ultimate consummation. Plainly, the doctrine of the covenant and the system of covenant theology is virtually unknown in contemporary churches untethered from historic confessions, prayer books, creeds and catechetical resources. Paul the Apostle, in his letter to the church at Ephesus, said, “...remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called ‘the uncircumcision’ by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands-- remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”¹ May the church be not “strangers to the covenants of promise.”

As noted above, the basis of covenant as a central theme in scripture finds its persuasion in both the explicit usage of the terms, berith (in the Hebrew Old Testament) and diatheke’ (in the Greek New Testament) and the implicit use of the covenant reality that was so common in the ancient world of the Old and New Testament. While berith is found over three-hundred times in Old Testament and diatheke nearly thirty times in the

¹ Ephesians 2.11-12, English Standard Version
New Testament, it is the implicit use of covenantal *treaty* structures that provide a compelling argument for the idea of covenant as one of the primary themes that unite the scriptures as one testament. According to the early ground-breaking work of Meridith Kline:

The rediscovery of treaties of the great kings of Near Eastern antiquity has been widely exploited by biblical scholarship in the last few years. It has been generally recognized that certain adjustments are required in the negative judgments which control modern studies in the area of Old Testament history and higher criticism, but it does not yet seem to have been appreciated that in these treaties the modern biblical critic has the tiger by the tail. The significance of the treaties for subjects like the beginnings of the canon of Scripture and the authenticity of the Pentateuch as well as the historicity of various covenants recorded in the Bible can hardly be overestimated.²

Kline’s scholarship revealed the pervasive nature of the Suzerain/Vassal treaties in the Ancient Near Eastern world, which has helped Biblical theologians detect the patterns of these treaties within the biblical texts, especially in the Torah of the Old Testament. Kline argues that the giving of the Law in Exodus 20, repeated in Deuteronomy 5, finds its covenantal structure in the pattern of such treaties. “‘I am the Lord thy God,’ the opening words of the Sinaitic proclamation (20.2), correspond to the preamble of the suzerainty treaties, which identified the Suzerain, or the ‘great king,’ and that in terms calculated to inspire awe and fear.”³ Much of Kline’s work is possible because of George Mendenhall’s synthesis of Ancient Near Eastern treaty practices. “The last century of scholarship has


³ Ibid, 13.
helped the traditional Reformed homage to the covenantal motif. In the mid-twentieth century, George E. Mendenhall, consolidating a number of studies by others, demonstrated the remarkable parallels between the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e., Old Testament) and ancient Near Eastern (i.e., secular) treaties."^4

If Yahweh’s self-disclosure to Abraham and Moses is as the covenant Lord, it certainly stands out that this would have been language and structure that God’s people would have been aware of and indeed familiar, with its substance and structure. This comports with the nature of God’s speaking to humanity in a way it can comprehend. It shows the compassion of God to relate to his creatures in a mode of language that is readily digestible, applicable and transportable within the context of the Ancient Near Eastern world.

In the seventh chapter of the Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the assembly of divines set forth a theology of the covenant nature of God and scripture. They open their rationale by suggesting that God chose to communicate his will to his people in covenantal terms. "The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience to him as their creator, yet they could never have any fruition of him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which he has been pleased to express by way of covenant."^5 Not only does this passage demonstrate the central role of covenant in divine

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revelation, but it reveals how prominent and persuasive covenant theology had become by the middle of the seventeenth century. Further, though the Westminster Confession is not an official document of the Anglican Communion or Episcopal Church, it is nonetheless a vital confession in the history of the English Reformation. Diarmaid MacCulloch argues that the Confession’s impact in England was minimal. “The Westminster Confession of 1646 still has an honoured place in the doctrinal standards of the Church of Scotland, but it has had a much lesser role in English religious life.”6 Certainly this may be true regarding the adoption of the Confession as an official document, but MacCulloch’s argument may not tell the whole story regarding the Confession’s influence on the level of the populace in England. In the arena of ideas, the Confession was a particular theological achievement, a summary of reformed theology that was aimed to influence children and families. The English Puritan, Thomas Manton, in his Epistle to the Reader in the Confession, reveals the target and goal of the Confession: to influence young people. And of this aim Manton describes the contextual difficulties in which it was produced, with a certain lament that under more favorable circumstances in the Church in England, that its influence might be greater:

And, to that end, I know not what work should be fitter for their use, than that compiled by the Assembly at Westminster; a Synod of as godly, judicious divines, (notwithstanding all the bitter words which they have received from discontented and self-conceited men,) I verily think, as England ever saw. Though they had the un hapiness to be employed in calamitous times, when the noise of wars did stop men’s ears, and the licentiousness of wars did set every wanton tongue and pen at liberty to reproach them, and the prosecution and event of those wars did exasperate partial

discontented men to dishonor themselves by seeking to
dishonor them; I dare say, if in the days of old, when councils
were in power and account, they had had but such a council of
bishops, as this of presbyters was, the fame of it for learning
and holiness, and all ministerial abilities, would, with very
great honour, have been transmitted to posterity...?

Though the Long Parliament ultimately failed in reorganizing the Church of
England toward a Presbyterian polity, the Westminster Assembly’s contribution,
theologically, in the Confession of Faith, cannot be denied. The scope of its influence in
the British Isles and beyond is inestimable. Peter Golding writes that the contribution of
original reformed and covenantal theological perspective from English divines is much
stronger than it is often recognized:

The Westminster Confession is, in the words of Geerhardus Vos, ‘the
first Reformed confession in which the doctrine of the covenant is not
merely brought in from the side but is placed in the foreground and has been
able to permeate at almost every point.’ But whereas the assembly sat from
1643 onwards, the Summa Doctrinae de Foedere et Testamentis Dei did not
appear until 1648, the year in which the Confession was completed. Clearly,
then, the Westminster Divines were not being influenced from Leyden, but
simply summed up what in England ‘had ripened as the fruit of a slow
development.’

No doubt its influence could have been more pronounced had political and ecclesiastical
outcomes been different. Given the plot-line of the English Reformation’s story,
however, judgments regarding its lasting influence seem difficult to determine.

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7 Thomas Manton, Mr. Thomas Manton’s Epistle to the Reader, in The Westminster Confession of Faith,

8 Peter Golding, Covenant Theology: The Key Of Theology In Reformed Thought And Tradition, (Scotland:
Christian Focus, 2004), 15.
Though not in an official capacity, the Confession does point to a flourishing era in the development of an advance in Systematic and Biblical Theology. However one might critique the political and civil leadership of the middle seventeenth century, the development of Reformed, Protestant theology was the result of an ad fontes, back to the sources, devotion to the Bible. Not only were the great core doctrines of the gospel rediscovered, but the systemizing of biblical doctrine served to advance our knowledge of God and of his redemptive decree in scripture. The covenantal theology of the Reformation era in the British Isles sought to establish a clear illumination of the gospel of Christ for the people. The covenantal theological framework unlocks a comprehensive hermeneutical grid for students of scripture, uniting Old and New Testaments, and demonstrating a re-occurring motif that carries the redemptive drama forward toward its climax. It could be argued that, with a renewed interest in biblical studies and a careful survey of the apostolic and church fathers, the Continental and British Isle reformers, were drawn to parallel theological conclusions: the covenantal nature of God’s revelation to his people.

The Westminster Confession, along with other documents of the era, demonstrate, if only in germinal form, what a careful search of the scriptures yields, a covenantal creation and redemption. Because Covenant Theology came into a more mature state during the reformation era, it is often thought of as a contrivance or concocted theory. This might be a fair critique outside of the context of church history. But the Reformation, among many other things, is arguably a renewal and recovery of a scriptural understanding and application in the church. A.G. Dickens suggests this dynamic:

...we have sought to understand the English Reformation as an integral part of the European Reformation, and also to see the whole movement
as more profound, more radical than any mere attack upon the disciplinary shortcomings of the late medieval Church. Not altogether without reason, the Reformers believed that the Church had long since tended to drift away from Christ's teaching and from apostolic principles as recorded in the New Testament.9

Integral to the Reformers' recovery of apostolic doctrine was a growing development of the theology of covenant. It is a vital facet of the story of the Reformation, from the Continent to the British Isles. The unique context of the English Reformation meant that reform in Britain would be a very mixed bag of competing theological camps and a conformist tradition that embraced reform to a degree, but that ultimately limited the amount of reform theologically, liturgically and in its polity. The marks of a robust Reformed theology, however, can be found in the Book of Common Prayer (BCP).

That Prayer Book in England of 1549 and 1552 was an expression of a reforming church could never be denied. Cranmer's struggle for how much reform is at the center of an unparalleled ecclesiastical drama. Caught between the Conformist party of a church resistant to change its position on the eucharist and the push of a growing number of proponents for even more radical reforms, Cranmer sought to thread the needle of reforming key components of prayer book theology while allowing other aspects to remain intact. Cranmer's strategy meant straddling the line between two disappointed groups in the church. It seems that Cranmer's focus was to bring the Prayer Book into general alignment with the soteriology of the Calvinistic reformed tradition without being

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overly assertive with its details. Cranmer's real trust was in the proliferation of the English Bible and the impact that reading the scriptures would have in the life of the church. "For Cranmer, traditional religion in England had been more concerned to demonstrate the sacerdotal power of the priesthood than to instruct the people in Christian doctrine and practice...It is reading the Bible that Cranmer first wants to ensure."\textsuperscript{10} The central issue of Cranmer's generation surrounded the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In his \textit{Defense of the True and Catholic Doctrine of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Our Saviour Christ} (1550), against the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, Cranmer's title page features artwork of the Passover Meal from Exodus, the water from the rock, the manna from heaven and a prominent feature of the Last Supper scene of Jesus and the disciples in the upper room from the Gospel accounts. Diarmaid McCulloch comments:

\begin{quote}
The agenda of the book, announced on the title-page, was the case would be 'grounded and stablished upon God's holy word and approved by the consent of the most ancient doctors of the Church': in other words, the proof would come from scripture, but the most reliable post-scriptural traditions would vindicate the early Church's integrity by showing its agreement with the reformed understanding of the biblical message.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

The influence of the first and second generations of continental reformers upon the English church generally and Cranmer, specifically, helped shape the 1552 Prayer Book. Peter Martyr and Martin Bucer's direct input, along with Calvin and Bullinger, among


many others, were of considerable impact upon Cranmer's 1552 edition of the Prayer Book. Alan Jacob's notes the satisfaction of its achievement,

Cranmer and his allies must have been pleased at what they had accomplished. They had now produced a Book of Common Prayer that retained some of the most venerable and beautiful aspects of traditional worship but also fully embodied the evangelical commitment to serious engagement with scripture, and offered a communal liturgical enactment of what it means to live by faith and by grace. Traditionalists were unhappy, but their numbers were decreasing; and the people would soon become used to the new forms of worship, and would be, as Bucer put it, "thoroughly instructed in Christ." 12

In the 1979 American Book of Common Prayer, traces of the Reformed and covenantal distinctives can be found throughout and are emphasized heavily in the Historical Documents, the eucharistic prayers and in the formulation of the Baptismal Covenant. The Anglican and Episcopal practice of paedobaptism is necessarily a theological appeal to covenant theology. It is difficult to imagine a theology of infant baptism that does not anchor itself in a covenantal framework. The pastoral implications are important and will impact the way we disciple and nurture children and youth, in particular, and God's people, in general, in the Christian faith.

The intent of this thesis is to explore the convergence of two primary ideas and to answer one primary question. The first idea is to gauge the influence that reformed, covenantal theology had on the English Reformation. How pervasive were the reformed statements of the doctrines of grace and how deeply did a covenantal view of revelation penetrate the churches of the British Isles during the time of the reformation?

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Secondly, if there was such an influence and adherence, in parts of the church, what is the doctrine’s legacy? Is it a legitimate appellation to be a reformed Anglican? Is that part of the multi-faceted heritage of the Anglican ethos? Does the Episcopal Book of Common Prayer, in this case the 1979 edition, reveal a reformed, covenantal legacy in its rites, prayers and structure? Finally, does a reformed, covenantal theology have anything to say about the baptismal covenant that frames the journey and understanding of the Anglican believer? And how might a reformed theological understanding harmonize our theology of baptism with a comprehensive understanding of the Bible and the history of redemption? This project seeks to sift through some of the layers of theological history, exploring the development of covenant theology as the reformation matured in the early seventeenth century. The intent is also to locate possible intersections of covenantal theology, with accompanying debates and endorsement, to varying degrees, among English divines in these formative decades. Finally, this project seeks to discover the ramifications of this history for the current landscape of ministry in the Episcopal and Anglican tradition. Does our baptismal covenant rest on the foundation of a robust reformational, covenant theology? If so, how are we teaching the theology of covenant with regard to our understanding of peadobaptistic practice and conviction?
Chapter One

The Centrality of Covenant in Special Revelation

The meaning and application of a covenantal theological perspective, like any other biblical doctrine, carries with it a diversity of opinion, weight, influence and application in the life of the Church. Some Biblical doctrines experience an ebb and flow of emphasis through church history, depending, in some cases, on context and what acute needs exist which demand varying levels of proportionality and emphasis in the church. For example, infant mortality rates in the Middle Ages and Reformation era undoubtedly played a role in the significance of the attention given to the role of baptism in soteriology.

Theologian J.I. Packer describes twentieth century presentations of the gospel as being largely a “truncated affair”\(^\text{13}\) in which Jesus death and resurrection are quickly explained and then a call to repentance and faith is given. While this may be effective and, in some cases, necessary, it is not what he would describe a “fulsome” understanding of the good news. It leaves off the broader context of why Jesus’ appearing was even necessary. It fails, in the very least, to address the foundational articles of faith, for instance, as given in summary form in the Apostles’ Creed. In his introduction of a republication of Herman Witsius’ *The Economy Of The Covenants Between God And Man*, Packer describes the meaning of covenant theology:

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answer to that question is that it is what is nowadays called a hermeneutic – that is, a way of reading the whole Bible that it undergirds. A successful hermeneutic is a consistent interpretive procedure yielding a consistent understanding of Scripture that in turn confirms the propriety of the procedure itself. Covenant theology is a case in point.\textsuperscript{14}

So, we may say that covenant is not necessarily as much a core doctrine of scripture as it is a framework through which doctrine and theology may be contextualized or understood.

