

CHRIST AND THE CONDITION: SAMUEL PETTO (c.1624–1711) ON THE MOSAIC COVENANT

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Introduction

IN 1674, when Samuel Petto (c.1624–1711) published his book, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained: With an Exposition of the Covenant of Grace in the Principal Concernments of It*, discussion and debate about the Mosaic covenant was still in full swing among the Reformed orthodox. As they defended, clarified, and codified the doctrines and practices of the early Reformation, the orthodox divines wrestled with the question of how the old and new covenants relate within the *historia salutis*. Although there remained a substantive continuity between the thought of Calvin and his contemporaries and the thought of their Reformed orthodox successors with regard to God's one plan of salvation (i.e. *sola gratia*, *sola fide*, *solus Christus*) mediated in one covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*), there were, nevertheless, competing views among the latter group regarding how the Mosaic covenant fit into that system. As they responded to challenges from Socinianism, Arminianism, and Roman Catholicism, as well as internal disputes concerning antinomianism and neo-nomianism, two general schools of interpretation emerged. The first school taught that the Mosaic covenant was the covenant of grace legally administered. The second school, however, taught that the Mosaic covenant was *distinct from* the covenant of grace. Within these two schools of Reformed thought, there existed a wide spectrum of views with regard to how the Mosaic covenant, with its prescribed works, specifically related to the covenant of grace and its new covenant administration. Representatives from both schools taught that the Mosaic covenant somehow renewed or republished the original covenant of works (*foedus operum*).

Despite the voluminous writings on covenant theology at the time, Petto believed more work needed to be done and thus devoted his pen to the matter. "There are many useful Treatises already extant on this subject," said Petto, "but still there are some weighty points referring to it, as with Jesus Christ, and especially concerning the Old mount Sinai covenant and also the New, which have need of farther clearing."¹ Petto was

¹ Samuel Petto, *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained: With an Exposition of the Covenant of Grace in the Principal Concernments of It* (London, 1674), A2 in

born around 1624 and educated at the staunchly Puritan and Calvinistic St. Catherine's College of Cambridge University during England's turbulent 1640s. He was ordained to the ministry in 1648 and served as a pastor of several Congregationalist churches in England until his death in 1711. Over that period, he published a number of theological works, including two catechisms and books on pneumatology, eschatology, ecclesiology, apologetics for infant baptism, a polemic against witchcraft, and his work on covenant theology. While not as prolific a writer as some of his contemporaries, Petto may have had a more significant role in the development of British covenant theology than his present obscurity suggests. His book on covenant theology did not go unnoticed. None other than John Owen (1616–83), who, in the words of Carl Trueman, was the preeminent Puritan theologian and one of the most influential men of his generation, wrote the forward to this book.² Owen called Petto a “Worthy Author” who labored “with good success,”³ and there is some evidence to suggest that Petto's work may have influenced Owen's own thinking on the subject. Moreover, in 1820, twenty-nine Scottish ministers and theologians called for Petto's book to be republished, “entirely approving and recommending it, as a judicious and enlightened performance.”⁴ *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant* was reprinted in Aberdeen in 1820 as *The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace*. Thus, Petto's work serves as a window into the era of high orthodoxy (c.1640–1725) and also provides us with a view of the development of British covenant theology that helped shaped later generations of Reformed thought.⁵

the preface to the reader. In my quotes and citations of primary sources in English, I replicate all unconventional spelling and punctuation from the original publications. Hereafter, Petto's *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant* will be abbreviated *DBONC*.

² Carl Trueman says of Owen, “In his own day he was chaplain to Cromwell, preacher to Parliament, Chancellor of Oxford University, leading light of the Independents, and the preeminent Puritan theologian. By any standard one of the most influential men of his generation.” *The Claims of Truth* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1998), p.1. Owen's fellow Congregationalist, Ambrose Barnes, said that Owen was “the Calvin of England.” See Peter Toon, *God's Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1971), 173.

³ John Owen, preface to Petto, *DBONC*, no page number given. Owen also wrote a preface to Patrick Gillespie's work *The Ark of the Covenant Opened* (1677), which was one of five volumes Gillespie wrote on covenant theology.

⁴ A list of the names, as provided by the publisher of the 1820 reprint, included Dr. M'Cre of Edinburgh, Professor Paxton of Edinburgh, Rev. George Moir of Edinburgh, Dr. Pringle of Perth, Rev. James Aird of Rattray, Rev. Matthew Fraser of Dundee, Rev. Adam Blair of South Ferry, Rev. W. Ramage of Kirriemuir, Rev. James Hay of Alyth, Rev. Alexander Balfour of Lethendy, Rev. David Waddell of Shiels, Rev. Patrick Robertson of Craigdam, Rev. J. Ronaldson of Auchmacoy, Rev. John Bunyan of Whitehall, Rev. James Millar of Huntly, Dr. Kidd of Aberdeen, Rev. A. Gunn of Wattan, Rev. Niel Kennedy of Logie Elgin, Rev. Hector Bethune of Alness, Rev. Hugh Ross of Fearn, Rev. Thos. Monro of Kiltearn, Rev. John M'Donald of Thurso, Rev. A. Stewart of Wick, Rev. John Monro of Nigg, Rev. Isaac Kitchin of Nairn, Rev. David Anderson of Boghole, Rev. Thomas Stark of Forres, Rev. Simon Somerville of Elgin, Rev. Robert Crawford of Elgin. *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant Stated and Explained* (Aberdeen: Alexander Thompson, 1820).

⁵ On the eras of orthodoxy, see Richard Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics: The Rise and Development of Reformed Orthodoxy, ca. 1520 to ca. 1725*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 30-32. Hereafter this work will be abbreviated *PRRD*.

1. The Current State of Scholarship

There are at least three reasons why this study is needed. First, the name of Samuel Petto is scarcely known today; few students of Reformed orthodoxy and English Puritanism will recognize it. Secondary literature devoted to Petto is almost non-existent,⁶ and taxonomies of seventeenth-century covenant theology seem to omit his name altogether.⁷ In recent years, historical studies have referred to him in connection with his non-conformist ecclesiology⁸ and his works on eschatology,⁹ pneumatology,¹⁰ and witchcraft (a subject of growing interest in both Old and New England during the seventeenth century),¹¹ but his covenant theology has been largely neglected.¹²

Secondly, an examination of Petto's work will also prove beneficial in refuting the so-called "Calvin v. the Calvinists" thesis, which has indicted post-Reformation English Reformed theologians on charges of hijacking the warm and scriptural theology of Calvin and other early Reformers

⁶ See Mark Jones' introduction to the 2007 reprint of *DBONC, The Great Mystery of the Covenant of Grace* (Stoke-on-Trent: Tentmaker, 2007), 9-27; and Donald Strickland's article, "E.F. Kevan, Samuel Petto and Covenant Theology," *Reformation Today*, No.137, January 1994.

⁷ Petto's name does not appear, for example, in the following taxonomies of seventeenth-century covenant theology: R. Scott Clark, "Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy," Herman Selderhuis, [ed.] *Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming); Brenton C. Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant: A Reformed Taxonomy" in Bryan Estelle, J.V. Fesko, David VanDrunen [eds.], *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant* (Philipsburg: P & R, 2008), (hereafter this book will be abbreviated *LINF*); Jeong Koo Jeon, *Covenant Theology: John Murray's and Meredith G. Kline's Response to the Historical Development of Federal Theology in Reformed Thought* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1999); Mark W. Karlberg, *The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology*, PhD. dissertation (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980); and Rowland S. Ward, *God & Adam: Reformed Theology and the Creation Covenant* (Wantrina: New Melbourne Press, 2003). Moreover, Petto is not profiled in popular surveys of the Puritans. He is not found, for example, in Joel R. Beeke & Randall J. Pederson [eds.], *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006); William Barker, *Puritan Profiles* (Ross-shire: Mentor, 1999); or J.I. Packer [ed.], *Puritan Papers*, 5 vols. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2000-2005).

⁸ See Francis J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community* (Northeastern University Press, 1994), 191-248; and Richard P. Gildrie, *The Profane, the Civil, and the Godly* (Penn State Press, 2004), 191.

⁹ See David Brady, *The Contribution of British Writers Between 1560 and 1830 to the Interpretation of Revelation 13.16-18 (the Number of the Beast): A Study in the History of Exegesis* (Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 17, 119, 215-16; and Kenneth G.C. Newport, *Apocalypse and Millenium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5, 57.

¹⁰ See D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford: OUP, 2008); Crawford Gribben, *God's Irishmen: Theological Debates in Cromwellian England* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); Ian Harris, *The Mind of John Locke: A Study of Political Theory in Its Intellectual Setting* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and esp. G.F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹¹ See Nathan Johnstone, *The Devil and Demonism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 122-3; and Gilbert Geis, Ivan Bunn, *A Trial of Witches: A Seventeenth-century Witchcraft Prosecution* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 140-1, 206-7.

