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***THE COVENANT IDEA
IN ANTE-NICENE THEOLOGY***

J. Ligon Duncan, III

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Doctor of Philosophy

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In Memoriam
J. Ligon Duncan, Jr.
(1925-1992)

Eighth-generation Southern Presbyterian, Ruling Elder,
Kind and Beloved Father, Follower of Christ

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Calvin once said:

Let us also know that the Jews had been so trained as ever to flee to God's Covenant; for on the general covenant depended all particular promises This special promise [the return from exile] could have been of no moment, except as it was an appendix of the covenant, even because God had adopted them as his people. . . . Now, again, we must bear in mind, that the covenant was founded on Christ alone; for God had not only promised to Abraham that he would be a Father to his seed, but had also added an earnest or a pledge that a Redeemer would come. We now then perceive the reason why the Prophets, when they sought to strengthen the faithful in the hope of salvation, set forth Christ, because the promises had no certainty without the general covenant. And . . . the general covenant could not stand . . . except in Christ (Commentary on Jeremiah, [33:15], J. Owen, trans., 249-250).

May the readers of this thesis know the blessings of the covenant, and come to appreciate afresh its significance in the divine redemptive history even as we consider the early Christian contribution to its exposition.

J. Ligon Duncan, III
Reformed Theological Seminary
Jackson, Mississippi
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ABBREVIATIONS

AAE	Academic American Encyclopedia
AB	Anchor Bible
ABD	Anchor Bible Dictionary
ANCL	Ante-Nicene Christian Library
ATR	<i>Anglican Theological Review</i>
<i>B</i>	<i>Biblica</i>
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
BAG	Bauer's Greek-English Lexicon
<i>BOT</i>	<i>Banner of Truth</i>
<i>BS</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
<i>BT</i>	<i>Bible Translator</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
CAH	Cambridge Ancient History
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
<i>CH</i>	<i>Church History</i>
<i>CJT</i>	<i>Canadian Journal of Theology</i>
<i>CP</i>	<i>Catholic Presbyterian</i>
<i>CTJ</i>	<i>Calvin Theological Journal</i>
DBI	Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation
DBT	Dictionary of Biblical Theology
DCC	Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church
DNT	Dictionary of the New Testament
<i>E</i>	<i>Expositor</i>
EBT	Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology
EEChr	Encyclopedia of Early Christianity
EEC	Encyclopedia of the Early Church
EDT	Evangelical Dictionary of Theology
<i>EQ</i>	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ERE	Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics
<i>ET</i>	<i>Expository Times</i>
<i>ETL</i>	<i>Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses</i>
<i>EvTh</i>	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
<i>HBT</i>	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IDB	Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible
<i>Imm</i>	<i>Immanuel</i>
<i>Int</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
ISBE	International Standard Bible Encyclopedia (rev.)
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
NDCT	New Dictionary of Christian Theology
<i>NE</i>	<i>New Englander</i>
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	New International Greek Testament Commentary

NLC	New London Commentary
NLF	<i>Natural Law Forum</i>
NSHE	New Schaff–Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge
P	Πρεσβυτέριον: <i>Covenant Seminary Review</i>
RSPT	<i>Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Theologiques</i>
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
SCe	<i>The Second Century</i>
SJT	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
SP	Studia Patristica
T	<i>Theology</i>
TB	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
TD	<i>Theology Digest</i>
TCERK	Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge
TDNT	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament
TDNTA	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged
TRE	Theologische Realenzyklopadie
TT	<i>Theology Today</i>
TZ	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
VT	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	<i>Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament</i>
WTJ	<i>Westminster Theological Journal</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZKG	<i>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

ABSTRACT OF THESIS

This thesis argues that the covenant idea was more significant in the writings of particular ante-Nicene theologians than has generally been admitted in patristic research or general surveys of the history of the covenant idea in the Christian tradition. Indeed, this survey of the covenant idea in the ante-Nicene period demonstrates a significant usage, development, and modification of the covenant concept as it is found in the OT and NT writings and in early Judaism. This investigation reveals that the covenant idea functions in several arenas of early Christian thought. It is employed (1) to stress moral obligations incumbent upon Christians; (2) to show God's grace in including the Gentiles in the Abrahamic blessings; (3) to deny the reception of these promises to the Israel of the flesh, that is, Israel considered merely as an ethnic entity; (4) to demonstrate continuity in the divine economy; and (5) to explain discontinuity in the divine economy.

In reviewing the role of early Christian covenant thought in these areas, this thesis argues that (1) the pre-Nicene theologians usually take OT covenant passages (not NT passages) as the starting point in their applications of the covenant concept to Christian living; (2) the early Christian use of the covenant idea evidences that they understood the covenant to be both unilateral and bilateral, promissory and obligatory, to bring divine blessings and entail human obedience; (3) these writings also show that, from the very earliest times, Christian authors (following OT and NT examples) have employed the covenant concept as a key structural idea in their presentations of redemptive history; (4) contrary to the suggestions of previous studies, there is no evidence of a gap in the usage of the covenant idea after the era of the NT writings; (5) the covenant idea was closely linked to the early Christian self-understanding as the people of God; (6) the covenant idea is not monolithic in the thought of the authors surveyed. It is employed with differing emphases and takes on varying shades of meaning in their respective writings; (7) genetic connections in specific usages of the covenant idea can be found in different pre-Nicene authors (e.g., Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian).

The argument of this thesis proceeds by first reviewing the role of the covenant idea in the writings of the NT, the Apostolic Fathers, and Justin. This provides background for comparison and contrast with subsequent theological reflection on the covenants in Christian theology. Then we consider, in turn, the covenant idea in Melito, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Cyprian, Origen, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus, and Novatian. In each, specific employments of the covenant idea are inventoried. In the epilogue, our findings are summarized and conclusions are drawn.