The idea of covenant theology is as a hermeneutical lens. It helps provide a framework from which the Bible is ordered and best understood. More importantly, it accounts for the way God communicates with his creation and provides the “atmospheric” quality of that relationship. O. Palmer Robertson compares describing the biblical notion of covenant to that of trying to define what a “mother” is.\textsuperscript{15} Covenant in the Bible demands both a wide and narrow understanding. “Clearly any definition of ‘covenant’ must allow for as broad a latitude as the data of scripture demands. Yet the very wholeness of the biblical history in being determined by God’s covenants suggests an overarching oneness in the concept of the covenant.”\textsuperscript{16} As stated above, The Westminster Confession of Faith describes this hermeneutical feature and the

\textsuperscript{14} J.I. Packer, in Herman Witsius, \textit{The Economy Of The Covenants Between God And Man}, (Reformation Heritage Books: Grand Rapids, MI. 2010). P.28


\textsuperscript{16} Ibid, 4.
fundamental importance of the covenant motif in the appropriation of scripture. Chapter seven describes the covenant and its role:

The distance between God and the creature is so great, that although reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator, yet they could never have any fruition of Him as their blessedness and reward, but by some voluntary condescension on God’s part, which He hath been pleased to express by way of covenant.17

Though not an official confession of the Anglican Communion, the Westminster Confession is very much a part of Anglican and Reformation church history of the British Isles. Many of these divines were very much contending for the Church of England, in hope of greater reform. The ecclesiastical fallout of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (and beyond) may have been successful in creating liturgical and polity-centered silo’s, but the influence of theological discourse is not so easily contained. Influence, in both directions (from the continent to the British Isles and back) would color the doctrinal development of the Church of England. In fact, the Anglican tradition, which finds its unity in liturgical tradition and polity, welcomes a diversity of theological outlooks within a general credal acceptance. Other post-reformational denominations find their unity primarily around a doctrinal and theological emphasis, which may include polity and liturgy.

Though the contemporary Anglican and Episcopal traditions seem to seek the widest possible ends of a ‘mere Christianity,’ the application of theology, along with its implications, cannot be indiscriminate. Theology is necessarily the application of God’s

17 Westminster Confession of Faith, Article VII. Chap. 7 Kindle.
revelation to all of life. It moves from generalities to specifics, because the human need for guidance, wisdom and instruction is always in the details of the sacred journey. Generalities suffice on some levels, but more definition is often required. David A Weir argues that the covenant motif is a universal necessity for anyone who seeks to do theology in the Biblical tradition. He writes:

Covenant theology is a theological system in which the covenant forms the basic framework and acts as the controlling idea in that theological system. Almost all Christian theologians ultimately practice some form of covenant theology, in that they must somehow distinguish themselves as Christians and not as believers under the Old Testament dispensation. Martin Luther, for instance, saw this distinction in terms of Law and Gospel. John Calvin described it in terms of Old Testament and New Testament. The federal theology is a specific type of covenant theology, in that the covenant holds together every detail of the theological system, and is characterized by a prelapsarian and postlapsarian covenant schema centered around the first Adam and the second Adam, who is Jesus Christ.¹⁸

As we dive deeper into questions of applied theology, we necessarily bump into the covenant theme in scripture. In fact, it is rather unavoidable. “Covenant is the word God uses to describe his relationship with his people. At each stage of the Bible’s story, including our own, God relates to his people through a series of these interlinked covenants. That relationship is more complex than we sometimes imagine.”¹⁹

It is indeed the ripening of a doctrine that we find regarding both the nuanced richness of covenant theology, along with its unending controversies (reformed vs.

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Arminian debates regarding election, predestination and free-will) and the particular pastoral implications in the church. The covenant is not an easily grasped concept, at least not beyond the surface. This is not unlike other points of core biblical doctrine and theology, but the covenant concept has been nurtured in the church, lost for seasons (for various reasons) and recovered in different moments and stages of church history. Lyle Bierma comments:

The term “covenant” appears in the Bible nearly 300 times, most often to denote special relationships that God entered into with his people in the course of biblical history. Christian theologians recognized the importance of this concept in scripture already in patristic and medieval times, but it was only in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Reformed Protestantism that the covenant concept came to be viewed as a thread that wove together the entire message of scripture. Continental reformed as well as English and New England puritan theologians developed what came to be called covenant or federal theology, a systematic ordering of biblical teaching according to the various covenental arrangements between God and humanity mentioned in scripture.20

The broad sketch of the development of covenant theology in the course of church history begins in the Old and New Testaments. The theology of the covenant begins and ends in the exposition of the Word of God. The New Testament record itself shows that the apostolic reflection on the events and import of the life of Jesus of Nazareth to be that he ushered in and ratified a New Covenant in his blood. This New Covenant was both a supplanting of the Old Covenant and the fulfillment of the previous covenant dispensation. To be clear, it is not a repudiation of the Old Covenant as much as it is the final revelation of an overarching Covenant of Grace. The New Covenant renders the

Old Covenant obsolete precisely because Jesus is the perfect fulfillment of the Old Covenant and thereby the rightful mediator of the New Covenant.

But these gospel-recoveries hang on a God-ordained contextual apparatus. Generally speaking, this context is of course, creation. But God’s ability to bring revelation to the world, considering God’s exalted state and humanity’s lowly state, in a manner we can comprehend, becomes a miracle of divine condescension and human receptivity. God ordains his revelation through the created means of covenant. It is woven into creation itself through the Creator’s bond of loyalty, evidenced throughout general and special revelation. But it is also a reflection of God’s own trinitarian self-giving, the eternal bond of love between Father, Son and Spirit.

William Perkins (1558-1602), an English theologian and resident preacher at St. Andrew’s Church in Cambridge, was a very influential pastor and a prolific writer, who built on the theological foundation of earlier reformers like Calvin and Theodore Beza. Perkins ascribed to an interlinked system of covenants, and a pre-lapsarian “covenant of works” that helped him shape his theological perspective and system:

Perkins taught that God established a covenant of works with Adam in paradise, thus setting a covenantal context for the fall. Similarly, he made the covenant of grace as the context for the salvation of the elect. In a dipleuric (two-sided) view of the covenant of grace, the pact between God and man implies mutual, voluntary interaction between God and man… Perkins offered this view of covenant as a way to relieve the tension between God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility.21

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The establishment of a pre-lapsarian covenant of works, is a formulation in covenant theology that opens the door for more development of the doctrine. As an English pastor and theologian with a high view of Covenant theological principles, Perkins’s stands as an important, if not prolific voice in the development of English protestant conviction, in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Brown Patterson’s recent scholarship on Perkins’s theology suggests Perkins unique role as both a proponent of the Church of England and upholder of the doctrine of the covenant. The concern in the church during the Elizabethan Settlement had shifted from intense focus on the eucharist to the church’s soteriology. “Salvation was the most widely discussed theological issue in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England. It was a concern of university Scholars, clergy in the established Church, and government officials.”²² Perkins’ own Covenant Theology was rooted in scripture. His treatise on the doctrine of salvation, *A Golden Chain*, was foremost a Biblical exposition, unfolding the doctrine. Patterson writes, “Perkins devoted the first two-dozen pages of *A Golden Chain* to describing the nature of God on the basis of God’s self-revelation in the scriptures.”²³

The history and origins of Covenant theology originate in scripture. Like the doctrine of the Trinity or Christology or ecclesiology, scriptural doctrine is unpacked, systematized, and fleshed out. The concept of the covenant is the same way. One of the reasons that the Reformation period of history is such fertile ground for the refinement of

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²³ Ibid, 72.
theology is the Reformers conviction regarding the original Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible. This exegetical commitment, an impact from the Humanism of the Renaissance, which encouraged a renewed commitment to the original languages of scripture and the writings of the era, helped to clarify numerous passages of scripture that may have been under-served in the Latin. This was certainly the case with many instances with the covenant word or implicit covenant concept.

Returning again to the original source languages has aided our understanding of original meanings, which in some cases had obscured the prominence of the covenant motif in scripture. For example, J.V. Fesko notes that Theodore Beza's translation of the Greek in Luke 12.29, was more accurate to say 'covenanted' than the word 'appointed,' found in Jerome's Latin Vulgate translation of the Bible, the standard text for nearly one thousand years in the church.24

The formulation of Reformed soteriology in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries used some variety of terminology, some using the Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace only, many others including the "Covenant of Redemption" as the ground of the two other covenant realities. "Simply put, the Covenant of Redemption between the Father and the Son provides the eternal, inviolable foundation of the temporal Covenant of Grace (foedus gratiae)."25

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The context of this point by Fesko is his argument for the relatively late emergence of the reformed doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption, or Pactum Salutis. Covenant Theologians have long held to a Covenant of Works and a Covenant of Grace, but the Covenant of Redemption, emerged at a later time in church history. Fesko is quick to defend its legitimacy:

In terms of the origins of the doctrine, novelty is the wrong concept to invoke when describing the genesis of the Pactum Salutis. Novelty implies an ex nihilo birth – there was nothing and now there is something. The more accurate term to employ is refine or refocus. Reformed theologians looked upon the Son’s appointment as mediator, a scriptural teaching that no one would deny, and refined the exegesis of a number of the texts associated with the idea. They looked through the lens of the original languages and brought the Christ’s appointment into sharper focus.26

The Covenant of Redemption is pre-temporal, inter-trinitarian agreement between the Father and Son, related to the redemption of sinners through the obedience of the Son. We get glimpses of this covenant in the high-priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17 and in the exchange between Yahweh and Moses on Mt. Sinai in Exodus.27 The Covenant of Redemption may be speculative, but its speculation is grounded in solid Biblical exegesis, what scripture says about itself. “In the covenant of redemption, Jesus agreed that he would bind himself to his people, so the two became one...In the Covenant of Redemption, God gives Jesus all the blessings of the story: he is the end to which the whole story has been driving. But the covenant of redemption is also the means by which

26 Ibid, 7.
27 Exodus 34.6-7, ESV
Jesus can deal with our spiritual problems. This is why at the last supper Jesus called his blood ‘covenant blood.’"28 Scottish theologian David Dickson (1583-1662) was one of the first to articulate the Covenant of Redemption. “Dickson offered the first explicit statement and exposition of the doctrine at the General Assembly of the Scottish Kirk in 1638...Dickson identified and engaged the subjects of election, the efficacy of Christ’s satisfaction, the nature of free will, and the doctrine of perseverance.”25

The covenant of Grace finds its surety in the Covenant of Redemption. Whether you separate these or collapse them into one idea, it nevertheless stands that scripture supports the idea that Jesus and the Father had a covenantal agreement in the work of redemption. After the fall in Genesis 3, we see the succession of covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David and also with Christ in the New Covenant. These divine covenants demonstrate the outworking of the covenant of grace in the surety of the everlasting covenant of redemption.

The covenant of works is also referred to as the covenant of creation. Louis Berkhof’s historical survey of the covenant of works suggests, like the other reformed covenant conceptions, that all the ingredients existed from earliest times, but were brought together in wholistic form as the church was able to grasp the connections. Regarding the development of the covenant, he writes,


The development of the doctrine of the covenant of grace preceded that of the doctrine of the covenant of works and paved the way for it. When it was clearly seen that scripture represented the way of salvation in the form of a covenant, the parallel which Paul draws in Romans 5 between Adam and Christ soon gave occasion for thinking of the state of integrity as a covenant. According to Heppe the first work which contained the federal representation of the way of salvation, was Bullinger’s *Compendium of the Christian Religion*; and Olevianus was the real founder of a well-developed federal theology, in which the concept of the covenant became for the first time the constitutive and determinative principle of the entire system. From the Reformed churches of Switzerland and Germany federal theology passed over to the Netherlands and to the British Isles, especially Scotland.  

There is a debate regarding the place of second-generation Swiss reformer John Calvin, whose *Institutes*, while acknowledging a post-lapsarian covenant of grace, does not articulate a pre-lapsarian covenant of works. Some scholars feel that Calvin’s theological heirs took his basic outlook in directions with which he would not agree. Though fraught with speculation, this may be a demonstration of how a Biblical doctrine may move forward in the spirit of *semper reformanda*. Peter A. Lillback remarks on the relationship between Calvin and one of his students, Caspar Olevianus, who took Calvin’s system of theology and built upon it:

Lyle Bierma’s study of Caspar Olevian’s covenantal thought has sought to demonstrate that the connection between Calvin and Olevian was that the theology of Calvin was molded into a covenantal system by his pupil Olevian. While Calvin used the covenant idea significantly in the areas of the unity of the Old and New Covenants, the sacraments, and election to a lesser degree, Olevian gave several other doctrines of Calvin a distinctively covenantal shape that were non-covenantal in their original contexts in Calvin.

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While no theologian deserves to have ideas attributed to his or her theology, especially posthumously, the point seems to be not an attempt to change Calvin’s meaning, but to take his work and push it forward. And in the fertile time of the Reformation, which witnessed an explosion of theological discovery and exchange of ideas, it seems that this should be expected, particularly given the new possibilities presented by the printed word and in the common vernacular.

Joel Beeke and Mark Jones argue in their co-authored volume, *A Puritan Theology*, that all the elements for a covenant of works existed in Calvin’s theology, only the terminology was missing. They go on to speculate that on the origins of the term, “English Puritan Dudley Fenner (1558-1587) may have been the first to use the term ‘covenant of works,” at least in its Latin form *Foedus Operum*. He likely picked up the substance of the doctrine from his teacher, Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603), who in turn may have learned it during his twenty years of exile on the Continent.” James Ussher (1581-1656) Archbishop of Armagh of Ireland, in his *Body of Divinity*, taught a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. Under his eighth head of doctrine he writes:

**Declare now out of that which hath been said, what the Covenant Of Works is?**
It is a conditional covenant between God and man, whereby on the one side God commandeth the perfection of Godliness and righteousness, and promiseth that he will be our God, if we keep all of his commandments; and on the other side, man bindeth himself to perform entire and perfect obedience to God’s law,

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33 Ibid, 218.
by that strength wherewith God hath endued him by the nature of his first creation.\textsuperscript{34}

Under the eleventh head of doctrine, Ussher continues his exposition in catechetical fashion:

\textbf{What then is the sum of the covenant of grace?}
That God will be our God, and give us life everlasting in Christ, if we receive him, being freely by his Father offered unto us, Jer. 31, 33 Acts 16.30-31. John 1.12.\textsuperscript{35}

As a pretext to this description of the covenant of grace, Ussher grounds it in the intertrinitarian idea of the \textit{Pactum Salutis}, but does not use the term explicitly. However, the idea that the Father and the Son were in a covenantal relationship is spelled out clearly in the following:

\textbf{What is the foundation of this covenant?}
The mere mercy of Christ: Whereby grace reigneth unto life, through the obedience of one, which is Jesus Christ, Rom. 5.21. For there being three persons of the Trinity, the Father sent his Son to accomplish the work of our redemption, and both of them send the Holy Ghost to work saving grace in our hearts, and apply unto our souls the holiness purchased by the Son of God.\textsuperscript{36}

The biblical record of the Old and New Testaments demonstrate clearly the centrality of a covenantal framework in God’s redemptive economy. Through Special Revelation, God pushes the salvific ‘ball’ forward by way of covenant, relating to his image bearers in a pledge of loyalty, wrapped in a relationship. The repeated chant of Yahweh to his people,


\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, 141.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 140.
spanning both testaments, is: “I will be your God and you will be my people.”\textsuperscript{37} It is not that covenant is a handy system God designed to channel revelation, it is that God operates covenantally with his creatures. His person is expressed in covenant characteristics. “God’s very existence is covenantal: Father, Son and Holy Spirit live in unceasing devotion to each other, reaching beyond the Godhead to create a community of creatures serving as a giant analogy of the Godhead’s relationship.”\textsuperscript{38}

So strong is the covenant motif in scripture, Michael Horton argues, that covenant, not predestination or total depravity, not even the TULIP soteriological construct supersedes the architecture of covenant. Reformed doctrinal cohesion is by way of covenant. “What unites them is not itself a central dogma but an architectonic structure, a matrix of beams and pillars that hold together the structure of Biblical faith and practice. That particular architectural structure that we believe the scriptures themselves to yield is the covenant.”\textsuperscript{39}

Not only is the biblical record filled with explicit instances of covenant-cutting, but the record of implicit covenant-cutting is equally persuasive, once detected and exposed. The twentieth-century developments on Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaties have further expanded the theologians’ understanding of the pervasive nature of a covenantal reality in the unfolding of God’s redemption. The scholarship of George

\textsuperscript{37} Jeremiah 31.33 ESV


\textsuperscript{39} Ibid, 13.
Mendenhall and the late Meredith Kline opened a window into the Biblical world in the context of the Ancient Near Eastern suzerain-vassal treaty practices.

