

The Idea of the Covenant*

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Since the time of the Reformation, the doctrine of the covenant has occupied an important place in Reformed theology, and a dominating position in the life of the Reformed churches. It is a peculiarly Reformed heritage, even more distinctively so than the doctrine of sovereign predestination, for while the latter truth is, held by other than Reformed churches, the truth of the covenant was developed exclusively by them. And we can agree with Dr. G. Vos when he finds the reason for this in the strong emphasis which Reformed theology places on the glory of God as the end of all things, for the realization of the covenant is, indeed, the highest self-revelation of God as the implication of **all** infinite perfections, and as the Triune, Who within Himself lives a ,covenant life of friendship.(1).

This development of and emphasis on is not to be traced to Calvin as its source, and certainly not to Melancton, the synergist, as some would contend, but rather to Bullinger and the Swiss theologians. Calvin does, indeed, speak of the covenant, both in his insistence of the unity of the Old and New Testaments, (2) and in his defense of paedobaptism (3); but he does so rather in passing. It was through their contact with Zurich that Olevianus and the Reformed theologians of Germany gave the doctrine of the covenant, through the same contact this truth received a place an integral place in their theology (4); and in the theological system of the theologians of Reformed persuasion in the Netherlands, such as Junius, Gomarus, Trelcatius Sr. and Jr., etc. and in England, of whom may be mentioned the names of Thomas Blake, Perkins, and James Ussher.(5). The development seems to have been thus that the idea of the covenant was applied, first of all, to the relation between God and His elect in Christ, and to the way of salvation, and later to the relation between God and Adam in the state of rectitude. The former became known as the covenant of grace, the latter was known by various terms, such as the covenant of works, the covenant of nature, the covenant of the law.

This latter development of the idea of the covenant with Adam is evident from the Reformed Confessions. For while some of the earlier Confessions, such as the Confessio Belgica and the Heidelberg Catechism do speak of the covenant of grace, they fail to mention the covenant of works.(6). And not only are they silent concerning the covenant relation between God and man in the state of rectitude, but it is a striking fact that, in their explanation of original sin they follow the organic line, and omit the idea of the imputation of Adam's guilt to all his posterity altogether, (7). This is all the more important in view of the fact that Reformed theologians generally adopted the creationist view of the origin of the individual soul. Even the, Canons of Dordrecht, 1613-19, attribute the corruption of the human nature wholly to the propagation of the fallen and corrupt nature of our first parents: the idea of federal imputation is not so much as suggested. (8). Only when we come to the Westminster Confession, which dates from the middle of the seventeenth century, do we find mention of the covenant of Works, and, in close connection therewith, of the imputation of original guilt as a basis for the¹corruption of all mankind. (9). Since that

time, however, also the idea that the original relation between God and man was that of a covenant, was generally accepted and developed by Reformed theologians everywhere. The covenant idea occupies an essential place in any Reformed system of dogma. Reformed theology is federal theology.

Now, in this ,essay we are to answer the question: what is the idea of the covenant? By idea, I take it, is meant something similar to general conception. The term is derived from the Greek *idein*, to see, and refers therefore to a mental image of anything, whether sensible or insensible. My subject, therefore, concerns the proper conception of the covenant in all its essential elements, such as might be expressed in a definition. Besides, the subject as it was assigned to me tacitly implies that there is one, general idea or concept of the covenant that is common to every form this relation between God and man may assume. Taking my subject somewhat broadly, I shall try, after having given a historical review of the question, to answer three questions, viz., 1. What is the covenant relation? 2. What is its deepest ground? 3. How is it finally realized?

When we consult our Reformed Confessions, we find little or nothing that can be of aid to us in defining the idea of the covenant. The Heidelberg Catechism merely declares that infants "sowohl als die Alten in den Bund Gottes and seine Gemeinde gehoren," and, therefore, "sollen sic durch die Taufe, als des Bundes Zeiehen, der christlichen Kirche eingeleibt and von her unglaubigen Kindern unterschieden werden," but does not define the idea of the covenant. The Confessio Belgica declares of the children of the believers: "lesquels nous crayons devoir etre baptises et scelles du signe d'alliance." Our Baptism Form speaks of an "eternal covenant of grace," which God the Father seals unto us, and of two parts in the covenant, our part consisting in this, that we are "obliged unto new obedience, namely that we cleave to this one God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; that we trust in him, and love him with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our mind, and with all our strength; that we forsake the world, crucify our old nature, and walk in a new and holy life; and it declares that "baptism is a seal and undoubted testimony that we have an eternal covenant of grace with God." And children of believers are said to be entitled to baptism "as heirs of, the kingdom of God and of his covenant." (10). All this is, indeed, significant, but it offers no definition of the covenant.

