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Terms

Introduction

*R*eformed theology has long used and cherished covenantal language for Adam's relationship with God. Criticism of this language has arisen only relatively recently, for example, in the twentieth century. John Murray (1898-1975) rejected the idea of a covenant of works and instead preferred to refer to God's pre-fall dealings with humanity as the *Adamic Administration*. He advocated this change in terminology because the Bible does not explicitly apply the term *covenant* to the Adamic state, and he did not want to employ the term *works* to describe it. Although Adam was under a divine probation, Murray nevertheless wanted to register the idea that it was not a contract or compact.[1] If Murray was pressed to employ the term *covenant* to describe the pre-fall Adamic state, then he preferred *covenant of life*, which was a term used by the Westminster Shorter and Larger Catechisms.[2] Murray's rejection and preference of designations raises an interesting question about the various terms early modern Reformed theologians used to either label or describe the pre-fall

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1. John Murray, 'Adamic Administration,' in *Collected Writings*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), II:47-59, esp. 50.

2. *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament Sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Larger Catechisme* (London: A. M., 1648), q. 20; *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament Sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Shorter Catechism* (London: J. F., 1648), q. 12.

Adamic state. While *covenant of works* was certainly common, it was by no means the only term used. This chapter, therefore, presents a brief reconnaissance of the various terms used for the pre-fall covenant.

In short, theologians employed vocabulary based ultimately on personal preference, but they nevertheless chose different terms for the pre-fall covenant based upon how they identified the sequential place, nature, basis, condition, or goal of the covenant. But regardless of the rationale, theologians never made terminology a test of orthodoxy. Even then, this succinct survey provides an opportunity to better understand the rationale behind the Adamic covenant; it showcases the fact that it was a doctrinal construct rather than an explicit teaching of Scripture.[3] In other words, theologians arrived at the shores of this doctrine by way of good and necessary consequence. The chapter first surveys a collection of numerous terms that theologians employed to designate or describe the Adamic covenant. The survey is not exhaustive but illustrative to provide examples of the different terms that appear in early modern treatments of the Adamic covenant. Second, the chapter examines two high orthodox Reformed theologians, Francis Turretin (1623-1687) and Herman Witsius (1636-1708), in order to get a closer look at how they arrived at their respective decisions regarding the proper label for the Adamic covenant. The chapter then concludes with some observations about the various terms early modern theologians applied to the pre-fall covenant.

Survey of Terms

One of the earliest designations for the Adamic covenant comes from Roman Catholic theologian, Diego Lañyez (1512-1565), who spoke of the 'first and second covenants' (*primo et secondi pacti*). Sequence appears to be the motivating factor in this choice, as Adam's covenant is naturally first and the 'covenant of the grace

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3. On this point, see e.g., Richard A. Muller and Roland A. Ward, *Scripture and Worship: Biblical Interpretation and the Directory for Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2007), 69-81; J. V. Fesko, *The Theology of the Westminster Standards: Historical Context and Theological Insights* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 86-90.

of God' (*pacti gratiae Dei*) comes second.[4] The choice, therefore, is practical. Another rationale for choosing terminology lies in soteriological categories and the relationship between law and gospel. Martin Luther (1483-1546) famously distinguished between the categories of law and gospel.[5] The law makes demands and the gospel gives promises. Other theologians such as Zacharias Ursinus (1534-1583), who studied with Lutheran theologian Philip Melanchthon (1497-1560), picked up this distinction and employed it in his own theology.[6] In his Larger Catechism, Ursinus poses the question, 'What is the difference between law and the gospel?' He replies: 'The law contains the natural covenant [*foedus naturale*] … The gospel, however, contains the covenant of grace [*foedus gratiae*].'[7] Ursinus layers the natural covenant and covenant of grace over the categories of law and gospel, which was a trend that appears in several early modern Reformed treatments of the Adamic covenant. Ursinus' use of the terms *natural* juxtaposed with *grace*, however, owes its origins to the long-standing doctrinal pair of nature and grace, common to patristic and medieval theology.[8]

Nevertheless, Thomas Cartwright (1534-1603), for example, succinctly states: 'The lawe and the ghospell, otherwise called the

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4. Diego Lañyez, 'Disputatio de justitia imputata,' in *Jacobi Lainez Disputationes Tridentiae*, vol. 2, ed. Harmannus Grisar (Regensberg: Feliciania Rauch, 1886), II.v (p. 159), II.xxxvii (p. 189).