The basic pattern of these treaties, mirrored in the biblical record, is an Announcement of the suzerain’s name, an Historical Prologue (what the suzerain has done), Stipulations (rooted in benevolence and listed requirements), Sanctions (including blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience) and finally, the Administration, or application or execution of the covenant. Kline views the Sinaitic giving of the Law as a covenant-treaty in the pattern above.

The giving of the Law in Exodus 20 signifies the suzerain-vassal treaty structure. Yahweh announces his name, provides a historical prologue of his acts of deliverance, the stipulations are given in Yahweh’s call to choose life through God’s law, blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience and the administration of the covenant, or how it will be regulated or lived out.40 Kline’s work, Treaty Of The Great King, is a demonstration of the covenant treaty model by Moses in the structure of a suzerain-vassal expression between Yahweh and Israel. His broad outline: “1. Preamble (Deut. 1.1-5). 2. Historical Prologue (Deut. 1.6-4.49). 3. Stipulations (Deut. 5-26). 4. Curses and Blessings or Covenant Ratification (Deut. 27-30). Succession Arrangements or Covenant Continuity, in which are included the invocation of witnesses and directions for the disposition and public reading of the treaty.”41

40 Meredith G. Kline, Kingdom Prologue, (Hamilton: Gordon-Conwell Seminary, 1993), 38.

The covenantal structure of Deuteronomy not only displays the wisdom and structure of Yahweh’s bond with Israel as a pattern for all of special revelation for God’s people, but the stamp of authenticity of this important book. Kline summarizes:

Part of the standard procedure followed in the ancient Near East when “the great king” gave his covenant to a vassal people was the preparation of a text of the ceremony as the treaty document and witness. The Book of Deuteronomy is the document prepared by Moses as a witness to the dynastic covenant which the Lord gave Israel in the plains of Moab. (cf. 31.26).  

That Yahweh’s covenantal bond with creation in general, and with his people Israel, specifically, demonstrates the centrality of covenant as a pattern for the whole of redemptive history. One obvious clue is the continuity of covenant signs and seals, from Old Covenant to New Covenant, which change in their administration but that remain the same in their signification, or in their substance. Quoting from Kline’s, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, Michael Horton synthesizes the accomplishment of Christ as a fulfillment of covenant stipulations, while also enduring the covenant curses, giving him authority to impute covenant blessings:

United to Christ in his circumcision-death, the baptized too come under God’s sword judgment. “It is a judicial death for the penalty of sin,” says Kline. “Yet to be united with Christ in his death is also to be raised with him whom death could not hold in his resurrection unto justification.” He bears the sanctions, the curse (“cutting off”) and the blessing (justification and life); and we participate in this union through faith. Ultimately, Jesus’s actions are an eschatological sign of judgment and justification. “Here Old Testament prophecy proclaims the New Testament’s deliverance out of the malediction of human circumcision by pointing to the malediction-benediction of the circumcision-resurrection of Christ.”

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42 Ibid, 48.

The pervasive covenant motif in scripture points to the structure and direction of creation and redemption, but also to the relational passion of our covenant Lord. The structural dynamic of the covenant shows us what kind of world we live in and what kind of God governs it: personal, stable, moral, beautiful. The direction of the covenant dynamic is both diagnostic and prescriptive; it is fractured but will be made new. The God of promise has spoken. It shall come to pass: “And I will bring them to dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. And they shall be my people, and I will be their God, in faithfulness and righteousness (Zechariah 8.8).”44 The Bible is not a book with covenants, it is the published covenant of the covenant Lord.

44 Zechariah 8.8, ESV
Chapter Two

The Historical Development of Covenant Theology

Tracing the development of a biblical doctrine is a long journey. Tracing it through the Reformation period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries becomes complicated. And tracing that development through the English story of that reformation is even more nuanced and harrowing. But there is a story there. Like sifting through the layers of an archaeological site, we discover elements and clues that help us see, in this case, traces of a developing doctrine of grace, intrinsically connected to a biblical, covenantal theology. This developing biblical doctrine forms the “gathering center” of the fresh, Reformational recovery of Biblical soteriology, and its heart, the doctrine of justification by faith. It parallels the story of Protestantism, the unwinding of a tightly drawn church, co-mingled with monarchical self-interest and rigid controls on access to biblical texts. This was all to change in rapid fashion. The Reformation is the plot line of how nations, monarchies, clergy and cultures adjusted to the explosion of new ideas, or old ideas made new through a recovery of God’s word.

Western Christianity’s great 16th century trauma was driven by doctrinal disagreements. The modern world’s materialism, pragmatism, and – to be blunt – sheer sloth makes us reluctant to accept that ideas really could matter that much to that many people, but they did. Western Christendom’s last great prophet before the schism, Erasmus, argued that every Christian could and should be a theologian. The Protestant reformers, in particular, made heroic efforts to realize that impossible vision, and in the process, works of doctrinal definition and controversy flew off their printing presses, an unprecedented theological blizzard which continues...
to buffet and to drive scholars today.\footnote{Alec Ryrie, \textit{Being Protestant In Reformation Britain}. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 1.}

The reverberations of the Reformation, inaugurated in proper, yet unwittingly, by Martin Luther on October 31, 1517, continue to impact every level of religion, culture and society in the western world. The Reformation ignited not from the discovery of something new, but rather, the recovery of something old, the thread of the Gospel revealed in the Bible. The impetus for Luther's critique of the Papacy was not a new-fangled spirituality, but a fresh awakening to the centrality of scripture and the illumination of core doctrines taught by the Apostles and the early church. Like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, much of the Roman Catholic church had dimmed the purity of the gospel with teaching and practices that produced adherents riddled with fear, superstition and a lack of any assurance of salvation. The western church of the late middle-ages was marked by a time of transition from a monastic-centered system to what gradually became a parish-centered structure of the church. Upheaval and confusion around papal authority, the rapid advance of Islam in the East and the growing impact of the European Renaissance provided both challenges and opportunities to an impaired Christendom in a rapidly changing world.

In his \textit{Anglicanism}, Stephen Neill invokes Chaucer's \textit{Canterbury Tales}, as a helpful, though not complete description of the general state of things regarding the perception of the church and clergy during the fourteenth century.\footnote{Stephen Neill, \textit{Anglicanism}. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 25-30.} He compares and contrasts Chaucer's Friar (who is veering into a worldly state) and the Poor Parson, who
though having a limited education and means, served his flock faithfully. “He never left his benefice for hire and left his sheep to flounder in the mire.” Neill suggests that the impulse for reform in the church existed well before Martin Luther’s day, but the volatile nature of the geo-political changes proved to be just enough constant distraction for any real reform movement to take hold. Commenting on the general state of the English church in the late middle ages, Neill finds that loyalty to the church was born more out of habit than conviction:

The ordinary man in England as elsewhere complained of his church and criticized it, but still did he love it and depended on it. The Mass was the centre of the life of the parish; few parishioners would be absent on Sunday, and a surprising number of Christians in England found their way to church on weekdays. Probably the ordinary man understood little of the teaching of the church – late medieval preaching was directed more to the emotions than the mind.

Not only were the promises of the gospel obscured, but so were the demands for true religion legislated by the clergy, who, taking cues from their ecclesiastical hierarchy, placed unbiblical, legalistic, ritualistic and cultic demands on the laity. The proverbial “straw that broke the camel’s back,” for Luther, was, of course, the practice of selling indulgences, which was the new capital campaign strategy of Pope Leo X. Luther’s careful study of scripture was sounding an alarm in his conscience; the 95 Theses, in the

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49 Ibid, 29.
provinece of God, became inevitable. In this sense, the Reformation denoted a recovery and a re-discovery of something that had been deformed or maligned along the way. Like the messy business of Christian discipleship (where the theological categories in the ordos salutes often appear blurred), recovery, discovery and reformation unfolds both instantaneously and gradually over time. Such was the case as the flame of reformations swept across Europe and onto the British Isles. One of the hallmarks of the reformation was a return to the Apostolic Fathers of the early church. Like the reforms of the young Judean king, Josiah, the Reformation was not innovation per se, but a recovery of the core of the faith. Josiah's reforms\textsuperscript{50} were a call back to first things, not necessarily new things. In the spirit of ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda secundum verbum Dei\textsuperscript{51}, a twentieth century formulation by Swiss theologian Karl Barth, reformation also meant that the church should always be conforming and reforming with reference to the word of God.

The period of the Reformation not only saw the recovery of biblical authority, it also welcomed (this may be too generous an expression) new explorations in the development of Biblical theology as the church became re-acquainted with its core and how to develop its identity around that core doctrine. This meant the discovery of more of the nuance and depths of the Gospel. Like the reforms in Judah under King Josiah, the recovery of scripture also gives rise to a renewed investigation and interest in the

\textsuperscript{50} 2 Kings 22-2, ESV

application of theology in life. The proliferation of the scriptures, as they became widely
accessible in the peoples’ vernacular, shifted the church toward a more biblically
informed laity and clergy. But this development happened through the realities of an
imperfect world and through the complexities of the human drama. It means that
sometimes circumstances pushed the theological pursuit and that, at other times, the
theological pursuit and application, molded the circumstances.

This is not to say that some new ideas and contours of theology did not emerge
quickly during the Reformation; they most certainly did, and in some cases, in quite the
meteoric fashion. At its best, these new theological advances were discoveries made by
the Reformers as they peeled back the layers of Biblical doctrine and their application in
the church and world. Most famously, Luther quickly re-established the great doctrine of
justification by faith alone. Many other, core doctrinal re-affirmations would follow.
And each of these “new” teachings had world-changing effects in individuals,
households, churches, villages and political empires.

Of course, the Reformers were not alien to their world, but very much products of
late-medieval, European society. They were, as we all are, products of their cultural
environment and they stood on the shoulders of their predecessors, of thinking saints
whose viewpoints reached all the way back to the early church Fathers, and to the
Apostles themselves.

One of the key theological recoveries during the Reformation is the idea of
covenant. But as we will discuss, this doctrine emerges slowly, both on the Continent and
in the British Isles. Covenant is no hidden concept in the Bible. It is prominent in both
the Old and New Testaments and, like other meta-themes of the Bible (such as the
Kingdom of God), covenant is a centralizing, or gathering theme. In fact, many
Reformed theologians have identified the *Kingdom of God* as the overarching, controlling
theme of Biblical theology. As Weir argues, that Kingdom is administered by way of
covenant:

This was a crucial question being discussed among intellectuals and
theologians of Northern Europe during the period 1550-1600. The
Reformation had now been established, and the lines of Roman
Catholicism, Lutheranism, Calvinism and various sects had been
established. The several camps were now entrenching themselves
to do battle. It is the contention of this book that the idea of the
covenant of works, or pre-lapsarian covenant, was introduced
by Reformed theologians to help resolve this question
of God's providence and Adam's original sin.\(^{52}\)

Covenant theology proper, is a system of Reformed biblical theology that
understands the redemptive contours of Special Revelation and the redemption it
illumines through the lens of Kingdom through covenant.

Carlos M.N. Eire describes the web of unfolding history of the English
Reformation as having a dynamic that both lurked underneath the surface and operated
from above the surface.\(^{53}\) He defines these as the reformation “from below” and “from
above.” These become good categories for understanding both the underground influence
and movement of reformational thought and conviction along with the official operations

\(^{52}\) David A. Weir, *The Origins Of Federal Theology In Sixteenth Century Reformed Thought*, (Oxford:

Press, 2016), 319.
and deliberations of the monarchy in England, and the power of the state. Though Luther’s 95 Theses was a pivotal catalyst that accelerated the reformational wave on the Continent, the convictions that flowered in the early sixteenth century were not entirely original. The Reformers were tapping into what they felt was as old as the apostles, making right application of the gospel that had been handed down from Israel and through the church. Eire describes some of this activity, much of it “Reformation from below,” as precursors to the Reformation. For example, he details some of the influence of John Wycliffe and his followers, the Lollards, in the fifteenth century. Already, this underground movement of reform in the church, through non-conformist groups like Wycliffe’s disciples and the Lollards, was making an impact. Eire writes, “What is unquestionable is their later role in Protestant historiography, in which they would always be cited as precursors to the Reformation and proof positive that Protestantism was not a recent invention at all – as Catholics loved to charge – but rather a return to the original apostolic message and to the true church revived by Wycliff and his followers.54

Further, the English experience of reformation took on a truly unique flavor with respect to the broader, continental Reformation. One of the primary factors in the distinctive English experience was tied to the absolute power, control and volatility of the monarchy (in association with the Parliament) during the Tudor and Stewart periods that spanned the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Eire argues that this circumstance makes the English Reformation a unique development. “Ultimately, the English

54 Ibid, 320.
Reformation would be dominated by the crown, through a succession of monarchs who gained total control of the Church of England and directed the pace of religious change."\(^{55}\)

From the earliest days of Roman settlement in the British Isles, the import of theological influence has been an ongoing shaper of the theological make-up of the Church in England. Depending on the monarch, luminaries from the Continent were able to come to England, Ireland and Wales, bringing theological influence to shape the developing church and society. This was never more so than in the highly volatile sixteenth and seventeenth centuries of English history. Other factors weigh heavily in the reception of reformational teaching and doctrine from the continent. These factors are political, geographical, social, military, economic, ecological and health related. They form a web of variables, impacting the rate of change and receptivity of new ideas. Eire contends that for these and other reasons, the English story of reformation is considerably complex, perhaps more so than many other places at the time:

One of the prime distinguishing features of the English Reformation is the fact that it occurred at various levels simultaneously, with no single trajectory. Unevenly pursued over the reign of several monarchs, and resisted in places, the anti-Roman Reformation imposed at once from above, as act of state, based principally on appeals to monarchical authority, always had to contend with an anti-Roman Reformation that bubbled up from below, based on appeals to biblical authority.\(^{56}\)

\(^{55}\) Ibid, 322.