The ,Westminster Confession reflects the later development of the covenant idea in English theology. It describes the covenant with Adam as something added to his relation to God as creature, and as "a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience;" and speaks of the covenant of grace as a second covenant, "wherein he freely offered unto sinners life and salvation by Jesus Christ, requiring of them faith in him that they may be saved."(11). Here we meet with the idea of the covenant as something additional and secondary, a way to a certain goal, a means to an end. And it is this notion. that has become rather prevalent in Reformed theology. Thus Turrentine defines the covenant as follows: "At stricte et proprie notat pactionem Dei cum homine, per quam Deus sua bona, et praecipue vitam aeternam, illi promittit, et ab homine-vicissim officium et cultum restipulatur, certis signis externis confirmationis causa adhibitis, quod dipleuron et mutuuum vocatur, quia mutua constat partium foederatarum obligatione, hint promissione a parte Dei, inde conditionis stipulatione ab hominis parte," that is; "Strictly and properly the covenant

denotes a pact of God with man, through which God promises his blessings, particularly eternal life, to that one, and in like manner from man requires due obedience and loving worship, certain external signs being employed for the sake of confirmation; which is called bilateral and mutual, because it is established by a mutual obligation of the covenanting parties, here by the promise on the part of God; there by the keeping of the condition on the part of man."

Van Maestricht defines the covenant as "een overeenstemming tusschen God en Zijn yolk, waarin God belooft de gelukzaligheid en allerlei daaraan ondergeschikte goederen en eischt afhankelijkheid tot Zijne eer en heerlijkheid; en de Kerk van hare zijde belooft aan God afhankelijkheid en gehoorzaamheid en eischt de belofte belooning." And he defines the "Covenant of works" as "Dat verdrag 't welk God in Adam ingegaan heeft met het gansche menschelijke geslacht om aan hetzelfde te geven het eeuwige leven onder beding van eene volkomene gehoorzaamheid." (13). The covenant, according to him, is strictly bilateral, has two parties, that enter into a mutual treaty: God and the Church. (14). And according to Brakel the covenant of grace is "een overeenkomst of verdrag. . . . tusschen God. . . en de uitverkorenen, in welke God belooft de verlossing. . . en zaligheid, in welke de mensch toestemt, dezelve aanneemt," etc. (14). And the "covenant of works" he defines as an "overkerkomst tusschkn God en het menschelijk geslacht in Adam, in welke God de eeuwige zaligheid belooft, onder voorwaarde van gehoorzaamheid, en den eeuwigen dood dreigt, indien hij niet gehoorzaamde, welke belofte ken voorwaarde Adam aannam." (15). According to Prof. W. Heyns, the essence of the covenant is the "belofte om u te zijn tot een God." This promise, according to him, gives to all that are born under the covenant, the objective right to the inheritance of salvation, but their actual coming into possession of that inheritance, and the application by the Spui't to them of all the blessings of salvation, depends upon their consent by faith to the covenant. (16). In the more recent Dutch theologians one finds the glimmer of a deeper and richer notion of the covenant. Dr. A. Kuyper Sr. begins to emphasize the fundamental truth that God is a covenant God in Himself, and that the relation between the three persons of the Trinity is a covenant relation. He finds in this covenant life of the triune Jehovah the basis for all covenant dealings of God with man. And he even speaks of the covenant as a relation of friendship, in which God eats and drinks with man, and speaks with him as a man with his brother, as a friend with his friend. (17). "Verbonds-sluiting is een daad van vriendschap." (18). Yet, ultimately, he does not transcend the notion of the covenant as a means to an end, as an agreement or pact or alliance between God and man. (19). The idea of the covenant is, according to him, expressed in the definition that it is an alliance between two parties against a third. (20).

