

The Problematic Law-Grace Scheme of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith

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ABSTRACT

In this article the question has been pursued as to whether the theology which eventually found expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, actually displays a law-grace scheme which might also be threatening the sola gratia of their formation in the reality of the church in South Africa. After historical influences and the verdicts of the confessions regarding the covenant and the law had been closely scrutinised, it was concluded that the tabled confessions indeed did deviate from the grace-law scheme of the reformation with implications for the reformational sola gratia. The concerning fact that these confessions did not only have worldwide influence upon the reformed world and South Africa, but that they may also have an impact in Africa via the Reformed Baptists, is to be lamented.

Keywords: Law; Grace; Westminster Confession of Faith; 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith; Federalism Wet; Genade; Westminster Geloofsbelydenis; 1689 Baptiste Geloofsbelydenis; Federalisme

INTRODUCTION

In his book, *Bevrydende Waarheid: Die karakter van die gereformeerde belydenis*, Jonker (1994:9-10) refers to Van Ruler (1947:65-66), who appealing to Noordmans, indicated that the confession is a staff, a stick and a voice. As a staff to accompany one, it has an edifying purpose: it should serve as medium for the preaching and as conclusion of the truth to enhance the good course of the church in the world. As a stick to hit with, the creeds have a polemic function: it should unmask heresy. As voice, however, it should also incite the congregation to sing the praise of the Lord because it expresses the richness of the salvation in words.

That then is the reason why it is so obvious that a creed can have far-reaching consequences in the church of the Lord. Is it possible that the staff and the stick instead of bringing the liberation of grace could place believers under legalistic coercion to such an extent that it, as voice, could smother the song of praise?

In the light of this unsettling possibility, the point of view which the Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith hold regarding the place and function of the law is to be investigated in this article.

The Westminster Confession of Faith's global impact upon the church may not be underestimated. It is without a doubt the reformed creed which had, and still has, the greatest influence on the reformed world. Together with the Larger Catechism and Shorter Catechism it has for longer than 300 years exercised a significant influence on various churches worldwide that have adopted the confession and catechism as their doctrinal standard. Here we think not only of the Church of Scotland but also of the Presbyterian churches worldwide. This confession has, of course, also been adapted and adopted by the Congregationalists in England in the form of the Savoy Declaration (1658). In similar fashion the Second London Baptist Confession (1689), or the so-called 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith came into existence. Reformed Baptists worldwide still presently subscribe to this creed (Duncan III 2004:XIV-XV).

In South Africa therefore this confession definitely did not only have an impact via the Presbyterian church.

It is, however, especially through the Reformed Baptists that there now is a new significant influence being exercised in South Africa and throughout the rest of Africa.

Aucamp (2011:234-238) indicates that Reformed Baptists in South Africa, who all subscribe to the 1689 Baptist Confession of

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Faith, are experiencing a new revival due to the so-called Sola 5 affiliation of like-minded congregations that were instituted in 2005. There is still constant growth in the number of congregations that have become part of this affiliation both inside South Africa as well as in various other southern African countries (Chase 2017).

The relevance, therefore, of the question that this article intends to investigate is then all the more of cardinal interest both for the church in South Africa and in Africa: *is the sola gratia of the reformation perhaps being threatened by the confessions at hand to such an extent that grace is being made subordinate to law?*

THE RELEVANT THEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSIO OF FAITH

When one looks at the theological background of the Westminster Confession of Faith, which had an impact upon their handling of the law and the covenant, it becomes quite clear that there was a formative influence upon the Westminster Theology by a reformed theology which was different from that of John Calvin.

The first theologian who must be mentioned in this regard is Heinrich Bullinger. According to Carr (2009:4-5), Bullinger (1504-1575) had an impact upon the Westminster Confession of Faith specifically via a series of published sermons called *The Decades* (Bullinger 1849) which became compulsory reading for preachers in England. The important thing for our study is the fact that Vos (1980:235) commented that the *Decades* was a piece of work "structured entirely by the covenant idea", as he called it.

Vos makes the insightful remark that the theology of Calvin is built upon the basis of the Trinity and for that reason the covenant could not come to the fore as the dominant principle in his theology (Vos 1980:236). The works of McCoy and Baker(1991) more than any other, identify Bullinger as the primary source of the whole federal movement, and his *De testamentoseufoedere Dei unico etaeterno*(1534) as the seminal work - out of which the rest of federalism so-to-speak emanates.