5. Robet Kolb, 'Luther's Hermeneutics of Distinctions: Law and Gospel, Two Kinds of Righteousness, Two Realms, Freedom and Bondage,' in *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology*, eds. Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'Ubomír Batka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 168-86.

6. Derk Visser, 'Ursinus, Zacharias,' in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols., ed. Hans. J. Hilderbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), IV:202-03.

7. Zacharias Ursinus, *Larger Catechism*, q. 36, in *An Introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism: Sources, History and Theology*, ed. Lyle D. Bierma, et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); idem, *Summa Theologiae*, in *Der Heidelberger Katechismus und Vier Verwandte Katechismen* (Leipzig: Georg Böhme, 1907), 156.

8. See, e.g., Augustine, *A Treatise on Nature and Grace*, in NPNF[1] V:116-54; Paul Helm, 'Nature and Grace,' in *Aquinas Among the Protestants*, eds. David VanDrunen and Manfred Svensson (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 229-48.

Covenant of Woorkes and the Covenant of grace.'[9] George Walker (ca. 1581-1651), a Westminster divine, discusses the importance of distinguishing between 'the knowledge of the true difference of the Old and New Testament, the Covenant of Workes, and the Covenant of Grace, the Law and the Gospel.'[10] The identification between law and gospel and the two covenants (works and grace) appeared as early as Ursinus in early orthodoxy and persisted, therefore, into the beginning stages of high orthodoxy, evident in Walker's statement but also present in the works of others, such as James Ussher (1581-1656) and Henry Finch (ca. 1558-1625).[11] In concert with the connection between law and gospel and the two covenants, some theologians employed the term *foedus naturale*. Perhaps due in part to his time at Heidelberg and the influence of Ursinus, Franciscus Gomarus (1563-1641) labels the two periods as the natural and supernatural covenants (*naturale et supernaturale*).[12] Although, these terms could also find their inspiration from Gomarus' University of Leiden colleague Francis Junius (1545-1602) and his influential work on prolegomena where he divides theology into natural and supernatural categories.[13] According to Junius, natural theology dealt with things that

9. Thomas Cartwright, *A Short Catechism*, in *Cartwrightiana*, ed. Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1951), 159.

10. George Walker, *The Manifold Wisedome of God: In the Divers Dispensation of Grace by Jesus Christ* (London: John Bartlet, 1640), 2-3.

11. James Ussher, *A Body of Divinitie, or The Summe and Substance of Christian Religion* (London Tho. Downes and Geo. Badger, 1645), 123; [Henry Finch], *The Summe of Sacred Divinitie* (London: William Stansby, 1625?), I.xv (p. 223). Note, Finch's *Summe of Sacred Divinitie* has been erroneously attributed to John Downame (1571-1652). On Finch's authorship of the *Summe of Sacred Divinitie*, see Randall J. Pederson, *Unity in Diversity: English Puritans and the Puritan Reformation, 1603-1689* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 89-90 n. 2, 123-27; Richard A. Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition: On the Work of Christ and the Order of Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 223 n. 176.

12. Franciscus Gomarus, *Oratio De Foedere Dei*, in *Opera Theologica Omnia* (Amsterdam: Joannis Janssonsius, 1664), 2; cf. Michael A. Hakkenberg, 'Gomarus, Franciscus,' in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Reformation*, 4 vols., ed. Hans. J. Hilderbrand (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), II:181-82.

13. Francis Junius, *A Treatise on True Theology*, trans. David Noe (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 145-68.

are common to all humans, and this was Adam's state when his nature was intact.[14] Conversely, after the fall and the corruption of nature, humans required inspired or supernatural theology to rescue them.[15] Gomarus, it appears, takes these two categories and unites them to the covenant concept to designate the natural and supernatural covenants.

Another source for the Adamic covenant comes from 1 Corinthians 15:45-46: 'The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual' (KJV). The fact that Paul contrasts the two periods as natural versus spiritual led theologians like John Cameron (ca. 1579-1625) to call the Adamic covenant the *foedus naturae* ('covenant of nature'), which he contrasted with the *foedus gratiae* ('covenant of grace').[16] Theologians who employed Cameron's covenant theology, such as Edward Leigh (1602-1671) and Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), therefore, also used the same term for the Adamic covenant. Leigh, for example, contrasts the *foedus naturale* with the *foedus evangelicum*, rather than the covenant of grace.[17] But Leigh also denominates the Adamic covenant as a *foedus legale* ('legal covenant'), a term also used by Alexander Morus (1616-1670), namely, *l'Alliance légale*.[18] There was a degree of flexibility in terminology among the adherents to the covenant of works evident in Leigh's use of *foedus naturale* and *foedus legale*,

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14. Junius, *True Theology*, thesis 16 (p. 147), thesis 17 (p. 151).