Also Dr. Bavinck emphasizes that the covenant rests in the covenant life of God Himself : "Het pacturn salutis doet ons de verhouding en het leven der drie personen in het Goddelijk wezen kennen als een verbondsleven, als een leven der hoogste zelfbewustheid en der hoogste vrijheid. Hier, binnen het Goddelijk wezen, heeft het verbond zijn voile realiteit." (21). He even finds in the covenant the very essence of religion, as fellowship with the living God. (22). But also he ultimately considers the

covenant as a means to an end, as a way of salvation. The covenant of grace "beschrijft den weg, waarlangs deze uitverkorenen tot hunne bestemming zullen geraken; het is de bedding, waarin de stroom der verkiezing zich voortbeweegt naar de eeuwigheid heen." (23). And Dr. G. Vos defines the covenant of grace as "the gracious pact between the offended God and the offending sinner, in which God promises eternal life in the way of, faith in Christ and the sinner accepts this believingly." (24). And identically the same definition may be found in the "Dogmatiek" of Prof; F. M. Ten Hoor. (25).

All these definitions of the covenant have this in common that they describe the covenant as a means to an end, not as an end, the highest end in itself. They differ only in their denotation of the essence of the covenant, some emphasizing the idea of an agreement or pact or alliance, others that of the promise, still others that of a way unto salvation. They differ, too, in their description of the parties of the covenant, and their relation to each other. According to some, the covenant is strictly unilateral, according to others it is completely bilateral, while still others prefer to speak of the covenant as unilateral in its origin but bilateral in its operation. And again, some identify the pactum salutis with the covenant of grace, while others consider the covenant of redemption as the basis for the covenant of grace. Some insist that the covenant of grace is established with Christ, others call it a pact between God and the elect, while some prefer to speak of it as an agreement between the offended God and the offending sinner. But always the covenant is essentially a means to an end, a pact or agreement, and the essential elements are always the promise of eternal life and the conditions of faith and obedience.

There are several grave and serious objections against this presentation of the idea of the covenant. First of all, how can man ever be a party, a contracting party, in relation to the living God? God is God, the infinite, eternal, self-existent One. He is the Lord, the absolute Sovereign, out of Whom and through Whom, and unto Whom are all things. There is none beside Him. And man is the creature, that owes all that he is and has, body and soul, all his powers and talents, his entire existence, every moment, to his Lord and Creator. God is the Fount, and man is the creature that drinks from that Fountain of good. God is the all-sufficient I AM, man is completely and constantly dependent for his whole life and existence upon Him. There is no obligation man can assume apart from that which is incumbent upon him by reason of his being a creature: to love the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind, and with all his strength, every moment of his existence. He can bring nothing to God, whose is all the silver and the gold, and the cattle on a thousand hills. He can do nothing for the Most High, Who, is perfectly self-sufficient. All the good man has is a gift of grace, of free and sovereign favor, from his God. Even if he may love and serve his Creator, it is a gift of divine goodness, for which man owes Him thanks. How, then, can the relation of that creature to his Creator ever be or become an agreement or pact, according to which man may merit something higher than he has already attained, even eternal life? Shall I make an alliance with the worm that crawls at my feet? Can the man that owes me a thousand dollars merit some other good that I am able to bestow upon him, by paying his debt? Can man, then, be a contracting party with the Most High., and merit anything with Him to Whom he owes all? God forbid! The covenant between God and man can never be a pact with mutual stipulations, conditions, and promises Reformed theologians have

felt this objection. And, therefore, they usually add that this form of dealing on the part of God with man, is due to His condescending grace and mercy. By grace man is put in a position in which he is a party with God, and is able to merit or attain some higher good, particularly eternal life. But I object that God cannot deny Himself, and that even by grace He cannot so condescend to man that the latter becomes a party next to Him, so that he has the prerogative to make his stipulations, and to demand eternal life on the basis of anything that he has done. The declaration of the law: "do this and thou shalt live," is for ever true, to be sure, because obedience is the sole way of God's favor, and in His favor is life; but it does not, and can never mean that by keeping God's precepts man in the state of righteousness could attain to that higher state which is called life eternal, and which is attainable only through the Son of God. And it is true, that in the covenant of grace, as in all covenants, there are, indeed, two parts, and that our part of the covenant is that we love the Lord our God with all our heart, and with all our mind, and with all our soul, and with all our strength; but let me remark, first of all, that "parts" is not the same as "parties;" and, secondly, that our part of the covenant is not a condition which we must fulfill in order to enter into the covenant of God, but rather our expression, as rational and moral creatures, of the covenant relation which God establishes with us by His grace. The covenant is first, established with us through "God's part," and our part follows, and is the fruit of that gracious act of God.