This study is significant for at least these following reasons: (1) It confirms current research on the Jewish matrix of early Christianity, from a vantage-point not yet exploited. (2) It reviews in greater detail the early Christian covenant thought which is now being acknowledged to have been influential on the sixteenth-century Reformers (such as Bullinger and Calvin). (3) As the first extensive patristic survey of the covenant idea, it fills a significant lacuna in the history of ideas. (4) It lays the groundwork for more detailed considerations of the covenant concept in the pre-Nicene and post-Nicene eras.

INTRODUCTION :

**THE COVENANT CONCEPT
IN THE EARLY CHRISTIAN ERA**

WHY STUDY THE COVENANT CONCEPT IN THE EARLY CHURCH?

Few subjects have received more sustained attention in biblical and historical studies in recent years than the idea of covenant. In the realm of OT studies, since Wellhausen appealed to the development of the covenant concept in the OT as supporting evidence for the evolutionary development of Israel's religion, countless pages have been devoted by OT scholars to scrutinizing the covenant idea.¹ There have been philological investigations of ברית,² studies of the role of the covenant idea in Israel's cultus,³ comparisons of OT covenant forms with Near Eastern treaty forms,⁴ considerations of the prophets' use of

¹ For good, brief accounts of the development of the covenant idea in the OT, see G.E. Mendenhall, "Covenant," in IDB 1:714-723; id., and G.A. Herion, "Covenant," in ABD 1:1179-1202; and L. Köhler, OT Theology, trans. A.S. Todd (London: Lutterworth, 1957), 59-75; D.R. Hillers gives a popular but useful account, dependent on Mendenhall, in Covenant: History of a Biblical Idea (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1969), 1-168; R. Kraetzschmar provides a revision and expansion of the Wellhausen thesis concerning covenant in Die Bundesvorstellung im AT (Marburg: Elvert, 1896); E.W. Nicholson attempts a resurrection of this view in God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the OT (New York: OUP, 1986); see also G. Quell, s.v., "diatheke," in TDNT 2:109-124.

² For example, see J. Begrich, "Berit. Ein Beitrag zur Erfassung einer alttestamentlichen Denkform," ZAW 60 (1944):1-11; L. Kohler, "Problems in the Study of the Language of the OT," JSS 1 (1956):4-7; W. Schottroff, "'Gedanken' im Alten Orient und im AT," WMANT 15 (1964):202-224; J. Barr, "Some semantic notes on the Covenant," in Beiträge zur Alttestamentlichen Theologie, eds. H. Donner, et al (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1977), 23-38; and G. Quell, who provides additional bibliography for philological studies of covenant, in TDNT 2:106-109.

³ For example, see S. Mowinckel, The Psalms in Israel's Worship, 2 vols., trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1962); and M.G. Kline, By Oath Consigned (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 13-49.

⁴ For example, see G.E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East (Pittsburgh: Biblical Colloquium, 1955); D.J. McCarthy, Treaty and Covenant, 2nd ed. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1978); M.G. Kline, Treaty of the Great King (Grand Rapids:

the covenant idea,⁵ examinations of covenant and kingship,⁶ and attempts to construct a unified OT theology around the central theme of covenant.⁷ Though these studies manifest a variety of concerns with, and approaches to, the covenant idea, there are a few recurring issues in debate. First, there is the question of definition. Is a covenant a divine disposition or a compact? If it is an agreement, is it unilateral or bilateral, unconditional or conditional?⁸ Second, and

Eerdmans, 1963); K. Baltzer, The Covenant Formulary in Old Testament, Jewish, and Early Christian Writings, trans. D.E. Green (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971); E. Gerstenberger, "Covenant and Commandment," JBL 84 (1965):38-51; G.M. Tucker, "Covenant Forms and Contract Forms," VT 15 (1965):487-503; and M.J. Buss, "The Covenant Theme in Historical Perspective," VT 16 (1966):502-504.

⁵ For example, see R.E. Clements, Prophecy and Covenant (London: SCM, 1965); J. Bright, Covenant and Promise (London: SCM, 1977); W. Zimmerli, The Law and the Prophets, trans. R.E. Clements (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965); H.B. Huffmon, "The Covenant Lawsuit and the Prophets," JBL 78 (1959):286-295; J. Harvey, "Le 'rîb-Pattern,' réquisitoire prophétique sur la rupture de l'alliance," B 43 (1962):172-196; F.C. Fensham, "Common Trends in the Curses of the Near Eastern Treaties and Kudurru-inscriptions Compared with the Maledictions of Amos and Isaiah," ZAW 75 (1963):155-175; J.R. Boston, "Les attachés littéraires, l'origine et la signification de l'expression biblique 'Prendre à témoin le ciel et la terre,'" VT 16 (1966):8-25; and W. Brueggemann, Tradition for Crisis: A Study in Hosea (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1968).

⁶ For example, see J. Bright, A History of Israel (London: SCM, 1960); A. Alt, "Das Königtum in den Reichen Israel und Juda," VT 1 (1951):2-22; G. Widengren, "King and Covenant," JSS 2 (1957):1-32; and J.R. Porter, Moses and Monarchy (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963). The first two authors argue that the monarchy represented a defection from an earlier, purer covenant idea. The latter two, on the other hand, argue for the priority of the Davidic covenant.

⁷ For example, see W. Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, 2 vols., trans. J.A. Baker (London: SCM, 1961); W.J. Dumbrell, Covenant and Creation: An Old Testament Covenantal Theology (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984); T.E. McComiskey, The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants (Nottingham: IVP, 1985); F.C. Fensham, "Covenant, Promise and Expectation in the Bible," IJZ 23 (1967):305-322.

