John Locke’s Covenant Theology

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Recommended citation:

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Introduction

That Locke propounded a covenant theology in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695) is a fact that deserves more attention than it has received. Indeed, given the number and variety of scholarly writings on Locke, the lack of attention is striking. One explanation is the modern animus against theology itself. Another is that the role of Christianity generally in Locke’s thinking has been, and to some extent still is, a matter of some contention in Locke studies. By paying Locke’s covenant theology its due, this article aims to cast new light on the place of Christianity in Locke’s thought, and on the theological assumptions in which his view of Christianity was anchored.

In what follows, I argue that the origin of Locke’s covenant theology is in Covenant Anglicanism as represented by Hammond and the Arminian move towards moral theology during the mid-seventeenth century. Shifting the Old Testament covenant from Moses to Adam allowed Locke and others to recover the law of nature as part of the created order given to Adam and his posterity. Locke’s ‘federal’ theology universalized the Adamic Covenant so that all mankind was morally responsible to God. His denial of original sin buttressed his argument against any type of Adamic inheritance, except ‘death’, the word to be taken literally as recorded in Genesis.

I further claim that Locke’s covenant theology relied on a two-covenant schema: the Law of Works and the Law of Faith. The Law of Works consists of the Adamic and Mosaic Covenants, which are distinct, yet mutually consistent, because the moral law of both remains effective. The Law of Faith is the New Covenant of Grace based on an Arminian doctrine of justification, where grace can be resisted, and obedience is required. The two conditions of the New Covenant—faith and obedience—are supported by Locke’s scriptural exegesis in the *Reasonableness* and the *Paraphrase*. At the end, I comment on the issue of whether Locke’s covenant of redemption was based on intra-trinitarian contract, and note that his Messianic Christology, written about by Victor Nuovo, has political implications, a topic I want to address in another article.

In sum, I contend that Locke has a legal conception of Christianity by viewing Scripture as law promulgated by a legislative God, who enforces the terms and conditions of the biblical covenants, and holds individuals responsible for all laws that remain in effect. Divine positive law as delivered in Scripture, based on the fundamental Adamic Covenant of the law of nature, and authoritatively strengthened by New Testament morality, provides Locke with a way out of Calvinist antinomianism, the logical result of the doctrines of predestination and election, to a theological position that protects the goodness of God and the dignity of human freedom.

This account of Locke’s covenant theology runs counter to the Straussian position that Locke’s Christianity was a subterfuge. It has been difficult to dislodge this entrenched opinion, despite all the historical and textual evidence to the contrary. Leo Strauss’s view, developed at length in *Natural Right and History* (1953), was that Locke was an esoteric writer whose professions of Christian belief belied an underlying atheism. Strauss found no reason to revise this view upon consideration of the materials made accessible to scholars by the Earl of Lovelace selling his collection of Lockian books and manuscripts to the Bodleian Library, Oxford, in 1948. The Straussian belief in esoteric writing casts Locke as a dis-
semblers, an insincere Christian counterfeit, whose concealed purpose can only be known by the initiated philosopher. Straussians uniformly claim insight into Locke’s ulterior motives. They use stock adverbial phrases, such as ‘quietly’, ‘slyly’, ‘cavalierly’, and ‘cautiously’ to critique Locke’s alleged ruse. Straussians such as Michael Zuckert, Thomas Pangle, and others, and fellow travellers like C. B. MacPherson, are united in supposing that Locke introduced an entirely new political philosophy under the guise of orthodox Christian tradition. Although less influential among historians, the Straussian interpretation of Locke has had an astonishingly long life among political theorists.

Fortunately, John Dunn’s book *The Political Thought of John Locke* (1969) established a beachhead against the Straussians when he claimed that ‘an extremely high proportion of Locke’s arguments for their very intelligibility, let alone plausibility’, rest ‘on a series of theological commitments’. Still, it was not until the 1990s that the caricature of Locke as a kin of Hobbes and Spinoza drew concerted criticism. During the last decade or so, a spate of books has been published that take Locke’s religious views seriously. Jeremy Waldron, Joshua Mitchell, Kim Ian Parker, Nicholas Wolterstorff, Paul Sigmund, historians John Marshall and Ian Harris, Philip Milton, and J. R. Milton, and religious philosopher


Victor Nuovo, among others, have documented and analysed the significance of Christianity in Locke’s thought. Yet, despite the increase in religious scholarship, there has not been a thorough study of Locke’s covenant theology. Victor Nuovo has, however, prepared the way for such a study. Referring to the *Reasonableness*, he writes:

Locke’s account is certainly covenantal. The Law of Faith, which is the basis of justification, replaces the older covenants and their respective duties represented in the Law of Nature and the Law of Works, and although this covenant, like its immediate predecessor, defines a community, the keeping of it is more a matter of individual responsibility and self-monitoring than an obligation imposed by a community on its members.

Nuovo refers to the Westminster Confession of Faith (1647), and in a footnote mentions the puritan Richard Baxter, who observed ‘that

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7 Victor Nuovo, introduction to *John Locke and Christianity: Contemporary Responses to The Reasonableness of Christianity*, p. xxv. And in another place Nuovo comments that ‘among the singular features of Locke’s method is his preference for the expression “law of faith”. The expression is biblical, or, more precisely, Pauline, but it was not ordinarily used by the Reformers, and where they did use it they gave it a different sense from the one given it in the *Reasonableness*. [\textsuperscript{79} It is noteworthy that two distinctions on which the argument of the *Reasonableness* depends (law of works/law of faith; First Adam/Second Adam), derive from St Paul] (Nuovo’s note). Victor Nuovo, introduction to *Writings on Religion*, p. xlvi.
Christ’s law consists of two parts: “I. The Law of Nature (called by many moral) as commanding the love of God and its attendant Duties. 2. And the remedying Law which is more proper to the Redeemer called the Law of Faith”. 8 Nuovo comments that the idea may have come from Hooker originally, but ‘Hooker does not use the expression “law of faith” as Locke does’. 9

There could have been various sources for Locke’s use of the signal phrase, Law of Faith. John Tillotson (1630–94), Archbishop of Canterbury (1691–94) and Locke’s close friend, used the phrase ‘law of faith’ when discussing how the necessity of obedience as a condition of the Gospel was not inconsistent with God’s free grace. 10 Although Philip van Limborch does not use the phrase ‘law of faith’, the meaning is clear in his Theologia Christiana (1686). 11


9 Nuovo, Introduction to Writings on Religion, p. xlvii.

10 Locke’s formulation is essentially the same as that of Tillotson, his theological mentor. See John Marshall, ‘John Locke and Latitudinarianism,’ in R. Kroll et al. (eds.), Philosophy, Science, and Religion in England, 1640–1700 (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 253. Tillotson said, ‘The Gospel is called the Law of Faith, and the Law of Grace, in opposition to the Jewish Dispensation, which is called the Law, or Covenant of Works, because it consisted so much in external Rites and Observances, which were but types and shadows of good things to come (as the Apostle calls them in this Epistle)’. John Tillotson, ‘The Possibility and Necessity of Gospel Obedience, and its consistence with free Grace’, in Several Discourses (London, 1698), v. 251.