Nor do we ever read in Scripture of a mutual transaction between God and man, in which God stipulates certain conditions, which man accepts, and by fulfilling which he may make himself worthy of eternal life. The covenant of works is usually described as consisting in a promise, a condition, and a penalty. The promise is said to be eternal life, the condition is obedience in regard to the probationary command not to eat of the forbidden tree; and the penalty is death. But, first of all, let it be noted that Scripture does not speak one word, in the first three chapters of Genesis, of a mutual agreement between God and Adam. It is God that acts, and He alone. He plants the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden, and He gives Adam the command: "thou shalt not eat of it." The command is in no wise contingent upon Adam's agreement or consent. He is under the law. Secondly, the idea that God promised Adam eternal life in case he obeyed this command, is a pure invention. Scripture does not speak of such a promise, nor suggest it. The notion of such a promise is deduced from the threatened penalty: death. It is argued that, since death was the penalty on disobedience, eternal life was the implied promise. And, it may be granted, Adam would not have died had he remained obedient to God's command, but this does not imply that he would have attained to eternal life, and to heavenly glory. He would have been confirmed in the state of life in which he had been created. Moreover, we may safely state that eternal life is a form of fellowship with the living God which Adam could never attain. It is a form of life that has and requires for its basis the union of God and man established in the incarnation of the Son of God, and that has its central realization in the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. No promise of eternal life, therefore, was, nor could have been, extended to Adam, nor was the keeping of the probationary command presented to him as a condition unto that higher, heavenly life.

Nor is that other, manifestation of the covenant that is called the covenant of grace ever presented in Scripture as a pact or agreement. Uniformly we read that

God establishes His covenant. When, after man had violated God's covenant, He continues and maintains it, He reveals this act of grace in a sovereign declaration: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise: thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Gen, 3:15. On man's consent this realization of the covenant depends in no wise. Both before and immediately after the flood, the Lord says to Noah that He will establish His covenant with him, and -with his seed. The covenant is God's, and He alone establishes it, Gen. 6:18; 9:11. The same expression is used to denote God's covenant with Abraham. Gen. 17:7.

And thus it is throughout Scripture. Through Isaiah Jehovah says to His people: "I will make an everlasting covenant of peace with you." Isa. 55 :3; and through Jeremiah: "I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel." Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8 :8-10. And the unilateral character of the covenant is clearly revealed in the vision of Jehovah to Abraham recorded in Gen. 15:9 ff. Abraham is commanded to take several sacrificial animals, divide them into halves, and lay the pieces in row over against each other. Jehovah then, under the symbols of a smoking, furnace and a burning lamp, passes through the midst of the pieces. The meaning of this ritual of passing between the halves of the sacrificial animals must have been well known to Abraham. It symbolically expressed that the covenant was inviolably ratified, and that he that so ratified it, guaranteed it with his life, would rather go through death than annul it. Now, while in performing this ceremony the covenanting parties usually would pass through the pieces, because a covenant could not be of one, in the vision of Genesis 15 the Lord alone performs this act, thus indicating that He is His own party, and that He alone establishes His covenant. This is probably the reason, thy the word *BERITH* is usually rendered by the Greek *diatheke*, which emphasizes the onesidedness of this covenant.

To this we may add the consideration that this follows also from the fact that the covenant is historically established in the line of continued generations, and that infants as well as adults are comprehended in the covenant of God. How could they be included in the covenant if the establishment of it were a pact, and depended upon the consent of the covenanting parties ? Reformed theologians generally have felt that it is absurd to speak of the covenant as an agreement, a mutual alliance between the infinite God and the speck of dust that is man, and, therefore, they usually admit that it is unilateral in its establishment. But if this be true, it depends throughout on God alone. It is no longer a pact; It has no conditions. God sovereignly performs all that belongs to the establishment and realization of the covenant. He alone and sovereignly determines who are to be received into covenant relation with Him. And on His faithfulness alone it is based. God is faithful! That is the reason why the covenant is eternal. He maintains it. That is why it cannot be broken. It is an everlasting covenant! And here lies another reason why the Scriptural idea of the covenant cannot be correctly represented by those notions of it that make it a way to salvation, or a means to an end. It is an everlasting covenant. "I will make an everlasting covenant of peace with you," Isa. 55 :3. "I will make an everlasting covenant with them," Isa. 61:8. "And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do them good; but I will put my fear in their hearts, that they shall not depart from me." Jer. 32 :40. "Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore." Ezek. 37:26. Similarly, our Baptism Form speaks of an eternal covenant of grace. Now, a way not everlasting. When the destination is reached the way is come