⁸ Some writers tend to stress the unconditionality of the covenant, such as J. Begrich, "Berit," ZAW 60 (1944):1-11; the general consensus, however, is to recognize the mutuality of the covenant without denying

along with this, is the question of the relation of law and covenant and their respective roles in Israel's relationship with God.⁹ Third, scholars attempting to detail the development of the covenant idea in the OT inevitably must address (or assume an answer to) the question whether there is a univocal concept of covenant in the OT.¹⁰ This is obviously a critical issue for those who are endeavoring to construct an OT theology around covenant. These common issues in OT covenant studies are of interest because they tend to recur in NT and historical studies of the covenant idea.

When compared to the volume of writing on covenant in the OT, research on the covenant idea in the intertestamental era may seem sparse. Nevertheless, a good number of significant studies have been devoted to analysis of the covenant concept in the Apocrypha,

the divine initiative or graciousness in the covenant relationship, for example, see D.J. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant: A Survey of Current Opinions (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973), 2-4; A. Jepsen, "Berith. Ein Beitrag zur Theologie der Exilzeit," in Verbannung und Heimkehr: Beiträge zur Geschichte und Theologie Israels im 6 und 5 Jahrhundert v Chr., ed. A. Kuschke (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1961), 161-180; O. Loretz, "Berith--'Band, Bund,'" VT 16 (1966):239-241; E. Kutsch goes so far as to deny that berith means covenant or relationship, and asserts that it means obligation in "Gesetz und Gnade. Probleme des alttestamentlichen Bundesbegriff," ZAW 79 (1967):18-35.

⁹ Numerous studies on law and covenant argue for close relationship of the two (i.e., covenant is not set over against commandment as grace often is over against law), see W. Eichrodt, "Covenant and Law: Thoughts on Recent Discussion," Int 20 (1966): 302-321; G.E. Mendenhall, Law and Covenant in Israel and the Ancient Near East; M.G. Kline, The Structure of Biblical Authority (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); see also below 2, n.4.

¹⁰ D.J. McCarthy is critical of scholars who begin their surveys of covenant in the OT with the assumption that all covenant in the OT is of one kind, see Old Testament Covenant, 4-6, 31-32, 86-89; D.R. Hillers, while observing that covenant in the OT may not be simply one idea, describes recent attempts to detail the OT conception of covenant: "It is not a case of six blind men and the elephant, but of a group of learned paleontologists creating different monsters from the fossils of six separate species," in Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea, 7.

Pseudepigrapha, Qumran texts, and the Cairo Damascus fragments.¹¹ These studies have been important in identifying the role played by covenant in early Judaism and providing background for the study of covenant in the NT.

Though literature on covenant in the NT is less abundant than in the OT, the subject is at least equally controversial. One of the major issues in NT covenant studies is the meaning(s) of *διαθήκη* in the NT writings. Indeed, there has been a continuing debate on the translation of *διαθήκη* in the NT since Deissmann said that ". . . no one in the Mediterranean world in the first century A.D. would have thought of finding in the word *διαθήκη* the idea of 'covenant.'"¹² Deissmann's

¹¹ For instance, see D.J. McCarthy, "Covenant in Narratives from Late OT Times," in The Quest for the Kingdom of God: Studies in Honor of G.E. Mendenhall, ed. H.B. Huffmon, et al (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 77-94; R.F. Collins, "The Berith-Notion in the Cairo Damascus Covenant and its Comparison with the NT," ETL 39 (1963):555-594; J.G. Harris, "The Covenant Concept Among the Qumran Sectaries," EQ 39 (1967):86-92; E.P. Sanders, "The Covenant as a Soteriological Category and the Nature of Salvation in Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism," in Jews, Greeks and Christians, ed. R. Hamerton-Kelly (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1976):11-44; A. Jaubert, La Notion D'Alliance Dans Le Judaïsme aux abords de l'ère chrétienne (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1963); for additional bibliography see E. Kutsch, s.v., "Bund" [II. Frühes Judentum] in TRE 7:405.

¹² Of course, there had been considerable discussion of the translation of *διαθήκη* before Deissmann [e.g., DIATHEEKEE, Covenant, Not Testament, (London: Trubner, 1856), an anonymous but learned tract]. At the time of the issue of the Revised Version, for instance, scholarship was favoring covenant over testament. The AV had translated *διαθήκη* as covenant twenty-one times, testament twelve times. The RV changed ten of these twelve and so covenant appeared in thirty-one of thirty-three occurrences of *διαθήκη* in the NT. By Deissmann's time this trend was reversing, and his remarks provided impetus for renewed discussion of the issue. For Deissmann, the question of translating *διαθήκη* as testament (which he understood to imply a unilateral enactment) or covenant (which indicated a bilateral agreement) was ultimately whether Christianity was a religion of grace or works; see A. Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, trans. L.R.M. Strachan (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1910), 337-338.

assertion was not received without dissent, however, and recent scholarship tends to prefer covenant as the usual translation of διαθήκη in the NT.¹³ Another concern in NT covenant studies, in view of the occurrence of covenant terminology in the eucharistic narratives of the Synoptics and 1 Corinthians, has been to determine the significance of covenant in the sacramental theology of the NT theologians.¹⁴ There has been further interest in investigating the covenant theology of