15. Junius, *True Theology*, thesis 18 (p. 154), thesis 20 (p. 160).

16. John Cameron, *Certain Theses, or, Positions of the Learned John Cameron, Concerning the Threefold Covenant of God with Man*, in Samuel Bolton, *The True Bounds of Christian Freedome* (London: P. S., 1656), thesis VII (p. 356); idem, *De Triplici Dei Cum Homine Foedere Theses* (Heidelberg: 1608); idem, *Ioh. Cameronis S. Theologiae in Academia Salmuriensi Nuper Professoris, Praelectionum Tomus Tertius et Ultimus* (Saumur: Cl. Girard & Dan. Lerpiner, 1628), 611.

17. Edward Leigh, *A Treatise of the Divine Promises. In Five Books* (London: George Millar, 1633), II.i (pp. 63-64); Thomas Goodwin, *Of the Creatures, and the Condition of Their State by Creation*, in *The Works of Thomas Goodwin*, 12 vols. (1861-1866; Eureka, CA: Tanski Publications, 1996), I.iii (vol. VII, pp. 22-23).

18. Leigh, *Divine Promises*, II.i (p. 63); see J. P. Gaberel, *Histoire de L'Elglise de Geneve*, 3 vols. (Geneva: Joël Cherbuliez, 1858-62), III:121-23.

an elasticity that also marks Robert Rollock (1555-1599). Rollock calls the Adamic covenant a *foederis legalis* ('legal covenant'), but he also uses the interchangeable terms *foedus naturae sive operum* ('covenant of nature or works').[19] But at the same time, Rollock's preference was for the term *foedus operum* because works were the condition of this covenant and hence the best term to describe it, a choice shared by others such as Johannes Heidegger (1633-1698).[20]

If Rollock decided to use the term *covenant of works* because Adam's obedience was the condition, other theologians were motivated by the covenant's telos. Westminster divine George Walker employed the terms *covenants of works and grace* in tandem with law and gospel, but he also used several other terms for the Adamic covenant: 'the covenant of natural life and blessings.'[21] Henry Finch interchangeably employed the terms *law* and the *covenant of works*, but he also readily used *life* as a term to describe the Adamic state: 'With the Creatures, who are thus to doe his will, it hath pleased God to make a Covenant which is called the Covenant of Workes: A Covenant of life (or blessedness) to the doers: of death (or of a curse unto transgressors).'[22] Obadiah Sedgwick (ca. 1600-1658) called the covenant of grace, the *covenant of life*, but this was the term the Westminster Catechisms apply to the covenant of works.[23] It seems that Walker, Finch, and Sedgwick

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19. Robert Rollock, *Some Questions and Answers about God's Covenant and the Sacrament That is a Seal of God's Covenant*, trans. and ed. Aaron Clay Denlinger (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2016), q. 2 (p. 21); idem, *Quaestiones et Responsiones Aliquote de Foedere Dei* (Edinburgh: Henry Charter, 1596); idem, *Analysis Logica in Epistolam Pauli Apostoli ad Galatas* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1602), 55.

20. Rollock, *God's Covenant*, qq. 14-15 (p. 24); Johannes Heidegger, *Medullae Theologiae Christianae* (Zurich: David Gessner, 1697), IX (p. 69).

21. Walker, *Manifold Wisedome of God*, 2-3.

22. [Finch], *Summe*, I.xv (p. 222).

23. Obadiah Sedgwick, *The Bowels of Tender Mercy Sealed in the Everlasting Covenant* (London: Adoniram Byfield, 1661), I.ii (p. 7); Westminster Shorter Catechism, q. 12. A number of theologians called the covenant of grace the covenant of life (see., e.g., William Lawne, *An Abridgement of the Institution of Christian Religion Written by M. John Calvin* [Edinburgh: Thomas Vautrollier, 1585], III.xxi.1; Jeremais Bastingius, *An Exposition Upon the Catechisme of the Lowe*

all recognized that life was the goal of both the covenants of works and grace and thus employed the term for both states, but the Westminster divines eventually settled on the *covenant of works* in the Confession and *covenant of life* in the Catechisms.[24] The Westminster Confession acknowledged that theologians were not decided on the precise term for the covenant of grace, which they note was one of the commonly used designations.[25] The same terminological plasticity is true of the covenant of works.