As McCoy (1957:60) says: "The real beginning of federalism, however, is found in Heinrich Bullinger, successor to Zwingli at Zurich."

Bullinger indicates very clearly that the principle of law or works functions in a characteristic and decisive way in the Mosaic administration of the covenant of grace. The law of Moses is in a certain sense a repetition of the life-principle in the order of creation, called the law of nature which was originally given to Adam before the Fall. The analysis of this principle of law presents Bullinger with an opportunity to describe the similarities and differences between the Old and New Testament.

As he expresses it:

In the very substance, truly you can find no diversity: the difference which is between them consists in the name of administration, in a few accidents, and certain circumstances (Bullinger 1537:162).

A further important shift in emphasis with eventual deep-seated implications upon the Westminster Confession of Faith is, however, also visible with Melancton (1497-1560). Diemer (1953:23-39) professes that he is already returning to the scholastic-Aristotelian nature/ grace paradigm. Where Calvin, Zwingli and Bullinger refer to ONE covenant of grace, Melancton now makes a distinction between a general covenant(*foedusgenerale*) which God closed with man before the Fall and in which case the law of nature is valid, and a special covenant (*foedusspeciale*) which is valid from all eternity and was made with all the elect on a basis that is determined by God alone.

It is however, Ursinus, who establishes the idea of a double-covenant (*Doppelbund*) since 1562. Zachary Ursinus (1534-83) who initially studies under Philip Melancton in Wittenberg, becomes the first theologian who in 1562 in his Catechism, distinguishes between a *foedusnaturale*(natural covenant) which was instituted between God and man, and the *foedus gratia* or covenant of grace which comes into operation after the Fall. He therefore makes use of a pre-lapsarian covenant as a way to interpret the story about man before the Fall (Genesis 1-3); this is in contrast to Calvin, Zwingli and Bullinger and the other Reformers who only work with the covenant of grace as a post-lapsarian covenant which was closed with sinners after the Fall. The promise of the latter was fulfilled in Christ (Carr 2009:5-6; Torrance 1994:21).

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For the first time in the reformed tradition the term *foedus* was used to interpret creation and human existence before the Fall.

Ursinus's fellow-professor, Caspar Olevianus (1536-87) also teaches that God maintained the covenant that He had with Adam, and he then calls it *foedus creationis*, or creation-covenant (Jonker 1989:84; McCoy & Baker 1991:39).

For both Ursinus and Olevianus the concept of a covenant hasn't yet become a co-ordinating principle in their theology. There is no reference to this in the Heidelberg Catechism or in Pareu's commentary on Ursinus's Catechism (Torrance 1994:23).

Before the end of the 16th century it does however acquire such a dominating function when, under the British, the federal and Calvinistic schools-of-thought converge closely to find expression in the English Puritanism and in the Scottish covenant-tradition. In 1585 Fenner publishes his *Sacra Theologia* with a preface by Thomas Cartwright. According to Torrance this is the first piece of work of which we know where the term "covenant of works" (*foedus operum*), or the "covenant of law" was used. He combined High Calvinism and federal theology in a way which Ursinus had never done before (Weir 1990:147).

It also becomes all the more obvious that the whole federal idea of the doctrine of the two covenants was growing in importance through the fact that James Ussher (1581- 1656), together with Perkins and Ames of the prominent Federalists had constituted the so-called Irish Articles of 1615 at the beginning of the seventeenth century. These articles are in fact the first confession which explicitly uses the terminology of "covenant of works". These articles not only prepare the way for the drafting of the Westminster Confession, as far as the federal idea is concerned but also provides the basic order and structure of the Westminster Confession (Mitchell 1838:117).

We thus find in Fenner the bridge between early federal theology and the federal Calvinism of the seventeenth century. The idea that the two covenants (law and grace) are the two stages through which God executes his two eternal decrees, we also see especially in William Perkins's work in England. He constantly uses the twin ideas of natural law (*Decalogue*) and covenant. Both are defined in highly contractual terms. God will be merciful if the law has been

satisfied. It is an interesting fact, according to Torrance, that Perkins was one of the most widely-read Puritans of the seventeenth century and, as such, that he would undoubtedly have been read by the writers of

The Westminster Confession of Faith. His most well-known pupil was William Ames, whose own pupil was then John Cocceius.