11 According to John Marshall, Locke read and commented on Theologia Christiana in 1685 in Holland. See Marshall, John Locke: Resistance, Religion and Responsibility (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), 133. Theologia Christiana was first published in Latin in 1686; the second edition in English in 1695. Limborch derives his theology from the New Testament as a fulfilment of the Old Testament. His essential focus is the New Covenant, whose precepts are lengthy and demanding. For Limborch, the New Covenant in Christ consists of two parts: ‘First, The Stipulation of a Duty on Man’s side: And Secondly, The Promise of Salvation to such as perform their Duty, and the threatening of Punishment and Eternal Death to those who neglect it’. He continues that the duty of man has two considerations: ‘(1) Its Rule, and (2) The Duty of Worship it self. The Rule of our Duty is likewise either External, viz. The Divine Precepts; or else Internal, our own Conscience’. Limborch’s formulation is a legal conception of Christianity; though individuals have the right of conscience, these rights are determined by divine law. Philip Limborch, A Compleat
a work representing the central tenets of Dutch Remonstrantism, whose ideas Locke knew well. The same can be said about Samuel Pufendorf’s treatise *Of the Nature and Qualification of Religion in Reference to Civil Society* (1685), and although Pufendorf does not label the distinction between faith and deeds as the ‘law of faith’ and the ‘law of works’ as Locke does, the concepts are there. In the New Testament, St Paul himself says the law of faith is that which justifies someone who believes in Jesus. Also, the Anglican Henry Hammond (1605–60) uses the term ‘Law of Faith’ in his *Practical Catechism* (1645), and is cited by Locke at the beginning of the *Reasonableness of Christianity*, a title perhaps borrowed from Hammond’s earlier *Of the Reasonableness of Christian Religion* (3rd edn., 1650), which contains similar arguments. Hammond also wrote *Of Fundamentals* (1653); and *A Paraphrase and Annotations upon all the Books of the New Testament* (1653), the former is a theme of the *Reasonableness*, and the latter a possible model for Locke’s *Paraphrase*.


12 During his exile in Holland (1683–9), Locke read extensively in Remonstrant theology. The remonstrant project which Arminius started in Dordt was continued by his student and successor Simon Episcopius (1583–1643), whose lifespan almost parallels that of Grotius. As Remonstrants against the high Calvinism of Dordt, Episcopius and Grotius moved into a more liberal stance theologically than Arminius. Locke and Limborch were close friends and theological allies in liberalizing hardline Calvinism.


As is typical of Locke, there is probably no one single influence; but rather, his theology consists of a combination of themes, principles, and ideas from various sources. It is hard to pinpoint when Locke’s covenant theology as expressed in the *Reasonableness* took root, because this theological perspective had permeated English society by the beginning of the seventeenth century. As historian Michael McGiffert states,

The covenant of works did not exist in 1530 or even, as far as we know, in 1560; it was well defined by 1600. That God had made a covenant with Adam at Creation hardly entered the minds of the originators of covenant doctrine. Zwingli, Tyndale, Bullinger, and Calvin accepted no other general covenant than that of grace, commencing after the Fall.

David Weir believes that ‘federal’ theology, which articulated the covenant of works—whether called *foedus operum, foedus naturale*, or *foedus creationis*—developed during the late sixteenth century, because of a perceived need to counter the Calvinist view of a unilateral, unconditional covenant between God and man that began and ended with grace. According to Weir, the differences between the Genevan and Swiss Reformers on the nature of God’s covenant

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15 As an example, Wainwright states that in writing the *Paraphrase* Locke drew from as many as thirty-one different writers, including Reformers Luther, Calvin, and Beza; the more unorthodox Lightfoot, Mede, Vorstius, Burthogge, Allix, and Crellius; Anglicans Chillingworth, Tillotson, Hammond, Whitby, Cudworth, Fowler, and Walker; humanists Erasmus and Grotius, and Dutch Remonstrants, Limborch and Le Clerc. Wainwright, Introduction to *Paraphrase*, 4, 11–18.

16 Michael McGiffert, ‘From Moses to Adam: The Making of the Covenant of Works,’ *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19 (1988), 132–3. The federal covenant theology in the Swiss reformation of Huldreich Zwingli (1484–1531) and his successor Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75), whose *Decades* (1557) was widely read by Anglican clergy, conceived ‘of the covenant relationship as an agreement or contract between two parties, with the result that man must fulfil certain conditions if he is to receive the promised blessing’. However, the covenant was viewed as one eternal pact. Richard L. Greaves, ‘The Origins and Early Development of English Covenant Thought,’ *Historian*, 31 (1968), 24.
were stark.\textsuperscript{17} Still, Zwingli and Bullinger held to a one-covenant view of grace; and Zacharias Ursinus, who is credited with the introduction of the covenant of works, saw the covenant of grace as requiring faith alone without works, placing him within the Reformed tradition of covenant by promise of grace.\textsuperscript{18}

Federal theology itself was not monolithic. How one construed federal theology depended on the doctrine of justification—whether it was by faith and grace alone, or faith coupled with works and human choice. Thus, the rise of Arminian theology in England affected the stronghold of the Calvinist one-covenant view. Before Archbishop William Laud (1573–1645) and his introduction of Arminianism in the 1620s, the Church of England was thoroughly Calvinist. As Nicholas Tyacke remarks about this rise of Arminianism, ‘It is difficult for us to grasp how great a revolution this involved for a society as steeped in Calvinist theology as was England before the Civil War’.\textsuperscript{19} As Arminianism gained strength in the early seventeenth century, federal covenant theology began to be reinterpreted with this theological gloss.

\textsuperscript{17} David Weir lists the different tenets of belief between Calvin and Zwingli-Bullinger as set forth by Leonard J. Trinterud:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textit{Calvin and the Genevan theologians}
  \begin{itemize}
    \item 1. The covenant is unilateral.
    \item 2. The covenant is God’s unconditional promise to man.
    \item 3. The burden of fulfilling the covenant rests on God.
    \item 4. The covenant is fulfilled in Christ’s Incarnation, Crucifixion, and Resurrection.
  \end{itemize}

  \item \textit{Zwingli, Bullinger, and the Rhineland theologians}
  \begin{itemize}
    \item 1. The covenant is bilateral.
    \item 2. The covenant is God’s conditional promise to man and man’s response (a mutual pact or treaty).
    \item 3. The burden of fulfilling the covenant rests on man.
    \item 4. The covenant is fulfilled in the obedience of the individual.\textsuperscript{94}
  \end{itemize}
\end{itemize}


\textsuperscript{19} Nicholas Tyacke, \textit{Aspects of English Protestantism c. 1530–1700} (Manchester: MUP, 2001), 132.
Unlike Calvin, Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) insisted that the doctrine of creation preceded that of predestination. He viewed creation as a primeval covenant of moral law between God and Adam, which, when broken by Adam, resulted in original sin. The new covenant of grace was not conditional upon obedience, but faith in Christ, restoring the foedus in creatione by making allowances for sin. Even though Arminius did not believe that obedience was a condition of the new covenant as Hammond, Locke, and others would, he did advocate a bilateral covenant that required the human act of belief, breaking sharply from the Calvinist doctrine of sovereign grace.