Turretin and Witsius

Turretin exemplifies the terminological flexibility that was common among early modern Reformed theologians. Turretin defines a covenant as 'a mutual agreement between two or more persons concerning the mutual bestowal of certain goods and offices for the sake of common utility.'[26] He qualifies this definition and acknowledges that in the Adamic covenant there is 'no equality or proportion between God and man,' but that through His 'infinite condescension' God 'willed to enter into a covenant with his creatures.'[27] This definition and qualification reveal that Turretin does not baldly apply the term *covenant* to the pre-fall state without careful consideration of the parties. In other words, despite the common criticisms that the covenant of works implied that God and man were equals, Turretin recognizes they are not and that the only way humanity could participate in such an arrangement is if God voluntarily and willingly condescended to His creature.

Countryes [Cambridge: John Legatt, 1589], q. 74; George Walker, *Socinianisme in the Fundamentall Point of Justification Discovered, and Confuted* [London: John Bartlet, 1641], 53; Samuel Rutherford, *The Covenant of Life Opened: or, A Treatise of the Covenant of Grace* [Edinburgh: Robert Broun, 1655]).

24. *The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines, Now by Authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster, Concerning a Confession of Faith* (London: Company of Stationers, 1647), VII.i; Shorter Catechism, q. 12; Larger Catechism, q. 20.

25. Westminster Confession, VII.iii.

26. Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, 3 vols., trans. George Musgrave Giger, ed. James T. Dennison Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992-97), VIII.iii.1; idem, *Institutio Theologiae Elencticae* (Edinburgh: Robert Carter, 1847).

27. Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.iii.1.

With this definition in mind, Turretin describes the double covenant (*foedus geminum*) proposed in the Scriptures as: *naturae et gratiae, operum et fidei, legale et evangelicum* ('nature and grace, works and faith, legal and evangelical').[28] Turretin readily acknowledges a number of different designations for what theologians commonly labeled the covenants of works and grace. He identified these pairs of terms for the twofold covenant because the distinction rested on the different relations (*schesi*) that God had to His creation, whether as Creator and Lord (*Creator et Dominus*) versus Redeemer and Father (*Redemptor et Pater*), as well as the diverse states of humanity, either as perfect (*creatura integra*) or as a fallen creature (*lapsa*). There were also different modes of obtaining eternal life and happiness (*vitam et felicitatem*), either through proper or imputed obedience. In the former God requires perfect obedience from Adam whereas the latter rests on the grace of God in Christ alone. The former is from the hand of a just Creator and the latter from a merciful Redeemer. God gave the former to innocent man without a mediator and the latter to fallen man through the work of a mediator.[29]

The following table illustrates the twofold covenant that Turretin observes in Scripture and why there are various common terms for the Adamic covenant:

Category	Covenant of Nature, Works, or Legal Covenant	Covenant of Grace, Faith, or Evangelical Covenant
God	Creator and Lord	Redeemer and Father
Humanity	Perfect	Fallen creature
Mode of life and happiness	Proper obedience	Imputed obedience
Requirement	Perfect obedience (works)	Obedience of another (faith) – grace of God alone

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28. Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.iii.4.

29. Turretin, *Institutes*, VIII.iii.4.

Category	Covenant of Nature, Works, or Legal Covenant	Covenant of Grace, Faith, or Evangelical Covenant
Divine role	Just creator	Merciful redeemer
Human condition	Innocent man without a mediator	Fallen man with mediator

The pre- and post-fall conditions, therefore, warrant the use of the different pairs of terms to denote the covenants of works and grace. That being said, Turretin does have a preferred term for the Adamic covenant. Based on the distinctions between the pre- and post-fall God and man relations, Turretin presents the following definition: 'The covenant of nature [*foedus naturae*] is that which the Creator made with innocent man as his creature, concerning the giving of eternal happiness and life under the condition of perfect and personal obedience.' He prefers the term *foedus naturae*, not because the covenant arises from the natural obligation (*obligatione naturali*) that was incumbent upon man at his initial creation, but because God founded the covenant on man's nature (*in natura hominis*) as he was first created by God and 'on his integrity or powers' (*in illius integritate seu viribus*).[30]

Witsius has a similar elasticity regarding the proper designation of the Adamic covenant. Like Turretin, Witsius provides a basic definition of a covenant: 'A covenant of God with man, is an agreement between God and man, about the way of obtaining consummate happiness; including a commination [threat] of eternal destruction, with which the contemner of the happiness, offered in that way, is to be punished.'[31] He then dissects a covenant into its three constituent elements: (1) a promise, (2) designation or prescription, and (3) penal sanction.[32] From within this general

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30. Turretin, *Institutes,* VIII.iii.5.