It is clear that the concept of *foedus naturale* by the end of the 16th century was the co-ordinating principle of the widely-acclaimed interpretation of reformed theology, as federal theology. In Fenner we thus find a bridge between earlier federal theology and the "Federal Calvinism" of these seventeenth century, which was developed further by William Perkins ((1558-1602) in England and by Robert Rollock (1555-1599) in Scotland (Carr 2009:7-10).

It is significant that Rollock goes as far as to say: "... the greatest part of the Old Testament is spent propounding, repeating and expounding the covenant of works" (Rollock 1849:43).

Yet Rollock makes it clear that amidst all this the law-administration doesn't change the contents of the Mosaic covenant. The Mosaic covenant still remains a specific historic manifestation of the covenant of grace (Karlberg 1980:23). These changes which initially start with Fenner, are eventually brought to the Westminster meeting where it finds its classical expression in the Westminster Confession of Faith, and later via the Westminster Confession of Faith in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.

THE ANTINOMIAN STRUGGLE OF THE 1640'S AND FURTHER AND THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSIO OF FAITH.

When one looks at the culmination of chapter 19 of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, it is striking that, in comparison to some of the other chapters, a really large amount of space is allotted to the confession of this law. The reason for this is to be found in an antinomian controversy which raged on throughout the 1640's and even later. It is especially strikingly apparent in the schism between Congregationalists and Presbyterians of 1690 and later (Hulse 1993:24-26).

Gamble's doctorate thesis (Gamble 2015) gives particular insights in this regard. He indicates quite convincingly that the Westminster

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Confession of Faith, who were by no means unanimous in their thoughts around the law, were intentionally set upon curbing this antinomian threat. He saw it as a threat from a radical religious movement which was growing at such an alarming rate that it could cause anarchy in the country and was conflicting with that which the compilers viewed as their precious reformed legacy.

The declarations of the Westminster Confession of Faith regarding the law must be seen both in the light of the theological background of the compilers and this reactionary agenda which the Westminster Confession of Faith saw tabled as a result of the threat of the Antinomians.

THE RELATIONSHIP, DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSIO OF FAITH AND THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSIO OF FAITH WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE LAW

The great majority of material in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith originally came from that of the Westminster Confession of Faith. It is therefore assumed that the Westminster is the specific document which was revised (cf. Chute, Finn and Haykin 2015:61-74).

Waldron(1995:428) however, points out that this was not the case. A thorough study of the 1689 shows that it is the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order upon which Collins and Cox of the Petty France Church, the compilers of the initial Second London Confession of Faith, worked in 1677. The dominant Westminster language thus appeared via the screening of the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order which had been compiled in 1658 by the Congregationalists, also known as the Independents. Many of the Westminster Assembly's delegates were also represented here (Hulse 1993:7).

The great respect of the Baptists for the Savoy and Westminster, however, doesn't mean that it is copied slavishly. Deviations are found regarding the state, the baptism and also the covenant. The use of the First London Confession of Faith also testifies of a slavish pursuance in various aspects of the former confessions. Waldron points out that out of the 160 paragraphs in the 1689, as many as 146 come from the Savoy, which in various regards reflect the Westminster. Eight come out of the First London Confession of Faith and six come from Collins and Cox (Waldron 1995:429).

Hand-in-hand with this confession's declarations regarding the law, his basic thoughts revolve around the basic relationship between God and man, which can be described as a covenantal relationship. It is striking that the term "covenant of works" is absent in the treatment of the covenant (ch.7) in the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith while the corresponding paragraph 7.2 in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Savoy does, in fact, contain the term. It would seem that the authors of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith have theological objections against the term, especially when the term is also removed from paragraphs 6:1 and 19:1.

The problem with the supposition of theological objections against the term is that both 19:6 and 20:1 of the Westminster Confession keep the phrase "covenant of works". An explanation of this ambivalence could have been that the authors of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, although they have objections against the use of the term, do seem to agree with the basic idea.

Waldron(1995:95), however, points out that the the principle signatories of the creed undoubtedly are in favour of the term. Editorial considerations, however, cause the removal of the term in paragraphs 6:1, 7:2 and 19:1.