to an end. A means is not eternal. When the thing to be effected by it has been attained, the means has served its purpose. An everlasting covenant, therefore, is not a way or means, but is the destination, the end itself. It is not accidental, but essential.

We agree, then, with Dr. Bavinck, when he states that the covenant is the very essence of religion, of religion, that is, in the sense of fellowship with the living God. And we would express this somewhat more clearly and concisely by maintaining that the covenant is, essentially, fellowship with the ever blessed God. We also agree with Kuyper when he defines the covenant as an act of friendship. And again, we would emphasize this idea by insisting that the covenant itself is, essentially, a relation, a bond of friendship. Accordingly, we would define the idea of the covenant as that living bond of fellowship between God and man that assumes the particular form of friendship. And by friendship we mean such a bond of fellowship and intimate communion of love that subsists between persons on the basis of the highest possible equality, that differ in respect to personal properties. Friends have no secrets, they enter into, each other's life. And this is possible only on the basis of equality. On the other hand, true friendship is fellowship, and fellowship cannot subsist between persons that are identical in every respect. They supplement each other. Perfect friendship is a bond between persons that together form a perfect unity, that lacks nothing, and into which no other can enter. Hence, on the basis of equality there must be personal distinction. And the idea of the covenant is briefly expressed in the term friendship, or bond of friendship between God and man. In that bond God is the Friend-sovereign, Who reveals Himself to man, leads him into the secrets of His Counsel, opens His heart to him, and causes him to taste His blessed grace; and man is the friend-servant of God, who dwells in His house, walks and talks with Him, loves Him with his whole being, and consecrates himself and all things in the house of God to His praise and glory. Indeed, the covenant is the essence of religion!

That this idea of the covenant is based on the, teaching of Holy Writ is not difficult to demonstrate. In paradise God reveals Himself to Adam, and speaks to him as a friend with his friend; and Adam knew God in the cool of day. The first creation is concentrated in paradise, the house of God; paradise has its significant center in the tree of life, that symbol of life in God's fellowship; and the whole is concentrated in man, who is placed over the whole house of God to have dominion over all creatures.

In the heart of man is the ethical center of the whole creation, and through that heart all creation is united to the heart of God. Adam is the house-servant of God in the covenant of friendship. Of the early saints we read that they walked with God, a term denoting intimate fellowship and friendship. Gen. 5:22 ; 6:8. We read that they talk with God, that God reveals His counsel to them, and hides nothing from them. Gen. 6:13; 9:9; 18:17ff. Abraham is called the friend of God, Isa. 41:8; Jas. 2:23. To Moses the Lord spoke as a man speaketh with his friend, Ex. 33:11 ; and the Lord knew him face to face. Moreover, it is this idea of the covenant that is symbolized in the tabernacle and the temple, expressing the idea of God's dwelling with His people under one roof. And it is well know that the covenant relation between God and Israel is presented as a marriage relation, that most intimate of all human relationships, and that unfaithfulness to and transgression of the covenant is called adultery. The highest realization of the relation of God's people to Him in Christ is

expressed in the words of the sacerdotal prayer: "I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one." John 17:23. Almost defined is this idea of the covenant in Ps. 25:14: "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him; and he will shew. them his covenant." The church is the temple of the living God, and she has the promise: "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." II Cor. 6:16. And the end of all, the highest realization of God's purposes of salvation, is expressed in the words of the great voice out of heaven: "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God." In the New Jerusalem, God's people will walk in the light of the glory of God, and they shall see His face. Rev. 21:3; 22:4. God's covenant of friendship shall have been realized in its highest, heavenly perfection!