31. Herman Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*, 2 vols., trans. William Crookshank (1822; Escondido, CA: Den Dulk Foundation, 1992), I.i.9; idem, *De Oeconomia Foederum Dei Cum Hominibus*, 2nd ed. (Leeuwarden: J. Hagenaar, 1685).

32. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I.i.10.

framework, like Turretin, Witsius argues that Scripture reveals 'two covenants of God with man.'[33] He then identifies the first covenant: *Foedus Operum, quaod alias naturae, vel legale dicitus; & Foedus Gratiae* ('The Covenant of Works, otherwise called the Covenant of Nature, or the Legal; and the Covenant of Grace').[34] He also acknowledges that the covenant of works is called *legis & naturae* ('of the law and of nature') because God prescribed the covenant by the law and required works as its condition, which were founded on and coeval with nature.[35] Like Turretin, Witsius acknowledges the different terms by which theologians commonly denote the Adamic covenant, but he prefers the *foedus operum* instead of the *foedus naturae* as his term of choice.

Witsius opts for *foedus operum* because the apostle Paul mentions the *legem operum, & legem fidei* ('the law of works, and the law of faith') in Romans 3:27. By these principles the apostle identifies that a person can attain salvation by means of works or faith. Witsius compares and contrasts the two covenants to demonstrate where they agree and disagree. They agree in terms of their contracting parties (God and man), the promise of eternal life, the requirement of perfect obedience, and the same final cause, namely, the glory of God. They differ, however, in the following ways:[36]

Category	Covenant of Works	Covenant of Grace
Relation to God	Supreme law-giver	Merciful redeemer
Mediator	None	Jesus Christ
Condition	Perfect obedience	Perfect obedience of Christ
Man	Working (*ergazmeno*), and the reward given as debt (*ex debito*)	As believing (*credens*), and reward given by free grace (*donata kata charin*)

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33. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I.i.14.

34. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I.i.15.

35. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I.ii.1.

36. Witsius, *Economy of the Covenants*, I.i.15.

Category	Covenant of Works	Covenant of Grace
Conditional or absolute	Conditional	Absolute
Telos	Manifestation of the holiness, goodness, and justice of God evident in His liberal promise and the recompense of reward	Praise of the glory of His grace (Eph. 1:6) and the revelation of His unsearchable wisdom found in Christ

Witsius and Turretin have a similar analysis of the differences between the covenants of works and grace, but Witsius nevertheless reveals his preference for the *foedus operum* as his desired designation for the Adamic covenant. Neither theologian gives the slightest hint of disapprobation for other common designations but nevertheless exhibits a partiality for different terms.

Conclusion

William Shakespeare once asked, 'What's in a name? that which we call a rose By any other name would smell as sweet?' Regardless of the name, early modern Reformed theologians agreed regarding the existence of the covenant of works. They did not agree on the precise terminology for this doctrine. They agreed that God and Adam were in covenant, but how they should label and describe this covenant was an issue of minor difference. Colleagues such as Turretin and Heidegger have very similar explanations of the doctrine but nevertheless landed on different terms, the *foedus naturae* for the former and the *foedus operum* for the latter. Some chose their term because of sequence – it was the first covenant in relation to the second, the covenant of grace (Lañyez). Others believed the covenants of works and grace were synonymous with law and gospel (Cartwright, Walker, Ussher, and Finch). Some opted for *foedus naturale* or *foedus naturae* because it contrasted with the *foedus gratia* or the *foedus evangelicum*; or, as a term *foedus naturae* highlighted the basis of covenant, namely, created nature (Leigh and Turretin). Another motivating factor in choice was

the condition of the covenant, that is, Adam's obedience, hence they chose the term covenant of *works* (Rollock, Heidegger, and Witsius). And still yet others decided to label the covenant according to its telos, and hence the covenant of *life* (Westminster Assembly, Downame, Sedgwick, and Walker). A number of these theologians could also use multiple terms interchangeably (e.g., Rollock). Despite their different terminological choices, early modern Reformed theologians were united in their belief that God and Adam were in covenant.