Hammond himself moved from a Calvinist conception of covenant in his earlier sermons to an Arminian view in his *Practical Catechism* (1645). Locke’s conception of the two covenants—Old and New or Works and Grace—echoes that articulated by Hammond, an Anglican focused on the fundamentals of Christianity, moral theology, and practical piety. Hammond was part of the Great Tew Circle in Oxford, who were contemporaries of the

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21 Ibid. 208.

22 Ibid.

23 John Marshall documents Locke’s familiarity with the works of the Great Tew Circle: ‘By the time of his death in 1704 Locke’s personal library collection included over a hundred separate works by contemporary latitudinarians, and many more by their Tew Circle and Cambridge Platonist forefathers, such as Chillingworth, Hales, More, and Smith’ [J. Harrison and P. Laslett, eds., *The Library of John Locke* (Oxford, 1965), entries under the names of Barrow, Boyle, Burnet, Cudworth, Fowler, Lloyd, Patrick, Stillingfleet, Tenison, Tillotson, Whichcote, Worthington, Chillingworth, Hales, More, and Smith.] (Marshall’s note). Marshall, ‘John Locke and Latitudinarianism’, 253. Marshall further comments that, ‘Notebooks show that Locke was reading works by Hales, Falkland, Chillingworth, and Boyle in the late 1650s and early 1660s’. Ibid. 253–4. Dewey Wallace references Hammond, Taylor, Baxter, Thorndike, Chillingworth, and others as sources for Locke’s Arminian doctrine of justification. Although Wallace does not use the label ‘Great Tew Circle’, Chillingworth and Taylor were part of that group. See Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., ‘Socinianism, Justification by Faith, and The Sources of John Locke’s *The Reasonableness*
Cambridge Platonists, and succeeded by the Latitudinarians, with most of whom Locke had some connection.\textsuperscript{24} Locke’s ‘Latitudinarianism’ was primarily an ecclesiastical term arising directly from his theological minimalism. The distinction between fundamental and non-fundamental doctrines made by Locke in the \textit{Reasonableness} and the \textit{Vindications} originated in the Christian humanist tradition of Erasmus. The first group of Latitudinarians in England, the Great Tew Circle, initiated the Protestant argument of ‘reducing doctrine to a few, clearly revealed fundamentals … to counter Jesuit attacks on Protestant individualism and to provide a basis for a more comprehensive Church of England’.\textsuperscript{25} John Hales (1584–1656), William Chillingworth (1602–44), and Jeremy Taylor (1613–67) are among those who made this type of theological and ecclesiological appeal. Locke had read Chillingworth, Falkland, Sanderson, Hales, and Hammond by the early 1660s.\textsuperscript{26} I believe that Locke’s view was grounded in what became known as ‘Covenantal Anglicanism’, which ‘flowed in the seven-


\textsuperscript{24} The earlier generation of Latitudinarians known as the Cambridge Platonists consisted principally of Benjamin Whichcote (1609–83), John Smith (1616–52), Ralph Cudworth (1617–88), and Henry More (1614–87), with all of whom Locke had an affinity, particularly Whichcote. A Fellow of Emmanuel College, Whichcote became a Sunday lecturer in Trinity Church, where Locke regularly attended while he lived in London from 1667–75. Frederick J. Powicke, \textit{The Cambridge Platonists} (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1926), 200. Whichcote is known to have been Locke’s favourite preacher. These churchmen were succeeded by those similar in theology but not Platonists: John Tillotson (1630–94), Edward Stillingfleet (1636–99), Simon Patrick (1626–1707), Thomas Tenison (1636–1715), Gilbert Burnet (1643–1715), Joseph Glanvill (1636–90), William Lloyd (1627–1717), and John Wilkins (1614–72), with most of whom Locke shared some common theological and ecclesiastical beliefs. Martin I. J. Griffin, Jr., \textit{Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth-Century Church of England} (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 4–5.


teenth century from Lake and Donne and their Calvinist contemporaries to Hammond and on to Allestree, Thorndike, Littleton, and Taylor'.\[^{27}\] It is Hammond’s Arminian version of covenant, liberalized by Taylor’s denial of the doctrine of original sin, that most resembles Locke’s conception in the *Reasonableness*. According to Neil Lettinga, Taylor went further than Hammond, Sanderson, and Thorndike in that,

He was so concerned that sinners be responsible for their sin that he denied Original Sin. Taylor framed his denial carefully, resting his case on the view that the fall had not changed human nature, but merely deprived it of supernatural grace. The loss of that grace meant that death and imperfection, which are part of the natural human condition, were able to enter the human race.\[^{28}\]

Although Locke takes a literalist hermeneutic approach, to deny original sin by focusing on the words of Scripture, which state ‘death’ not ‘original sin’ as the result of Adam’s Fall from grace, he, like Taylor, moves away from orthodoxy in order to maintain the rational, moral principle of individual responsibility.

\[^{27}\] Twenty years ago, Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., noted in *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 197, that ‘[t]he use of the covenant by Anglican anti-Calvinists is a story yet to be told, and one that might well be long’, I must leave that telling to others.] (McGiffert’s note). Michael McGiffert, ‘Henry Hammond and Covenant Theology,’ *Church History*, 74 (2005), 284–5.

\[^{28}\] Neil Lettinga, ‘Covenant Theology and the Transformation of Anglicanism’ (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1987), 252. Lettinga observes that, ‘Robert Sanderson, like Hammond, had believed that “whatever then we may impute of … Original guilt to Adam, yet we must take … our actual transgressions wholly and solely to ourselves. Herbert Thorndike had taken a step away from the classical doctrine of Original Sin when he claimed that Original Sin did not mean that all of Adam’s posterity had committed Adam’s particular sin with him, but rather that Adam’s sin had allowed the principle of sin to enter the world, a distinction he drew in order to put the responsibility for sin on the sinner’. Ibid.
The Origin of Locke’s Covenant Theology

Evidence for Locke’s covenant theology is in the texts themselves: *The Reasonableness of Christianity, As Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695) and *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (posthumous, 1705–7). The fact that Locke did not write about covenant theology before the *Reasonableness* does not mean he had no view on the subject. Given the historical context and Locke’s familiarity with the writings of the Great Tew Circle, I do not believe that Locke discovered covenant theology in the 1690s prior to writing the *Reasonableness*, but that he was aware of this line of thinking much earlier, during the 1660s or before.