The reason for the omission in Chapter 7 is that the single title "Of God's covenant" in the aforementioned creeds is contradicted by the mention of two covenants. Hence the fact of only one covenant being mentioned in 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith: the "covenant of grace"(Waldron 1995:95).

THE FEDERAL IDEA OF THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSIO OF FAITH SCRUTINISED MORE CLOSELY

Since, as indicated, the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith as well as the Savoy Declaration of Faith and Order are subordinate to the Westminster, the latter will now be used for further evaluation.

God's Covenantal Action towards Man: The Covenant of the Works

The Westminster Confession of Faith states it very clearly that God's dealings with man are covenantal. It is expressed as follows:

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

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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 a covenant (WCF 7.1).

Mc Williams(1991:11) quite rightly comments that the confession makes it very clear here that man is dependent upon God's grace. If it had not been for God's voluntary descent towards man, there would not have been any possibility of salvation.

It is, though, also clear that the confession regards the relationship between God and man as a law "... reasonable creatures do owe obedience unto Him as their Creator".

Karlberg (1980:39) indicates that the confession repeatedly connects the principle of the legacy of works to the first covenant (WCF 6.6;7.2;8.4,5;11.3;19.1,6 also compares these to the Larger Catechism's Q.A.20, 38, 70, 71, and 93).

This original covenant between God and man is a covenant of works.

God gave to Adam a law, as a covenant of works by which he bound him and all his posterity to personal, entire, exact and perpetual obedience, promised life upon the fulfilling, and threatened death upon the breach of it, and endued him with power and ability to keep it (WCF19.1).

Whichever way it may be, from both these creeds, it is clear that Adam could receive life if he could keep this "law". And he was capable of doing this. In fact, it is clear that all people still prevail under this covenant of works before they come to the faith in Christ. The confession then makes the following comment:

This law, after his fall, continued to be a perfect rule of righteousness, and, as such, was delivered by God upon Mount Sinai, in ten commandments and written in two tables: the first four commandments containing our duty towards God; and the other six, our duty to man(WCF19.2).

This paragraph is open to misunderstanding and was undoubtedly dealt with in an invalid manner by certain recent authors. In this way then Torrance(1994:32) comments as follows:

... The federalists said that God made the covenant of works(law) three times - first with Adam, who broke it, second with

Israel at Sinai, who also broke it; third with Christ who kept it on behalf of the elect.

He clearly argues that the confession teaches that the Decalogue was issued again at Sinai as a covenant of works. Other theologians like Mark, W. Karlberg and Meredith Kline, who strongly criticise the more Barthian inclinations of Torrance (Karlberg, 1980:1-7), also teach that the Mosaic covenant can be interpreted as a work-covenant, though not exclusively so (Kline 1991:434).

Karlberg alleges that " The Mosaic Covenant is to be viewed in some sense (underlining mine) as a covenant of works" (Karlberg 1980:3). In fact according to him Biblical exegesis demands that one should "not reduce the Mosaic Covenant to a covenant of 'pure grace' with no element of works in its administration"(Karlberg 1980:56).

When one takes cognisance of the theologians who had an influence on the Westminster Confession of Faith, one has to agree with Karlberg that it shouldn't be said too quickly that the Westminster Confession of Faith explicitly taught that the Mosaic law was a covenant of works.

Yet Torrance's view can be understood for, seen on the surface, it would seem that the Westminster Confession of Faith did indeed tend to interpret the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works.

The least one can therefore say, is that the connection between the two paragraphs of chapter 19 of the confession, implies that the Mosaic covenant, in at least more than ' one or other way ' is a covenant of works. As indicated, paragraph 19:1 states that the law was given to Adam as a covenant of works. Paragraph 2 begins with " *This law...*" which clearly refers to the law that is described in paragraph 1. One can easily argue that since the law in paragraph 1 can be described as a covenant of works, that then the law in paragraph 2 should also refer to a covenant of works.

Yet this is not a watertight argument if one bears in mind that the law was given for two different and distinct objectives:

Firstly the law was given to Adam alone (although later to Christ) as a covenant of works (cf.WCF 19.1; WLC, 92).

Secondly the law was given to all people as a " perfect rule of righteousness" (WCF19.2;

WLC 95).