The deepest ground of this covenant relationship between God and man is the triune God Himself, of Whose triune life it is at the same time the highest revelation. For God is in Himself, apart from any relation to the creature, a covenant God. For He is one in Being, yet three in persons. The equality of the three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is absolute, for it rests in the oneness of the divine essence. One in being and nature, one in mind and will, one in all the essential and ethical virtues, in eternity and immensity, in immutability and independency, in simplicity and sovereignty, in knowledge and wisdom, in holiness and righteousness, in grace and beauty, in love and mercy, absolutely one and equal are the three persons of the Godhead. In infinite perfection they enter into one another's nature and life. Each knows the others as He is known. Yet, they are personally distinct, and they possess each His own personal properties, as is expressed in their personal names. The Father eternally subsists in the divine essence as Father, the Son as Son, the Holy Ghost as Spirit. And yet, also in their threeness they constitute a completeness, a unity, an exclusive whole or union. They belong together. No other person could possibly be conceived as added to that adorable threeness. The Father generates the Son and breathes forth the Spirit unto the Son; the Son is generated by the Father, and breathes forth the Spirit unto the Father; the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father the Son as the Spirit of the Father, and returns as the Spirit of the Son unto the Father. And on the basis of that absolute equality by personal distinction, the three persons of the Holy Trinity live an eternally perfect covenant life of friendship. The Father knows and beholds and loves the Son through the Spirit, the Son knows and loves and beholds the Father through the Spirit; the Holy Ghost, searching the depths of God, knows the Father through the Son in Himself. The covenant life of the triune God is the ultimate ground for the covenant relationship between God and the creature.

For, no doubt, Reformed theology is correct, when it emphasizes that the reason for and purpose of all the works of God *ad extra* is the glory of God. God wills to glorify Himself. And God's self-glorification is His self-revelation, the revelation of all His glorious and blessed virtues in the greatest possible creaturely measure, and on the highest possible plane. To this will to glorify Himself, and to reveal Himself in all the beauty of His adorable perfections, and in all the blessedness of His divine life, belongs His eternal purpose to reveal Himself in His blessed covenant life of eternal friendship. But how could this covenant life of God be revealed otherwise than unto and through a people that would have a place in His fellowShip, to whom He would

reveal His secrets, and that would be able to taste His marvellous love and grace? The triune God, therefore, from eternity determined to form a people that would have a creaturely place in the fellowship of the divine family. And if we must speak of a pactum salutis, or a covenant of peace. (a conception, by the way, that, as it was developed in Reformed theology, i.e. as a pact between the three persons of the Trinity unto the salvation of the elect, has no ground in Scripture; partly, because the passage in Zech. 6:13 has no reference to such a pact, partly because the texts usually quoted in support of such an agreement within the Trinity speak of the covenant between God and Christ, rather than between the Father and the Son), I would say, that it is the eternal purpose of the Triune God to reveal His own covenant life to the highest possible degree and on the highest possible plane, by establishing the covenant relation of friendship between Himself and His people.

But this required the formation of a people, of a creature, that would be in the highest possible creaturely measure like unto Himself. For, as we said, the bond of friendship presupposes a basis of likeness. Hence, God in His everlasting counsel, determines upon and conceives of a people that shall be conformed according to the image of His Son; that He may be the firstborn among many brethren. The first of these covenant-creatures in the divine conception is the Christ, the Son of God in human flesh, and that, too, as the resurrected Lord! The risen Lord is the first-born of every creature in God's counsel. In Him the likeness of God is realized in the highest possible degree and measure. You understand that this means that I conceive of the counsel of God in a strictly supralapsarian light. History may be and, no doubt, is *infra* in its order of events; but God's eternal purpose and good pleasure dare not be conceived otherwise than according to the supralapsarian order. What is ultimate in history, or in the realization of God's good pleasure, is first in His eternal counsel. Not the first world, but the new creation is the goal from the beginning, because it is first in God's decree. Not the first covenant, but the eternal tabernacle of God on the heavenly plane has the first place in the counsel of God. Salvation is no repair work, but the realization of the eternal good pleasure of Him, Who knows all His works from the beginning. And since all things in the new world are concentrated in the glorified Son of God in the flesh, and He is the head of all things in that new world; and all things are created unto Him and for Him, we repeat with emphasis, that in the eternal good pleasure of God the risen and glorified Christ is the firstborn of every creature. In Him God wants to reveal His glory. He is the highest, central realization of that likeness to God which is the *conditio sine qua non* for the highest possible realization of God's covenant of friendship with men. This is the meaning of that marvellous passage in Col. 1:15ff.: "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and *for* him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that In him should all fulness dwell."