In 1647, Locke was at Westminster School, in the same year that the Westminster Confession was published. Locke’s formulation of the first covenant is strikingly similar. The Westminster Confession of Faith states that:

The first covenant made with man was a covenant of works, wherein life was promised to Adam, and in him to his posterity, upon condition of perfect and personal obedience. The covenant or law of works is related to Adam’s transgression of God’s command in Eden, and the law delivered to Moses at Mount Sinai.29

In the *Reasonableness*, Locke writes that,

*The Law of Works* then, in short, is that Law, which requires perfect Obedience, without any remission or abatement; So that by that Law a man cannot be Just, or justified without an exact performance of every tittle. Such a perfect Obedience in the New Testament is termed δικαιοσύνη, which we translate *Righteousness*.30

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30 *Reasonableness*, 17.
As in the Westminster Confession, Locke combines the Adamic and Mosaic law under one covenant or law: ‘tis plain, that under the Law of Works is comprehended also the Law of Nature, knowable by Reason, as well as the Law given by Moses’.\(^{31}\) Even though the Law of Moses was given only to the Jews, the moral part of this law applies to all mankind, i.e. the Ten Commandments, because it is consistent with the Law of Nature or Adamic Covenant that the Gentiles have written in their hearts and consciences.\(^{32}\) Thus, the Law of Works governs both Jews and Gentiles under the Law of Moses and the Law of Nature given to Adam.

That is as far as the similarity goes with the Westminster Confession, which contains the doctrines of predestination, election, and Christ’s satisfaction, all of which Locke rejects. Hammond’s *Practical Catechism*, a non-Calvinist document endorsed by Charles I and published twenty-one times by 1700,\(^{33}\) responded to the Westminster Confession by expressing a theological view labelled ‘Caroline Anglican Moralism’.\(^{34}\) Neil Lettinga says the following about the Confession and the Catechism:

In each case the authors set out to summarize and elucidate the fundamental issues of the Christian faith, and in both cases the authors defined Christianity for their community—the Westminster Assembly as the final codification of English puritan orthodoxy,\(^3\) *A Practical Catechism* as the first articulation of what would become the accepted Anglican orthodoxy. Hammond’s ideas

\(^{31}\) Ibid. 18.

\(^{32}\) Ibid. Locke cites Romans 2:14–15, where St Paul writes that, ‘For when the Gentiles which have not the Law, do (i.e. find it reasonable to do) by nature the things contained in the Law: these having not the Law, are a Law unto themselves: Which shew the work of the Law written in their hearts, their Consciences also bearing witness, and amongst one another their thoughts accusing or excusing’. Locke adds the parenthetical comment that the Law is found reasonable to the Gentiles not because it is innate, but because it is the law of nature knowable by reason.


were shaped by his reaction against those articulated by the divines who met at Westminster.\textsuperscript{35}

Although the Confession’s two-covenant formulation of works and grace held to a prelapsarian covenant with Adam that was superseded by the postlapsarian Covenant of Grace in Christ—the basic structure of ‘federal’\textsuperscript{36} theology—on other doctrines it was Calvinistic, and because of that the Covenant of Grace was understood differently. Calvin had written of the Old Covenant and the New Covenant, the former beginning after the Fall of Adam and ending with Christ, and the latter beginning with Christ and ending at the Day of Judgement.\textsuperscript{37} For Calvin, the Adamic Covenant was a result of man’s sin and total depravity, and thus, the New Covenant necessarily subsumed this Old Testament covenant through Christ’s atonement for sin providing justification by faith alone.

In contrast, if the covenant with Adam was before the Fall at creation, not after as Calvin believed, then the freedom and dignity of human nature and the law could be preserved. It was the same problem of law and gospel that engaged Luther. Calvinist theology appeared to resolve law and gospel into grace leaning towards antinomianism. In response, federal theologians—all Puritan—formulated the two-covenant schema in order to preserve the continuity of law between the Old and New Testaments.

The federal theologians hinged God’s relation to man on the covenant rather than divine decrees. Following this, Hammond


\textsuperscript{36} ‘Federal’ was derived from the Latin foedus or covenant. See Michael Jinkins, ‘Elements of Federal Theology in the Religious Thought of John Locke’, \textit{The Evangelical Quarterly}, 66 (1994), 125 n. 2.

reinterpreted the Covenant of Grace from Puritan theology, viz. that set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, to mean that the Christian’s duty to obey God’s commands was central.\textsuperscript{38} As a result, ‘Anglican religion after Hammond was a religion of moral duty’ giving ‘them a basis for refusing to conform to Puritanism and for refusing to convert to Catholicism’.\textsuperscript{39}

Hammond defines the first covenant as that ‘made with Adam, as soon as he was created, before his first sin, and with all mankind in him’.\textsuperscript{40} His description of Adam’s weakness and ignorance as a result of the Fall, rather than depravity of sin, resembles Locke’s references in the \textit{Reasonableness} to mankind as ‘poor frail Creatures’, and ‘poor frail Mortals’.\textsuperscript{41} However, although Hammond believed Adam’s punishment was expulsion from Paradise and death, he states that,

\begin{quote}
Upon the fall of Adam, he and all mankind forfeited that perfect Light and perfect Strength, and became very defective and weak both in Knowledg and Ability of performing their duty to their Creator; and consequently were made utterly incapable of ever receiving benefit by that first Covenant.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

The perfect obedience required by the first covenant is the same standard that Christ, the second Adam, fulfilled by his exact, unsinning obedience in the new covenant.\textsuperscript{43} Still, Hammond stressed that Christians are to live a life of faith, repentance, and sincere effort to keep the divine law, even though the Law of Faith allows God to pardon them in their sinning obedience.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[38] Lettinga, ‘Covenant Theology Turned Upside Down’, 659.
\item[39] Ibid.
\item[40] Henry Hammond, \textit{A Practical Catechism} (8th edn., London, 1668), 3.
\item[41] \textit{Reasonableness}, 136–7.
\item[43] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
Not only did Hammond, Locke, and others focus on the first covenant in the Old Testament, but there was a shift back to Adam from Moses. McGiffert points out that the early English covenant theologians, such as Dudley Fenner, Josias Nichols, Thomas Cartwright, and William Perkins associated the Covenant of Works with the Mosaic Covenant. However, the need for universality caused them to glance back to Adam, rather than to Sinai, and motivated continental thinkers such as Bucanus of Lausanne (d. 1605) and Polanus of Basel (d. 1610) to recognize the problem of locating the Old Covenant with Moses. Both in its limited application to the Jews, and in its excessive legalism, the Mosaic Covenant was hard to square with the universal New Covenant of Grace. McGiffert makes the following observation about the development of starting the Covenant of Works with Adam and not Moses:

As long as they found that covenant burdened by legalities, they could not preach it cleanly, boldly, profitably; too much breath had to be spent explaining, clarifying, justifying. To make the evangelical covenant serviceable, they had to free it to act in its own way by its own spirit. The remedy, administered to the system of salvation as a purgative, was foedus operum; and we may not be altogether astray if we perceive not so much a legalistic as in truth an antinomian impulse in Puritan thinking that doubled the covenants. It is a question inviting inquiry—this antilegalistic prompting for the legal covenant of works.