The connection between paragraph 1 and 2 of chapter 19 is therefore then that the content of the law is the same. The discontinuity between the two paragraphs is found in the use of the same law as indicated by the qualifying subordinate sentences "as a covenant of works" and "and" as a perfect rule of righteousness" respectively (Kevan 1993:448-445).

It may also seem as if the Westminster Confession of Faith regards the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, since there is reference to the Mosaic covenant as law while the new covenant is depicted as gospel (WCF 7:5-6). The Old Testamental saints are described as if they were "under the law", whilst the New Testamental believers on the contrary are described as "under the Gospel" (WCF 20.1; 25.2).

Since "law" is also used to describe the "Covenant of Works", it may be deduced that the Mosaic covenant *in a certain way* may also be a covenant of works. On closer scrutiny it appears that the Confession uses the term "law" as a synonym for the Old Testament. According to Westminster Confession of Faith 7.5 "This covenant [of grace] was differently administered in the time of the law and in the time of the gospel"

And Westminster Confession of Faith 25.2 says: "The visible church, which is also catholic or universal under the Gospel (not confined to one nation, as before under the law)...."

It is clear that 'law' does not exclusively refer to the Mosaic covenant, but to the whole Old Testament, inclusive of the Abrahamic and Davidian covenants. Therefore "under the law" was once again not equivalent to the understanding of the covenant of works but refers to life under the Old dispensation.

It is, however, undeniably true that Larger Catechism 93 of the moral law says that it does the following: "promising life upon the fulfilling, and threatening death upon the breach of it" and Larger Catechism 98 says that the moral law is summarised in the Ten Commandments given at Sinai. When these two ideas are connected, the logical conclusion may be drawn that the law which was given to Israel, gives life if it is obeyed and brings death if it is transgressed.

Seen in this way, *the confession does indeed teach that Israel (at least in a certain way)¹ was under a covenant of works.*

Regarding believers and the 'covenant of works', the confession shows that Christ kept the covenant of works in the place of the believers (cf. "Christ and the perfection of his obedience": WCF 19.6) so that they would not any more stand subjected to such works as far as their justification is concerned.

Although true believers be not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet it is of great use to them (WCF 19.6)

It is at this point that the so-called tri-section of the Tora, in moral, ceremonial and civil laws, which had already been present in embryo stage with certain church-fathers, was given a fixed form by Thomas Aquinas; via the Reformers it was adopted by federalism, thus obviously copied and also pursued in its three-way split of the moral law, which is also found amongst the Reformers (Thomas Aquinas *Sum. Theol.* 1a2ae.99, 35; Calvin *Inst.* 2.7.6).

The Tri-Section of the Law (Tora)

The Moral (Ethical) Law

The Westminster Confession of Faith reads:

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof; and that, not only in regard of the matter contained in it, but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. Neither doth Christ in the gospel, in any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation (WCF 19.5).

¹The fact that the confession isn't crystal-clear regarding the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works, should probably be understood in the light of the fact that according to Kevan (1993:113) there were four different views amongst seventeenth century Puritans regarding the nature of the Mosaic covenant:

Firstly there are those who see the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works.

Secondly there are those who see it as a subordinate covenant.

Thirdly those that see it as a combination of the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.

Fourthly those that see the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of grace

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Neither are the for ementioned uses of the law contrary to the grace of the gospel,

but do sweetly comply with it; the Spirit of Christ subduing and enabling the will of man to do that freely, and cheerfully, which the will of God revealed in the law, requireth to be done (WCF 19.7).

The Ususpoliticus (First Use) or Civil Use of the Moral Law in the State and Community

In paragraph 19.4 the confession says that all the civil laws fell into disuse except the "general equity" of those laws. This language usage most probably comes from Calvin (*Inst.*4.20.16) and simply means that all the civil laws given to Israel except those which are both "general" and "equitable" (or "fair") for all the nations, had expired together with Israel. These "general" and "equitable" laws are normally called the "natural law" which is written on the hearts of the whole of mankind (Rom 2:14-15) Here, thus, the confession calls the civil or first use of the moral law, the natural law, which would be contained and regarded as generally acceptable, to all civil governments including that of the people of Israel. Wherever this law is to be found in the Old Testament and in the laws of other nations, it can be said that the "equity" of the civil laws of Moses are applied to other modern states.

