



❖ P R E F A C E ❖

THE covenant of redemption, the pre-temporal intra-trinitarian agreement to plan and execute the redemption of the elect, was once a faithful sentry on the ramparts of the Reformed tradition, but in recent years its abilities have been questioned, criticized, and even rejected. I must admit that the first time I read about the doctrine it struck me as a bit arcane and speculative. How can we possibly know what the triune God was doing in eternity before the foundations of the world? I scrutinized the doctrine and was convinced of its validity, but it would be a few years before I would truly appreciate and study the doctrine with great interest. As I was doing research on the doctrine of union with Christ, I was surprised by how often the covenant of redemption was employed in the latter half of the seventeenth century.

The more I researched the more I realized how little literature there was on the doctrine. There have been very few monographs dedicated specifically to the covenant of redemption – only three in the last 325-plus years. I also noted that the doctrine was quite common from the seventeenth century until the twentieth century. But in the twentieth century Reformed theologians rejected it. Theologians once advocated three covenants (redemption, works, and grace) but it is now common to find people only



speaking of one, the covenant of grace. As I surveyed this trend, I also discovered how few monographs there are specifically on the covenant of works. Thus far, I have only found one, John Colquhoun's *Treatise on the Covenant of Works* (1821). In my future research, I may uncover other books on the subject. As common as it was in classic Reformed theology, I think numerous theologians have been critical of the doctrine in the contemporary period for a host of reasons. My hope is to remedy this lacuna on these two vital doctrines, the covenants of redemption and works.

My original plan was to write a one-volume comprehensive treatment of the covenant of redemption, but the manuscript grew ungainly and, in a very un-Solomon like manner, I decided to divide it. I offer a detailed history of the doctrine in *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016). Readers interested in the history of the doctrine should consult that work. I present a summary of my historical findings in Part I of this study. This book focuses upon a systematic statement of the doctrine.

In my grand scheme, this book constitutes the first of a three-volume covenant theology, with sequel volumes on the covenants of works and grace. I firmly believe that, as suspicious as many people are of it, there are nevertheless tremendous benefits and insights in classic Reformed covenant theology. Even though twentieth-century Reformed theologians such as Murray, Schilder, and Hoeksema either rejected or redefined the covenant of redemption and outright rejected the covenant of works, I remain unpersuaded by their arguments.

Reformed Orthodoxy and classic covenant theology still have much to offer. The threefold covenant scheme (redemption, works, and grace) offers the best explanation of the biblical data. God willing, I aim to continue to defend this claim in forthcoming volumes. For the time being, this is the first installment in proving



PREFACE

the viability and orthodoxy of classic Reformed covenant theology. I believe one of the reasons the Reformed church has struggled with matters related to the doctrine of justification is because we have become unfamiliar with key elements in classic covenant theology. Case in point, Christ's identity as covenant surety, a key pillar of the covenant of redemption, provides important data regarding the material cause of justification. The covenant of redemption also delivers important information regarding the priority of the forensic to the transformative benefits in redemption. Or, in more technical terms, the covenant of redemption explains why justification precedes sanctification in the *ordo salutis* (order of salvation). These are not the only issues I address in this book, as the covenant of redemption touches upon many other doctrines. In many respects, I believe that the entire system of doctrine lies in seminal form within the covenant of redemption. This makes explaining and constructing the doctrine very challenging but nevertheless very rewarding.

There are several things to note. First, I use the English Standard Version for Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted by an asterisk (*). All Scripture quotations with an asterisk are my own translations. Second, all quoted confessions and catechisms, unless otherwise noted, come from Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss, eds., *Creeks and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, 3 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. Third, I have entered into dialogue with contemporary theology when necessary. One of the Reformed church's failings, I believe, is that she has not engaged recent contemporary theology. Charles Hodge, B. B. Warfield, J. Gresham Machen, Geerhardus Vos, and Herman Bavinck brought classic Reformed theology to the church's public square. It seems to me that in the latter half of the twentieth century, the Reformed church became insular and

preoccupied with internecine skirmishes. While people were debating the length of the days of creation, Geneva was burning. The New Perspective on Paul was making deleterious inroads into the Reformed church. Times of small uncivil wars replaced the days of Machen's *Christianity and Liberalism*. The lion of Princeton no longer roared; instead whispers of higher criticism skulked out of Reformed academia. All is not lost and there are, I believe, signs of life. A new generation of Reformed theologians has taken up the cause of bringing Reformed Orthodoxy and covenant theology back to the church's public square. My hope is to contribute in some small way to this ongoing effort – to turn our introspective gaze away from ourselves and once again extraspectively look to the broader church and even the outside world.

My aim is to retrieve and recover classic Reformed covenant theology for the church. My grandfather once said, 'You can't give away what you don't own.' Each generation must appropriate the truth and pass it on to subsequent generations. The moment we believe that we can merely assume key doctrinal truths is the moment that we become vulnerable to forgetting and losing them. My hope and prayer, therefore, is that the church would rediscover the wonder, beauty, and glory of classic Reformed covenant theology. And in this case, I hope that this book on the covenant of redemption is but one small step in having a better understanding of God's covenants. For in them we find life, redemption, and eternal joy – we glorify our triune Lord and enjoy Him forever.