As McGiffert summarizes, ‘The four fathers of English double-covenant theology generally identified the covenant of works with the moral law, introduced after the Fall, derived it from the covenant of grace, ascribed it to the mediation of Moses, and stressed its service to the plan of redemption’. McGiffert, ‘From Moses to Adam,’ 146. See this for an exposition of Fenner’s Sacra Theologia (1585); Nichols’s An Order of Household Instruction (1596); Cartwright’s A Treatise of Christian Religion (1616); and Perkins’s A Golden Chain (1591).


Ibid. 153.
Opposed to antinomianism, Locke believed the divine covenants were ‘conditional’ and ‘bilateral’. By entering into a covenantal relation with God, man assumes his moral stature and makes consequential choices about whether to accept God’s grace and live a life of obedience. For Locke, the Calvinist system of predestination, election, and total depravity undermined human existence itself, and degraded God’s own nature of justice, goodness, and mercy. At the outset of the *Reasonableness*, Locke declared the Calvinist view so unsound as to be the cause of deism:

For whilst some Men would have all Adam’s Posterity doomed to Eternal Infinite Punishment for the Transgression of *Adam*, whom Millions had never heard of, and no one had authorized to transact for him, or be his Representative; this seemed to others so little consistent with the Justice or Goodness of the Great and Infinite God, that they thought there was no Redemption necessary, and consequently that there was none, rather than admit of it upon a Supposition so derogatory to the Honour and Attributes of that Infinite Being; and so made Jesus Christ nothing but the Restorer and Preacher of pure Natural Religion; thereby doing violence to the whole tenor of the New Testament.47

Since a covenant is a bond, a relation of trust between God and man, no rational man would ‘consent’ to the God depicted in Calvinism. The Calvinist doctrines of election and predestination eliminated consent, which is crucial in a covenantal relation.

When turning to the specifics of Locke’s covenant theology, it will become apparent that his ‘federal’ view of Adam combined with Arminianism and an unorthodox position on original sin placed him on the liberal side of Covenant Anglicanism.

**Locke’s Covenant Theology**

47 *Reasonableness*, 5.
In 1695, the doctrine of justification—the crucial dogma of the Protestant Reformation—was still a matter of great controversy between Calvinists and Arminians, and the explication of this doctrine had a large influence on how one construed the biblical covenants between God and man. In the *Reasonableness* and the *Paraphrase*, Locke interprets Scripture—the Gospels in the *Reasonableness* and St Paul’s Epistles in the *Paraphrase*—as an explicit promulgation of divine positive law setting forth the Covenant of Works and Covenant of Grace, both of which are conditional with the consequences of rewards or punishments.

1. **The Law of Works: Adam and Moses**

For Locke, the Law of Works is moral theology consisting of the Adamic and Mosaic Covenants.

*Adam and the Law of Nature*

Locke’s covenant theology can be characterized as ‘federal’, because of Adam’s central role. However, in contrast to Pufendorf and others, Locke’s theology is ‘federal’ only in the sense that he relied on the Adamic Covenant as fundamental in the Old Testament. The prelapsarian covenant between God and Adam at creation is the fundamental doctrine of Locke’s Law of Works. This is important, because the Law of Nature, or Law of Reason, that Locke consistently uses throughout his writings is a universal law for all rational creatures.

The law of nature given to Adam by God at creation established the eternal law for all mankind. Adam is also a model of how individual sin brings forth death. But, Adam is not ‘federal’ as a theological representative. In Locke’s account, Christ is the second Adam who ‘restores to all men, … that Life, which they receive again at the Resurrection’.48 The core purpose of Christ’s resurrection corresponds to Adam’s Fall. Locke writes that ‘from this estate of Death Jesus Christ restores all mankind to Life; I Cor. XV.

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48 Ibid. 12.
Thus Christ is the second Adam by providing eternal life, that which was lost by the first Adam. According to Locke, Christ’s redemptive act on the cross is for each individual’s own sin, not an original sin inherited from Adam, who, in his own right violated a divine positive command. No individual received that particular divine command except Adam, and thus only Adam is responsible for his own transgression. A fair and just law must be directed and promulgated to those who have the obligation of obedience.

Until the time of Moses, the law of nature constituted the Covenant of Works. Death reigned from Adam to Moses because of Adam’s transgression. Locke believed all those who died after Adam and before Moses did so because they sinned individually. They broke the law of nature and suffered the consequence of sin, which is death. Thus mortality was the single inheritance from Adam. Both Jews and Gentiles before the Mosaic Covenant operated under the Adamic Covenant, a law clearly established by God as the law of reason and nature which all mankind could understand if they chose to do so. For Locke, sin had to be personal so as to ground duty, obligation, and obedience to the law. As he comments, rhetorically: ‘But as I remember every ones sin is charged upon himself only’. Under this legal interpretation, Adam’s posterity could not inherit his sin, since the divine command violated by Adam was specifically addressed to him.

49 Ibid. 11.

50 According to Locke, if original sin were true, then God would express his punishment as a result of Adam’s sin. No scripture text attests to this, as God never says he punishes sin because of the original sin of Adam. St Paul’s clear teaching is that what we inherit from Adam is death, not sin. Reasonableness, 6–11. Cf. Paraphrase, ii. 522–7.

51 Reasonableness, 9.

52 Locke notes that Romans 5:14, where St Paul states that death reigned from Adam to Moses, proves ‘all men became mortal by Adams eating the forbidden fruit and by that alone, because noe man can incur a penalty without the sanction of a positive law declaring, and establishing that penalty, but death was annexed by noe positive law to any sin, but the eating the forbidden fruit; and therefore mens dyeing before the law of Moses
To conclude, the Adamic Covenant has a peculiar dual character. It is both the eternal rule of rectitude as written in the divine positive law of Scripture, and a body of moral precepts written in man’s natural conscience readily available to natural reason.\textsuperscript{53} Because of this, the Adamic Covenant is universal, applying to those who have no direct knowledge of divine positive law.

The second part of the Law of Works—the Law of Moses—is strictly divine positive law.

\textit{The Law of Moses}

Moses was the specific representative of the Israelites in the Sinaic Constitution, which established particularities suited to Jewish customs, rites, and laws. The Israeliite Commonwealth was a commonwealth of laws. God set the terms: if they obeyed, blessings; if they disobeyed, curses. All political power—legislative, executive, and judicial—was immediately exercised by Yahweh over the Israeliite polity. Unlike the Adamic Covenant, the Gentiles were not part of the Mosaic Covenant. As St Paul says in Ephesians, and Locke particularly notes, the Gentiles were ‘Aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel … and Strangers to the Covenants of Promise’\textsuperscript{54}. The promised Messiah was for the Jews, not the Gentiles. However, the New Covenant of Grace incorporated both Jews \textit{and} Gentiles. This was the great mystery St Paul talks about was purely in consequence of Adams sin in eating the forbidden fruit and the positive sanction of death annexed to it, an evident proof of mans mortality coming from hence’. \textit{Paraphrase}, ii. 525 n. 14*.