¹² There is a brief reference to Petto's covenant theology and understanding of the nature of conditionality in the covenant of grace in Richard Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 106-7.

with a cold scholasticism, Aristotelianism, and rationalism.¹³ Petto's federal theology provides us with more evidence in defense of the "Muller Thesis," that is, the argument for the Reformed Orthodox as the legitimate and faithful heirs of Calvin.¹⁴ Analysis of his work stands in opposition to the claims of scholars such as R.T. Kendall, who argues that English Calvinism, through its affirmation of a limited atonement, was actually "crypto-Arminian" in its theology and made it almost impossible for one to be assured of saving faith apart from laborious works.¹⁵

Third, an examination of Petto's covenant theology in its historical context may also be useful to discussions regarding works and grace in the Mosaic covenant and the doctrine of republication. Given the wide variety of interpretations on this important point, the Reformed tradition continues to need new studies in historical theology to bring light to the discussion.¹⁶ While, as Bryan D. Estelle, J.V. Fesko, and David Van-

¹³ See, for example, James B. Torrance, "The Concept of Federal Theology," in *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor*, ed. William H. Neuser (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), "Covenant or Contract," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23/1 (February 1970); Basil Hall, "Calvin Against the Calvinists," in G. E. Duffield, ed., *John Calvin*. Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology (Appleford: Sutton Gourtenay Press, 1966); B.A. Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy: Protestant Scholasticism and Humanism in Seventeenth-Century France* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Peter Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Swengel: Reiner Publications, 1973); and R.T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

¹⁴ Rising to defend post-Reformation scholasticism as the legitimate and faithful theological heirs of Calvin has been a growing number of historical theologians led primarily by Richard Muller. This school, sometimes dubbed the "Calvin and the Calvinists" school, has offered a positive reassessment of the internal developments of post-Reformation Reformed theology. See Richard Muller, "Calvin and the 'Calvinists': Assessing Continuities and Discontinuities Between the Reformation and Orthodoxy," [parts one and two] *Calvin Theological Journal*, 30-31, 1995, 1996; *PRRD; After Calvin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Trueman, *The Claims of Truth*; idem, *John Owen: Reformed Catholic, Renaissance Man* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007); Carl Trueman and R. Scott Clark [eds.], *Protestant Scholasticism: Essays in Reassessment* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1999); R. Scott Clark, *Casper Olevian and the Substance of the Covenant* (Edinburgh: Rutherford House, 2005); idem, *Recovering the Reformed Confession* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008); idem, "Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy," *Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*; Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982); Michael Horton, "Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance: Continuity and Discontinuity in the Reformed Tradition, 1600-1680," Ph.D. dissertation (Wycliffe Hall, Oxford and Coventry University, 1996); and Joel Beeke's Ph.D. dissertation for Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, "Personal Assurance of Faith: English Puritanism and the Dutch 'Nadere Refomatie' from Westminster to Alexander Comrie (1640-1760)" published as *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999); Lyle Bierma, *German Calvinism in the Confessional Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996); idem, "The Role of Covenant Theology in Early Reformed Orthodoxy," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 21, 1990, 453-462.

¹⁵ Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism.*, 3-4, 205, 209. Kendall criticizes the syllogistic reasoning of Beza, Ursinus, and later English Calvinists, claiming that it was introspective, speculative, and ultimately made faith an act of man, located in the human will. All of this, says Kendall, was a qualitative departure from Calvin and the early Reformation. See *Ibid.*, 8-9, 33-34, 40-41, 56-57, 63, 69-74, 125, 148, 150, 179-81, 211.

¹⁶ See, for example, the differences on this point posited by thinkers such as John Murray (1898-1975) and O. Palmer Robertson on the one hand, and Meredith Kline (1922-2007) on the other. See John Murray, "The Adamic Administration" in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol.2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 50; O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 1980), 34; Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 22-24.

Drunen contend in the recently published, *The Law Is Not of Faith: Essays on Works and Grace in the Mosaic Covenant*, “the Reformed tradition has always acknowledged and tolerated a variety of positions on the Mosaic covenant,” probing the covenant theology of Petto, a theologian from the seventeenth century, may facilitate the present conversation in Reformed theology regarding the Mosaic covenant and the doctrine of republication.¹⁷ This study does not intend to support any particular dogmatic or biblical-theological construction, but merely to do the work of history by filling in some of the gaps of the historical picture.

The purpose of this essay is to pursue the question of what Petto believed with regard to the Mosaic covenant and considers how it protected his doctrine of justification *sola fide*. It argues that Petto viewed the Mosaic covenant as a republication of the covenant of works for Christ to fulfill as the condition of the covenant of grace in order to uphold and defend his doctrine of justification *sola fide*.

In order to defend this thesis, this study makes four observations. First, it explains Petto’s general covenant schema in terms of the covenant of redemption (*pactum salutis*), covenant of works (*foedus operum*), and covenant of grace (*foedus gratiae*). Second, it describes briefly some of the competing views that emerged in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries concerning the Mosaic covenant and its relationship to the covenant of grace. Third, it attempts to make clear Petto’s position on the Mosaic covenant, looking at how he understood the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the covenant of works, the covenant of grace, and the new covenant. Fourth, it considers some of the implications Petto’s view of the Mosaic covenant had for his doctrine of justification *sola fide*.

2. Petto’s Covenant Schema

Although a three-covenant super-structure (i.e. covenant of redemption, covenant of works, and covenant of grace) became standard fare among the Reformed orthodox, Petto spoke of two covenants, namely, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace. His formulation of the latter, however, taught the essence of the covenant of redemption by describing a pretemporal constitution of the covenant of grace.

2.1. The Pretemporal Constitution of the Covenant of Grace

Petto viewed the institution of the covenant of grace to consist of elements which others typically attributed to the covenant of redemption. His view can be summarized in five points:

1. The Father and the Son entered mutual agreement in a federal transaction to achieve “the great end of salvation” for the elect.¹⁸

¹⁷ *LINF*, 20. Although *LINF* contains three essays in historical theology, including a taxonomy of views from Reformed theologians in the seventeenth century, none of them mention Petto’s *DBONC*.

¹⁸ *DBONC*, 2-3.

2. The Father prescribed conditions for this covenant, “something to be undergone by Jesus Christ” for “the working out of redemption” and the fulfillment of “the condition of life” for the elect.¹⁹
3. The Father promised the Son that he would a) assist him with his continual presence as he underwent the afflictions and trials of his earthly life; b) be victorious over his enemies; c) have the heathen for his inheritance; and d) see the salvation of the seed which he represented.²⁰
4. The Son voluntarily accepted the conditions, and assumed the work as surety of the covenant.²¹
5. The Father approved and accepted the performance of the Son, who likewise laid claim to the promises made in the covenant.²²

In sum, Petto’s view seemed to reflect WLC 31: “With whom was the covenant of grace made?” It answers, “The covenant of grace was made with Christ as the second Adam, and in him with all the elect as his seed.”²³

As with the view of the covenant of redemption common amongst the Reformed orthodox, Petto’s view of the pretemporal constitution of the covenant of grace between the Father and the Son made explicit Christ’s role as the second Adam and federal head.²⁴ On behalf of those given to him by the Father, the Son overcame the catastrophic consequences of the first Adam’s breaking of the covenant of works, and merited the benefits of redemption mediated in the covenant of grace.²⁵

¹⁹ *DBONC*, 2-4. Petto referenced Isaiah 53.10-12.

²⁰ *DBONC*, 4. Petto cited Pss 2:8,9; 72:8; Isa 41:13; Dan 7:14; and Zech 9:10, “all which,” said Petto, “plainly argue a *Covenant* between the Father and the Son.”

²¹ *DBONC*, 3-4. Petto cited Heb 5:4,5; Ps 40:7,8; and Jn 10:17,18 in relation to Christ’s “acceptation of this office and voluntary submission to the will of the Father in it...And these together amount to or make up a *Covenant* between them.”

²² *DBONC*, 4.

²³ On Question 93, the WLC cites Gal 3:16; Rom 5:15-21.

²⁴ John Owen (1616–83), for example, five major elements within the covenant of redemption: (i) The Father, as “promiser,” and the Son, as “undertaker,” voluntarily agreed together in counsel to achieve a common purpose, namely, “the glory of God and the salvation of the elect.” (ii) The Father prescribed conditions for this covenant, which consisted of the Son assuming human nature, fulfilling the demands of the law through his obedience, and suffering the just judgment of God for the elect in order to satisfy God’s justice on their behalf. (iii) The promises of the covenant, which were two: First, the Father assisting the Son in the accomplishment of his redeeming work by continually being present with him as he underwent the afflictions and trials of his earthly life. Secondly, if the Son did what was required of him, the work itself would prosper by bringing about the deliverance and glorification of those for whom he obeyed and suffered. These promises the Father confirmed with an oath. (iv) The Son voluntarily accepted the conditions, and assumed the work as surety of the covenant. (v) The Father approved and accepted the performance of the Son, who likewise laid claim to the promises made in the covenant.²⁴ Note the similarity between this and Petto’s view of the pretemporal constitution of the covenant of grace. See John Owen, *Vindiciae Evangelicae* (1655) in *Works*, 12:498-507.

²⁵ As Clark points out, “Even those writers who did not refer specifically to a pretemporal, intra-Trinitarian covenant of redemption taught the essence of it by speaking of Christ as the surety (*sponsor*) of the covenant of grace for the elect.” In this way, “there was

2.2. The Covenant of Works

As was common among the Reformed orthodox on both sides of the English Channel, Petto was firmly committed to the doctrine of a prelapsarian covenant of works.²⁶ There was no mediator for Adam, no one to stand in his stead. God's requirement for Adam was "Do this and live," and thus not limited to his negative command forbidding Adam to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He was obligated, as one created in the divine image, with an inscription of the divine law upon his heart, to conform perfectly and personally to the divine will.²⁷ This was a test and trial. Should he succeed, the promised reward was eschatological life. "Doubtless as the threatened death was intended purposely to deter from eating, so the hope of life was also a perswasive to this forbearance. Yea the *tree of life* confirmeth this: man was made an exile out of Paradise."²⁸ The prelapsarian state was not an end in itself; there was an eschatological goal set for Adam.²⁹

The promise of a reward for Adam's perfect obedience in the covenant of works, as well as Adam's ability to perform that obedience, was the result of God's condescension and goodness, which Petto, like many of his Reformed orthodox contemporaries, sometimes called God's favor or "grace."³⁰ One should be careful, however, to understand how he used the word "grace" in different contexts. He did not use the word in any soteric sense when speaking of the covenant of works. "It must, therefore, be said, it was not Gospel grace, or faith in a Mediator that was found in the Covenant of Works."³¹ Adam was created for obedience and fully able to keep himself in a state of integrity. The covenant of works did not require, therefore, grace or mercy as its foundation.³² For Petto, once God established this covenant through his divine condescension, Adam had a legal claim and right to its reward upon the fulfillment of its conditions. This claim was not the result of an intrinsic merit, but a covenantally determined merit.³³

virtual unanimity on the three covenant superstructure to Reformed theology." "Christ and Covenant: Federal Theology in Orthodoxy," *Companion to Reformed Orthodoxy*.