With Him, then, the covenant of friendship is first of all established, and in the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected Christ there is the highest possible creaturely likeness of God. And to Him-are given all the elect, the sons whom God wants to

lead to glory, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. They are chosen in Him, and unto Him. And they are ordained to be conformed according to His image, in order that the covenant of friendship, centrally realized in the risen Lord, the Head of the Church, might be reflected in millions upon millions of sons of God, and so all might redound to the praise of the triune God. And what is more, unto Him and His Church all things in heaven and earth are given. For Christ is the Head of heaven and earth. In Him as the head, all things must be gathered together, and in God's counsel they are conceived as united in Him, so that the whole creation is a house of God, in Christ and through His Church the covenant of God embraces every creature, and all things must serve the new man in Christ, that he may serve his God. And unto that glorious realization of God's heavenly and all-embracing covenant, all things that are accomplished and must be accomplished in time are subordinated and made subservient, even creation and the fall, sin and death, reprobation as well as election. It must all serve the realization of God's everlasting covenant of friendship in Christ and His Church.

You understand that I am speaking now of the counsel of God, not of the order of things in time. If you bear this in mind, you will also discern the sharp difference between this and the Barthian "Theologie der Auferstehung" as presented by, Walter Kunneth in his book under that very title. He expresses a view similar to that presented above, but he refuses to proceed from a supralapsarian conception of the counsel of God, applies the truth that the risen Lord is the firstborn of every creature to creation and its development, and leaves the impression that creation culminates and reaches its perfection in the resurrection of Christ, and that, too, in the way of development and in virtue of an inherent "triebkraft" in creation as originally called into existence by the Word of God. Writes he: "Was Gottes Schopfungswille bedeutet, ist von Christus aus zu verstehen. Er ist nach der Kolloserbrieftheologie das Urbild aller Kreatur". And while this may be understood in a sound sense, we cannot agree with the following: "Der Erstgeborene ist noch nicht fertig, noch nicht am Ende seines ihm von Vater vorgezeichneten Weges. Auch der 'Sohn' trägt, wie gezeigt, eine Verheissung; es ist die Anwartschaft des Erstgeborenen auf Herrschaft. Der 'Sohn' ist angelegt auf den Empfang des Kyriostitels von Gott, der 'Sohn' wartet auf eine Existenz, die ihm noch Hoheres als seine Sohnschaft verleiht. Die Sohnschaft des Christus wartet auf ihre Erfüllung in der Auferweckung. Ist die Auferstehung der Zielpunkt des Lebens des 'Sohnes', dann kann es für die Vollendung der Schopfungswelt ihrer Christusgebundenheit gemäss keine andere Zielsetzung geben als die Auferstehung. Die Auferstehung Jesu wird damit zur Triebkraft der Schopfung, zur inneren Dynamik des Schopfungswerdens." (26).

We can subscribe to this if we may interpret it as meaning that, when God created the first world, He had the second in view; when He formed the first Adam, He did so with a view to the last Adam, the Lord from heaven, the risen Christ, the firstborn of every creature. But if, as appears to be the intention, we must understand the author to mean that in the original creation as such there is a "Triebkraft", a power that urges it on to the resurrection of the Lord, we must differ from him radically. There is no *Triebkraft* in the first creation toward the risen Lord and the eternal covenant of God in the new creation. Between the first and the last Adam, between "Schopfung and Auferstehung", between the first paradise and the eternal tabernacle of God with men, there lies the deep chasm of sin and death. This chasm

was, no doubt necessary for, and in God's counsel subservient unto the highest revelation of God's covenant of friendship in the risen Lord and His Church; but it nevertheless, separates, as far as historical development is concerned, the first world from the last, the culmination from the beginning. The original creation is an image of the new world that is to come, but it is not its beginning. The first man is the image of the second, but he can never develop into him. The chasm between the two can be abridged only by the wonder of grace, that has its central revelation in the incarnation of the Son of God, and, through His death, in the resurrection and glorification of Christ the Lord: It is not by the *Triebkraft* of the original creation, but by the irresistible power of the wonder of grace that all things are raised from their original earthly level, and that, too, through the depth of sin, death, and the curse, to the height of glory in God's eternal covenant of friendship!