The Ususelentichus (Second Use) or Evangelical Use of the Moral Law as Teacher of Sin in the Experience of Repentance towards God

It is clear that the law in its "second "use as a medium through which sinners can come to the conviction of their sins, is embedded in the following pronouncement:

... discovering also the sinful pollutions of their nature, hearts and lives; so as, examining themselves thereby, they may come to further conviction of, humiliation for, and hatred against sin, together with a clearer sight of the need they have of Christ, and the perfection of his obedience (WCF 19.6).

The Ususdidacticus or Normativus (Third Use) or the Didactic Use of the Moral Law Asrule for Grateful Obedience to God

From paragraph 19.7 it is clear that the Holy Spirit, in fact, enables the believers to keep to the demands of the work covenant in their sanctification.

God's will, therefore, is unequivocally bound to this "moral law" which forms the core of the works covenant and still provides the guidelines for the sanctification of believers (WCF 19.2). The so called "third" use of the morality law is taught here. The confession thus shows that the believer is not under the curse of the law any more but that the law reminds the believer of his sin and shows him what he deserves, in order to make him both humble and grateful for the work of Christ on his behalf. Yet the moral law of God has also been given to indicate to the believer how he/she should live for God in Christ and under the Holy Spirit (WCF 19.6-7). It is insightful that the Sabbath law is dealt with as a moral and not a ceremonial law. According to the Westminster Confession of Faith, God (did):

... by his Word, in a positive, moral and perpetual commandment,

binding all men, in all ages, he hath particularly appointed one day in seven for a Sabbath to be kept holy unto him.....the first day of the week , which is called the Lord's day, and is to be continued to the end of the world as the Christian Sabbath...(WCF 22.7).

The Ceremonial Law

The confession (WCF 19.3) says that the majority of the law given at Sinai was ceremonially only applicable to Israel. As already indicate, the law of the Sabbath isn't classified as ceremonial, but as moral.

Civil Law

As far as this subsection of the law is concerned Westminster Confession of Faith points out that a large part of the law was given for the social right and justice of the people of Israel alone (WCF 19.4) so that the moment when those laws were fulfilled and the people of Israel ceased to exist, an enormous number of these laws were wiped away in Christ and "expired".

SUMMARY OF THE FEDERAL² THINKING IN THE WESTMINSTER CONFESSON OF FAITH

²In this article federal theology implies that form of Calvinism which gives a central place to the concept of the covenant (*foedus, pactum, testamentum*) and whatever would distinguish between various covenants (*foedera*) when one speaks about God's relationship with the world. There is specific reference to a "covenant of works" (*foedus operum* or *foedus naturale*- the covenant of

AND THE 1689 BAPTIST CONFESSION OF FAITH

Despite certain clear developments and differences in focus, especially as far as the merciful character as such of the Mosaic covenant is concerned, we can still summarise the federal theology's scheme of thought in the light of the two confessions, as follows(cf. also Jonker 1989:83-87).

- The confessions work with a comprehensive covenant of grace, as already discovered with Calvin. This covenant is specifically called the "covenant of grace" because it was concluded with fallen man and is therefore an expression of God's merciful concern with man, in order to save him, despite his sin, and to let him partake in the eternal glory. This already occurs after the Fall (Gen. 3:15).
- It is furthermore argued that this covenant of grace is based upon the eternal agreement or covenant between the Father and the Son, which was entered into with the view to the salvation of the elect.
- Even though the covenant of grace was entered into only after the Fall, it is unthinkable that the relationship in which man existed before the Fall, wouldn't have been a covenantal relationship already. The covenant with Adam was especially based upon the idea that the covenant of grace would wish to restore a relationship which had been broken by the Fall, and as such had to bear the characteristics of a covenant- the so-called covenant of works.
- Within this covenant of works God expected obedience to His commandment. The presumption is that man by his nature had knowledge of God and his will. God was to reward him for his obedience, but punish him for disobedience.
- Even though Adam broke this covenant, the demand for it still remains true for all people.
- The Decalogue, or "Moral law", which God gave Israel at Sinai, is as far as its contents are concerned, similar to the covenant of works, but was given to Israel as a perfect directive for the life of righteousness.

law) and a covenant of grace (*foedusgratiae*).