¹³ Two early studies of διαθήκη which supported Deissmann's position (i.e., διαθήκη=testament) are J. Behm, Der Begriff DIATHEKE im NT (Erlangen: Lippert, 1912); and E. Lohmeyer, Diatheke: Ein Beit. zur Erläuterung des neutestamentlichen Begriffs (Leipzig: Hinrich'sche Buchhandlung, 1913); however their conclusions were contradicted by the Roman Catholic scholar L.G. Fonseca who argued that διαθήκη=compact (except in two places) in the NT, "Diatheke--Foedus an Testamentum?," B 8 (1927):31-50, 161-181, 290-319, 418-441; and 9 (1928):26-40, 143-160; G. Vos took a position between the extremes in "Covenant or Testament?," Bible Magazine 2 (1914):205-225; H.A.A. Kennedy calls Deissmann's assertion "absurd" in "The Significance and Range of the Covenant Conception in the New Testament," E 8th ser. 10 (1915):385-410; E.D. Burton provides a brief but superb survey of διαθήκη in classical, LXX, later Greek and NT usage, then argues that διαθήκη=covenant everywhere in the NT (except in Hebrews 9:16-17), in Epistle to the Galatians (ICC) (New York: Scribners, 1920); see also G.E. Mendenhall, "Testament," in IDB 4:575; D.F. Estes, "Covenant (NT)," in ISBE 1:793; and W. Selb, "Diatheke im NT," JSS 25 (1974):183-196.

¹⁴ F. Lang, "Abendmahl und Bundesgedanke im NT," EvTh 35 (1975): 524-548; A.R. Millard, "Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians," in Apostolic History and the Gospel, eds. W. Gasque and R.P. Martin (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), 242-248; A.R. Eagar, "St. Luke's Account of the Last Supper: A Critical Note on the Second Sacrament," E 7th ser. 5 (1908):252-262, 343-361; T.H. Robinson, "My Blood of the Covenant," BZAW 41 (1925):232-237; H.S. Gehman, "The Covenant-Old Testament Foundation of the Church," TI 7 (1950):40, 41; W.G. Most, "A Biblical Theology of Redemption in a Covenant Framework," CBQ 29 (1967):17-19; Mendenhall, "Covenant," in IDB 1:722-723; N. Clark, An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments (London: SCM, 1956); see also J. Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, trans. N. Perrin (London: SCM, 1966); M.G. Kline presents an intriguing argument for a covenantal understanding of the sacrament of baptism in By Oath Consigned, see esp. 50-102.

Hebrews¹⁵ and comparing it to the Pauline conception of the covenant.¹⁶ Some of these studies have also given attention to the matter of relating the new covenant to the OT law.¹⁷ These particular inquiries are indicative of a more general concern for evaluating the role of covenant in the NT theologians' presentations of salvation history.¹⁸ Hence, we may note a number of similar discussions in NT and OT covenant studies.

Perhaps, however, it is in the field of historical studies that the covenant idea has received the greatest attention of late. In the

¹⁵ For instance, G. Vos, "Hebrews, the Epistle of the Diatheke," in Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, ed. R.B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 161-233; C. Spicq, "La théologie des deux Alliances dans l'Épître aux Hébreux," RSPT 33 (1949):15-30; A. Carr, "Covenant or Testament? A Note on Hebrews 9:16,17," E 7th ser. 7 (1909):347-352; and G.D. Kilpatrick, "Diatheke in Hebrews," ZNW 68 (1977):263-265; see also O.P. Robertson, The Christ of the Covenants (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 138-146.

¹⁶ For studies of the covenant concept in Paul, see W.C. van Unnik, "La conception paulinienne de la Nouvelle Alliance," in Sparsa Collecta, 3 vols. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1973), 1:174-193; W. Wallis, "The Pauline Conception of the Old Covenant," P 4 (1978):71-83; C. Roetzel, "Diatheke in Romans 9:4," B 51 (1970):377-390; H. Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, trans. J.R. DeWitt (London: SPCK, 1977), 333-341; Y.K. Yu, "The New Covenant: The Promise and its Fulfillment" (Ph.D. dissertation, Durham University, 1989); for comparisons of Paul and Hebrews, see U. Luz, "Der alte und der neue Bund bei Paulus und im Hebraerbrief," EvTh 27 (1967):318-336; H.A.A. Kennedy, "The Significance and Range of the Covenant Conception in the NT," esp. 395-410; and R.V. Moss, "The Covenant Conception in Early Christian Thought" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1954), 140-153.

¹⁷ In addition to works mentioned below 6, n.16, see E.P. Sanders, Paul, The Law, and the Jewish People (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), esp. 137-141; Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (London: SCM, 1985), esp. 245-269; Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (London: SCM, 1977), esp. 511-515; and H. Hubner, Law in Paul's Thought, trans. J.C.G. Greig, ed. J. Riches (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1984), esp. 67-100.

¹⁸ For discussions of the role of covenant in NT *heilsgeschichte*, see Moss, "The Covenant Conception," 140-153; Most, "A Biblical Theology," 10-19; Hillers, Covenant, 169-188; and Robertson, Christ of the Covenants, 271-300.

last fifty years, particularly in Reformation and Puritan studies, the amount of research devoted to the idea of covenant has been formidable.¹⁹ We may point to two historiographical landmarks which have, to a certain extent, fostered the current historical interest in the covenant idea. The first is the work of Perry Miller on Puritanism.²⁰ Writing in a day that had little time for Calvin or Calvinists, Miller managed to rehabilitate the Puritans by depicting them as the authors of a "revision of Calvinism."²¹ The Puritans, according to Miller, mollified the harsher characteristics of Calvinism by the "invention" of covenant or federal theology. This covenant theology supposedly had the effect of creating a space for human responsibility in an oppressive predestinarian system. Hence in Miller's presentation, the covenant idea was a theological tool used by the Puritans to change Calvinism for the better. Miller's work has exerted a tremendous influence on subsequent writing on the idea of

¹⁹ Of course, the historiography of the covenant idea in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was considerable; see for instance, A.B. van Zandt, "The Doctrine of the Covenants Considered as the Central Principle of Theology," Presbyterian Review 3 (1882):28-39; T.M. Lindsay, "The Covenant Theology," British and Foreign Evangelical Review 28 (1879):521-538; J.L. Girardeau, "The Federal Theology" in Memorial Volume for Columbia Seminary, ed. B.M. Palmer (Columbia: Presbyterian Publishing House, 1884); R. Rainy, "Federal Theology," CP 5 (1881):341-349,427-434; and G. Vos, "The Doctrine of the Covenant in Reformed Theology," in Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation [=De verbondsleer in de Gereformeerde theologie (Grand Rapids: Drupkers, 1891)]; for an extensive bibliography of nineteenth-century treatments of the development of the covenant theology, see A.A. Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenant Thought: A Study in the Reformed Tradition to the Westminster Assembly" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Glasgow, 1988), 101-128.