²⁶ See Bierma, *German Calvinism*; Clark, *Casper Olevian*; Richard Muller, "The Covenant of Works and the Stability of Divine Law in Seventeenth-Century Reformed Orthodoxy: A Study in the Theology of Herman Witsius and Wilhelmus A Brakel," in *After Calvin*; Willem Van Asselt, "The Doctrine of the Abrogations in the Federal Theology of Johannes Cocceius (1609-1669)," *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), 101-16.

²⁷ *DBONC*, 9.

²⁸ *DBONC*, 8-9.

²⁹ Such a view was common to the Reformed Orthodox. Herman Witsius (1636-1708), for example, asserted, "If Adam had, in his own, and in our name, stood to the conditions of the covenant; if, after a course of probation, he had been confirmed in happiness," Adam, along us with "his posterity" would have "been translated to the joys of heaven." See *Economy of the Covenants*, 1:59; cf. 1:70-76.

³⁰ *DBONC*, in the preface (no page number).

³¹ *DBONC*, 15.

³² Carl Trueman makes the important point that "while the Reformed Orthodox will routinely use language of *grace* when referring to this condescension, this is to be understood not in a redemptive sense, for there could be no redemption where there is nothing to be redeemed before the Fall, but simply as underlying God's freedom in the establishment of the covenant." Trueman, *John Owen*, 74.

³³ See *DBONC*, 220-21.

With the Fall of Adam, the covenant of works was broken and Adam's sin was imputed to the human race.³⁴ The disastrous results of the first Adam's failure to fulfill the covenant of works placed humankind under the wrath of God and in desperate need to possess the righteousness that God requires in order to be received into favor and subsequently enjoy the blessed supernatural end for which they were created. The Covenant of Grace

Upon the first Adam's failure in the covenant of works, God was pleased to make a covenant through the mediation of Christ, the second Adam.³⁵ The covenant of grace was not a revised covenant of works for the people of God; it did not place them in another state of probation.³⁶ For Petto, the covenant of grace was first revealed in the *proto-evangelium* in Genesis 3:15, and runs without interruption until the consummation. All believers in every period of redemptive history are members of and saved through this covenant by virtue of the covenant's surety and mediator, Christ, the One with whom the covenant was made.

Petto's covenant schema highlights the radical distinction between the covenants of works and grace, the former made with Adam and his seed, the latter with Christ and his seed. His theology of a pretemporal constitution of the covenant of grace, a prelapsarian covenant of works, and a postlapsarian, temporal covenant of grace was not only within the bounds of confessional orthodoxy, but it also upheld the Reformed soteriology of one covenant of grace in which all believers are justified by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in the finished work of Christ alone.

The question remains, however, what did Petto do with the discontinuity between the old and new covenants? How did he understand the role of the Mosaic covenant in the one covenant of grace? Before we turn to Petto's thought on the Mosaic covenant to answer this question, we should briefly note the continuity and discontinuity within the wide spectrum of views represented in Reformed orthodoxy.

3. The Mosaic Covenant in Reformed Orthodoxy

Calvin's orthodox successors saw covenant theology as the biblical-theological expression of the same Reformed doctrine taught in the early Reformation and enshrined in their confessions and catechisms. This historical continuity between Calvin and the Calvinists was not lost in the seventeenth century intramural dialogue concerning the tension between the old and new covenants and how they interact within the *historia salutis*. On this point, the Reformed orthodox saw different schools of interpretation emerge from within their ranks as they responded to the challenges of their time.³⁷

³⁴ See *DBONC*, 134.

³⁵ See *DBONC*, 2.

³⁶ See *DBONC*, 12-13.

³⁷ For an example of the variety of views on Sinai present in the seventeenth century, see Ferry, "Works in the Mosaic Covenant" in *LINF*, 76-105. While Ferry makes categorizations that the present author does not always find helpful, his essay nevertheless demonstrates well

Upon careful examination of the representative writers in the period of early and high orthodoxy (c.1565–1640 and 1640–1725 respectively), two points must be made. First, any interaction with the covenant theology of the Reformed orthodox must take into serious consideration the wide variety of their views regarding Sinai and its place in the *historia salutis*, as well as their variegated interpretive nuances. As with other doctrines, there was not a monolithic unity among the Reformed orthodox on this point. There were, instead, an assortment of formulations on how the Mosaic covenant related to the covenant of works, covenant of grace, and new covenant. Some writers, such as Calvin,³⁸ Zacharias Ursinus (1534–83),³⁹ William Ames (1576–1633),⁴⁰ John Ball (1585–1640),⁴¹ Samuel Rutherford (1600–60),⁴² David Dickson (1583–1663),⁴³ Edmund Calamy (1600–66),⁴⁴ and Francis Turretin (1623–87)⁴⁵ taught the Mosaic covenant to be the covenant of grace legally administered and held that the works principle in Sinai pertained only to the outward, legal administration and “accidents” of the covenant of grace as it was expressed in the Mosaic economy. Others, such as Caspar Olevianus (1536–87),⁴⁶ Robert Rollock (1555–98),⁴⁷ William Perkins (1558–1602),⁴⁸ Amandus Polanus (1561–1610),⁴⁹ Johannes

the complexity of trajectories on the question of Sinai and its relationship to the *historia salutis*.

³⁸ See John Calvin, *Institutes*, 2.10-11; 4.16.3, 5-6, 10; idem, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. from the original Latin by John Pringle, vol.2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr.1999), 171-79. See also Peter A. Lillback, “Calvin’s Interpretation of the History of Salvation: The Continuity and Discontinuity of the Covenant,” in *A Theological Guide to Calvin’s Institutes: Essays and Analysis*, ed. David W. Hall and Peter A. Lillback (Phillipsburg, P & R, 2008), 169; idem, *The Binding of God: Calvin’s Role in the Development of Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.); J.V. Fesko, “Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic Covenant,” in *LINF*, 25-43.

³⁹ See Zacharias Ursinus, *Summa Theologiae*, an English translation of which is provided by Lyle Bierma in idem et al., *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History, and Theology*, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 163–223. See also Derk Visser, “The Covenant in Zacharias Ursinus,” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 18 (1987): 531–44, Lyle Bierma, “Law and Grace in Ursinus’ Doctrine of the Covenant: A Reappraisal,” in *Protestant Scholasticism*, 96-110.

⁴⁰ See William Ames, *The Marrow of Theology*, trans. John Dykstra Eusden (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1983), 111, 149-50, 202-10.

⁴¹ See John Ball, *Covenant of Grace* (London, 1645), 6-15, 93-107.

⁴² See Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened or a Treatise on the Covenant of Grace* (Edinburgh: 1655), 57-65, 172-80, 201-17, 226, 246.

⁴³ See David Dickson *Therapeutica Sacra* (1664), chapters IV-VI.

⁴⁴ See Edmund Calamy, *Two Solemn Covenants Made Between God and Man: viz. The Covenants of Workes, And the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1647), 1-2, 10-11.

⁴⁵ See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 2:227-34. See also J. Mark Beach, “Christ and the Covenant: Francis Turretin’s Federal Theology as a Defense of the Doctrine of Grace” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2005).

⁴⁶ See Caspar Olevianus, *A Firm Foundation. An Aid to Interpreting the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. Lyle D. Bierma, Texts and Studies in Reformation and Post-Reformation Thought (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 3–9. See also See Clark, *Casper Olevian*, 14, 91–100, 110–14, 141–48, 177–80.

⁴⁷ See Robert Rollock, *A Treatise of our Effectual Calling in Select Works of Robert Rollock*, vol. 1, ed. W. M. Gunn (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1849), 29–46.

⁴⁸ See William Perkins, *Workes of That famous and worthy Minister of Christ in the Universitie of Cambridge, Mr. William Perkins*, 3 vols. (London, 1616-18), 1:165; idem, *A Golden Chaine* (London, 1591), 31-2. See also Bierma, *German Calvinism*, 176-79.

Wollebius (1586–1629),⁵⁰ Richard Sibbes (1577–1635),⁵¹ William Strong (d.1654),⁵² James Ussher (1581–1656),⁵³ and John Owen (1616–83),⁵⁴ saw the Mosaic covenant as a republication of the covenant of works and a covenant distinct from yet pedagogical for the covenant of grace. Still others, such as Samuel Bolton (1606–54), saw Sinai as a third type of covenant, neither of works nor of grace, but still subservient to the gospel.⁵⁵ Within each of these camps, there existed a spectrum of sub-views and complex nuances regarding the number of covenants and how Sinai should be viewed in relation to the covenants of works and grace. Thus, the views of the Reformed orthodox on this point cannot be reduced to a single paradigm or simplistically delineated into a mere two or three different positions.⁵⁶

Second, while the Reformed orthodox trajectories on the Mosaic covenant were many, they remained within the bounds of their own confessional codification of the early Reformation's interpretation of Paul's gospel. As they developed a sophisticated federal theology in response to the challenges of their day, they maintained a clear consensus that the substance of the covenant of grace did not change. From the *proto-evangelium* to the consummation, in both the old covenant and new covenant, salvation is the same: *sola gratia, sola fide, solus Christus*, mediated in one unifying covenant of grace. Though they came to different conclusions as they wrestled with the complex question of the Mosaic covenant, they stood unified in their desire to protect their law-gospel antithesis and doctrine of justification *sola fide*, and typically sought to uphold that protection by distinguishing between the covenants of works and grace.

With this context in mind, we are now ready to consider in detail the thought of Petto regarding the Mosaic covenant.

⁴⁹ See Amandus Polanus, *The Substance of Christian Religion*, trans. E.W. (London, 1595), a translation of *Partitiones theologiae christianae* (Basel, 1590), 85-88.

⁵⁰ See Johannes Wollebius, *Compendium* in John W. Beardslee [ed. and trans.] *Reformed Dogmatics: J. Wollebius, G. Voetius and F. Turretin* (New York: OUP, 1965), 64-120.

⁵¹ See Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed and Smoking Flax* in *The Works of Richard Sibbes*, 7 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 1:43-59.