History, or the realization of God's counsel, is *infra*. Creation is first, then sin, the fall, death, the curse; and thereupon the revelation of the risen Lord and redemption, salvation, final perfection and glorification. While in God's counsel the risen Christ is the firstborn of every creature, historically, Adam is the first man, Christ the second.

Hence, in the first paradise, we behold the first, the earthy realization of the covenant of friendship. That covenant was not an agreement between God and Adam, made sometime after his creation, as something new and additional, but it was the living bond of fellowship according to which Adam was the friend-servant of God, set over God's entire earthly house, so that all things must serve him that he might serve his God. And also this covenant relationship functioned a *parte hominis* on the basis of the fact that he was created in the image of God, in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Even as Adam in his nature reflected the nature and virtues of his Creator, so his relation to and life with God reflected from the moment of his creation, the life of the Triune.

But Adam did not regard his exalted position. Through the instigation of Satan, he violated the covenant of God, and made himself worthy of His fierce anger, death and the curse. He dies and becomes corrupt, dead in trespasses and sins, an exile from the house of God; and in him all men, including the elect, the sons God had ordained unto Glory, fell into sin and death. There was no way out, as far as man's was concerned. As far as it lay in his power, he had destroyed the covenant of God. The return to the fellowship of God had, from man's viewpoint, become for ever impossible.

But man's impossibility is but God's medium for the revelation of His glorious grace. He had provided some better thing for us: the perfection of His covenant of friendship in Christ. Adam violated the covenant of God, but God maintains it. Adam and all the elect fall upon Christ that stood behind them according to God's eternal good pleasure. And now God at once reveals His covenant as it is eternally fixed in Christ. For He announces that He will put enmity between Satan and the woman, and between their seed, and that the cause of the Son of God shall have the victory. That covenant is to follow the antithetical line of election and reprobation. And for the revelation of this covenant of Christ in the elect, with its antithesis in the reprobate; the state is set in all creation. Man is subjected to temporal death, separated from the tree of life; the conception of the woman is multiplied, in order that Christ may come quickly as always, and her sorrow shall be great; the ground is cursed, and will produce thorns and thistles; not only will man eat his bread in the sweat of his

face, but he will also eat and drink his own death; and the creature is made subject to vanity, so that all real culture by the fallen lord of the earthly creation is for ever become impossible. But upon that stage God reveals His covenant, and through that darkness He causes the light of the promise, the light that shines from the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to penetrate; filling the heirs of the promise with hope.

He reveals that covenant to Noah and his seed, as a covenant that embraces the whole creation, so that also the creature, groaning in the bondage of corruption, may look forward in hope to the glorious liberty of the children of God. He reveals that covenant to Abraham His friend, as running in the line of his generations, but as embracing, nevertheless, all the nations of the earth. He establishes that covenant at Sinai, placing it, however, under the law, in order that sin might abound; and under the taskmaster, the children of the promise might look the more earnestly for the *telos* of the law of Christ. And all through the dispensation of that covenant of Sinai, the powers of darkness and an adulterous people exerted themselves to violate and to destroy the covenant of Jehovah; yet, in the fulness of time, He realized the covenant of friendship, uniting Himself with His people centrally in the incarnation, the Son of God come in the flesh, God of God tabernacling with us; laying the basis of righteousness in the atoning sacrifice and perfect obedience of the

Servant of Jehovah; and raising the firstborn among many brethren, and the firstborn of every creature, from the dead, to exalt Him at His right hand in heavenly glory. He establishes that eternal bond of friendship in the new covenant, through the Spirit of the risen Lord, indwelling in the Church, by Whom He writes His law in their hearts, so that they all know Him, from the smallest to the greatest.

And still the counsel of God concerning His everlasting covenant is not finished. One more revelation of the wonder of grace is yet to be expected, when the glorified Son of God shall be revealed from heaven, the old things shall pass away, and all things shall be made new. Then He shall make our mortal bodies like unto His most glorious body, by the power whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself; even creation shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption to participate in the glorious liberty of the children of God, and all things shall be made conformable to the glory of the risen Lord. The tabernacle of God shall be with men in heavenly glory, and as friend-servants in the house of God, a royal priesthood, we shall have perfect fellowship with the triune Jehovah, see Him face to face, know even as we are known, and taste and declare that the Lord is good for ever and ever!

H. H.

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