²⁰ P. Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Boston: Beacon Press, 1939).

²¹ See G.M. Marsden's classic analysis of Miller's work on the Puritans, "Perry Miller's Rehabilitation of the Puritans: A Critique," CH 39 (1970):91-105.

covenant in the Reformed tradition.²²

A second catalyst for modern historical consideration of the covenant idea may be found in Karl Barth's criticism of the older covenant theology.²³ Whereas other modern theologians tended to ignore the Reformed theology of the seventeenth century, Barth appreciated and interacted with the covenant theologians of that period. He also recognized that the covenant idea that had attained such a prominent place in their system was not absent from the earlier Reformers.²⁴ But Barth was very critical of these federal theologians at certain points.²⁵ He was particularly displeased with the concept of a pre-fall

²² Marsden put it well when he said, "As for the thesis that the covenant of grace represented a revision of Calvinism, Miller has created a myth that has been so elegantly presented and widely repeated that it will be difficult to destroy" ("Perry Miller: A Critique," 105); Miller's influence can be seen in the work of L.J. Trinterud whose "two-tradition" theory of the development of covenant theology was a modification of the Miller thesis; see "The Origins of Puritanism," CH 20 (1951):37-57; see also M. McGiffert, "Grace and Works: The Rise and Division of Covenant Divinity in Elizabethan Puritanism," HTR 75 (1982):463-502; and id., "William Tyndale's Conception of the Covenant," JEH 32 (1981):167-184; J.W. Baker's Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant: The Other Reformed Tradition (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1980) is an expansion of the Trinterud thesis; for similar approaches, see G.D. Henderson, "The Idea of the Covenant in Scotland," EQ 27 (1955):2-14; and J.G. Møller, "The Beginnings of Puritan Covenant Theology," JEH 14 (1963):46-67; for helpful correctives to this sort of interpretation, see J. von Rohr, The Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); D.A. Stoute, "The Origins and Early Development of the Reformed Idea of the Covenant" (Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge University, 1979); & D.B. Calhoun, "The Covenant in Bullinger and Calvin" (Th.M. paper, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1976).

²³ For a distillation of Barth's views on covenant, see Church Dogmatics, 4.1, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), 1-78; see esp. 54-66, where he discusses Federal Theology.

²⁴ Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4.1, 54-55.

²⁵ For an elaboration of Barth's own covenant theology and his criticism of the Cocceian school, see J.L. Scott, "The Covenant in the Theology of Karl Barth," SJT 17 (1964):182-198, and B.L. McCormack, "A scholastic of a higher order: The development of Karl Barth's theology, 1921-1931" (Ph.D. Thesis, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1989), 2:626-

covenant of works and the use of covenant theology to maintain a doctrine of limited atonement.²⁶ These "later developments" in covenant theology, Barth suggested, were given confessional status for the first time in the Westminster Confession.²⁷ Since Barth made these observations, a plethora of writing has sought to substantiate historically his theological criticism of the covenant theology.²⁸ According to writers in this school, the systematization of an "unbiblical" conception of covenant led to a revision of Calvinism (similar to Miller's thesis), but for the worse (*contra* Miller). As we noted in biblical studies of the covenant idea, there are a few recurring issues in these historical examinations of the covenant

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²⁶ Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4.1, 57-63.

²⁷ Barth, Church Dogmatics, 4.1, 59.

²⁸ See for example, J.C. McClelland, "Covenant Theology - A Re-evaluation," CJT 3 (1957):182-188; C.S. McCoy, "Johannes Cocceius: Federal Theologian," SJT 16 (1963):352-370; H. Rolston, "Responsible Man in Reformed Theology: Calvin versus the Westminster Confession," SJT 23 (1970):129-156; id., John Calvin versus the Westminster Confession (Richmond: John Knox, 1972); J.B. Torrance, "The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology," SJT 26 (1973):295-311; id., "The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology and Politics and its Legacy," SJT 34 (1981):225-243; id., "Covenant or Contract? A Study of the Theological Background of Worship in Seventeenth Century Scotland," SJT 23 (1970):51-76; M.C. Bell, Calvin and Scottish Theology (Edinburgh: Handsel Press, 1985); D. Weir also tends to follow this line in The Origins of Federal Theology in Sixteenth-Century Reformation Thought (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990) -- see my review of Weir in the Scottish Bulletin of Evangelical Theology 12.1 (Spring 1994) 55-57; for cogent criticism of this sort of historical approach see M.W. Karlberg, "The Original State of Adam: Tensions within Reformed Theology," EQ 59 (1987):291-309; P.A. Lillback, "The Binding of God: Calvin's Role in the Development of Covenant Theology," (Ph.D. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985); id., "The Continuing Conundrum: Calvin and the Conditionality of the Covenant," CTJ 29 (1994):42-74; Richard A. 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 à Brakel," CTJ 29 (1994):75-101; and A.A. Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought," esp. 129-198.

theology: the conditionality or unconditionality of the covenant,²⁹ the role of the law and its relation to covenant,³⁰ the question of single versus multiple traditions of covenant thought in Reformed theology,³¹ and the role of covenant in the structure of redemptive history.³²

In spite of this attention currently being given to the covenant concept in Reformation and Puritan studies, historical theological research on the period prior to the Reformation has largely ignored the covenant idea. Comparatively little historical work has been devoted to the examination of the theological use of the covenant idea in the medieval era,³³ and even less in the patristic period. Nevertheless,

²⁹ See for instance, C.S. McCoy, "Johannes Cocceius," 362-364; J.B. Torrance, "Covenant or Contract?," esp. 54-57; the same preoccupation with conditionality/unconditionality may be noted in the latter's "The Covenant Concept in Scottish Theology," 228-231.