⁵² See William Strong, *A Discourse of the Two Covenants* (London, 1678), 1-2, 88.

⁵³ See James Usher, *A Body of Divinity Or Summe and Substance of Religion*, 2nd Edition (London: 1653), 123-58.

⁵⁴ See John Owen's exposition of Hebrews 8 in *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (1668-84) in *Works*, 22, especially pages 70-78. See also Michael G. Brown, "The Covenant of Works Revived: John Owen on Republication in the Mosaic Covenant" *The Confessional Presbyterian Journal* 4, 2008.

⁵⁵ See Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedom* (London, 1645), 22-24, 130-45.

⁵⁶ This error was made by E.F. Kevan in his *The Grace of Law: A Study of Puritan Theology* (1964, repr. Ligonier: Soli Deo Gloria, 1993) in which he delineated only two schools of Puritan thought on Sinai, one that saw it as a covenant of works and the other of grace. Yet, others, in their attempts to refute Kevan, have not done much better. See Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life*, 27-28. See also Don Strickland, "E.F. Kevan, Samuel Petto and Covenant Theology," *Reformation Today*, No.137, January 1994.

4. Petto on the Mosaic Covenant

To understand Petto's position on Sinai, three relationships in his covenantal thought must be considered: the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the covenant of works, to the covenant of grace, and to the new covenant.

4.1. Relationship of the Mosaic Covenant to the Covenant of Works

Petto believed Sinai to be a republication of the covenant of works: "the Lord, in infinite wisdom made a revival or repetition of the Covenant of Works as to the substance of it (with a new intent) in the Covenant at Mount Sinai."⁵⁷ Like many of his contemporaries, he believed the Mosaic law republished the "natural obligation" and "inscription of the divine law upon Adam's heart," that is, the basic commands to love God and neighbor engraved upon the human conscience in the prelapsarian covenant of works.⁵⁸ The "new intent" to which he referred, however, was an allusion to Christ's role as the second Adam.

For Petto, there were two possible ways of viewing the Mosaic covenant, either as "a Covenant of Works, as to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ" or "the Covenant of Grace as to its legal condition to be performed by Jesus Christ, represented under a conditional administration of it to Israel."⁵⁹ Viewed either way, Sinai was a covenant of works *for Christ*.⁶⁰ What the original covenant of works was to the first Adam, the Mosaic covenant was to the second Adam; it provided the temporal setting for the Federal Head to obtain eternal life for those whom he represented.⁶¹ Sinai gave the Son the opportunity to perform, through his active and passive obedience *as a true human being*, the righteousness which the original covenant of works required. This made the Mosaic covenant a necessary and vital part of God's plan of redemption.⁶² Born under the Mosaic Law with a real body and soul, Christ was able to fulfill what he promised in his pre-temporal covenant with the Father. "It is true, there

⁵⁷ *DBONC*, A3 in the preface. See also his statements in pages 134-35, where he repeatedly calls the Mosaic covenant a "repetition" and "renewing" of the covenant of works.

⁵⁸ *DBONC*, 9. He elaborates in pages 10-12 on the Decalogue as an expression of the natural law inscribed on Adam's conscience. His conclusions here are similar to Owen's, who said that Sinai "revived, declared, and expressed all the commands of that covenant in the decalogue [sic]; for that is nothing but a divine summary of the law written in the heart of man at his creation." See *Works*, 22:77. Cf. 11:388. For a helpful analysis of Owen's natural theology, see Carl Trueman, *John Owen*, 67-71. For other examples of natural law understood by High Orthodox theologians, see Turretin, *Institutes*, 1:575-76; Herman Witsius, *Economy of Covenants*, 1:71-72; and David VanDrunen, "Natural Law and the Works Principle Under Adam and Moses," in *LINF*, 283-314.

⁵⁹ *DBONC*, 102. He stated this thesis again on page 127: "the Sinai Covenant did hold forth the Covenant of Grace as to its legal condition to be performed by Jesus Christ and so was a Covenant of Works as to be fulfilled by him. Or, It conditionally promised its blessings, especially Eternal Life, upon the perfect obedience of Jesus Christ, then (in Moses time) not fulfilled."

⁶⁰ "[T]he Sinai Covenant, was a Covenant of Works as to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ." *DBONC*, 124.

⁶¹ See *DBONC*, 125.

⁶² See *DBONC*, 135-6.

was an agreement between the Father and the Son from Eternity about it, the Covenant of Grace was then struck and had a being; but the Sinai Covenant was a necessary medium or means for the execution thereof.⁶³ This, for Petto, was the chief purpose of the Mosaic covenant. It was “a Platform of the legal righteousness, which was indispensably necessary unto Life.”⁶⁴

To present this argument, Petto drew heavily upon the books of Romans and Galatians, with particular emphasis upon Paul’s use of Leviticus 18:5, namely, the command “do this and live.”⁶⁵ He interpreted Paul to mean Leviticus 18:5 was a command unto justification and eternal life, viz., a command which Christ fulfilled.⁶⁶ He did not believe, however, that this command was a mere hypothetical offer for salvation. For him, Romans 10:4-5 proved

that the Law hath an end to be attained, and that is righteousness; and that Jesus Christ performeth it, he becometh that end of it to believers; not only accidentally and indirectly, as the Law discovers duty impossible for any man to perform, and a necessity of looking to another for relief; but, directly, Jesus Christ has wrought out and fulfilled that righteousness which the Law exacted, and so is the end of the Law; for it is here opposed unto that righteousness which is of a man’s own working out.⁶⁷

In other words, the purpose of the command “do this and live” was not strictly pedagogical; it had a greater purpose than merely showing Israel their inability to keep it and, consequently, driving them to Christ for relief (i.e. “accidentally and indirectly”). Instead, argued Petto, it was an actual command that Christ had to fulfill by his personal and active obedience as the True Israel. He acknowledged that Sinai indeed had a pedagogical function and that Paul makes that point clear in Galatians 3:24, but he contended that the apostle’s argument in Romans 10 and Galatians 3 shows that Sinai had *more* than a pedagogical function; it was the means whereby Christ became the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes. It was not a *hypothetical* offer of salvation, but a *real* offer in which “a perfect doing was aimed at” and Christ, “the only doer for Life,” fulfilled in his active obedience.⁶⁸

Most writers who held to the doctrine of republication did not make this particular nuance, at least not explicitly.⁶⁹ More common was the view that Sinai’s republication of the covenant of works in the command “do this and live” hypothetically offered salvation to sinners with the pedagogical purpose of driving them to Christ, who, through his active

⁶³ See *DBONC*, 136.

⁶⁴ See *DBONC*, 130.

⁶⁵ See *DBONC*, 121-2.

⁶⁶ See *DBONC*, 128.

⁶⁷ *DBONC*, 129.

⁶⁸ *DBONC*, 142. Petto called this the “higher intendment” of Sinai, namely, “a performance of it by Jesus Christ for impetration or the procurement of federal blessings for us.” *DBONC*, 121.

⁶⁹ See, for example, Brenton Ferry’s discussion of the principle of republication in his essay “Works in the Mosaic Covenant” in *LINF*, 90-98. Ferry shows that among the Reformed Orthodox writers who held to the doctrine of republication, the interpretations of how Sinai republished the law varied. See also Ward, *God & Adam*, 126-39.

and passive obedience fulfilled all righteousness. Of the writers surveyed in the previous chapter, Olevianus, Rollock, Perkins, Polanus, Wollebius, and Patrick Gillespie (1617–75) all seemed to hold to this more common view of republication. While all of these writers strongly affirmed the prelapsarian covenant of works and the necessity of Christ's active obedience imputed to sinners for their salvation, they typically made the connection between Sinai's command "do this and live" and Christ's active obedience by inference. They did not interpret "do this and live" in the same strict way Petto did by calling it a covenant for Christ.

This view that Petto embraced, however, was not unique. Samuel Bolton was aware of it as early as 1645. He listed it last among six interpretations different from his. "There is another interpretation, and that is, that Doe this and live, though it was spoken to them immediately, yet not terminatively, but through them to Jesus Christ, who hath fulfilled all righteousness for us, and purchased life by his own obedience."⁷⁰ Bolton distinguished this view of republication from the more commonly held hypothetical/pedagogical view of republication, which he listed fourth:

Some thinke that God after he had given the promise of life, and tendered life upon beleeving, he repeated the covenant of works in the law, to put man to his choice, whether he would now be saved by working or beleeving. And this the rather to empty them of themselves, and answer them in these thoughts, which perhaps they might think that they were able to come to life by obedience, and therefore God puts them to the triall: and lest they should thinke that any wrong was done to them, he gives them a repetition of the former covenant; and as it were, puts them to their choice whether they would be saved by working or beleeving; that when they were convinced of their owne impotencie, they might better see, admire, adore, advance the mercy of God who hath given a Promise, sent a Christ, to save those that were not able to doe anything toward their own salvation.⁷¹

In other words, this view saw Sinai as a republication (i.e. "repeated" and "repetition") of the covenant of works *after* "the promise of life" (which seems to be a reference to the *proto-evangelium* and the Abrahamic covenant) in order to distinguish between law (i.e. "life by obedience") and gospel (i.e. "saved by ... beleeving") and cause sinners to flee to Christ. Yet, for Bolton, this interpretation had a noticeably different nuance than the interpretation he listed last, namely, the interpretation that directly applied the command "do this and live" to Christ as a covenant of works. William Strong seemed to embrace a view similar to Petto's, as did John Owen and Herman Witsius (1636–1708).⁷² Yet,

⁷⁰ Bolton, *True Bounds*, 156.

⁷¹ Bolton, *True Bounds*, 155-6.

⁷² See Strong, *Discourse*, 88. An unanswered question is, was Petto influenced by Strong? Strong was appointed a Fellow at St. Catherine's Hall, Petto's alma mater, in 1631, and served there until 1634. While Petto would not have studied under Strong, having entered St. Catherine's after Strong's time, it is possible that he would have been exposed to Strong's work. Moreover, Strong's *Discourse* was not published until 1678, long after his death in

none of them formulated Sinai as a covenant of works for Christ as directly and explicitly as did Petto.