\textsuperscript{53} See \textit{Paraphrase}, ii. 501 n. 26* a-b. Also, see Locke’s similar depiction in \textit{Essays on the Law of Nature} (1663): ‘This law of nature can be described as being the decree of the divine will discernible by the light of nature and indicating what is and what is not in conformity with rational nature, and for this very reason commanding and prohibiting’. The law of nature is ‘a law enacted by a superior power and implanted in our hearts’, and reason is ‘its interpreter, unless, violating the dignity of the supreme legislator, we wish to make reason responsible for that received law which it merely investigates’, in \textit{John Locke: Political Essays}, ed. Mark Goldie (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), 82.

\textsuperscript{54} \textit{Paraphrase}, ii. 632.
again and again—that God intended for Jews and Gentiles to be his people, constituted under his laws and constitution, and to be part of his eternal, spiritual, universal kingdom.

When the Mosaic Covenant was amended by the New Covenant of Grace repealing the provisions of all Jewish ceremonies, the Adamic Covenant of the law of nature remained unchanged. The moral parts of the Mosaic law, such as the Ten Commandments, as rearticulations of the law of nature, went unaltered. According to Locke, since God promulgated the divine positive law of Moses, he had the right to revoke, amend, or repeal it.

When Locke comments on the Abrahamic Covenant in his *Paraphrase*, he makes the legal observation that the New Covenant of Christ could repeal the ceremonial laws of the Mosaic Covenant, but not any part of the Abrahamic Covenant. The Sinaic Covenant was between two parties, God and Moses. By contrast, the promise to Abraham and his seed applied to all descendants, Jews and Gentiles; therefore, in order for the Abrahamic Covenant to be amended or repealed all parties to the agreement had to consent. This is why the Abrahamic Covenant of faith remained constant in the Old and New Testaments—it was never changed by the parties. Abraham fulfilled the covenant by having faith and believing God’s promises, exemplified in his near-sacrifice of Isaac, and God, the other party, accepted this ratification of the everlasting covenant. Since Moses was not a party to the Abrahamic Covenant and had no representative authorization for Gentiles, the Sinaic Covenant could have no effect on the compact of Abraham. In his explanatory note to Galatians 3:20, Locke comments about Moses’s limited representation to the Israelites:

> God is but one of the partys concerned in the promise, the Gentiles and Israelites together made up the other. ver. 14. But Moses at the giveing the

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55 Locke interprets the ‘Mystery of his will’ in Ephesians 1:9 as ‘the mystery of God’s Purpose of calling the Gentiles, and making out of them a People and Inheritance to himself in his Kingdom under the Messiah’. *Paraphrase*, ii. 616 n.8(p).
Locke believed that if all parties consented, the Abrahamic Covenant could have been altered. Since it was divine positive law it could be changed, but this did not happen and there is nothing in Scripture remotely to suggest this. The only way the Mosaic Covenant could have had an effect on the Abrahamic Covenant is if the Jews were the only party to both covenants.

The limited representation of Moses for the Jews explains why the Mosaic Covenant could be partially repealed in the New Covenant. Since the parties to the Abrahamic Covenant and the New Covenant are the same, viz. Jews and Gentiles, the part of the Mosaic law which was exclusive to the Jews no longer applied. All the ceremonial rules and regulations about worship and sacrifice Christ fulfilled. As Locke comments further:

For if both the partys concerned in the promise had transacted by Moses the Mediator, (as they might if none but the Nation of the Israelites had been concerned in the promise made by god to Abraham) they might by mutual consent have altered or set asid the former promise as well four hundred years as four days after. That which hindered it was, that at Moses’s Mediation at Mount Sinai God who was but one of the partys to the Promise was present: But the other party Abrahams seed consisting of Israelites and Gentiles together was not there, Moses transacted for the Nation of the Israelites alone, The other Nations were not concerned in the Covenant made at Mount Sinay, as they were in the promise made to Abraham and his seed which therefore could not be di<s>annulled without their consent. For that both the promise

56 Paraphrase, i. 139 n. 20ab-c.
to Abraham and his seed and the Covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai was National is in it self evident.\(^{57}\)

An important distinction between the Adamic and Mosaic Covenants is the parties involved. The ‘individual’ is a party to the Adamic Covenant by virtue of being human, made in the image of God; whereas, the ‘community’ is the party to the Mosaic Covenant. The Jewish people as a community of a nation consented to God and to each other to be bound by the Sinaic Constitution. Because salvation is a universal phenomenon, the New Covenant in Christ expands beyond the Jewish people to include the Gentiles, and all nations. However, it is the ‘individual’ who is a party with God in the New Covenant, not communities or nations. The kingdom of God under the New Covenant consists of a multitude of believing individuals transcending national and ethnic boundaries.

I mention these details of how Locke construed the relation of the biblical covenants to show his legal, contractual conception of Christianity. Even the idea of faith as unmerited grace has a legal sense in his thinking.

**II. The Law of Faith: New Covenant of Grace**

The Kingdom of God which Christ established under the law of the Gospel merged Jews and Gentiles ‘into one new Society or Body of God’s People, in a new Constitution under himself’.\(^{58}\)

Because the Law of Works is eternal law, both as the law of nature revealed by the light of reason and as divine positive law given to Adam and Moses in Scripture, it cannot be supplanted by the Law of Faith, since this would undermine man as God’s rational creature. Thus the Law of Works is ‘conformable to the Eternal Law of Right, is of Eternal Obligation, and therefore remains in force still under the Gospel; nor is abrogated by the Law of Faith, as St. Paul found

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\(^{57}\) Ibid. i. 139–40 n. 20\(^{d-f}\).

\(^{58}\) Ibid. ii. 634–5.
some ready to infer, *Rom. III. 31. Do we then make void the Law through Faith? God forbid; yea, we establish the Law*. 59

Consequently, according to Locke,

The difference between the *Law of Works* and the *Law of Faith* is only this; that the *Law of Works* makes no allowance for failing on any occasion. Those that obey are Righteous, those that in any part disobey are unrighteous, and must not expect Life the Reward of Righteousness. But by the *Law of Faith*, Faith is allowed to supply the defect of full Obedience; and so the Believers are admitted to Life and Immortality as if they were Righteous. 60

What the Covenant of Grace in the New Testament provides is ‘that Law whereby God Justifies a man for Believing, though by his Works he be not Just or Righteous, *i.e.* though he came short of Perfect Obedience to the Law of Works’. 61 Faith in Christ justifies a man before God—the Protestant doctrine of justification; however, Locke’s view differs from the Reformed belief in justifi-cation by faith alone. Locke’s doctrine of justification requires both faith *and* obedience. 62 As Locke states in the *Paraphrase*:

That by the doctrine of St Paul and the New Testament there is one and the same rule of rectitude set to the actions of all man kind Jews Gentiles and Christians: and that faileing of a complete obedience to it in every tittle makes a man unrighteous the consequence whereof is death … but that both Jews and Gentiles shall be saved from death, if they beleive in Jesus Christ and

59 *Reasonableness*, 19.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid. 20–1.