Eamon Duffy’s *The Stripping of the Altars*, argues for a more intrusive dynamic of reform upon a majority in England who neither felt an immediate need for change nor welcomed its innovations upon their communal and spiritual lives. Duffy’s basic thesis is that the late-medieval church, while not without its flaws, was much more robust and strong in its communal life and expression than conventional accounts of the Reformation story acknowledge. Duffy’s argument is for the legitimacy of the spiritual program of the medieval Church to minister and nourish God’s people in the Christian life. As an example of this, Duffy points to the introduction of the practice of annual confession by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215. “This ruling put into the hands of the parish clergy an immensely valuable pastoral and educational tool, for the priest in confession could explore not only the moral condition of his parishioners, but also their knowledge of Catholic faith and practice.”\(^\text{57}\) This mandate no doubt necessitated resources such as William of Pagula’s *Oculus Sacerdotis*, which provided explanations for priests regarding guides for absolution and for the laity explain the Creed, the Ten Commandments, the Seven Deadly Sins and corresponding works of mercy. Later, other resources, like John Mirk’s *Instructions for Parish Priests*, were “designed to help simple and unlearned priests to carry out their duties in pulpit, confessional, and at deathbed.”\(^\text{58}\) The validity of Duffy’s argument that the late-medieval English parish was far from lifeless is hard to argue against, along with its majority position on the eve of the


\(^{58}\) Ibid, Kindle Location, 1945.
Reformation. However, as Duffy reflects in his revised preface to his history, “My account of the English Reformation presented it less as an institutional and doctrinal transformation than a ritual one, ‘the stripping of the altars’: in retrospect, I see that the intensity of focus I brought to my task as a historian was nourished by my own experience of another such ritual transformation” (the Vatican II Council).59

A.G. Dickens highlights the shift from scholasticism to humanism, or what is described as the New Learning. The New Learning (other scholars describe this as the New Thought) was a shift away from a predominantly philosophical, allegorical approach to the study of the Bible in favor of a more “literary, historical and philological one.”60 This New Learning opened the educated community up to a fresh reading of the Bible, and consequently, made ready the soil for the wave of new scriptural emphasis that would spill into England from the hand of Luther, Zwingli, Bucer and later, John Calvin. This fresh reading of the Bible was a part of the ad fontes spirit that pursued a re-acquaintance with the antiquities, the thinkers and philosophers of the Greco-Roman world, the world of the ancient Hebrews and the Apostolic Age that gave us the New Testament.

The renaissance conviction about the importance of ad fontes prepared the way for the Reformers and their own investigation into the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible. “The revival of western awareness of the Greek fathers continued into the

59 Ibid, Kindle Location 172.

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as we shall see, and these writers came to be useful among the Reformers in putting forth their arguments."\textsuperscript{61} John Calvin's first published work, as an example, was a commentary on the Roman Stoic philosopher Seneca's two-volume \textit{De Clementia}.

Not only did the new focus on ancient languages prepare the Reformers for Biblical studies in the original language, it also put them in closer proximity to the Biblical world and context, which only served to bolster their theological positions and convictions as more in-touch, compelling and authoritative. As J.R.H. Moorman writes: "Men were tired of the subtleties of metaphysic and interested more in history and the sifting of evidence."\textsuperscript{62} Moorman also notes three prominent English humanists, who are fore-runners to the Reformation, serving as a bridge from the late Middle Age to the Reformation. These are John Colet, Desiderius Erasmus and Sir Thomas More. Colet, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral (1505-1519), preached in an expository fashion, through the Epistle to the Romans. This was a brand-new approach and became a prelude to things to come.\textsuperscript{63}

In the early decades of the sixteenth century, no approach was more influential than Luther's fresh recovery of the doctrine of Justification and the theology that flowed from the fountain-head of this seminal doctrine of soteriology. Had this new shift in


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 152-153.
historical and philological emphasis not happened, it could well have been greatly
delayed or rebuffed. Dickens remarks, “Certainly, if the Lutheran comet had appeared
above the English horizon twenty years earlier, the watchers would have raised very
different cries.”64 It was not only a providential shift in the academy that gave rise to the
receptivity of reformational thought and practice, it was also bound up in the common
life of everyday people. Both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England were
especially difficult on most every front. The population was decimated by the plague,
tensions with the papacy mounted by its relocation to rival France and ill-advised policies
instituted by the Parliament65 contributed heavily toward a state of unrest among the
people.66 “This was natural in a time when life was becoming increasingly difficult and
uncertain for economic reasons, and when a certain failure of nerve and confidence
becomes perceptible. The churches laid increasing stress on the terrors of death, of the
judgment to come, and of that hell…”67

The influence of Luther and Lutheran theology, though suppressed and resisted by
Henry VIII in England, was nevertheless impossible to entirely eliminate. The floodgates
of transport via smuggling and the pervasive underground thirst for such material proved
too strong. In fact, in the 1520’s through the 1540’s, Cambridge became known as “Little

64 Ibid, 88.

65 Moorman sites the Statutes of the Labourers of 1349 and the Poll Tax, both of which paved the way for the Great Revolt of 1381.


Germany”. Meetings at the White Horse Inn, to discuss theology along reformational lines, had taken on some notoriety. Such was the impact and influence of the pen of Martin Luther and the theology he communicated through every accessible medium. Dickens describes a book burning of Lutheran writings, in an effort to suppress the influence of Luther in England: “On 12 May 1521 a far more magnificent burning took place at St. Paul’s in London, where, before an enormous crowd, Wolsey took the chair under a canopy of cloth-of-gold, attended by a brilliant throng of peers, bishops and foreign ambassadors.”68 But despite the best efforts of the crown, attempts to suppress reformational ideas did not succeed.

Lyle D. Bierma, in The Covenant Theology of Caspar Olevianus, argues that the theology of William Perkins was most likely impacted by the writings of Olevianus. “English merchants…served as regular intermediaries between the continental Reformed churches and the English Puritans…furthermore, by the 1570’s the University of Heidelberg had surpassed the Genevan Academy in its reputation for instruction in the arts and theology and was drawing a large number of foreign students to its halls.”69 The pace of the development of reformed doctrine, however, was at the mercy of the broader historical context. Church historian Carl Trueman, along with others, have noted that the English Reformation, in its early stages, does not produce a singular voice or leader. Continental reformers like Luther in Germany, Bucer in Strassborg, Calvin in Geneva

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68 Dickens. The English Reformation, P.91
69 Lyle D. Bierma, German Calvinism in the Confessional Age: The Covenant Theology Of Caspar Olevianus, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 1997), 179.
and Zwingli in Zurich become powerful voices around which various streams of reformational thought and theology coalesce. Trueman believes this dynamic is due largely to the inordinate number of early luminaries who were martyred in the early stages of English reform.\textsuperscript{70}

The English situation, as the Reformation unfolds, was unique. The relationship of the English monarchy with papal authority was unlike the political set-up on the Continent, which more resembled state governors under the Pope (ecclesiastically) and the Holy Roman Emperor (politically and militarily). The Tudor monarchy in England, with its succession of figure-heads, brings with it a back-and-forth allegiance or disdain toward the papacy and openness to reform.

The impact of these unstable years, especially from creates a ripple effect of instability and a sense that uniform theological conviction among academic theologians, parish priests and the people is impossible. To further muddy the waters of theological reform is not only the social and political impact, but the personal ambitions of principal leaders whose career paths were jeopardized by reform, theological or otherwise. Lord Chancellor Wolsey, under Henry VIII, dismissed the arguments of Luther, perhaps on the basis that his good standing with the Pope and the Catholic church must not be jeopardized by the ideas of the Reformers.\textsuperscript{71} The centralization of the Western church through the Papacy in Rome was losing both power and influence, by degrees. Though


many in the Roman Catholic Church, both clerics and laity, recognized the need for reform, centralized reform would prove impossible.

The prestige of the Vicar of Christ and head of Christian society continued to command a confused assent and respect among the peoples. But the states of Europe were restricting papal authority. To expect the Pope to reform the church was to expect a miracle which he had little power to perform. He might give impetus to reform by example, or by influence, or by teaching; but the days were passing when he could command – supposing that he wished to command.72

This creates a patchwork dynamic of shifting theological ground in which we are able, at best, to trace the contours of influence and adoption of reformational ideas along the way. Interestingly, theological developments are being flattened from hierarchy during this time, with the proliferation of printed texts, which provided the mobility of ideas through faster and more sophisticated modes of transport.

This means that the exchange of ideas (and in this case, theological ideas), though ultimately legislated from the top-down, became a powerful, grass-roots phenomenon. Book burnings, though fairly common and effective in the short-term, were ultimately futile in stopping the flood of ideas emerging during this time.

The sixteenth century reinvented the educated man (more rarely the educated woman) who was not a professional member of the clergy, or a clerically trained civil servant, or a “religious” (that is, a member of a religious order). For the first time in the West since the fall of Rome and the end of the ancient world, there was an opportunity for the intellectual inquiry driven by sheer curiosity, the exchange of ideas in letters among friends, and the cultivation of self-conscious stylistliness, an elegance of thought and expression.73


Tracing the development of Covenant theology as it emerged through the intensity of the English Reformation is certainly a challenge, particularly in the first half of the sixteenth century. Much of the fixation of this time period has to do with the eucharistic theology of the Lord’s Supper and the authority of the Bible over and against the role and authority of the church. What is happening during the eucharist with the elements? Does the church have its identity and authority from the authority of Scripture or does scripture need the authorization of the church? Questions about the nature of communion and whether scripture should be translated into the common vernacular for the common people served more as symptoms of an emerging re-discovery of the apostolic gospel with its foundational doctrine of justification by grace through faith.

Though the development is sometimes slow, with stops and starts, deviations and detours, we trace a progressive development of Reformed doctrine. The influence of the Reformation on the Continent was able to penetrate the British Isles in the aforementioned ways, which provided a relentless drip of theological refinement. This refinement worked its way into the hearts and minds of the English people at all levels of society. The free-flow of ideas, however, was limited, often suppressed or outlawed depending on the presiding monarch.

The early sixteenth century presented the initial waves of theological influence. Lutheran influence from Germany and then later by early Reformed thought by Zwingli in Zurich, Bullinger, Bucer, Peter Martyr and, of course, mature Reformed thought by Calvin in Geneva, as he systematized, through his Institutes, and built upon much of what Luther had introduced. Not all of the continental ideas were from incoming theologians
and, or their writings which made their way into the British Isles. Through threat of persecution, many English clergy and theologians fled to the Continent for refuge and to learn from leading Reformers. This back and forth migration to the British Isles and the European continent was continuous throughout the later Tudor monarchic dynasty. During the famous Marian Exile under the reign of Mary Tudor, who realigned the Church of England with the Papacy, many English divines were martyred. Famously, Cranmer, Ridley and Latimer were burned at the stake. But many others survived through exile. Stephen Neill writes that this exile may have been as much strategy as it was an understandable visceral reaction in a very severe moment. He writes:

It has been suggested that this emigration was planned and carried out as a part of a deliberate policy – to preserve and develop the leadership through which at a later date the Reformation could be re-established and carried further in England. The hand of prudent William Cecil, later Elizabeth’s great minister, has been seen as active in these arrangements.74

It is the latter half of the sixteenth century, during the reign of Elizabeth I and under the Elizabethan Settlement (and in the context of the via media) that theological development becomes more refined, nuanced, debated, practiced and nurtured in the common life of the church. This is not to suggest that severity of law and policy was overly tolerant (especially by today’s standards), but the sheer length of Elizabeth’s reign meant that the volatility was toned down somewhat in favor of a measure of peace. However, the dividing lines of theological camps and convictions were only becoming more distinct.

For example, by the time Elizabeth’s reign, “the acceptance by church and state that there should be a widely available authorized translation of the Bible in English was no longer politically or theologically controversial in England.” The pace of reform is integral to our exploration of the development of certain aspects of Christian doctrine and practice, especially a technical doctrine like covenant, which forms the often invisible undergirding structure to our understanding of the apostolic gospel with which the church has been entrusted. Because the reformed theological principles tended to flow from the continent into the British Isles, it will be necessary to trace the roots of federal theology and its implications as they begin to surface in Germany and Switzerland.

As we will see, the impact of a covenantal theological blueprint is hard to deny, especially in the first two-hundred years of the reformation. And as David Weir points out, the impress of a covenant framework is unavoidable once the details and implications of an implicit pre-lapsarian berith is established:

With the rise of the federal theology, historians have noted how the idea of covenant began to have a controlling influence in the systematic ordering of doctrine. This should not be surprising, for once the doctrine of a covenant before the Fall is postulated, the covenant becomes the primary way in which God relates to man.

The Puritan push for reform may be said to have this covenantal framework as one of the prime theological influences motivating change. Theology is never just on paper, it drives implications on very practical levels, certainly in matters of ecclesiology.

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As mentioned above, reform in England, unlike the experience of reform in continental Germany, Switzerland or the Netherlands, was particularly bound up with the shifts of the monarchy. Dramatic shifts from Protestant to Catholic allegiances on the throne created violent swings in realms of influence, power and endorsement. The theological stakes were incredibly high and volatile. The ever-shifting ground of ecclesiastical and state politics was a unique experience in the English reformation, and served to create a very mixed bag of not only a Catholic-Protestant divide, but a splintering Protestant reality of non-conformists, Ana-Baptists, Presbyterians and Episcopalian or Church of England loyalists, who all wanted their version of Christendom to be adopted by the crown and the Parliament as the official expression of doctrine and practice in the church.

The influence of Covenant Theology would permeate each of these Protestant expressions. The Puritan push for reform, which included a polity and prayer book change, driven by the theological convictions of sola scriptura, was ultimately rebuffed on an institutional level. Diarmaid MacCulloch observes part of this dynamic struggle for reform toward the latter stages of the reign of Queen Elizabeth and the Elizabethan Settlement:

With the political nation in such a mood, Puritans might justly claim that they were the true loyalists in the Elizabethan state. Providing the logical corollary to growing national anti-catholicism by advocating thorough-going reformation. Yet they were always in danger of isolation, particularly those pressing for a Presbyterian system; they could count on widespread goodwill from those who cared about the advancement of the Protestant faith, as long as they did not seem to be subverting the life of the Protestant nation.77

MacCulloch describes the proper demise of the Puritan advocacy of a national Presbyterian polity (and hopes for further reform at the institutional level of the Church of England) to have been complete by around 1558, when key leadership voices either died (John Field) or were impugned in mild scandal (Thomas Cartwright) over clandestine meetings of Presbyterian groups. He calls this the collapse of the “Classical Movement” of Puritanism.78 “What is striking after that is the lack of theological controversy. Conformists had received backing from on high because of the quarrel over church polity; in other respects it was difficult to portray Puritans as a danger to the English way of life, and the issues which conformists tried to take up were simply not significant enough.”79 And of course there would be more politics to come and attempts to see further reform actualized in the English Church through Parliament and the monarchy, but the key in all this was the theological influence of Puritanism and Covenant Theology through teaching, preaching and the printed word. McCulloch reflects on this shift of tactic over several decades, noting the work of the prominent Puritan William Perkins:

So Puritan literature changed from the Presbyterian polemic of Field and Cartwright or the knockabout abuse of Marprelate, to weighty and intricate moral analysis, complete with printed diagrams of the path to salvation, from Cambridge theologian William Perkins…Significantly, Perkins hardly ever mentioned questions of church government: he was the latest and perhaps the most important exponent of ‘Covenant Theology’…This became one of the most characteristic features of the Puritan outlook…80

78 Ibid, 388.
79 Ibid, 388.
80 Ibid, 389.
McCulloch repeatedly refers to Perkins's formulation of Covenant Theology as a "scheme" through which Puritans, like Perkins, sought to manipulate adherence to the law by the uncertainty of one's election to salvation or reprobation.\textsuperscript{81} 

...by 1600, Puritanism seemed to have abandoned its vision of transforming the institutional structures of the church of English Church. As in the Netherlands, it gave priority in the manner of William Perkins to cultivating the individual soul in pilgrimage to the blessings promised to the elect of God...By doing so, English Puritans were both contained and influential within the Elizabethan and Stuart Church; they remained an integral part of its Protestant life.\textsuperscript{82}

The Arminian position of the seventeenth century argued for the necessity of baptism for regeneration. This was over and against the Puritan hesitancy to say that baptism automatically granted salvation. David Cressy's work, entitled \textit{Birth, Marriage \& Death: Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England}, reveals the sharpness of this debate and its pastoral implications in the everyday lives of people.