³⁰ See for example, H. Rolston, "Responsible Man in Reformed Theology;" F. Lyall, "Of Metaphors and Analogies: Legal Language and Covenant Theology," SJT 32 (1979):1-17; and J.D. Eusden, "Natural Law and Covenant Theology in New England 1620-1670," NLF 5 (1960):1-30.

³¹ See L.J. Trinterud, "The Origins of Puritanism;" M. McGiffert, "Grace and Works;" and J.W. Baker, Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant, for presentations of the "two-tradition" hypothesis, and A.A. Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought;" P.A. Lillback, "The Binding of God;" and J. von Rohr, Covenant of Grace in Puritan Thought for alternative evaluations of the development of covenant theology.

³² See C.F. Lincoln, "The Development of the Covenant Theory," BS 100 (1943):134-163; W.C. Kaiser, "The Old Promise and the New Covenant," JETS 15 (1972):11-23; and J. Feinberg ed., Continuity and Discontinuity (Westchester: Crossway, 1988), 37-62.

³³ Only within the last thirty years has the covenant concept gained considerable scholarly notice in medieval studies, for instance, H. Oberman, "The Shape of Late Medieval Thought: The Birthpangs of the Modern Era," in The Pursuit of Holiness in the Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion, ed. C.E. Trinkaus (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), 3-25; id., The Harvest of Medieval Theology: Gabriel Biel and Late Medieval Nominalism (Durham, NC: Labyrinth, 1983), 148-174, 186, 190-193, 246-247, 350; id., "Wir sind pettler: Hoc est verum: Bund und Gnade in der Theologie des Mittelalters und der Reformation," ZKG 78 (1967):232-252; and S. Strehle, Calvinism, Federalism, and Scholasticism: A Study of the Reformed Doctrine of the Covenant (Bern: Peter Lang, 1988), 1-82; Oberman and Strehle concentrate on the

there are signs that this phase of neglect is coming to an end. Researchers in two different fields of historical study are beginning to address the nature and significance of the covenant idea in the early church.

First, scholars studying the origins of the covenant theology of the sixteenth-century Reformation have established a link between the early Reformers' covenant thought and patristic sources.³⁴ It has been shown, for instance, that Bullinger appealed to a number of early church fathers for confirmation of his teaching on the covenant idea in his De testamento seu foedere dei unico et aeterno (1534).³⁵ McCoy and

nominalist (*via moderna*) tradition; see also P.A. Lillback, "The Binding of God," 67-96, J. Preus, From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther (Cambridge, MA: Belknap/Harvard, 1969), 125-132; C.S. McCoy and J.W. Baker, Fountainhead of Federalism: Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenantal Tradition (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991) 14-17; and A.A. Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought," 230-254.

³⁴ See, for instance, Baker's Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant, 1-25; J. Staedke, Die Theologie des jungen Bullinger, Studien zur Dogmengeschichte und systematischen Theologie 16 (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1962), 43 *et passim*; Stoute, "Origins and Early Development of the Reformed Idea of the Covenant," 23 *et passim*; cf. W.N. Todd, "The Function of the Patristic Writings in the Thought of John Calvin" (Th.D. Thesis, Union Theological Seminary, 1964), 169-227, for an evaluation of Calvin's knowledge and use of the writings of the early church; McCoy and Baker, Fountainhead of Federalism, 14-15; Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought," 1:200-229; P.Y. De Jong, The Covenant Idea in New England Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 15-17; Lillback, "The Binding of God," 67-74; and M.W. Karlberg, "The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology" (Th.D. Thesis, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980), 37-45.

³⁵ The McCoy/Baker annotated translation of De testamento (A Brief Exposition of the One and Eternal Testament or Covenant of God) may be found in their Fountainhead of Federalism, 99-138; for Bullinger's appeals to the fathers, see 119-130; Bullinger had earlier appealed to Irenaeus, Tertullian, Lactantius, Eusebius, and Augustine in support of his covenant teaching in De originis erroris, in divorum ac simulachrorum cultu (Basel, 1529), sig. Bii(v), see Fountainhead, 127, n. 20.

Baker assert:

Bullinger drew heavily on the Bible and used several church fathers to give his idea of covenant a past, in order to demonstrate that it was not an innovation but the very fabric from which the history of salvation was woven through the centuries, from Adam to his own day. He cited Augustine, Irenaeus,³⁶ Tertullian, Lactantius, and Eusebius for patristic support.

This discovery has led a number of Reformation specialists to conduct preliminary surveys of the covenant idea in the fathers in order to set the stage for analysis of the Reformers' covenant theology.³⁷ Woolsey offered these concluding remarks in his brief overview of the use of the covenant concept in Epistle of Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Augustine:

First, they all used the idea of covenant to stress the unity, and explain the differences, between the Old and New Testaments. Secondly, they saw the covenant soteriologically as one eternal covenant in Christ manifest throughout all ages from the time of Adam. Thirdly, there was a dual emphasis in their presentation of the covenant. It was a unilateral promise of grace given sovereignly by God, but it also required a response of faith and obedience from man, though this response was only by divine enabling and not by any natural inherent power resident in fallen man. Fourthly, in the case of Augustine, there was a definite use of the idea of covenant in a legal sense, though still in a context of 'grace', with respect to Adam in his fallen state. Finally, again in Augustine especially, there was a close association of the covenant with baptism, so that it is erroneous to locate the origin of the idea of covenant in this connection in the Zurich reformation.³⁸

Hence, a new interest in the role of the covenant idea in the early church has been created through research into the sources of Reformation covenant thought.