This raises the question, however, what did Petto believe concerning Israel's role in the Mosaic covenant? If Sinai was specifically a covenant of works for Christ, what sort of covenant was it for the nation Israel? To answer this question we must turn to the second relationship in Petto's thought, namely, the relationship of the Mosaic covenant to the covenant of grace.

4.2. Relationship of the Mosaic Covenant to the Covenant of Grace

To understand this relationship in Petto's covenant theology, we summarize five trajectories in his thought. First, the Mosaic covenant was the legal condition of the covenant of grace for Christ to perform.⁷³ This was the most critical trajectory in his thought concerning the relationship between the covenant of grace and the Mosaic covenant. The covenant of grace "is made with Jesus Christ the Second Adam, and with all his seed in him, as their Mediator to make reconciliation, and work out a righteousness for them."⁷⁴ While Israel took an oath at Sinai in which they promised to fulfill the conditions of the Mosaic covenant, the obligation ultimately fell upon Christ, the true Israel.⁷⁵ Sinai was "a Covenant of Works, as to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ," but not a covenant of works for Israel.⁷⁶ God's intention in the Mosaic covenant "was not that Israel should, by their own obedience, obtain eternal life and salvation."⁷⁷ Sinners can never fulfill the demands of the law due to their guilt and corruption.

A second trajectory in Petto's thought on Sinai relation to the covenant of grace concerned what he called the "conditional administration" of the Mosaic covenant. Although Sinai was a covenant of works for Christ, it was nonetheless "represented under a conditional administration of it to Israel."⁷⁸ This conditional administration of Sinai contained a works principle for Israel concerning "temporal mercies as the Land of Canaan and such like."⁷⁹ It promised temporal blessings contingent upon Israel's obedience and threatened temporal curses for their disobedience. Remaining in the land of Canaan, for example, was conditional on Israel's performance of the stipulations that the people swore at Sinai.

1654, and four years after the publication of Petto's *DBONC*. Perhaps further research can determine whether or not Petto had access to Strong's work on covenant theology and, if so, how it may have shaped his own thought. On Witsius' view of the Mosaic covenant, see For more on Witsius' doctrine of the Mosaic covenant, see *The Economy of the Covenants between God & Man*, 2 vols., (1693, trans. William Crookshank, 1822; repr. Escondido: The den Dulk Foundation, 1990), 1:165-92, 281-324; 2:162-87. See also Fesko, "Calvin and Witsius on the Mosaic Covenant," *LINF*, 33-43.

⁷³ *DBONC*, 102.

⁷⁴ *DBONC*, 55.

⁷⁵ See *DBONC*, 125-6.

⁷⁶ *DBONC*, 102.

⁷⁷ *DBONC*, 104. He argued this point throughout pages 103-10.

⁷⁸ *DBONC*, 102.

⁷⁹ *DBONC*, 114.

A third trajectory is that the Mosaic covenant contained types and shadows that preached the gospel, making it “in some further way belong to the Covenant of Grace.”⁸⁰ Petto turned to the Levitical priesthood and the land of Canaan as examples. With its sacrifices and offerings in the tabernacle and temple, the priesthood pointed Israel to “the Antitype Jesus Christ [who] would far excel, out-strip, and go beyond the Types, the substance beyond the shadow.”⁸¹ Likewise, Canaan was a “Type of the rest in Heaven,” which proclaimed God’s promise to bring his people to the heavenly country through the Mediator of the covenant of grace.⁸² In this way, the Mosaic covenant preached Christ. “There was an abundance of the Gospel wrapt up in those legal Types and shadows of old.”⁸³

Fourth, the Mosaic covenant is distinct in substance from the Abrahamic covenant.⁸⁴ For Petto, the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants were in different categories. While the moral law was the rule of life and exposed sin and guilt, it was not in the form of a covenant after the fall until mount Sinai, which was some 430 years after God’s covenant with Abraham. Notwithstanding the types and shadows of Christ in the Mosaic covenant, Sinai was a covenant of law, whereas the Abrahamic covenant was a covenant of promise. Believers under the Mosaic covenant enjoyed spiritual blessings “by virtue of the Covenant with Abraham, and not by that at mount Sinai.”⁸⁵ Thus, there were “two distinct Covenants.”⁸⁶ To collapse the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants into one covenant was to muddle up the law with the gospel and thus threaten justification *sola fide*. Petto claimed this to be Paul’s interpretation of the two covenants in Galatians 3.⁸⁷

Fifth, the Mosaic covenant did not disrupt the continuity of the covenant of grace. As was typical of the Reformed orthodox in their response to the Socinians and Anabaptists, Petto argued for a tight continuity between the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant. The Mosaic covenant did not interrupt this. The sharp distinction between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants did not disturb the strong connection between the former and the new covenant. For Petto, the two were of the same substance, whereas the old (i.e. Sinai) and new were not. “[T]he New Covenant in the substance of it or as a Covenant, is found in that with Abraham, though not under the notion of New, for that is given in opposition to the Old; but it could not be said to succeed, until the Old had expired.”⁸⁸ In other words, the new covenant, in its substance, is *new* in relation to Sinai (a covenant of law), but not in relation to the Abrahamic

⁸⁰ *DBONC*, 114.

⁸¹ *DBONC*, 115.

⁸² *DBONC*, 116.

⁸³ *DBONC*, 115.

⁸⁴ See *DBONC*, 87.

⁸⁵ *DBONC*, 161. See also Petto’s treatment of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants in pages 103-10, and in his *Infant Baptism of Christ’s Appointment*.

⁸⁶ *DBONC*, 88.

⁸⁷ See *DBONC*, 87-90. Petto also cited Deuteronomy 5:2-3 as further evidence of this distinction and noted that the Mosaic covenant was in its substance “distinct from that which was made with the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.” See also pages 109-10.

⁸⁸ *DBONC*, 176.

covenant (a covenant of promise and grace). The gospel remains the same throughout redemptive history.⁸⁹

Donald Strickland overstates the case when he says Petto's view "breaks the tight continuity" in the views of those divines who saw the Mosaic covenant as an administration of the covenant of grace.⁹⁰ Responding to E.F. Kevan's work *The Grace of Law*, which delineated two schools of seventeenth-century thought on the Mosaic covenant, namely, those who taught it to be a covenant of works and those who taught it to be an administration of the covenant of grace, Strickland argues that Petto's view was so unlike the latter that it "could have been written by a Baptist."⁹¹ Such a reading of Petto, however, is simplistic at best and misleading at worst. While Strickland is correct to point out that Petto's view represented a third position in addition to the two positions Kevan delineated, he fails to do justice to Petto's teaching of the continuity in the one covenant of grace.

The following chart shows the general framework of Petto's covenantal thinking regarding the Mosaic covenant and its relationship to the covenants of grace and works and serves as a synopsis:

| | <i>Mosaic Covenant for Israel</i> | <i>Mosaic Covenant for Christ</i> |
|-----------|--|--|
| Parties | God and Israel | God and Christ |
| Nature | Conditional administration, but <i>not</i> a covenant of works for justification | The legal condition of the covenant of grace and a covenant of works <i>for Christ</i> |
| Extent | The nation Israel | The elect |
| Condition | National obedience | Perfect, personal obedience |
| Promise | Temporal blessings in Canaan | Justification and eternal life for the elect |

4.3. The Relationship of the Mosaic Covenant to the New Covenant

While Petto sought to uphold the unity of the covenant of grace, he did not see the old and new covenants as merely two administrations of the same covenant; rather, like Owen, he saw them as distinct covenants. The difference between the two was not of *accidents*, but of *substance*. Calling them the same covenant differently administered was, for Petto, an illegitimate flattening-out of the contours of redemptive history. The substance of the old covenant (Sinai) was law, but the substance of

⁸⁹ This was an important point that the Reformed Orthodox emphasized over and against the Socinians. Owen, for example, wrote extensively against the Socinians on this point (and many others), noting that the notion they prooted that the gospel was not present during the period of the old covenant was "senseless and brutish." See Owen, *Works*, 22:98.

⁹⁰ Strickland, "E.F. Kevan, Samuel Petto and Covenant Theology," *Reformation Today*, No.137, January 1994. As noted in the introduction of this essay, Strickland's article is one of the only pieces of secondary literature devoted to Petto.

⁹¹ Strickland, "Kevan, Petto and Covenant Theology."

the new (which was the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant) is gospel. According to John Ball, this view was in the minority in the mid-seventeenth century: “Most Divines hold the old and new Covenants to be one in substance and kind, differing only in degrees.”⁹² Petto seemed to agree with this assessment: “it is usually said, that they are two administrations or dispensations of the same Covenant.” Nevertheless, he disagreed with the conclusion made by these divines. “I think, they are not merely one and the same Covenant, diversely administered, but they are two Covenants.”⁹³

Petto drew principally upon passages such as Hebrews 8 and Galatians 3 and 4 to show the New Testament’s identification of Sinai as the old covenant and its contrast with the new. Concerning these passages, he said, “observe the contradistinction is, between Covenant and Covenant, not barely between circumstances and accidents of the same Covenant.”⁹⁴

At least one important question remains, however: Why did Petto hold to this view of Sinai as the condition for Christ to fulfill in the covenant of grace? To answer this question, we turn now to the final point of our essay, a consideration of the implications Petto’s view of Sinai had upon his doctrine of justification *sola fide*.

5. Implications for the Doctrine of Justification

By the 1670s, when Petto came to write his work on covenant theology, the defense for the Protestant doctrine of justification had become quite complex. Not only did the Reformed orthodox carry the weight of safeguarding their doctrine against the polemical attacks of their three chief adversaries, Socinianism, Roman Catholicism, and Arminianism, but they also encountered the internal challenge of neonomianism. Richard Baxter (1615–91), for example, in his 1649 *Aphorismes of Justification*, 1658 *Of Justification: Four Disputations*, and 1676 *Treatise of Justifying Righteousness*, taught a neonomian doctrine of justification by denying the imputation of Christ’s active obedience and claiming that an obedient faith fulfills the condition for justification.⁹⁵ This produced

⁹² John Ball, *A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* (London, 1645), 95. See also Ward, *God & Adam*, 133ff, where he calls this “the classic view.”