By the mid-seventeenth century, the Reformed view of baptism as a badge that pointed toward covenant reality was the predominant opinion, not equating baptism with regeneration. "The mainstream position of the Church of England was that baptism had limited efficacy, and did not wash away all sin. Anyone who suggested that the ceremony itself, or any of its particular elements, automatically secured forgiveness of sins would

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 389-390.  
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid, 391.
surely be condemned as superstitious. Puritans in particular stressed that 'the mystical washing away of sin' was not achieved by the water, still less by the sign of the cross, but only 'the work of God in the blood of the cross.'

This divide over the efficacy of baptism is a direct connection with the theology that one forms around our understanding of covenant, election and justification by faith in the finished work of Christ. For extreme Arminians to equate baptism with regeneration is to disregard the mystery of a covenantal reality in redemption. Trusting the sacraments as tangible signs and seals pointing our faith to Christ is one thing, placing faith in the sacrament itself, is an entirely different thing. For the Reformed, the sacrament was neither automatic with regeneration nor was it an empty exercise, rather, it pictured and pointed to the object of the cleansing and regeneration, Jesus the Great High priest.

"The Calvinist Theologian William Perkins explained that through this sacrament, through the 'outward sign of washing...is sealed and propounded the marvelous solemn covenant and contract' which made possible the prospect of everlasting life." For the Puritan position the reality of the Covenant of Grace is what is key, not the external sign that points to that reality. To hold the position that baptism is not synonymous with regeneration does not nullify the importance of the covenant signs and seals. God commands his people to administer them faithfully among his people.

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84 Ibid, 110.
The classic pastoral context of infants and baptism, especially in an era of history when infant mortality rates are very high, makes this issue an acutely personal and understandably contentious subject, with very serious emotional and spiritual consequences. Cressy relates the views of the church during this era: "Yet despite many years of protestant instruction, there were still lay folk who believed in the magical effectiveness of baptism, and ministers whose views on the subject verged on papism." 85

For the Reformed, the power of baptism lay not in the outward sign (except that it visibly and tangibly reassures us in the gospel) but in covenant engagement with the God of promise.

In covenant theology, outward baptism was not the ultimate arbiter of salvation, which many Arminian pastors and theologians espoused in the seventeenth century. Such Arminian convictions were why, the Puritans would argue, so much pomp and ritual accompanied the ceremony, a sign of superstition. "Unreformed beliefs were encouraged by traditionalist priests like the rector of Fobbing, Essex, who was called before the authorities in 1576 for saying 'that a child before he be baptized is not a the child of God, but the child of the devil', and like Thomas Staple, vicar of Mundon, Essex, three quarters of a century later, who taught that 'children dying without baptism are all damned.'" 86 Cressy notes that the consensus Calvinistic attitude regarding the importance and efficacy of baptism lay in its covenant engagement, granting to the baptized a welcome into the covenant community by the sign of the covenant and into the wonder of

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85 Ibid, 111.
86 Ibid, 111-112.
God's gracious election. Finally, Cressy relates a story of how a Puritan may view his own child's baptism, in the balanced view of the sacrament:

A poignant personal perspective is found in the diary of Robert Woodford, a puritan layman in Northampton, who began his diary in August 1637, with reflections on the solemnity of baptism. The Christian initiation of his first-born was surely an auspicious occasion on which to commence a record of his own actions and thoughts. "I prayed alone, and I and my dear wife prayed in private this morning to beseech the Lord for his blessing upon the sacrament of baptism to our poor child this day, that inward grace might go along with the outward sign." And in preparation for the baptism of his next child a year later, Woodruff prayed, "Lord, sanctify my child for the ordinance, and sanctify the ordinance to the child." For Woodruff, as for other moderate Puritans, the ceremonial trappings were less important than the sacramental covenant. A theory of sacramental grace was not incompatible with a Calvinistic belief in predestination.87

The evolution of Covenant Theology arises from the drama of the church's pursuit of the scriptures (and the gospel they reveal) through twists and turns of the turbulent shifts in Political, social, and ecclesiastical changes. Though Puritanism ultimately lost the politico-ecclesiastical battle for power in the English Church, the Reformed theological influence continued to permeate the life of the English people and clergy. The basic contours of Protestantism place each ecclesiastical body on a continuum of Reformed principles. In this way, Covenant Theology is not only a part of the history of the Anglican tradition, it continues to be part of the legacy and future of the Anglican and Episcopal church.

87 Ibid, 113.
Chapter Three

Covenant Theology and The Rite Of Paedo-Baptism In The Anglican Tradition

The sacrament of baptism in the Anglican tradition is, among other things, the opportunity to experience the mystery of the covenant reality in the Christian faith. Both baptism and the Lord’s Supper illumine the covenantal nature of God’s redeeming work and point to the sovereignty of God in salvation. From the time of the reformation, views on how to understand Baptism have been legion, ranging from the Catholic practice of baptism as required for salvation, to the Anabaptist practice of credo-baptism (i.e., “believers baptism”), to the Reformed and Anglican practice of baptism as a sign and seal of the covenant.

The signatory of the covenant and the seal of the covenant points both to the covenant reality and seals the baptized in the covenant reality. Reformed theologian John Frame emphasizes this point, “As an administration of the covenant, baptism is a sign and seal. As a sign it represents cleansing, repentance and union with Christ...It is also a seal, God’s confirmation that we belong to the covenant. Again, baptism is a naming-giving ceremony (Mat. 28.19), placing the name of God on Israel in Numbers 6.24-27.”

The point is emphasized in that the sacraments are an expression of Covenant Administration. As we noted in the suzerain-vassal treaty structures above, the

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administration of the covenant is the final feature of how the covenant is addressed or renewed or continued from one generation to the other in the Lord/servant paradigm.

Alec Ryrie view’s the Reformation as having introduced more complexity and nuance to the rite of baptism and the church’s understanding of what is going on in the sacrament. “Protestant theology complicated the sacrament considerably. For Catholics, it was a simple matter: baptism cleansed you from original sin and was an absolute prerequisite for salvation. However, this simple principle was compatible neither with protestants’ understanding of salvation nor with the doctrine of the church.” Keneth Stevenson seems to echo the sentiment that baptism in the Protestant tradition has arrived at no settled, strict monolithic rite and meaning in the church. “In the Anglican Divines...there seems to be no settled scheme either. There were attempts to justify an inherited system that was in need of adaptation. Many of them delved into the ancient past for inspiration for their ideas. It was a scheme that was on the move through the questions they faced that were often different from ours.”

During the time of the Reformation, as Stevenson notes, there was the very fluid matter of seeking to simplify the inherited medieval Catholic baptismal rites in a way that reflected the newly recovered theological grounds for understanding the sacrament. He asserts: “Medieval Catholic teaching about baptism was to the effect that baptism is for washing away of original sin. The Reformers challenged this, but in different ways: what

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about the centrality of the work of Christ on the cross? What about sins committed after baptism, which would not be dealt with automatically in the confessional?"\textsuperscript{91}

Baptism may be the perfect example of the unique nature of the Reformation in England with respect to its commitment to catholicity on one hand and its devotion to its own style of Reformed theology on the other. Stevenson summarizes:

The principle way in which debate and controversy in England operated – and still does today in world-wide Anglicanism – is the most endemic manner in which this particular style of Reformed Christianity is determined to face both ways. The Church of England is Catholic, but it is not Roman Catholic. It is Reformed, but it is not like the Reformed Churches of the continent.\textsuperscript{92}

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer defines baptism as “full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ’s Body the Church. The bond which God establishes in Baptism is indissoluble.”\textsuperscript{93} This definition describes baptism as both a sign of entrance into the covenant community, and also as a seal into the mystery of God’s covenant promise in Christ. The choice of the word “bond” is a nod to this covenant motif and points to covenant as the basis for signs and seals in both the Old and New Testament. O. Palmer Robertson defines covenant with the idea of it pertaining to a ‘bond.’ “What then is a covenant? How do you define the covenantal relation of God to his people? A covenant is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. When God enters into a covenantal relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. A

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid, 12.

\textsuperscript{92} Ibid, 13.

\textsuperscript{93} BCP, 298.
covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond to life and death, sovereignly administered.”94

Baptism as an “indissoluble bond that God establishes” is a dramatic statement regarding who is making a promise, who is redeeming, and with whom salvation is entrusted. God initiates the covenant and God sustains the covenant in the person and work of Christ.

Michael Brown’s small volume on the life and covenant theology of the English Puritan Samuel Petto (1624-1711), is an example of how influential the doctrine of the covenant was in the British Isles in the seventeenth century. Educated at Cambridge during the contentious years leading up to the English Civil war, Petto became an astute Reformed Orthodox theologian in the tradition of Calvin, Sibbes, Bridge and Owens.95 Petto’s understanding of the Mosaic Covenant is at the heart of Brown’s inquiry. Petto’s view is that the Mosaic Law is a republication of the original Covenant of Works. Of course, as Yahweh’s servant, the nation Israel is unable (gloriously unable) to fulfill the demands of the covenant.

So, the fulfillment of the covenant falls to God’s true servant, the man Christ Jesus, who fulfills the covenant in glorious faithfulness. Brown asserts the importance of this connection with regard to upholding the doctrine of justification by faith. Petto’s theology relates “to his doctrine of the imputed active obedience of Christ, the nature of conditionality in the covenant of grace, and faith as the instrumental cause of justification.”96

The immensity of Christ’s conditional obedience to fulfill all


96 Ibid, 123.
righteousness, makes the baptismal rite a glorious entrance into the covenant community and into the Paschal mystery. When our understanding flows from a righteousness from Christ, imputed to us by faith, not in our own ability to follow Jesus’ example, but in Jesus absolute obedience on our behalf, the good news of the gospel has been apprehended. Brown elaborates:

Petto’s covenant theology not only informed but also safeguarded the doctrine of justification. His interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant is a covenant of works for Christ and the condition he had to fulfill in the covenant of grace strengthened the Reformed orthodox doctrine of the active obedience of Christ. The Sinai commanded of Christ, ‘Do this and live’ as a covenant of condition, and because Christ fulfilled that command for justification and life on behalf of the elect, the gospel is not just that believers are forgiven, but that they are reckoned as law-keepers themselves by virtue of Christ’s obedience imputed to them.97

Because of Christ and imputed righteousness, as Brown relates, the grounds for the believer’s assurance are external, with Christ, not internal. “For Petto, assurance of faith is found not so much by turning inward to look for good works or a mystical experience, but primarily by hearing the absolute promises of the gospel, which calls us out of ourselves to find rest and refreshment in Christ.”98 Contemporary Presbyterian theologian John Frame brings clarity to our understanding of baptism as a sign and seal in the reality of the Covenant of Grace:

Baptism, as a sacrament, pictures the gospel; and the gospel is about the forgiveness of sins. Scripture doesn’t say, as some do, that baptism is the new birth or that our forgiveness comes through baptism. But it pictures forgiveness, so that people who are baptized as well as those who witness the ceremony will know what

97 Ibid, 120.

98 Ibid, 123.

William Perkins (1558-1602) in *A Golden Chain, or The Description of Theology*, defines baptism as “a sacrament by which such as are within the covenant are washed with water in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost: that being thus engrafted into Christ, they may have perpetual fellowship with him...Within the covenant are all the seed of Abraham, or the seed of the faithful. These are either riper years, or infants.”\footnote{100 William Perkins, *A Golden Chain or The Description Of Theology*, (Birmingham: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2010, reprinted from 1597), Cambridge, UK: 1597), 156.} Perkins’ appeal to God’s gracious covenant with Abraham, with the unconditional covenant promise to be God to Abraham and his offspring, provides a fundamental commitment in Yahweh’s covenantal interest not only in believers, but their children and their children’s children after them. For Perkins, the covenant theological motif formed the basis of the surety, or the pledge of adoption by Christ, for the offspring of Christians.

As Kenneth Stevenson observes, the baptismal theology of William Perkins is based on the surety of the inner-working of the Covenant of Grace in the life of a believer.

For Perkins, the Covenant of Grace – as for many of the Reformers – is a biblical image to describe the relationship of free grace between God and humanity which is sealed in Christ. The covenant’s purpose is ‘to manifest that righteousness in Christ whereby the whole law is fully satisfied and salvation attained.’ He goes on to describe it as the conduit pipe of the Holy Ghost.\footnote{101 Kenneth Stevenson, *The Mystery Of Baptism In The Anglican Tradition*, (Harrisburg: Morehouse}
For Perkins, baptism, whether for infants (nurtured in the covenant by believing parents and the in the covenant community) or for adult converts, is an external signatory pointing to the reality of Christ — who is the surety of the covenant participant. It is the mark of the faithful working of the Spirit, who confers all the blessings of Christ unto his people, which is an inward reality (the essence of sacramental mystery). In fact, Stevenson notes that what differentiates Perkins from most of his peers regarding baptism is that “he sets the Covenant of Grace above the sacraments.”

This means that the sacraments rest on the basis of the covenant, not the other way around. As Stevenson suggests, the covenant reality for Perkins is an outward (external sign) and inward (spiritual grace) that manifests itself in the life of believer in the fruit of faith and repentance. Or as Perkins himself describes it: “Therefore baptism may be truly termed the sacrament of repentance, and as it were, a board to swim upon when a man shall fear the shipwreck of his soul... Last of all, see thou never rest till such time as thou hast a feeling of that renewing power which signifies in baptism: namely, the power of Christ’s death mortifying sin and the virtue of his resurrection, in the renovation of the Spirit.”