Second, a few patristic specialists have recently given attention

³⁶ McCoy and Baker, Fountainhead of Federalism, 14-15.

³⁷ The best of these is in Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought," 201-222; but see also Baker, Heinrich Bullinger and the Covenant, 19-25; and Karlberg, "The Mosaic Covenant," 37-45.

³⁸ "Unity and Continuity of Covenantal Thought," 221-222.

to the place of the covenant idea in the theology of the early church.³⁹ Chief among them is Everett Ferguson, whose essay, "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century," is the only significant review of the covenant concept per se in the theology of the early church to date. He briefly surveys 1 Clement, Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Gnostic and Ebionite literature, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Melito of Sardis, the pseudo-Cyprian Adversus Judaeos, and Origen and concludes:

(1) Covenant was part of the Old Testament-Jewish heritage of the church. Like other Old Testament categories it was subsumed in Jesus Christ (the Covenant), becoming less important as a category in itself to second-century Christians.

(2) The covenant idea had its significance in structuring

³⁹ See E. Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century," 134-135; id., s.v., "Covenant" in EEChr 239-240; W.C. van Unnik discusses the significance of the application of the phrase καινή διαθήκη to the collection of writings which became the NT, and in passing highlights the import of the covenant idea in Irenaeus' theology in "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη - a Problem in the early history of the Canon," SP (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961), 4:212-227; R.V. Moss concentrates primarily on the covenant as a theological category in OT and NT canonical writings, but gives a brief consideration of its role in the periodization of redemptive history in Barnabas, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Clement of Alexandria in "The Covenant Conception in Early Christian Thought;" W.H.C. Frend notes Irenaeus' employment of the covenant idea in "The Old Testament in the Age of the Greek Apologists A.D. 130-180," SJT 26 (1973):129-150, esp. 148-149; D.S. Kolb discusses how the idea of the incarnation modified the church's inherited covenant concept through a survey of Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagoras, Irenaeus, Theophilus of Antioch, Melito of Sardis, Minucius Felix, Tertullian, Hippolytus, and Clement of Alexandria, but he assumes (rather than demonstrates) the concept's presence and content in the father's writings in "The Impact of the Incarnational Motif on the Churches' Understanding of Covenant Faith in the Period AD 150-AD 230" (Ph.D. Thesis, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1988); E.G. Hinson suggests that the "three pillars of the covenant concept" are monotheism, high moral standards, and mission, and that the covenant was an important theological concept in the early church in The Evangelization of the Roman Empire (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1981), 151; we may note in passing that, almost a century ago, Harnack (characteristically) did not allow the significance of the covenant idea in the fathers to escape his notice, see History of Dogma, trans. N. Buchanan, 3d ed. (London: Constable, c.1900; reprint, New York: Dover, 1961) 2:230-318, esp. 244-245.

holy history against Jewish claims for and the Gnostic repudiation of the law. . . . a covenantal, "dispensational," "history of salvation" view was one of the fundamental hermeneutical principles employed by many early Christian writers

(3) This covenantal structure may fairly be claimed to be rooted in the early kerygma and to be based on the first developments of it by Paul and Luke.

(4) The covenant concept is closely related to the theme of "God's people."

(5) Both Hebraic (relationship) and Hellenistic (testament) components persisted in early Christian texts about *diathēkē*.

(6) The association with "law" and "gospel" prepared for the adoption of the term "covenant" as title for the scriptures.⁴⁰

So, in the work of Ferguson and others, there are signs of more attention being accorded to covenant thought in patristic studies.

Despite this recent and growing recognition of the use of the covenant idea in the theology of the ante-Nicene Christian church, it has generally been disregarded in historical-theological treatments of this era, and the prevailing pattern is to rate the covenant to be a theological category of little consequence in the patristic period.⁴¹ Many continue to assume that the covenant idea is either altogether absent in the writings of the fathers or too insignificant to warrant detailed investigation. W. A. Brown, for instance, claimed that "Irenaeus is the only early Christian writer who makes much use of it [the covenant idea]," and C. F. Lincoln even suggested that "it was

⁴⁰ "Covenant Idea in the Second Century," 155-156.

⁴¹ For example, EEC (1992) does not even include an entry for "covenant" in the patristic era--though EEChr (1990) does, thanks to Ferguson's editorship; and even competent studies of Irenaeus' theology (in whose polemics the covenant concept is more generally recognized to have a notable role) have ignored the idea; both Benoit in Saint Irénée. Introduction à l'étude de sa théologie (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960) and Lawson in The Biblical Theology of St. Irenaeus (London: Epworth Press, 1948) fail to offer an in-depth discussion of the covenant idea per se.

unknown to the apostolic and early church fathers."⁴² The main objective of this thesis is to challenge such commonplace opinions. We shall argue that this idea was not only present in the writings of a representative selection of ante-Nicene theologians, but that it played a significant role in some of their theological systems, especially hermeneutically, in their attempts to relate the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, as well as in their polemics with the Jews and Gnostics. Such a study is justified for at least three reasons.

First, no extensive survey of the covenant idea as a theological category in the ante-Nicene period has ever been done. In fact, Everett Ferguson himself recently complained: "I have found no monograph on this important theological idea dealing with patristic literature."⁴³ Yet the fresh attention of Reformation and patristic historians to this idea in the theology of the early church, in combination with the prominence of the covenant concept itself in both OT and NT theology,⁴⁴

⁴² Brown, an acknowledged patristic scholar in his day, makes this remark in his discussion of the covenant idea as an antecedent to the development of covenant theology, and in his article "Covenant Theology" in *ERE* 4:219, he says of Augustine only that he "makes no use of the concept in his *City of God* . . . ;" Lincoln's comment is made in "Development of Covenant Theory," a dispensational diatribe against the alleged historical roots of covenant theology, 136.