⁹³ *DBONC*, 84–85.

⁹⁴ *DBONC*, 176.

⁹⁵ See Richard Baxter, *Aphorismes of Justification, with Their Explication Annexed* (London, 1649), *Of Justification: Four Disputations Clearing and amicably Defending the Truth, against the unnecessary Oppositions of divers Learned and Reverend Brethren* (London, 1658), and *A Treatise of Justifying Righteousness, In Two Books* (London, 1676). See also C.F. Allison, *The Rise of Moralism: The Proclamation of the Gospel from Hooker to Baxter* (London: SPCK, 1966), 154ff; J.V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2008), 30–31; Carl Trueman, *John Owen*, 106–7; idem, “A Small Step Towards Rationalism: The Impact of the Metaphysics of Tommaso Campanella on the Theology of Richard Baxter,” in *Protestant Scholasticism*, ed. Trueman and Clark, 181–95; R. Scott Clark, “How We Got Here: The Roots of the Current Controversy over Justification,” in *Covenant, Justification, and Pastoral Ministry: Essays By the Faculty of Westminster Seminary California*, R. Scott Clark, ed. (Phillipsburg: P & R, 2007), 15, esp. n.27; and D. Patrick Ramsey, “Meet Me in the Middle: Herman Witsius and the English Dissenters,” *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 19, 2008, 156. For a more positive assessment of Baxter, see Hans Boersma, *A Hot Pepper Corn*:

a blaze of controversy, for the Reformed orthodox, as R.S. Clark notes, “had been explicit that only Christ’s obedience is the ground and that in the act of justification faith’s only virtue is that it trusts Christ’s finished work.”⁹⁶ Baxter, on the other hand, asserted the very opposite, saying, “faith is imputed for Righteousness...because it is an Act of Obedience to God ... it is the performance of the Condition of the Justifying Covenant.”⁹⁷ For Baxter, faith, rather than the active and passive obedience of Christ, is the ground of and condition for justification. Moreover, such faith included obedience and evangelical works. The “perfect righteousness and sacrifice of Christ” secured more lenient terms for believers than previously enjoyed under the old covenant so that a believer’s faith (which must include “sincere love, obedience, or evangelical works”) is imputed for righteousness “as the condition of the law.”⁹⁸

Because Baxter’s construction of justification bore striking similarities to the Roman Catholic position that Christ obeyed the law in order to make it possible for sinners to cooperate with grace toward future justification, it elicited intense responses from Reformed orthodox writers. Owen, for example, responded in 1677 with his *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ*. In it he lamented, “In my judgment Luther spake the truth when he said, ‘Amisso articulo justificationis, simul amissa est tota doctrina Christiana.’ And I wish he had not been a true prophet, when he foretold that in the following ages the doctrine hereof would be again obscured.”⁹⁹

It is against this historical backdrop that Petto wrote on covenant theology and its implications for the doctrine of justification. While he does not name Baxter in *The Old and New Covenant*, he was clearly in-

Richard Baxter’s Doctrine of Justification in Its Seventeenth-Century Context of Controversy (Zoetermeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 1993) and J.I. Packer, *The Redemption & Restoration of Man in the Thought of Richard Baxter* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Publishing, 2003), 237-65.

⁹⁶ Clark, “How We Got Here,” 15. See also Westminster Confession of Faith 8.1; Westminster Larger Catechism 70-73; cf. HC 60-61 and BC 22. It is worth noting that the Savoy Declaration, the construction of which John Owen played a major role, went even further than the WCF in explicit language. While it essentially adopted the WCF’s language on justification (i.e. Chapter 11), the Savoy Declaration replaced the words, “but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto them” (WCF 11.1) with the words, “but by imputing Christ’s active obedience to the whole law, and passive obedience in his death for their whole and sole righteousness.” That the WCF did not include more explicit language about the imputation of Christ’s active obedience may be due to a consensual motive of the Assembly on behalf of a small minority of its members, such as its first prolocutor, William Twisse (1578–1646) and the theologian Thomas Gataker (1574–1654), who denied the vast majority view that Christ’s active obedience to the whole law was imputed to the believer for salvation. See Chad Van Dixhoorn, “Reforming the Reformation: Theological Debate at the Westminster Assembly 1643–52,” (PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2004) 7 vols, vol 1, 324-330.

⁹⁷ Baxter, *Treatise*, 178.

⁹⁸ Baxter, *Treatise*, 163.

⁹⁹ “When the article of justification is lost, at the same time the whole Christian doctrine is lost.” Owen, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ; Explained, Confirmed, and Vindicated, Works* (1677) in *Works*, 5:67. For more on Owen’s doctrine of justification and the imputation of Christ’s active obedience, see Truman, *John Owen*, 101-21.

teracting with his arguments.¹⁰⁰ For Petto, Christ's active and passive obedience in the Mosaic covenant is the ground of justification.

5.1. The Imputed Active Obedience of Christ

Unlike Owen, Petto did not write a full treatise on the doctrine of justification. Nevertheless, from *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant* we are able to see clearly where he stood on the matter. He gave no indication of having deviated from the doctrine of justification as expressed and codified in the Westminster Confession of Faith. Justification is, for Petto, "that great blessing of the Covenant."¹⁰¹ It is God's gracious remedy to the catastrophic consequences of Adam's breaking of the covenant of works. It provides guilty sinners with the righteousness they need in order to be acceptable to God. Such righteousness is not their own, since sin leaves humans incapable of producing righteousness acceptable to the standards of God's holiness. Rather, it is Christ's, as he earned it by his active obedience.¹⁰²

Petto was clear that justification involved more than the mere pardon of sin; there must also be a positive and perfect righteousness imputed to sinners.¹⁰³ He wanted to show that justification is not the mere procurement of the new covenant by Christ's sacrifice which allows a believer's faith to be imputed and accepted for righteousness, but that, in justification, Christ's perfect righteousness is imputed to the sinner who receives it by faith alone.¹⁰⁴

Contra the teachings of Baxter and others, such as Johannes Piscator (1546–1625) and Thomas Gataker (1574–1654), who regarded Christ's positive obedience to the law merely as being part of his obligation as a rational creature, Petto stressed the necessity of Christ's active obedience in our place:¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Although his *DBONC* (1674) was published three years before Owen's *Doctrine of Justification* (1677) and two years before Baxter's *Treatise of Justifying Righteousness* (1676), it is clearly engaged in the same theological controversy represented by the clashes between Owen and Baxter, and aiming its sights at neonomianism.

¹⁰¹ *DBONC*, a3.

¹⁰² *DBONC*, 104. In a fashion typical of the Reformed orthodox, Petto drew heavily upon Romans and Galatians to show that justifying righteousness was "performed for us by Jesus Christ."

¹⁰³ See *DBONC*, 268.

¹⁰⁴ "We are not to think that the righteousness whereby we are justified is to be performed by our selves, as if the sacrifice of Jesus Christ were intended only to expiate and obtain the pardon of our sins in coming short thereof: No, such a righteousness is exacted unto justification and eternal life, as is absolutely perfect, hath no flaws or sinful imperfections in it, no forgiveness is needed there, it is such as could not be performed by any but Jesus Christ alone." *DBONC*, 153.

¹⁰⁵ See Johannes Piscator, *A Profitable Treatise* (1599), Preface. See also Owen, *Works*, 5:173–75. Owen pointed out that certain Protestants of his time had been influenced by the Socinian notion that Christ's active obedience is not imputed to the believer, but only a participation in its effects. "And it is not pleasing to see among ourselves with so great confidence take up the sense and words of these men in their disputations against the Protestant doctrine in this cause; that is, the doctrine of the church of England." On page 175, he called them "impertinent cavils that some of late have collects from the Papists and Socinians, - that if it be so, then are we as righteous as Christ himself, that we have redeemed the world and

Some think the righteousness of Jesus Christ, or his active obedience in our stead, needless; unless as a part of his satisfaction for sin; because (say they) the law requires not of us both suffering and obedience. I Answer, the Law, as a Covenant of Works, required suffering in satisfaction for sin, and as it belongeth to the Covenant of Grace, so it requireth perfect obedience (to be fulfilled by Jesus Christ) as the condition of the Justification and Life of sinners.¹⁰⁶

In other words, for the salvation of his elect, God required of Christ more than his suffering alone; he required perfect, active obedience to the law. Christ had to be both the penalty-payer and the probation-passer for his people.¹⁰⁷

Germane to our thesis, however, is Petto's insistence that Christ's active and passive obedience was the fulfillment of *the Mosaic covenant* as the condition for the salvation of the elect.¹⁰⁸ In response to Sinai's demand, "Do this and live." Christ not only responded, "All this I will do," but also accomplished it in his active and passive obedience, which in turn is imputed to believers. The "Sinai Covenant is a Platform for the legal righteousness, which was indispensably necessary unto Life."¹⁰⁹ Thus, Petto's view of the Mosaic covenant as the legal condition of the covenant of grace protected his doctrine of the imputed active obedience of Christ.

5.2. The Nature of Conditionality in the Covenant of Grace

Another point to consider is Petto's understanding of the nature of conditionality in the covenant of grace, which was a topic of some interest among the Reformed orthodox.¹¹⁰ Not unlike his contemporaries, Petto made precise nuances regarding the conditionality of the covenant of grace. He distinguished between "conditional promises" and "absolute promises."¹¹¹ The new covenant "consisteth of absolute Promises, and therefore is better than the Old Sinai Covenant, which did run upon conditional Promises, yea had works as its condition."¹¹² The old covenant was defined by the conditional promise, "Do this and live." The new

satisfied for the sins of others, that the pardon of sin is impossible and personal righteousness needless."

¹⁰⁶ *DBONC*, 268.