Another Anglican divine that appears in Stevenson’s survey is Herbert Thorndike (1598-1672). Thorndike ministered in the mid seventeenth century, during a period of

\[^{102}\] Ibid, 26.
\[^{104}\] Ibid, 162.
great political and ecclesiastical changes. Thorndike appealed strongly to the Covenant of Grace. "His vision of the covenant of Grace builds on much of what we have so far seen. Even more than Perkins, Thorndike sees the covenant as a theological tool with which to understand the whole nature of the church. God takes the initiative, and we respond. God keeps taking the initiative, when our response is weak — as it necessarily is."105

This divine initiative is at the heart of Covenant Theology. At the heart of each successive covenant in scripture is the initiative of God, a sovereign administration of revelatory grace by the Covenant Lord. Thorndike is right to acknowledge this gracious initiative on God’s behalf, as a sign of his electing love and his bond with his creatures and creation, along with his commitment to make all things new.

Not only is God’s initiative, through covenant, a key concept, but so is Thorndike’s insistence upon our response to God’s initiative. As he points out, our response is sometimes weak, yet nonetheless, our response of faith and repentance is imperative, in the covenant. Like Yahweh, who walked both sides of the covenant made with Abraham (Gen. 17), Jesus fulfills the New Covenant on our behalf. Nevertheless, we are in Christ, by grace through faith. We died with him (to the old life of slavery to sin). We rise with him (in the newness of life in the Spirit, through the power of resurrection). In him, through the Holy Spirit, we are conformed to the image of Christ, we learn obedience to God’s commands, seeing them as beautiful and beneficial and glorifying to God.

105 Ibid, 152.
Bishop James Ussher, in his *Body Of Divinity*, echoes Thorndike from the standpoint of the ongoing journey of “owning our baptism” by faith and repentance:

Lastly, Baptism should be of continual use through a Christian’s whole life. It is administered but once, but it is always lasting in the virtue and efficacy of it. Baptism loseth not its strength by time. In all thy fears and doubts, look back to thy baptism, and the promises of God sealed up unto thee there; lay hold on them by faith, and thou shalt have the actual comfort of thy baptism, and feel the effect of it, though thou never saw it. In thy failings, slips and revolts, to recover thyself have recourse to thy baptism: new baptism shall not need; the covenant and seal of God stands firm, He changeth not: only renew thy repentance, renew thy faith in those blessed promises of grace which were sealed up unto thee in thy baptism.\(^{106}\)

The baptismal rite of the 1979 Book Of Common Prayer is a product of many prayer book iterations, with renewed emphasis on adult baptism, as well as attention to infant baptism. Marion Hatchett comments, “Though provision is made for the baptism of infants and children, adult baptism is restored as the model which manifests the meaning of the sacrament.”\(^{107}\) This was no doubt an effort to restore the normative baptismal pattern of the early church, which saw a large proportion of adult converts to the Christian faith. “The revisions in this edition attempt to restore the centrality of initiation to the ritual pattern, the public nature of the rite and congregational involvement in it, the bishop as the normal minister, the relationship to the church year, and admission to the Eucharist as the climax.”\(^{108}\)

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The emphasis in Hatchett’s commentary, however, is more to do with the rationale of what is included in the current prayer book over against the rationale for the inclusion of various elements in the previous versions of the prayer book. It is less concerned with the theology behind the elements of the rite, it seems (perhaps the aim is to be catholic enough without being Roman Catholic and protestant enough without being explicitly reformed in the sense of the confessional Reformed tradition of churches). Nevertheless, the structure of the rite in the Prayer Book and the inclusion of some of the covenantal history of Israel provide a framework from which to build a solid theology of the covenant as it is expressed in baptism. The recitation of the Apostles’ creed at the onset of the rite is a response to the grace of God in creation and in redemption. It is our response to the initiative of God.

The questions of covenant renewal109 aid the congregation in treasuring their own baptismal reality, both the blessings and requirements of faithfulness. The response of “I will with God’s help”110 is a reminder of the loyalty, the bond of God to redeem us by grace and to sustain his people in the redemption by that same grace.

The section, “Prayers for the Candidates,” in the context of infant baptism, is the invocation of the God of Covenant to do for the child what has been done for the sponsoring adult. It is an act of faith on behalf of the congregation, an appeal to the God of promise, who said to Abraham in Genesis 17.17, “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an

109 BCP, 304-305.
110 BCP, 304-305.
everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you.” Children were included in the covenant God made with Abraham. When we look at the record of the early church, as recorded in the book of Acts, and in the Epistles, we find, implicitly, that children continue to be included in the New Covenant, on the basis of God’s promise to Abraham, in the form of examples of “household baptisms.” Jesus’ own example of welcoming children into his arms is also a suggestive of God’s passion to include children in the covenant of grace. God’s interest in covenant succession is certainly at the heart of his redeeming grace and a key component to the normative pattern of redemption.

Perhaps part of the acrimonious dialogue and debate regarding the Reformed position on predestination and election centers around the perceived snugginess of those deemed as the elect. However, in the covenant reality, a sense of one’s adoption and election should lead not to arrogance, but humility, charity and gratitude. At the waters of infant baptism as well as adult baptism, what is most important is a simple trust in the God of Covenant to be the God who keeps covenant, from everlasting to everlasting, which he has done gloriously in Christ.

In the Thanksgiving Over the Water portion of the baptismal right, we encounter a brief recitation of redemptive history, which not only demonstrates the continuity and unity of the Old and New Testament story, but demonstrates God’s sovereignty in that redemptive history. God’s repeated covenantal overtures are revealed in creation, in Israel’s calling and deliverance and most brilliantly in Jesus’ incarnation in ratifying the

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111 Acts 11.14, 16.31 ESV; 1 Corinthians 1.16 ESV
New Covenant with his very life. It is a powerful, implicit recounting of the God of
Covenant:

We thank you, Almighty God, for the gift of water.
over it the Holy Spirit moved in the beginning of creation.
through it you led the children of Israel out of their bondage
in Egypt into the land of promise. In it your Son Jesus received
the baptism of John and was anointed by the Holy Spirit as the
Messiah, the Christ, to lead us, through his death and resurrection,
from the bondage of sin into everlasting life.

We thank you, Father, for the water of baptism. In it we are
buried with Christ in his death. By it we share in his resurrection.
through it we are reborn by the Holy Spirit. Therefore, in joyful
obedience to your son, we bring into his fellowship those who
come to him in faith, baptizing them in the Name of the Father,
and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.\textsuperscript{112}

It is difficult to imagine a theologically coherent practice of \textit{paedo-baptism}
outside a commitment to covenant theology. The basis of the rite, biblically, must appeal
to the covenantal dealings of Yahweh with Abraham, the other Patriarchs and the nation
of Israel. The covenant motif is more than a side-element, as evidenced above. The
reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries brought to light for the church the
key hermeneutical infrastructure of scripture, enabling the church to plunge deeper into
the gospel riches of the Trinitarian Godhead. This must involve the "first-love"\textsuperscript{113} or the
initiatory principle of grace.

People come to the waters of baptism (normally) because the God of promise has
drawn them. Parents bring their children to the waters of baptism because they have been

\textsuperscript{112} BCP, 306-307.

\textsuperscript{113} 1 John 4.19, ESV
redeemed and loved by Christ. The baptismal covenant must be framed by the invitation of God. The promise of Yahweh is to be their God, that they would be his people. In creation and in redemption (most amazingly in the Incarnation), God reaches first, offers first, calls first. The Baptismal Covenant is the pledge of our adoption by Christ. The unconditionality of God’s covenant with Abraham is the foreshadow of Jesus’ perfect obedience, both his active obedience in fulfillment of the law and his passive obedience in bearing the sin of the world upon the cross. “When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between the pieces.”\textsuperscript{114}

The baptismal covenant is a beautiful summons to gospel hope. The meaning of baptism must be subsumed not only in the surety of one’s election by grace, but also in the rest of Christ’s obedience on behalf of the believer. If our understanding of the baptismal covenant focuses on the believer’s performance, we lose sight of the accomplishment of God in securing our redemption. Like Abraham, we lie down in our weakness and incapacity, while God walks between the pieces. The believer descends into the watery grave with Christ (offering absolutely nothing), while Jesus raises the believer with him.

Marion Hatchett notes that the five inquiries in the 1979 Book of Common Prayer are an expansion from the 1662 version of the Prayer Book. “In the 1662 revision a question was added after the renunciations and the affirmation of faith, ‘Wilt thou then obediently keep God’s holy will and commandments, and walk in the same all the days of

\textsuperscript{114} Genesis 15.17, ESV
thy life.”¹¹⁵ As Hatchett observes, these become detailed in five different questions: abiding in the teaching of the Apostles, persevering in resisting evil, proclaiming Christ in word and example, serving Christ in all persons, and finally, striving for justice.¹¹⁶ The emphasis on the believer’s part in the baptismal covenant should be overwhelmed by the obedience of Christ, our substitute, as the surety of the Covenant. The obedience of the baptized does not create the surety, it merely exemplifies it. We must see the glory of Christ in the covenant.

In his consideration of the future of baptismal theology in the Anglican tradition, Kenneth Stevenson notes the wisdom of the prayer book’s adaptability to a variety of acceptable expressions and the nuance of apostolic faith:

Choices have to be made. For example, popular as the nuanced covenant-Theology of Taylor and others manifestly was, there was no desire to introduce it explicitly into the Prayer Book rite in 1662. Moreover labels are always hard to use accurately. But within the overall framework of the sixteenth and seventeenth century European theological scene, all our writers - and many others like them – merit the term “Reformed Patristic”. They were all Sons of the Reformation who loved tradition, and through their (sometimes not uncritical) loyalty to the Prayer Book and their desire to adapt and re-interpret it here and there, they bear witness to this new, living, literary tradition that has eyes open on the past, looks to the present and dreams of the future. The Anglican tradition is one of judicious re-interpretation, and this is where its Catholicity is to be found. It is never a straight-forward process, but it is a significant – and often undervalued – endemic characteristic that merits recognition on a wider scale.

Pastorally, covenant theology and the covenant practice of infant baptism emphasizes the greatness of God in salvation. And it forces our renewal in the central


¹¹⁶ Ibid, 274.
confession of God’s people, that ‘salvation belongs to the Lord.’ Our role is not to secure redemption, but to walk in a redemption that has already been secured. The joy of bringing a child to Jesus and trusting in the covenant promises of God to his people, through the finished work of the Son, is a gracious opportunity filled with exceeding comfort and hope.

\[\text{117} \text{ Psalm 3.8, ESV}\]
Chapter Four

Covenant Theology In the Anglican Tradition For A New Generation

Covenant theology has a legacy as long as the church’s history. As a hermeneutical framework, covenant theology is detailed, thorough, coherent and provides an incredibly tight synthesis of the Old and New Testaments, along with their central realities, the Old and New Covenants. But there is no doubt that the influence of Covenant Theology has been largely marginalized in the mainline Protestant churches. The recent resurgence of neo-Calvinism among evangelicals has served to reintroduce a new generation to Reformed theology, but most of this influence has been within the reformed Baptist circles of churches and ministries. There is a theological continuum in the protestant tradition, with varying levels of covenant conviction. Many on this continuum get relegated to the conglomerate group known as “evangelicals,” which is a difficult appellation to unpack, these days, as it has become very much a pejorative term in the culture, so much so that it has been rendered useless to a large degree.

Though adherents to Covenant Theology are certainly a minority in today’s Anglican Communion, it is a system of Biblical interpretation that compliments The Book Of Common Prayer and the administration of the sacraments, baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The legacy of Cranmer’s 1549 prayer book (and the versions that followed) is a resoundingly reformed document. It may not be laden with the intricacies of full-blown Covenant Theology, but it does not need to be. The gospel-shape of the Anglican ethos is plenty generous enough for covenant theological perspectives to not only survive, but to
thrive. W.B. Patterson’s exploration of William Perkin’s pervasive influence at the end of the sixteenth century is a monument to both the influence of Covenant Theology in its day and testament to the adaptability of Prayer Book and its documents in supporting such a theology:

Perkins’s theology concerning salvation was certainly not limited to Puritan circles, however defined. It was in the mainstream of the established Church and consistent with the English Church’s official formulary of belief. Through his teaching and preaching as well as his published writings, Perkins helped to establish a strong Reformed tradition in England in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.\footnote{W.B. Patterson, \textit{William Perkins and the Making of Protestant England}, (London: Oxford University Press, 2014), 88.}

The 1979 Book of Common Prayer has no problem living under the scrutiny of a winsome practice of Covenant Theology. This matters, not only for the future of Anglican and Episcopal worship, but also for the future of the church in general.

One of the practical criticisms on Covenant Theology may have less to do with its actual content and more to do with its details and nuanced intricacies. Simply put, can such a rigorous theological system find an audience in a sound-bite historical era? The answer is yes, partly because biblical studies are always fruitful, whether they lead to Reformed convictions or not, and partly because the church must labor on in faithfulness within its context, no matter how short the general attention span.

It takes a lot of nurture, and many conversations and many forays into scripture to begin to appreciate the system of covenants, how they relate, the various administrations
of the covenant and the doctrine of God as it pertains to matters of election, predestination and free-will.

In pre-baptismal instruction with parents and families, one of the great priorities is to emphasize that baptism is the sacrament of initiation. Truly, it is a functional starting line in the long race of nurture in the covenant. In the Old Covenant, male children were circumcised on the eighth day, given the covenant sign, and then they were nurtured in the covenant. The sign was given for inclusion. The nurture of faith then commenced. Deuteronomy 6 offers a picture of the pedagogical tool of covenant nurture, and how it is commanded by God for the children of believers. There is no change in this pattern from the days of Abraham to this very moment.

And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and gates. (Deuteronomy 6.6-9)

In addition to the covenant inclusion of Jesus blessing the children, it must also be a sharp rebuke to the general attitude of the Jewish and Greco-Roman community of Jesus’ time that children had no important status. Jesus demonstrates a different message. Not only does Jesus welcome them into the covenant community with high praise, he shows his desire to hold them and bless them and nurture them in their journey.

The shift in the church from a paradigm of covenant nurture to an emphasis on conversion for covenant children begins to take solid root in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the Great Awakening in the American colonies. The late Lewis
Bevins Schenk, who taught at Davidson College in North Carolina, wrote an insightful book entitled, *The Presbyterian Doctrine Of Children In The Covenant*. His description of the colonial church provides insight into a trend away from Covenant Theology and Covenant nurture in the church. Though his analysis primarily focuses on the Presbyterian tradition, this development certainly impacted other Protestant churches, including Anglican parishes in the Colonies and Episcopal parishes after the Revolutionary War. Schenck describes Cotton Mather’s New England congregation and the pastoral plight that led to what he describes as the “Half-Way Covenant,” from his great work of theology entitled, *Magnalia Christi Americana*:

The first settlers became concerned that their grandchildren could not be baptized, since the parents of these children found themselves unable to give an account of their own regeneration which would meet the rigid requirements of the Puritans. The Half-Way Covenant was the method devised to remedy this difficulty. It permitted parents who acknowledged the claims of God in their lives and promised submission to the church’s discipline – though not professing conversion – to have their children baptized.\(^{119}\)

So, churches in this era, for pastoral reasons, permitted baptisms without the kind of vetting and instruction that parents and guardians needed to nurture the baptized children in the faith. Schenck goes in to describe how the Half-Way Covenant measures led to Samuel Solomon Stoddard’s conviction that his congregation should offer open communion to unbelievers as a “converting ordinance.”\(^{120}\) The question of open

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\(^{120}\) Ibid, 55.
communion aside, Schenck’s point is that the normative Covenant arrangement and
sequence of Christian Nurture had been deformed by ill-advised pastoral shortcuts, which
neglected the nurture of covenant children in the home and began to unwind in successive
generations. This would necessitate on one hand, and open the door on another, for a call
to a fresh repentance and revival, which is just what happened.