62 Locke writes that, ‘The doctrine of justification by faith necessarily supposeth a rule of righteousness which those who are justified by faith come short of; and also a punishment incurd, from which they are set free by being justified: and soe this doctrine establishes a law. And accordingly the moral part of the law of Moses that δικαίωμα τοῦ Ἐκαίοῦ as the apostle calis it … is inforced again by our Saviour and the Apostles in the Gospel. with penalty annexed to the breach of it’. *Paraphrase* ii. 510 n. 31*.
sincerely endeavour after righteousness though they doe not attain unto it their faith being counted to them for righteousness Rom III.19–24.  

Locke writes in the *Reasonableness* that faith in Jesus as the Messiah ‘was the great Proposition that was then controverted concerning Jesus of Nazareth, whether he was the Messiah or no; And the assent to that, was that which distinguished Believers from Unbelievers’. The Law of Faith requires every one to believe what God requires, which, according to the Gospels, is faith in Christ as the Messiah, the Son of God, and King of Israel.

*Faith in Jesus as the Messiah*

Relying on Christ’s words and those of his apostles, belief in Jesus as the Messiah is the basis for individual salvation and the foundation of the church: ‘And it was upon the same Proposition, *That Jesus was the Messiah, the Son of the living God*, owned by St. Peter, that our Saviour said, he would build his Church. *Mat. XVI. 16–18*. This proposition is stated in four words as ‘Jesus is the Messiah’. Locke refers to it as ‘the great Proposition’, ‘this one Point’, ‘this one Proposition’, and ‘the sole Doctrine’. It is the essential point made throughout the *Reasonableness*, but it does not stand alone. There are concomitant articles of faith, such as belief in one true God, and Christ’s resurrection. It is the prominence of the proposition—Jesus is the Messiah—that raised the theological temperature of the Calvinist John Edwards (1637–1716), who claimed ‘that he unwarrantably crowded all the Necessary Articles of Faith into One, with a design of favouring *Socinianism*’.

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63 *Paraphrase* ii. 502 n. 26*.

64 *Reasonableness*, 23.

65 Ibid. 28.


Locke is following Chillingworth, Le Clerc, Limborch, and other Latitudinarians in stating that Christianity is belief in fundamental articles as expressed by Christ and his apostles. Locke’s exclusive concentration on the express words of Christ and his apostles in the history of the Gospels and Acts is along the lines of his Latitudinarian contemporaries. Locke had been interested in the harmony of the Gospels since meeting his Catholic friend Nicolas Toinard (1628–1706) while in France sometime between June 1677 and April 1678. By representing the essential doctrines of the Gospel as stated in Scripture, Locke believed theological disputes could end, and obedience could begin.

In sum, faith in Jesus is necessary, but not sufficient. In contrast to the Reformer’s declaration of *sola fides*, Locke underscored obedience (or repentance), because though the devils believed, ‘this Covenant of Grace was never offered to them’. Why? Because they did not repent.

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68 Chillingworth’s *The Religion of Protestants* (1638) was a paradigm for Anglican irenicists. Marshall (94) reports that, ‘Locke read Chillingworth’s *Religion of Protestants* again in Holland, and re-read it several more times in the 1690s’.

69 The argument over fundamentals of Christianity energized the polemics on the continent as well. Le Clerc, a remonstrant theologian whom Locke knew as part of his inner circle in Amsterdam, was known for his biblical criticism and his debate with the Catholic theologian Richard Simon (1638–1712). Martin I. Klauber, ‘Between Protestant Orthodoxy and Rationalism: Fundamental Articles in the Early Career of Jean LeClerc’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 54 (1993), 611–15.

70 In his *Theologia Christiana*, Limborch states in refuting Romanism: ‘’Tis not necessary that all Men should be of the same mind, in order to render their Faith one and the same; but only that they should agree in the fundamental Articles of Faith. But this Unity may be obtain’d without the determination of an infallible Judg, provided the Scripture be honestly understood, wherein all things necessary to Salvation are fully and clearly contain’d’. Bk. VII, 911.

71 Toinard’s *Evangeliorum Harmonia Graeco-Latina* was published posthumously in 1707.

72 *Reasonableness*, 110.
Obedience to Divine Law
The second condition of the New Covenant requires ‘perfect’ and ‘sincere’ obedience. Both subjective and objective elements are present; it is both heart and will. Repentance means a sincere heartfelt turning away from sin and living in godly obedience. For Locke, biblical righteousness is obedience: ‘What Adam fell from, is visible, was the state of perfect Obedience, which is called Justice in the New Testament, though the word which in the Original signifies Justice, be translated Righteousness’.73

Recall that Adam was in a state of ‘perfect Obedience’74 and he and his posterity ‘failed of a Compleat Obedience’ and were not ‘Exact Performers’, but ‘Transgressors of the Law’. And, that the Law of Works requires ‘perfect Obedience’ and ‘Faith is allowed to supply the defect of full Obedience’, because Adam ‘came short of Perfect Obedience to the Law of Works’.75 Consequently, ‘Faith without Works, i.e. the Works of sincere Obedience to the Law and Will of Christ, is not sufficient for our Justification, St. James shews at large’, and ‘that Christ does require Obedience, sincere Obedience, is evident from the Laws he himself delivers … and from the Sentence he will pass when he comes to Judge’. And, ‘This Righteousness therefore, a compleat Obedience and freedom from Sin, are still sincerely to be endeavoured after. And ’tis no where promised, That those who persist in a willful Disobedience to his Laws, shall be received into the eternal bliss of his Kingdom, how much soever they believe in him’. And, finally that ‘A sincere Obedience, how can any one doubt to be, or scruple to call, a Condition of the New Covenant, as well as faith; Whoever read our Saviour’s Sermon in the Mount, to omit all the rest? Can any thing be more express than these words of our Lord?’76

73 Ibid. 6.
74 Ibid.
75 Ibid. 13, 17, 19, 21.
76 Ibid. 118–20, 130.
As subjects of God’s kingdom, Christians must live by his Laws. Those laws are the Law of Works and the New Testament morality promulgated by Jesus and the apostles. Until Christ, the law of nature lacked a true, authoritative foundation. According to Locke, ‘Such a Law of Morality, Jesus Christ hath given us in the New Testament; But by the latter of these ways, by Revelation’. Natural reason alone could not provide a law with a ‘clear knowledge and acknowledgment of the Law-maker, and the great Rewards and Punishments, for those that would or would not obey him’. Consequently, what God requires by the Law of Faith is clear, plain, and direct; it is suited to the lowest and highest capacities of reasonable creatures.