¹⁰⁷ It is worth noting that Petto stressed Christ's definite atonement and vicarious sacrifice for our sins over and against Baxter's view, which denied that the actual sins of the elect were imputed to Christ and that his death was an identical satisfaction for them. Baxter adopted this position from Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), who constructed in an effort to combat Socinianism. Said Petto, "Christ suffered not the *tautundem*; something in lieu or stead of what we should have suffered, but the *idem*, the very same punishment of the Law that was due to us." See *Aphorismes*, 54 and Trumen, *John Owen*, 106-7, 115-16.

¹⁰⁸ See *DBONC*, 179.

¹⁰⁹ *DBONC*, 130. See similar statements in 131-40.

¹¹⁰ Turretin, for example, devotes the Twelfth Topic, Third Question of his *Institutes* to this matter. 2:184-89. For other discussions of the nature of conditionality in the covenant of grace, see also Gillespie, *Ark of the Testament Opened*, 256-64; Dickson, *Therapeutica Sacra*, 99-108; William Bridge, *Christ and the Covenant* (London, 1667), 68-70; Thomas Blake, *Vindiciae Foederis* (London, 1653), 34-52, 102-148, 192-201.

¹¹¹ See pages 39-40.

¹¹² *DBONC*, 202.

covenant, on the other hand, is defined by the absolute promise, “I will ... and ye shall”:¹¹³

When the condition of any Covenant is performed, it becometh absolute, as if there had never been any annexed to it. Now, Jesus Christ is mentioned as our great High-Priest and Mediatour, and that as having finished the work of Satisfaction, [Heb 8] ver. 1, 2, 6. and the condition contained in the Old, being exactly and compleatly fulfilled by him, it naturally or necessarily must turn into an absolute form as in the New, because upon his performance, nothing more is to be demanded of him, but all must certainly be accomplished unto us.¹¹⁴

In other words, Christ’s fulfillment of the condition of the covenant of grace makes the promises of the covenant of grace absolute to believers. Considered this way, the covenant of grace is not conditional for the recipients of its promises. It “is an absolute grant” to believers by virtue of Christ’s personal and perfect performance.¹¹⁵ “Nothing performed by us then is *conditio foederis*, the condition of the Covenant it self, Jesus Christ hath performed all required that way.”¹¹⁶

Upon close examination, it becomes clear that Petto’s understanding of conditionality in the covenant of grace was very close to Turretin’s. Both Turretin and Petto flatly rejected any notion of antecedent conditions in the covenant of grace, for that would make the believer’s work the ground of justification.¹¹⁷ Likewise, both Turretin and Petto affirmed a consequent condition in the covenant of grace (i.e. faith), which is also the gift of God and founded on Christ’s obedience alone, functioning as the instrumental cause for receiving the promises of the covenant.

At first, Petto seems to have denied that any such condition exists: “There can be no such antecedent condition by the performance of which we get and gain entrance or admittance into Covenant.... Neither is there any subsequent condition to be fulfilled by us, the use of that is, for the continuation of a right, and upon the failing thereof all is forfeited, as in the case of Adam.”¹¹⁸ He refused to call faith, as well as repentance and obedience, conditions, either antecedent or subsequent. He acknowledged that if there *was* a condition for believers in the new covenant, it would seem to be faith, yet that cannot be the case. A condition “properly taken,” he argued, earns the right to the benefit promised.¹¹⁹ This, said Petto, cannot apply to faith, because faith *receives* a benefit; it does not earn a right to it. While recognizing that the New Testament often uses conditional language to speak of the necessity of faith, repentance, and obedience, he stressed that these are gifts earned by Christ’s obedience and bestowed upon believers by the inward working of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁰

¹¹³ *DBONC*, 203. He cited Hebrews 8:10-13.

¹¹⁴ *DBONC*, 203-4.

¹¹⁵ *DBONC*, 210.

¹¹⁶ *DBONC*, 107.

¹¹⁷ See Turretin, *Institutes*, 2:184-5.

¹¹⁸ *DBONC*, 212-13.

¹¹⁹ *DBONC*, 216.

¹²⁰ See *DBONC*, 208.

In his chapter on the conditional promises of the new covenant, Petto gave examples of passages that contain a conditional form, passages such as Hebrews 3:6, Colossians 1:21-23, and the petition for forgiveness in the Lord's Prayer. Commenting on this, Petto explained that "Our forgiving others is not properly a condition, as if a performance of ours did *engage* the Lord or lay him under *an obligation* to forgive us; or, as if we had *right* and might lay *claim* to Divine remission upon such an act of ours." Rather, he argued, "it is expressed in a *Conditional form*, as a pressing argument and a quickening spur to so necessary a duty as the forgiving others, although the Lord hath *absolute intentions* to pardon us, and to cause us to forgive others."¹²¹

Nevertheless, he conceded that such conditional language is contained in the means to the end of salvation, and that both the means and the end are granted because of the obedience of Christ:

Where there is such a connexion of Duties, Graces, and Blessings, the matters may be sometimes expressed in a conditional form, with an *If* as Rom. 10.9. *If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thy heart...thou shalt be saved.* Such *Ifs* note the verity of such propositions in their connexion; they affirm this or that to be a certain truth, as that *he which believeth shall undoubtedly be saved*, yet that Grace is not properly the condition of Salvation; For even believing is absolutely promised, so as nothing shall intervene to hinder it, Isa. 53.10, 11. Heb 8.10. In that improper sense, some Scriptures seem to speak of conditions, viz. they intimate a connexion between Covenant blessings; some are conjoined as means and end, yet the promises are really absolute for their performance.¹²²

What Petto called "that improper sense" of conditions seems to equate to what Turretin called concomitant and consequent conditions, that is, conditions already secured by the finished work of Christ.¹²³ While Petto and Turretin did not use the same language, both writers affirmed that the means *and* the end in the promises of the covenant of grace are absolute because Christ secured them both for believers by his active and passive obedience.

What Petto sought to emphasize in his covenant theology, however, was that the Mosaic covenant was the legal condition of the covenant of grace fulfilled by Christ through his active and passive obedience, thus securing all redemptive benefits for the elect and making promises in the new covenant absolute. Consequently, this safeguarded his understanding of the nature of conditionality in the covenant of grace against neonomianism which tended to teach faith and evangelical obedience as conditions to be fulfilled by the believer for salvation.

¹²¹ *DBONC*, 319.

¹²² *DBONC*, 209-10. See also Chapter 14 of *DBONC*, "Of Those That Are Called Conditional Promises," esp. pages 317ff in which he says the New Testament uses conditional language regarding faith and other graces "as if" they were conditions.

¹²³ Turretin distinguished between antecedent, *a priori* conditions, which he denied belonged to the covenant of grace, and concomitant, consequent, *a posteriori* conditions, which he affirmed as belonging to the covenant of grace. Faith, he made clear, is not a condition antecedently or "absolutely." It is not "accepted for righteousness" nor a form of "obedience to the law." Rather, faith is only a consequent condition which, as the sole instrument in justification, "embraces Christ and his benefits." See *Institutes*, 2:184-89.

5.3. Faith as the Instrumental Cause in Justification

Petto's doctrine of faith clearly conformed to the doctrine of faith codified in the Reformed confessions.¹²⁴ He held it to be the sole instrument, which, apart from all works, trusts in and receives the righteousness of Christ for one's justification. While true faith inevitably produces good works and a love for the moral law of God, those good works and love are never part of faith itself.¹²⁵ All the works of a believer, whether legal or evangelical, are excluded from justification and faith, because "the way of Grace and Works are so mutually destructive one to the other, that if it be by one it cannot be by the other."¹²⁶ Faith is entirely extra-spective, looking away from oneself and one's own doing, "whether by nature or grace," and fixes its sights "upon Jesus Christ alone for righteousness and Life."¹²⁷

Contra Baxter, Petto rejected the idea of faith imputed as righteousness for salvation. Baxter taught that since Christ fulfilled the old covenant, the formal cause of justification in the new covenant was the faith of the believer.¹²⁸ Petto, however, labored to show the distinction between faith and the righteousness which faith receives in order to defend the view that faith is not the *formal* cause of justification, but the *instrumental* cause. As an instrumental cause, it cannot fulfill the condition for salvation. The command to believe on Christ in the new covenant is not a relaxed form of the law:

Hence in opposition to that Sinai Law which ran upon those terms *Do and Live*, under the dispensation of the *New*, we hear so often of *Believe and be saved*, and *he which believeth have everlasting Life*, Mark 16.16. Joh.3.16, 36. Not that believing now, taketh the place of doing in the Old Covenant; for then it must be our righteousness unto Justification, Gal 3.12. Rom 10.5., whereas that which justifieth is called, *the righteousness of Faith*, ver.6. and Phil.3.9. and therefore Faith is distinct from *that righteousness it self*, is not the least Atome of it: therefore, not our believing, but the obedience of Jesus Christ, is that which cometh in the room and stead of that doing for Life intended in the Law.¹²⁹

"Believe and be saved" is not a new law to fulfill, for that would make one's faith, rather than the obedience of Christ, the ground and formal

¹²⁴ WCF 11.1-2; 14; WLC 70-73; BC 22-23; HC 21, 60-61.

¹²⁵ Petto guarded against antinomianism by pointing out that "although Christ fulfilled the Law for us, so as it is imputed to us, and we made the righteousness of God in him, 2 Cor. 5.21. Yet it doth not follow that we should be freed altogether from the obligation of the Law unto obedience; for the righteousness of Jesus Christ, his obeying and fulfilling of the Law for us, was as the condition of Life, or that upon which the Lord hath promised Justification unto Life; but we may be (and are) obliged to obedience, not for that, but for other ends; not in the least for our Justification and title to Life; but as a part of our Sanctification; and we sin in not obeying, that we may glorifie God by those fruits of our being Spiritually alive. Christ's obedience was for one end, ours is for another; as his sufferings were for one end, our afflictions for another, and neither of them unnecessary." *DBONC*, 273. For Petto, good works do not contribute in any way toward justification, but are done in grateful obedience for the glory of God. See also *DBONC*, 320.

¹²⁶ *DBONC*, 113.

¹²⁷ *DBONC*, 199. See also 292-99 and 325-26.