Schenk shares his theory concerning the impact of revival-styled ministry upon
the church. His argument is that in eighteenth-century Colonial America, the church had
become dull and in need of revival. Schenck describes a climate in the church of gross
neglect of Covenant nurture among families, noting that many infants were being
baptized though their parents had no faith themselves. “As a result of this perversion of
the Reformed doctrine of infant church membership, and the ignoring of the underlying
conditions of the doctrine, the privileges of church membership and the baptism of
children were allowed to many who were regarded as having no vital relationship with
Christ.”121

The new arrangement ministry of revivalism and conversion of adults involves
three main features, according to Schenck, including a conviction of sin, agony over
those sins and a “despair of relief within oneself.”122 Not only did this move the surety of
one’s salvation from the objective accomplishment of Christ for sinners, it elevated
feeling and experience as the primary indicator of one’s Christian faith. The itinerant

121 Ibid, 53.
122 Ibid, 65.
preaching and resultant revivals of the kind led by George Whitefield, William Davies and later, Charles G. Finney and others contributed mightily to the spiritual vitality of early America. But this revivalism contributes a "conversionist" paradigm in the church rather than a covenantal nurture approach. Quoting Robert Ellis Thompson, Schenck writes, "the Great Awakening 'rearranged the theology' of the Protestantism in a new perspective of doctrines with reference to the conversion of sinners, laying stress upon those points which seemed to contribute to that end."123

Extraordinary experience is a part of the Christian journey, to be sure, and this part of church history in colonial America could well be a parable for our need for a balanced Christian faith that includes catholic, evangelical and charismatic contributions. But in this instance, and as the "conviction" experience became the normative measuring stick for justification, something important was lost in the church.

The big loss, in Schenck's estimation, was that from the mid-eighteenth century, children in the covenant and the idea of covenant nurture became a lost practice in the soteriological galaxy of the western church. Obviously, that is an exaggeration. However, Schenck's basic thesis seems to be credible, both from the historical record and from the lived experience in the present-day church. Schenck adds a final reflection: "The fact that a child was the child of believing parents, included in the covenant promise of God, made no difference. It was believed that they too must have this experience of conviction and conversion."124 Gone was the covenant soteriological idea that children

123 Ibid, 64.
124 Ibid, 65.
could grow up in the knowledge and love of Jesus. Quoting from the Associated Parishes pamphlet regarding baptism and nurture in the church, Ruth A. Meyers writes, “When Christian nurture is properly done, a baptized infant should grow to Christian maturity never knowing the time when he was not a Christian.”

Taking nothing from the true fruit of revivalist ministries, whether George Whitefield, Charles Finney’s Dwight L. Moody, or Billy Graham, there begins a pattern of developing ways of sharing the gospel in very minimal terms. We reduce the Gospel to a proposition like the “Roman Road” or the “Four Spiritual Laws,” or the “ABC” method of acknowledge, believe, confess. Particularly in the era of post WWII youth ministry paradigms, we press youth at events to pray salvation prayers and lift hands indicating their acceptance of Christ as a response to powerfully presented messages.

There is no doubt that God’s work in and through these means have yielded some lasting fruit. But it is perhaps also true that we have stripped the gospel down so far that we have dislodged it from its embedded home throughout all of the Bible. It now feels like a quick and clean transaction, not unlike a consumer through a drive-through.

J.I. Packer comments on this “sterilized” gospel (a gospel separated from its powerful context) in his book, *Affirming the Apostles’ Creed*,

In such a milieu, a truncated version of the gospel message, presenting Christ the redeemer apart from God the creator, and remission of sins a Apart from life and worship in the church, and the hope of heaven apart from the pilgrim path of holiness - which is what in practice the ABC

approach does - becomes a misrepresentation, one that sows the seed of many pastoral problems down the road. Against a background of general acquaintance with, and acceptance of, the Christian outlook, periodic highlighting of a few truths to galvanize response might not in itself be a bad idea; but when we reach the point where the creed no longer looks or sounds to Christian people like a declaration of the gospel, there is need, I believe, for some whistle-blowing and reassessment of what goes on.\textsuperscript{126}

In our current context, then, we find that a rhetoric of despair regarding the demise of the church to be alarmingly high. And there are justifiable reasons to be alarmed, in the short-run. In the long arc of redemptive history and especially in the New Covenant dispensation, the ebbs and flows of recession and advancement in the Kingdom of God are well documented. That said, there has arguably never been a time like the one in which we now find ourselves.

At the 2018 Convention of the Diocese of East Carolina, I was asked to serve as a contributing member of the Bishop’s Address Response Committee. The committee’s response included candid remarks from each committee member, speaking to personal concerns or fears for the church in our current context. I said in part: “In an increasingly secular age, and with the dramatic rise of the religiously ‘unaffiliated,’ known as “\textit{The Nones}\textsuperscript{127},” my fear is that the church is ill-equipped to respond both to the challenge and

\textsuperscript{126} Packer, J.I. \textit{Affirming The Apostles’ Creed}, (Downers Grove: IVP.

opportunity of Gospel engagement within a ‘cross-pressured\textsuperscript{128}’ society that is asking huge life-questions and seeking answers seemingly anywhere but the church.\textsuperscript{129}

The practice of paedo-baptism is necessarily a call to covenant nurture. Perhaps part of the answer to seeing less attrition form the church from by young adults has less to do with what we are teaching about Christianity (the content) and more to do with our neglect in introducing them to the Christian life and experience (the nurture of children in that content). Ruth A. Meyers in her work, \textit{Continuing The Reformation: Re-Visioning Baptism In The Episcopal Church}, argues that in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, baptism was losing ground in terms of emphasis and interest in the church. Most baptisms were out of the public sphere – which is a problem from the standpoint of the congregations’ active role in the nurture of its children. “While it was often a significant event for the family of the infant to be baptized, baptism was on the periphery of congregational life. Most Episcopalians were quite content with this approach, especially since the baptismal rite of the 1928 Prayer Book made no provision for congregational participation and so the rite simply added length to a service…”\textsuperscript{130}

Meyers traces the Church’s growing hunger to see baptism restored both to its rightful place in the church and used, as scripture encourages, as the launchpad for a

\textsuperscript{128} See a great essay by Derek Rishmawy, entitled \textit{Millennial Belief In The Super-Nova}, found in \textit{Our Secular Age: Ten Years Of Reading And Applying Charles Taylor}. (The Gospel Coalition: Deerfield, MI.) 2017 ed. Collin Hansen

\textsuperscript{129} This quote is recorded in the \textit{Diocesan Convention Journal of the 135\textsuperscript{th} Convention of The Diocese of East Carolina}, Bishop’s Address Response Committee Report, 2018.

pedagogical strategy in Christian nurture: “...the primary rationale for the return to public baptism was the renewed emphasis upon the corporate nature of the church, fostered by the liturgical and religious education movements, and the consequent understanding of the importance of baptism in the life of the church.”\textsuperscript{131} The 1979 BCP includes the congregation in several key ways. First, the congregation is asked and charged with being a corporate family in Christ, aiding the newly baptized in their journey of faith. The celebrant asks, “Will you who witness these vows do all in your power to support these persons in their life in Christ?”\textsuperscript{132} Secondly, the entire congregation is incorporated into the baptismal covenant renewal ceremony. “Let us join with those who are committing themselves to Christ and renew our own baptismal covenant.”\textsuperscript{133} In the context of the local church, this intentional incorporation of the fellow members of the Body of Christ is a small change with massive ramifications.

“Moral Therapeutic Deism,” as a basic theological grid embedded in the contemporary church, particularly in North America, has been well discussed and documented in the last several years.\textsuperscript{134} The exhaustive research conducted by sociologist Christian Smith and company, sponsored by the National Study of Youth and Religion, has provided data on what many have perceived for years. The massive data

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid, 52.

\textsuperscript{132} BCP, 303.

\textsuperscript{133} BCP, 303.

samples suggest that the church (at least, a large portion of it), while drifting incrementally away from historic, biblically-faithful Christianity, is simultaneously syncretizing with its surrounding pluralistic cultural mores and at the same time giving way to a more generic view of the divine.

As evidence for such an assertion, the NSYR study showed that the average teenager in America views God primarily as a deity of convenience and personal advancement. This perception of God follows an “instrumental” approach to religion.\textsuperscript{135} God is a cosmic therapist waiting to assist his children in times of need. God is less an authority to whom we must give account and more of a tour guide along life’s self-prescribed path. Smith writes, “This instrumental image of religion is not the invention of teenagers. It seems to be a dominating image of religion embraced by many adults…as far as could be discerned, what most teens appear to believe is that religion is about God responding to the authoritative desires and feelings of people.”\textsuperscript{136}

Perceptions of God in the younger generation are growing farther and farther away from the Triune God of scripture (and the vicarious atonement of Jesus Christ) and are becoming increasingly more like the generic deism demanded in a pluralistic society that rejects any concept of absolute truth or religious or philosophic certainty. And where do teenagers get these ideas regarding the person of God? From the church? Yes, as well as other places, to be sure. But the fountainhead for this worldview starts in the home,

\textsuperscript{135} In the book \textit{Soul Searching}, Dr. Christian Smith describes in detail an “instrumental” approach to spirituality.

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid, 148-149.
with parents along with the unrelenting onslaught of indoctrination from the ubiquitous internet. Kenda Dean makes this very point in her book *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*.

Why do teenagers practice Moralistic Therapeutic Deism? Not because they have misunderstood what we have taught them in church. They practice it because this is what we have taught them in church. In fact, American teenagers are barometers of a major theological shift taking place in the United States.\(^ {137} \)

The shift that Dean is referring to is the aforementioned trend toward a more generic type of deism, coined by sociologist Christian Smith, that fits within the framework of our society, where distinctions are generally frowned upon as being exclusively negative, bigoted and judgmental. We see this dynamic, for example, in our cultural commitment to inclusion and sameness. The flattening out of much of our world is happening fast, and even faster for the young, digitally native generation. Dean skillfully diagnosis the issue:

It’s easy to see Moralistic Therapeutic Deism’s homogenizing appeal. Growing up in a global village makes it impossible for most American young people to retreat into the enclaves of sameness that once kept religions apart. Today, cultural pluralism is a fact of life, increasing young people’s access to once unimaginable social networks. While history is rife with examples of religion’s polarizing potential, the NSYR (National Study of Youth and Religion) finds little evidence of such polarization in American teenagers. Their experience of religion is homogenizing, not polarizing; in fact, what makes American churches such cozy places for Moralistic Therapeutic Deism is our easy, uncritical fusion of the “other” with ourselves – which, of course, dismisses others’ identities by subsuming them in ours.\(^ {138} \)

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\(^ {138} \) Ibid, 30.
It is in this cultural context we find ourselves. Here children and older students (and adults) ingest daily thousands of media driven impulses that vie for the hearts of prospective consumers, worshippers and participants. It is a pluralistic pressure cooker, seeking to season all members toward the material, toward a trivial entertainment drip and toward a vapid fixation of self-aggrandizement through personalized social media (I am not vilifying the internet or other forms of media. These only provide new platforms, faster platforms, and more visible platforms for the development and exercise of one’s worldview). To make it all work properly and to avoid as much conflict as possible, this cultural pressure cooker strongly encourages, no tolerates, only an absolutely generic deity, if youths and others wish to worship one at all.

These laments (regarding the disintegration of a pervasive and acknowledged Christian worldview) are superfluous and well documented. And to be sure, they are helpful as we consider the multiple variables in play as the church seeks faithfulness to God’s charge of declaring the gospel of Christ to the nations.

Here, specifically, the aim is to consider how professing Christians may more effectively disciple those who already a part of God’s covenant community. Even more specifically, against the backdrop of predominant modes of Christian education efforts in children’s and student ministry, the aim is to consider the cross-section of the Bible’s teaching of the covenants of promise, its impact on our theology and, in turn, our theology’s impact on the church’s vision toward nurture of covenant children and students, and subsequently their parents or guardians. What I mean by covenant children and students is the offspring of believing families in the church, many of whom have
been baptized as infants and who are the immediate targets of covenental nurture both in the home and the church.

In recent decades, the church seems to have been so preoccupied with its appearance outside of her gates that she has forgotten to tend the citadels of its own vitality. In other words, the church has been so busy apologizing to the world for being the church that we have, in degrees, forgotten how to function as the Bride of Christ. A capital example of this could certainly be our contemporary practice in youth ministry. In an effort to attract as many kids from the community as possible, youth ministry has focused on being "un-church," these efforts leading to a subtle alienation from the Body of Christ in the name of relevance. The result, typically, is youth ministries, funded by congregations, existing in their own respective galaxies, with no meaningful engagement with the broader body of the local congregation. Or worse, the ministry becomes the drop-off area for students, their own jungle created by the church in the name of outreach and relevance. Soon enough, youth groups struggle to just to attract church kids. Programs become more focused on how to attract than how to make disciples in response to the Baptismal Covenant. Instead, youth talks and programs are designed on a topical basis (how a relationship with Jesus makes me a better friend, for example).

These become, in some cases, part of the breeding ground for "Moral Therapeutic Deism." Why? Typically, we have underestimated the core beliefs and practices of the church and their utter importance to the Christian life and rhythm: the preaching of the Word, the administration of the sacraments and the faithful practice of church discipline. Instead of learning doctrine and core Biblical theology, students are mostly ministered to
through “felt need” topics. Again, Patterson’s illumination of William Perkin’s ministry could give clergy and laity in the church a model for nurture and exhortation that is both passionate and winsome:

Perkins’ treatises do not advocate any form of spiritual exclusiveness on the basis of an experience of God’s justifying grace, nor does Perkins encourage sectarianism of the sort that was encouraged by more radical thinkers in the early seventeenth century. Perkins’s objective seems to have been to make the Church of England more effective in its preaching and teaching and to show ordinary parishioners how the message of the scriptures could transform their lives. As a theologian, he emphasized individual religious experience and ‘practical divinity’, while supporting an inclusive, not an exclusive, Christian community. He sees the national Church as made up of the widest variety of Christian believers, representing many stages of spiritual development.  