- This "moral" or "ethical" law is still the directive for the Christian's life of gratitude. Except for this normative (third) use, the moral law also in this dispensation fulfills a civil (first use), function as well as a pedagogical (second) function.
- On the whole the intention of the covenant of grace is that the demands of the covenant of works have to be met. Since the sinner was unable to comply with this himself, Christ came to do it in his stead.
- In this way the covenant of grace is, in fact, there in order to fulfill the original covenant of God with man, the covenant of works, with its demand for keeping the law.

IMPLICATIONS

Some implications of this basic thought-system are high-lighted, and where applicable an indication will be provided as to how these differ from the thoughts of the Reformers, namely those of Luther and Calvin.

The Precedence of Law Over Grace

In federal theology grace is only mentioned after the Fall. Before the Fall man existed in the state of a "natural independent" and therefore didn't need grace. In contrast to this, Calvin, as well as Luther, accepts that Adam before the Fall was dependent on God for everything. This then can already be described as a state of grace (Le Roux 1991:55). According to federalism, grace has a "recovery-function", in other words it is not primary but secondary. After judgement man will be restored to the position that he held before the Fall (with certain variations). Jeremiah 31:31-34 is seen as a promise of the return to the covenantal state (as it was) before the Fall (Weir 1990:6-7). As far as priority is concerned then, law is thus more important than grace, for it logically precedes grace. The gospel, then, in fact, finds its place once the works of the law maintain a primary place (Bell 1985:198). The great problem is that this position can easily lead towards the law being regarded as more important than gospel, since it, in fact, can be understood as the basic structure of the relationship between God and man. In the light of the above, we can thus declare, without fear of contradiction, that the gospel in the Federal scheme, logically speaking, has become an instrument only-- one that enables man, who has fallen from the covenant of works, to fulfill the law through grace again. Thus, in brief, we can say that, in the handling of the law and the

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covenant, the law has precedence over grace in federal theology.

Judicial Relationship versus Relationship of Grace

The logical consequence of the federal system could lead to the view that the relationship between God and man aren't seen primarily as a relationship of grace, as Luther and Calvin do, but as one of law. The first and most fundamental relationship between God and man, is thus seen as a legal one and not in terms of grace (Rolston 1972:133). With this the character of the covenant changed radically. Now it is no longer unilateral but practically and exclusively has the characteristic of a bilateral contract. If "law" were just another word for "obedience" without acquiring a legalistic character, it could very well also be describing a Father-child relationship. The fact that the intentional name of "covenant of works" is to indicate that the basic relationship between God and man is a relationship of works, through which man with his maintenance of the law was supposed to inherit eternal life, is indisputable. If it had not been the intention, then other names which were in circulation at the time, (like "original," or "Adamic" or "nature-" or "creation - covenant") could have been retained. The name of covenant of works was intentionally chosen specifically to express the message that man could only be saved by staying obedient to the law. One could, in fact, argue that the word "covenant" in contrast to the word "contract" contains a

personal connotation to a living community. Torrance (1994:32) points out convincingly, however, that "covenant" among federal theologians after Calvin, was seen as a bi-lateral contract, where the responsibility for the fulfilment of the covenant belonged to man. The ideal, therefore, in this scheme is then the "original" relationship between God and man, as it had been in Paradise where man justified his existence through his works.

Greater Emphasis of the Law Than on Christ

When the Sabbath law is used as a litmus-test, it becomes very clear how the Westminster federal Calvinism changed Calvin's emphasis. Calvin emphasizes the importance of one day for rest, but for him the spiritual, symbolic significance of the Sabbath idea is paramount. He sets it out as follows: "we are taught in many places in the Scripture that the foreshadowing of the spiritual

rest has taken up the most important place in the Sabbath- celebration" and also: "We must rest from all the works of our understanding so that God can work in us. As the apostle also teaches us : "we must especially rest in Him" (Calvin *Inst.*2:28-30).

When the Westminster Confession's handling of the Sabbath is used as a litmus-test

to evaluate the way in which they look at the functioning of the moral law in a Christian's life, one gets the very strong impression that the model and image towards which we should strive, isn't Christ, but "the law of universal obedience"(WCF 19.1) which had already been written in Adam's heart and still is "...the perfect rule of righteousness after the Fall" (WCF 19:2).