And this Law of Faith, which incorporates the Adamic Law of Nature and Law of Moses, is available to all mankind, not merely the Calvinist elect. God, as Legislator, has promulgated a divine positive law by revelation with declared rewards and punishments. As Locke remarks, ‘For though from Adam to Christ there was noe revealed positive law but that given to the Israelites yet it is certain that by Jesus Christ a positive law from heaven is given to all mankind, and that those to whom this has been promulgatd by the preaching of the gospel are all under it and shall be judgd by it’. Thus all mankind is held accountable to this Law of Faith, whether it is known by reason or revelation. To those who have heard the Gospel, the divine positive law is binding as promulgated, and to those who have never heard the Gospel, the law of nature is binding as promulgated within man’s conscience by natural reason.

Other Considerations: Covenant of Redemption and Messianic Christology

77 Ibid. 153.
78 Ibid. 154.
79 Paraphrase, ii. 499 n. 14*.
In closing, I would like to consider briefly issues raised by Michael Jinkins and Victor Nuovo, both of whom have written strictly from a theological perspective.

Michael Jinkins’s article published in 1994 is specifically about elements of federal theology in Locke’s thought. Jinkins labels Locke a Calvinist scholastic, because he understood revelation as propositional. The two-covenant federal schema is discussed by Jinkins, and a third covenant of redemption is mentioned as part of Locke’s theology.

According to Jinkins, this third covenant of redemption is ‘an intra-trinitarian contract effected between God the Father and God the Son in which the Father contracted to save the elect if the Son would become incarnate, fulfill the law (the contractual conditions of the ‘covenant of works’) and bear the punishment due the elect for their sin’. A legal conception of the trinity does follow from a federal theological motif, and Jinkins quotes from the Reasonableness where Locke states that we ‘know not what transactions there were between God and our Saviour in reference to his kingdom’. Jinkins’s description of a third covenant of redemption legally contracted within the trinity makes sense; but I do not find convincing evidence of this in Locke’s theology.

First, Locke did not believe in the doctrine of election, so the contract between the Father and the Son would not involve saving the elect, and the intra-trinitarian covenant of redemption is a

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80 Jinkins, art. cit. (n. 36), 131. I am indebted to Professor Jinkins’s article as my first insight and inroad to Locke’s federal theology.

81 [5 The Sum of Saving Knowledge, anonymously written, but probably authored by David Dickson and James Durham (c. 1648) presents this third covenant in the influential form it assumed in Scottish and Puritan theology.] (Jinkins’s note). Ibid. 127–8.

82 Ibid. 136.

83 Locke interpreted St Paul’s use of the term ‘elect’ in Romans 9 and other places to mean ‘nations’ not ‘individuals’. He writes the following about the potter–clay analogy in Romans 9:22: ‘The Apostle by the instance of a potters power over his clay haveing demonstrated that god by his dominion and soveraignty had a right to set up or pull down
restatement of the doctrine of Christ’s satisfaction, a dogma Locke rejects. Second, Locke’s literal hermeneutical approach to the Bible would not lead him in an intra-trinitarian contractual direction, because Scripture does not describe the trinitarian godhead (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) in contractual terms. As Jinkins points out, a contractual trinity leans toward tri-theism, and while Locke did have serious epistemic and hermeneutical issues with the Athanasian Creed formulation of ‘three persons of one substance’, he was not a tri-theist. He may have believed in some form of subordinationism of Christ, the Son, to the Father, but not three separate gods.

Further evidence against Jinkins’s claim is provided by Locke’s description of Christ in the Paraphrase, and his Messianic Christology in the Reasonableness. Victor Nuovo has written about Locke’s Messianic Christology in which Christ as the centre of salvation ‘achieves this goal through actions, and, he being a king, the benefits of saving activity are distributed to those who become his subjects after a judicial process’. Locke refers to Christ as the Messiah throughout the Reasonableness to emphasize his kingly

what nation he pleased, and might without any injustice take one race into his particular favour to be his peculiar people, or reject them as he thought fit, does in this ver. apply it to the subject in hand (viz) the casting off of the Jewish Nation, whereof he speaks here in termes that plainly make a parallel between this and his dealing with the Egyptians mentioned ver. 17. and therefore that Story will be best explain this ver. that thence will receive its full light. Paraphrase, ii. 568 n.22e–g.

84 Locke’s paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 8:6 is: ‘Yet to us Christians there is but one god the father and author of all things to whom alone we address all our worship and service, and but one Lord viz Jesus Christ by whom all things come from god to us, and by whom we have access to the father’. Paraphrase i. 206. In his note, Locke cites Joseph Mede, who refers to Christ as ‘one Lord-Agent’. Wainright’s note on this explains that Mede refers to ‘Jesus as a mediator or agent’. Paraphrase i. 437. Also, redemption in Ephesians 1:14 is defined by Locke as ‘Deliverance from a slavish Estate into Liberty’, and not payment of a ransom, the latter having a more legal meaning. Paraphrase ii. 619 n. 14(b)g.

power. Nuovo summarizes Locke’s Messianic Christology as that which, 

Affirms that the Messiah is a divinely appointed king, whose rational soul informed if not joined to the divine word from its inception, was incarnate in the man Jesus of Nazareth, who was divinely conceived. Jesus the Messiah is the founder of an everlasting kingdom, the successor of all the kingdoms of this world.\(^\text{86}\)

Locke’s view of redemption was kingly rather than intra-trinitarian contractual, something that has political implications.

In relating the *Two Treatises* to the *Reasonableness*, Nuovo observes that ‘Locke was, in effect, reading into the *Reasonableness* the conclusions of his earlier work, that Adam had no right to be the ruler or representative of “Millions” who had never heard of him and who could not have authorized or consented to this’.\(^\text{87}\) Thus, as Nuovo remarks: ‘On Locke’s view the right of kingship in sacred history belongs only to the Messiah’.\(^\text{88}\) Locke’s God is political.

Christ acts impeccably as King, Judge, Ruler, and Legislator over his universal kingdom, and though his rule is not theocratic, it is highly relevant to Locke’s political thinking. The relation between Locke’s covenant theology and his political philosophy is a question for consideration in a subsequent article.

In conclusion, I have sought to lay the groundwork of John Locke’s covenant theology in order to show that both Adam and Christ play a critical role in his doctrine of salvation and legal conception of Christianity. Locke’s covenant theology falls within Hammond’s Covenantal Anglicanism in its Arminian moral theology, and confluence of justification and sanctification. The law

\(^{86}\text{Ibid. 137.}\)


\(^{88}\text{Ibid.}\)
of nature given to Adam at creation, reconstituted into positive law by Moses, lives on by faith and obedience as conditions of the New Covenant of Grace in Christ the Messiah.

It is my belief that the biblical, scholarly depth of the *Reasonableness* and the *Paraphrase* are proof of Locke’s Christianity, and its foundational role in his life and thought.

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