It is my conviction that if the church merely nurtured these (our covenant children) in Christ, we would witness wide-scale renewal within the covenant community itself and as a result, witness the proliferation of the gospel in many darkened areas of our world both locally and globally. In a tidal wave of concern over “post-modernity,” contextual issues and being relevant, we have managed to lose our edge of distinction as God’s “peculiar” people. We have done this gradually, of course, and in a variety of ways, to be sure. As one who has been a youth minister for a number of years, it pains me to point to the “professionalization” of youth ministry as one of the reasons we have managed to nurture the church’s children so poorly. How could this be?

The advent of youth ministry “proper,” after World War II, created an environment in which Christian nurture in the church became more about outreach than

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140 1 Peter 2.9-10 ESV
discipleship. Youth ministers were hired to spark new interest in the church, to reach un-
churched students. Many saw this as a way to draw more families into local 
congregations. As youth ministries developed in missiological ways, they became less 
effective in nurturing children of the Covenant.

In time, the church’s covenant children become stunted in their growth. Instead 
of children being absorbed into high octane discipleship, a city of passion for Christ, the 
culture (in youth ministry) became more entertainment driven than centered on the 
Gospel and upon a growing knowledge of Christ. Efforts to present a “relevant” Jesus, 
sharing a gospel message that the “unchurched” youth could understand became 
paramount compared to sound, challenging, Christian nurture. The critique of 
contemporary youth ministry efforts is not an either/or proposition. The vision for 
Christian education in the local church should be comprehensive in nurture, evangelism 
and in equipping parents for their crucial, God-given role in the nurturing process.

Ministries to students in this paradigm also present another inherent danger: they 
offer to take the spiritual development of children away from the home. This is not by 
overt design. It is a process that has slowly developed since the early nineteenth century 
with the advent of the Industrial Revolution which gave rise to modern Sunday School in 
churches in Europe and in America. With the advent of Sunday school and age-targeted 
ministry, the home as the place for daily Bible reading, prayer, and devotion began to 
decline. Kenda Dean gives anecdotal evidence of this decline in spiritual devotion as she 
reflects on the work of the National Study of Youth and Religion. “Time and time again 
in our interviews, we met young people who called themselves Christians, who grew up
with Christian parents, who were regular participants in Christian congregations, yet who
had no readily accessible faith vocabulary, few recognizable faith practices and little
ability to reflect on their lives religiously."141 With the advent of the professional youth
worker, the home became even more decentralized in terms of an intentional Christian
nurture. The inclusion of both the congregation in the Baptismal rite, along with the
charge to parents and godparents to take seriously their role in covenant nurture, can help
re-establish the partnership between the church and families in teaching the faith to our
children. As Joel Beeke has written: “Covenant children have this advantage: all the
means of grace are furnished to them. Our homes, churches, and Christian schools form a
triangular community of faith committed to teaching and training these children, though
this responsibility falls on parents first of all.”142

This is not an easy history to trace, for it involves a very complex web of social,
economic, technological and scientific historical developments. The shift from
agriculture to industry, from country to suburbs and cities, for instance, has played a
major role in how the church is able to minister in the world and how families function in
everyday life. Technological development, even in the last decade, has served to speed
the pace of life to blinding new realities.

The development of youth ministry, in some ways, affirms the estrangement of
adolescent children from their parents and the estrangement of children from the broader


church. Of course, I am presenting the very worst of outcomes here, when, truthfully, the reality for most youth ministries in the local church fall somewhere in between.

I cannot blame youth ministry for some parents abdicating their God given responsibility of shepherding their own children. Nor can I blame youth ministry, necessarily, for becoming an isolated, lonely planet, merely orbiting the church, either. Be that as it may, these dynamics are often in play across the church and across denominations in the church, both in the mainline and in the non-denominational and independent evangelical churches. And it is this very dynamic that is hindering the kind of fruit that the gospel produces.

So, how might covenant theology in the Anglican ethos be a part of a paradigm for mission and ministry that shapes culture for the glory of God and bring new vitality to the Body of Christ? How then would covenant theology shape a vision for life-giving ministry with families, students and children in the seed-bed of the church? Churches, generally speaking, have a set of creeds and confessions that they hold to regarding the doctrines of the faith and practice of the church. As a baseline, the Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed and to a lesser extent, the Athanasian Creed, serve as ecumenical statements of orthodox Christian belief. In the Episcopal tradition, we acknowledge these credal statements as authoritative in the church and trustworthy for the people of God. The Creeds give a concise, satisfactory summation of the Christian faith. Most children and young people, even in churches that confess these creeds regularly, however, would struggle mightily to recall their contents if asked.
Further, a church in the mold of a covenantal theological framework would also have a particular confession of faith, such as the Westminster Confession of Faith, The Thirty-Nine Articles or the Three Forms of Unity, The Heidelberg Catechism, The Belgic Confession and The Canons of Dort, or the Catechism of the Book of Common Prayer 1979. These documents, fallible as they are, serve as faithful standards of interpretation. They help to safeguard the flock of God from erroneous teaching and provide illumination regarding the standards of Christian faith and practice.

Telling children and students to read the Bible and to treasure God’s word is commendable, but we also have a responsibility to unfold its teachings, to explain its meaning. The Catechism of the 1979 BCP is a concise exposition of Christian belief. Jesus was kind enough to do this for the disciples on the Emmaus Road and it is exactly what Paul is doing in his epistles in the New Testament. These creeds and catechisms provide a faithful and time tested (though not perfect) interpretation of the infallible Word of God.

Across broad swaths of the church, we have lost our heart (or lack the vision for seeing its importance, or perhaps the patience to endure) for any sort of doctrinal depth. Beyond the broad, ecumenical creeds of the early church (which are vitally important), we seem to want to distance ourselves from more specific doctrinal commitments and standards. Even the general creeds are neglected in many churches. Truly this is to our peril, as it keeps us ever lingering in the shallow end of the pool, fearful of launching into the deep. It suppresses Christian maturity and wonderment at the glory of God and his glorious gospel.
The generic deity described by both Christian Smith and Kenda Dean, combined with this loss of “otherness” in our globally connected, pluralistic culture is the opportunity to build bridges for ministry. But this can only happen when Christians know what they believe and are equipped with the knowledge of what makes the Christian worldview distinctive from other religions, philosophies and worldviews. This knowledge of God is not a mere mental assent to doctrinal formulas – covenant is how God relates to us; it is how we experience friendship with God. It is the vehicle for our bond and closeness with him. Discovering more of the knowledge of God is how we begin to experience him and relate to him.

This covenantal perspective, this relational quality, is the single greatest way to respond to Smith’s report of an “instrumental approach” to religion or God. Through the covenant, God takes on personality. Through covenant, God makes himself known. For a generation seemingly getting fuzzier on who or what God is, the covenantal framework opens the door to see the God of the Bible most clearly.

Finally, the theology of the covenant creates a dynamic worldview that equips people to engage in these activities described here. Apologetics and conversational evangelism are supremely important in our current cultural moment. Covenant Theology provides a foundation on which someone can articulate the gospel, succinctly and from a variety of angles. The Western church struggles to share its faith, not always because we don’t believe anymore, but because we are at a loss as to how to describe our faith or engage with a neighbor in matters of religion.
And as D. Martyn Lloyd Jones suggested years ago, neglecting the doctrines of the faith dims our understanding of who God is and who we are as God’s people.

Whether we know it or not our main trouble as Christians today is still a lack of understanding and of knowledge. Not a lack of superficial knowledge of the scriptures, but a lack of knowledge of the doctrines of the scriptures. It is our fatal lack at that point that accounts for so many failures in our Christian life. Our chief need, according to this Apostle, is that ‘the eyes of our understanding’ may be wide open, not simply that we may enjoy the Christian life and its experience, but in order that we may understand the privilege and possibilities of our high ‘calling’. The more we understand the more we shall experience these riches.  

Both Lloyd-Jones and Dr. Packer place their finger on a significant symptom of how Covenant Theology in the Episcopal ethos can revitalize and re-shape the church toward health and growth. Covenant theology presses us toward a robust view of the scriptures and the doctrine of God that they illuminate. The covenantal framework demands a growing understanding of the unity of scripture, a progressive revelation from Genesis to Revelation. The story of redemption unfolds from creation to the fall to redemption and to new creation. The gospel becomes much more than its apex of the death and resurrection of Jesus. The 1979 BCP echoes the fullness of the gospel in both its Eucharistic Prayers, Baptismal Rite and in many other places. For example, in Eucharistic Prayer B, it expresses the story of redemption this way:

We give thanks to you, O God, for the goodness and love which you have made known to us in creation; in the calling of Israel to be your people; in your Word spoken through the prophets; and above all in the Word made

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flesh, Jesus, your Son. For in these last days you sent him to be incarnate from the Virgin Mary, to be the Savior and Redeemer of the world. In him, you have delivered us from evil, and made us worthy to stand before you. In him, you have brought us out of error into truth, out of sin into righteousness, out of death into life.¹⁴⁴

This is a brilliant and summarizing expression God’s covenantal commitment to his people in creation and redemption. It is an example of how covenant theology comports with the basic contours of the Prayer Book. We must unfold these prayers and place them in theological detail in our Biblical equipping in the church, but the 1979 BCP is a treasure trove and springboard to a robust and winsomely reformed gospel.

¹⁴⁴ BCP, 368.
Conclusion

The era of “reformations” that characterize the events and ideas of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on continental Europe and in the British Isles is the history of monumental change. As we have observed, albeit focused on the area of theology and the application of that theology in the church, these monumental changes grow out of a desire to broker the best of the past into the present and future. Advancement in transportation and technologies like the printing press, allowed for an acceleration in the exchange of ideas in early modern times. They created a fertile and receptive soil through which the seeds of theological discovery and recoveries could be planted, watered, fertilized, harvested and taken to market with more speed than had ever been experienced before. The experience of the Reformation was both an effort to see with fresh eyes the Apostolic Gospel (through the study of scripture, in the original languages) through the ad fontes spirit of Humanism and to apply that theology to all of life. This application of God’s Word, especially in the area of soteriology, stirred up massive implications for the church. Martin Luther’s Ninety-Five Theses, meant to spark a debate around the question of the practice of Indulgences and the way the church taught salvation, sparked much more. The movement of reform on the continent in Germany and Switzerland witnessed the adherence to reformed theology in a much more comprehensive way. The spread of reform in England and the remaining British Isles was much more nuanced and uneven in its character, this due in large part to the volatility of England’s monarchical leadership and its relationship with the British Parliament. The
Reformation ideals of biblical studies, in both the original languages and translated in the vernacular of the people, led to the rapid development of doctrine and theology.

The covenant motif would emerge out of the work of Luther and Calvin’s heirs, who built upon their theological systems in the latter part of the sixteenth century. John Calvin taught a covenant theology that included a postlapsarian Covenant of Grace. As David A. Weir notes, it was reformers after Calvin who further developed a prelapsarian Covenant of Works as a way of systematizing a federal theology. “Before the rise of the federal theology in the late sixteenth century there were various theological conceptions of the covenant, and even some precursors to the idea of a covenant in Eden.”\textsuperscript{145} As Weir describes it in the passages quoted in Chapter One of this paper, any biblical theological position will involve some sort of commitment to the covenant idea in scripture. It is too pervasive to avoid.

The Biblical evidence of Berith and Diatheke persuade even a casual student of the Bible of its covenantal thought and prominence in the scriptures. Implicit and explicit expressions of divine covenants in God’s dealings with Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and with Jesus shape the redemptive narrative. Further, the twentieth-century scholarship of George Mendenhall shed light on the nature of suzerain-vassal treaties in the Ancient Near East, a form most biblical authors (Old Testament) would have had an intimate knowledge about. It was a covenant bond treaty to which Yahweh’s people could relate.

Varying levels of commitment to a covenant theology emerge from this period in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The argument of this thesis has been that the tradition of reformed covenant theology, though embraced with varying levels of acceptance in the church, had a massive impact on the Anglican spiritual tradition. Far from being at odds with Anglican worship, covenant theology comports favorably with the contours of the prayer book, in all of its iterations, past and present. The divide between Puritans and Conformists in England characterized an acrimonious ecclesiastical struggle, but the lines of distinction in the spiritual practice of the people is a blurred image. Reflecting on the situation in seventeenth century England, Alec Ryrie notes,

Many Protestants were both puritan and conformist. More importantly, the areas of disagreement were both relatively modest and fairly contained. Most people did not feel the need to choose a partisan identity for themselves, even when such choices were available. With hindsight we know that this broke down in the 1640's: violence always compels people to choose sides. But it is a serious error to read those divisions back into the earlier period, when no one knew that war would impose its sharp polarities. This is particularly true with regard to piety and devotion.\textsuperscript{146}

William Perkins may be a clear example of this dynamic. Perkins has been thought of as both a conformist and a puritan, clearly exhibiting the churchmanship of the conformist tradition in the Church of England, while maintaining a robust reformed theology of the covenant.

Clearly, Reformed Theology in toto did not win the day in the Church of England, regarding neither its polity nor in its liturgical expression. But the influence of the

reformed theological perspective, to varying degrees, was substantial and continues throughout the contemporary Anglican tradition. Further, this thesis has demonstrated that prayer book tradition, including the 1979 Book of Common Prayer of The Episcopal Church, pairs very well with a reformed theological import where covenant theology is concerned.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the practice of paedobaptism in the Anglican tradition, and the Baptismal rite of the 1979 Book of Common Prayer. The practice of infant baptism as the sacramental entryway into the church by the children of the covenant necessitates a commitment to some form of covenant theology.

The scholarship of Lewis Bevens Schenck demonstrates the impact of the neglect of covenantal nurture in the paedobaptistic tradition. This neglect in Anglican and Presbyterian and other reformed traditions, according to Schenck, precipitated the rise of a revivalist and conversionist ministry with an emphasis on evangelism. Though effective in the early eighteenth century and afterwards, it distorted the normative practice of infant baptism and nurture in the covenant of grace. Hence, the rise of the anabaptistic practice of “believers baptism,” or a post-conversion baptism. With the dominant protestant practice of credo-baptism, it is easy to see how the idea of covenant nurturc, its practice in covenant families and the theology which informs it, has been marginalized in the church. Contemporary youth ministry (late twentieth to early twenty-first century) has been largely informed by a revivalist paradigm. This is not a critique of evangelistic efforts with and for the young. Rather, it is a summons to the church for a
more robust, communal effort and commitment to the nurture of the church’s children in the Covenant of Grace. The fruit of such nurture, in the local church, could unleash a new generation of priests, deacons, evangelists, apologists, missionaries, servants and teachers for the glory of God.

The legacy of Reformed theology in the Anglican tradition can inform a fruitful future. The truncated formulaic gospel that Packer is so wary of, is warded off as the covenant people of God spend their lives in a growing understanding of the covenants of promise and the God who made them with his people. The goal of the covenant in “Spirit and truth” (John 4.23) is consummation, the bringing together of God’s people with the Lord of all creation. Indeed, “For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself” (Acts 2.39, ESV).
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