¹²⁸ Baxter, *Aphorismes*, 29, 88, 129-30.

¹²⁹ *DBONC*, 197-8.

cause of justification. As noted above, Petto refused to call faith a condition, at least not a condition “properly taken.” God offers the righteousness of Christ as a gift; faith then receives the offer.¹³⁰ “Not that Faith it self was reckoned the least of that righteousness whereby we are justified, but a means for the applying of Jesus Christ who is our righteousness.”¹³¹

His view of Christ fulfilling the Mosaic covenant as the legal condition of the covenant of grace upheld his understanding of faith as the *instrumental* and not the *formal* cause of justification. Faith itself is a gift by virtue of Christ’s fulfillment of the condition of the covenant. It “doth receive a title from Jesus Christ, doth not give one.” Refuting Baxter’s analogy of a “peppercorn” payment of rent to represent the believer’s contribution to salvation, Petto pointed out that faith does no such thing:¹³² “We claim Salvation not in the right of any act of ours, not upon the Rent of Faith (as men hold Tenements by the payment of a Penny, a Rose, or such like) no such thing here; all is paid to the utmost Farthing by our Surety, and we hold and claim upon the obedience of Jesus Christ alone.”¹³³ Faith is a gift that bestows a title upon the believer because of the obedience of Christ alone.

5.4. Pastoral Application of Justification

We would be remiss not to point out Petto’s pastoral application of justification, for this was his primary concern in the last three chapters of *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant*. Having set forth his argument for the obedience of Christ under the Mosaic covenant as the ground of the believer’s justification and the absolute promises made to those in the new covenant, he seemed to anticipate a reader saying, “This all sounds good, but how do I know it is true *for me*?” Petto’s answer to that question was faith, faith in the free promise of Christ.

He turned to the question of assurance and what he called “the evidences of interest in the New Covenant.”¹³⁴ While he acknowledged that the testimony of the Holy Spirit, sanctification, and evangelical obedience

¹³⁰ *DBONC*, 216.

¹³¹ *DBONC*, 217.

¹³² Said Baxter, “A Tenant forfeiteth his Lease to his Landlord, by not paying his rent; he runs deep in debt to him, and is disabled to pay him any more rent for the future, whereupon he is put out of his house, and cast him into prison till he pay his debt. His Landlord’s son payeth it for him, taketh him out of prison, and putteth him in his house again, as his Tenant, having purchased house and all to himself; he maketh him a new Lease in this Tenor, that paying but a pepper corn yearly to him, he shall be acquit both from his debt, and from all other rent from the future, which by his old lease was to be paid; yet doth he not cancel the old Lease, but keepeth it in his hands to put in suite against the Tenant, if he should be so foolish as to deny the payment of the pepper corn. In this case the payment of the grain of pepper is imputed to the Tenant, as if he had paid the rent of the old Lease: Yet this imputation doth not extoll the pepper corn, nor vilifie the benefit of his Benefactor, who redeemed him: nor can it be said that the purchase did only serve to advance the value and efficacy of that grain of pepper. But thus; a personall rent must be paid for the testification of his homage.” Baxter, *Aphorismes*, 83-84.

¹³³ *DBONC*, 200. Here he cited Rom 5:18, 19, 21.

¹³⁴ *DBONC*, 288.

all play a part in the believer's assurance, he insisted that faith in the free promise of the gospel is of the utmost importance:

Faith is not then properly the condition of the Covenant, upon the performance of which, they have a right and title to it; but a choice effect of it, and a singular means for the application of the promises, and fetching in of Covenant blessings to the Soul: by that the Promise, or what is in the Promise, is given to it, and Faith having thus to do with the Promises, it must needs have an aptitude above other Graces, above Sanctification and Evangelical obedience to witness a Soul's interest in the everlasting Covenant.¹³⁵

It is important to note that he ranked faith in the free promise above sanctification and evangelical obedience as the most necessary grace for a believer's assurance that he is in Christ and a beneficiary of the new covenant. Although he acknowledged the teaching of James that faith may be evidenced to others by good works, Petto stressed that such good works are the fruit of faith and that what Christians should keep their focus upon is the free promise of the gospel.¹³⁶

Such faith, for Petto, was not faith in faith itself or faith in a personal experience of faith, but only faith in the objective and finished work of Christ alone. "By Faith the Soul maketh out [i.e. looks] to Jesus Christ in the Free Promise, as he alone that giveth it subsistence in spiritual Life...Christians live by Faith, by what is laid up in Divine Promises, by these things they live."¹³⁷ He recognized that Christians often, as a result of their sinful nature, turn inward to find evidence of their salvation instead of resting in the free promise of the gospel and lamented that this was the case. "I have often thought, if Christians did give more attendance to such direct acts of Faith," that is, looking to Christ alone in the free promise of the gospel, "and spent less time in questioning their conditions, or giving way to doubtings about them, they would find their interest in the Covenant cleared up, yea and consolation also coming in as by the by."¹³⁸

Petto's doctrine does not seem to be the kind of doctrine of which R.T. Kendall has accused the seventeenth century British orthodox of teaching. In his *Calvin and the English Calvinists to 1649*, Kendall argues that English Calvinism, through its affirmation of a limited atonement, was actually "crypto-Arminian" in its theology and made it almost impossible for one to be assured of saving faith apart from laborious, introspective works.¹³⁹ Criticizing the syllogistic reasoning of Beza, Ursinus, and later English Calvinists for being introspective, speculative, and ultimately making faith an act of man, located in the human will, Kendall

¹³⁵ *DBONC*, 290.

¹³⁶ "Faith may be shewed unto others by Works, Jam. 2.18. A man may be *Declaratively* justified by Works, but if man doubteth of his Faith, he will as doubt of his Works, whether they be of a Gospel root or not?" *DBONC*, 295.

¹³⁷ *DBONC*, 294. He continued, "they know not how to subsist in any state or condition without a Promise: they would count themselves dead creatures without that, whatever earthly enjoyments they had in possession."

¹³⁸ *DBONC*, 296.

¹³⁹ Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 3-4, 205, 209.

claims that seventeenth century English Calvinism made an exodus from the early Reformation.¹⁴⁰ Petto's covenant theology, however, bears no marks of this. For him, assurance of faith comes not from rigorous, introspective works, but from an extraspective faith that rests in the free promise given in the Person and Work of Christ. Assurance is found not by turning inward to look for good works or a mystical experience, but by hearing the absolute promises of the gospel, which calls us out of ourselves to find rest and refreshment in Christ, the keeper of the covenant and the fulfiller of its conditions.

Conclusions

This essay has argued that Petto viewed the Mosaic covenant as a republication of the covenant of works for Christ to fulfill as the condition of the covenant of grace in order to safeguard the Reformed doctrine of justification *sola fide*. In light of the observations made in this essay, we draw three conclusions. First, Petto's covenant theology not only informed but also safeguarded his doctrine of justification. His interpretation of the Mosaic covenant as a covenant of works for Christ and the condition he had to fulfill in the covenant of grace strengthened the Reformed orthodox doctrine of the active obedience of Christ. That Sinai commanded of Christ "Do this and live" as a covenant condition, and because Christ fulfilled that command for justification and life on behalf of the elect, the gospel is not just that believers are forgiven, but that they are reckoned as law keepers themselves by virtue of Christ's obedience imputed to them.

Second, Petto was clearly an opponent of Baxterian neonomianism and its attack upon the Protestant doctrine of justification. His positions on (a) Christ's obedience as the ground of justification, (b) the nature of conditionality in the covenant of grace, and (c) faith as the instrumental cause of justification put him squarely in the ranks of the Reformed orthodox in their apologetic fight against neonomianism, as well as their ongoing battles with Socinianism, Arminianism, and the often sophisticated polemics of Roman Catholicism.¹⁴¹

Third, Petto's covenant theology informed how he applied justification *sola fide* for the believer's assurance. It highlighted the new covenant promise that sinners are saved by God's grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. It set forth Christ as the object of faith and the one in whom all the absolute promises of the new covenant are "yes" and "amen."

With deep pastoral concern for troubled consciences, Petto concluded his treatise *The Difference Between the Old and New Covenant*

¹⁴⁰ Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism*, 8-9, 33-34, 40-41, 56-57, 63, 69-74, 125, 148, 150, 179-81, 211. For a critical assessment of Kendall's thesis, see Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists*; Horton, "Thomas Goodwin and the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance;" Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*; and Dever, *Richard Sibbes*. Helm, Horton, Beeke, and Dever all establish the continuity between Calvin and his orthodox heirs regarding the doctrine of assurance.

¹⁴¹ For further evidence of this conclusion, compare Petto's work to Owen's lengthy 1677 treatise, *The Doctrine of Justification by Faith through the Imputation of the Righteousness of Christ*, found in *Works*, 5.

with this gospel exhortation, which also makes a fitting conclusion to this essay:

We are to take heed, that we do not ground and bottom our consolation on the qualifications within, but on the promise itself (or the Lord therein) without. Many are drawing and fetching their comfort from their faith and other graces, and lay the stress of it there, and accordingly are up and down, ebbing and flowing therein, instead of fetching it from the Lord in the promise, an immutable thing, Heb. 6.18. by the means of faith and taking that and other graces only as evidences of interest in it. Some, because they are weary and heavy laden, thence take their rest and refreshment, whereas they are called out of themselves, to come for it to Jesus Christ, Matth. 11.28. When qualifications lie most dark, or are most clearly discerned, yet we should not look so much to these, as to Jesus Christ in the promise for Consolation ... when Jesus Christ was upon Earth, he performed the office of a Mediator as to satisfaction; and now he is in heaven, he doth it still as to intercession, Heb. 7.25. He presenteth his obedience continually to the Father for our obtainment for what he hath purchased. Would we have any foederal blessings, the Law written in our heart in more lively characters, the Lord witnessed more fully to be our God, sin to be pardoned? Let our faith be acting upon him as one that mediateth for our obtainment of all; for he is the Mediator, not of the Old, but of the New and Better Testament, which is established upon better Promises.¹⁴²

¹⁴² *DBONC*, 325-26.