Paragraph 19:5 of the Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith creates the impression that Christ actually helps us to achieve this goal:

The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof, and not only in regard of the matter contained in it, , but also in respect of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it; neither doth Christ in the gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.

This of course, differs totally from Calvin who sees Christ as the model and image into which God wants to transform us: "And to bring us to better introspection, the Scripture shows us that God the Father, as he reconciled us in his Anointed with Him, so has imprinted an image in Him for us, and he wishes to make us similar to that (Calvin *Inst.*3.6.3).

The Preaching of the Law as Prerequisite to Evangelistic Preaching

Weir (1990:8-9) points out that the method of evangelistic preaching to the unconverted has undergone definite change as a result of federal theology. The means by which man comes to repentance is becoming more complicated, and evangelistic techniques similarly are also getting more sophisticated. Unconverted man must first be shown that he, through Adam, has broken and cannot maintain the covenant of works, and in this way stands condemned. As a result of this he must take refuge in the covenant of grace. With Puritans like Fenner and Perkins, the distinction between the covenant of works

made with mankind in Adam, and the subsequent covenant of grace made with the elect in Christ, was integrated in their comprehension of the *Ordo Salutis* of the Middle Ages - an order that grows out of the Mediaeval period. As Torrance (1994:36) quite rightly indicated, this order actually comes from the sacrament of penance, with its roots in Tertullian. This order can be depicted as follows: Man -Law -Sin - Repentance - Grace. God uses the covenant of law as the paidagogus to bring fallen sinners to Christ. The word "law work" is a common phenomenon in various Puritan works.³In other words, the law must first be preached, before grace and the work of Christ can be proclaimed.

Calvin sees the case differently and we notice an interesting development with him. In the Institutes of 1536, Calvin is still sharing in the Lutheran idea, namely that repentance opens the way to knowledge of Christ. The knowledge of sin, therefore, comes before the knowledge of Christ, and the law would then play a role here. Later after 1539, Calvin revises this thinking and refuses to recognize any awareness of sin any further before the gift of faith has been received.

Since his initial way of thinking remains, the result is a certain degree of inconsistency (Wendell1963:248-29). Calvin wants to avoid the concession that anything could help man to become just, which naturally includes the law. In the 1559 edition of his Institution, he makes a distinction between the repentance of the law and the repentance of the gospel. The latter is inextricably committed to faith and is incited by the gospel. As Calvin states it: "Repentance is proclaimed in the name of Christ when people hear through the teaching of the gospel that all their thoughts, all

their feelings, all their plans, are corrupted and sinful..."(underlined words my own) (Calvin *Inst.*3.3.20).

CONCLUSION

In the light of the preceding work, one cannot but come to the conclusion that the form of Calvinism, or indeed federalism, which was established in the Westminster Confession of Faith and the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith, deviated from the *sola gratia* of the reformation

³See Robert Shaw, 1845: *An Exposition of the Westminster Confession of Faith*. Ross-Shire, Scotland: Christian Focus. p. 195.

and moved to a dangerous position in which the fundamental structure of the relationship between God and man, veers towards a work relationship.

The concerning thing is that we in South Africa have been and still are affected by this. It is, for instance, insightful that the doctrine of the covenant of works, is taught in the catechism within both the Dutch Reformed Church (NG) as well as the Reformed Church (Barnard et al. 1981:225; Booyens, 1997:5). It is especially surprising if one bears in mind that the doctrine of the covenant of works is not taught in the creeds of the afore-mentioned denominations.

The preaching and teaching of the church in South Africa (which clings to the sixteenth century creeds) was probably more influenced by this than many would have admitted. Nobody would ever know how much struggling about salvific certainty, Sabbath day maintenance, etc. there might still exist among congregation members.

The matter of the Reformed Baptists in South Africa and Africa who are presently influenced via their Sola -5 affiliation, with certainly far-reaching consequences, demands further research. What is, however, concerning is the study of Koning and Buys(2016) in which certain unsettling tendencies have been exposed. Introspection (Koning& Buys 2016:5) and a shortage of conversions (Koning&Buys2016:6) as well as contextualisation (Koning & Buys 2016:6-7) could possibly be symptoms of the law-grace scheme of the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith.

May this article be instrumental in the renewed zeal to start to enthuse the *sola gratia* of the reformation in confession and deed.

SOLA DEO GRATIA

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