⁴³ "Covenant Idea in the Second Century," 135.

⁴⁴ Given the importance of the covenant in OT religion, the Synoptics' appeal to that covenantal tradition in the eucharistic narratives, the Pauline insistence that Christians are heirs to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, Hebrews' exposition of the superiority of new covenant religion (Christianity) over old covenant religion (Judaism under the Mosaic economy), and the occasional NT link between the covenant and forgiveness of sins, one might fairly expect to see at least some employment of the covenant concept in the theology of pre-Nicene Christianity (especially since many early Christian writers claimed to be the rightful heirs to the OT Scriptures and successors to the theology of the apostles). Indeed, the absence of the covenant idea from their writings would require some sort of explanation.

suggests the need for further, more thorough investigation. This is the first such attempt.

Second, the part which covenant can be seen to play, even from a superficial reading, in the early church's controversial writings against the Jews, in the anti-Gnostic polemics of the theologians of the second and early third centuries, and in the deliberation of the church on the role of the OT in a bipartite Bible manifests the need for a comprehensive consideration of the covenant idea in this era. From the perspective of patristics, Ferguson has already established that the covenant idea had a place in the theology, and especially the polemics, of the ante-Nicene church.⁴⁵ But in view of the general lack of attention given to the subject, undertaking a more thorough elucidation and evaluation of ante-Nicene covenant thought will be useful. Such a project invites a comparison with the covenant concept in the NT writings, apostolic fathers, and apologists and offers the prospect of viewing the development of the church's thinking in this important theological locus.

Third, this sort of survey is particularly important in view of the work being done on the precursors/origins of Reformation covenant thought and for defining the early church's contribution to the post-biblical development of the covenant idea. We have already suggested that there is a gaping hole in the historical theological study of the covenant concept. A consideration of covenant thought in the early church will not only make a start at filling this oversized lacuna in covenant studies, but will also benefit the historiography of covenant theology in the Reformation and post-Reformation. The Protestant

⁴⁵ "Covenant Idea in the Second Century," 134-135; see also s.v., "Covenant" in EEChr, 239-240.

theologians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not unprecedented in their use of covenant as a theological category, however original was their covenant theology. Not until we have studied the theological role of covenant in ancient and medieval Christian theology will we be in a position to estimate and appreciate fairly the contributions of the Protestant tradition to the development of this theological locus. This thesis is expedient for that particular task.

In this thesis, we will consider eight ante-Nicene Christian theologians: from Asia Minor, Melito of Sardis and Irenaeus; from North Africa, Tertullian and Cyprian; from Alexandria, Clement and Origen; and from Rome, Hippolytus and Novatian. Concentration on these writers provides us with a theological, geographical, and chronological compass that will enable us to ascertain "the significance and range of the covenant conception" (to borrow a phrase from H.A.A. Kennedy) in the late second, and third centuries. In our investigation of the covenant idea in these theologians we will first, give attention to the meaning(s) of important covenant terminology as employed by the various authors; second, compare their conceptions of covenant with those of their theological predecessors and contemporaries; third, identify areas of their theology in which covenant thought is influential; fourth, consider the function of covenant in their respective presentations of redemptive history; and fifth, evaluate the place of covenant in their overall theology.

In order to provide context for this survey, it will be necessary to review the use of the covenant idea in the NT writings, apostolic fathers, and apologists. This will also assure that we are asking realistic, non-anachronistic questions concerning covenant thought in the ante-Nicene patristic literature. The importance of this may be

illustrated with reference to the work of J. W. Baker, who suggests at one point that

. . . none of the church fathers, save perhaps Irenaeus--developed any sort of bilateral, conditional covenant notion. It was a theology of testament that Bullinger discovered in the fathers, not a theology of covenant.⁴⁶

Only a Reformation historian, writing after the time of Barth, could have made such a characterization of patristic covenant thought.⁴⁷ The questions that he is asking, the categories in which he is thinking, and the conclusions to which he comes are all controlled by current theological debates concerning the covenant concept and the specific uses to which the early Reformers put the fathers' words. Consequently, his analysis tells us more about contemporary and Reformation views on the covenant than it does about the thinking of patristic authors. This is precisely what we wish to avoid. A review of the writings immediately prior to the era on which we are focusing will provide us with a set of questions and categories that are native to the theological habitat of ante-Nicene theologians and thus contribute to the objectivity and value of our examination.

If Delbert Hillers' Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea was an attempt to trace the biblical development of the covenant concept from the early history of Israel to the Christian era, then this thesis

⁴⁶ Bullinger and the Covenant, 23.

⁴⁷ Because of the influence in Protestant circles of Barth's strongly monergistic bent on the covenant, and the subsequent equation of conditionality with "works salvation," almost all contemporary discussion of covenant thought breaks down into "either/or" categories: conditional/unconditional, bilateral/unilateral, synergistic/monergistic; this affects the historical study of the idea in the Reformation and post-Reformation eras as well. For a thorough evaluation of this pattern, see Woolsey's magisterial historiographical survey of covenant thought in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought," 101-198.

may be regarded as a contribution to the study of the covenant idea's early development in the post-biblical period--a study that is, as we have already noted, important for the history of ideas.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ D.N.J. Poole's recent Erlangen Ph.D. thesis, misleadingly entitled The History of the Covenant Concept from the Bible to Johannes Cloppenburg: De Foedere Dei (San Francisco: Mellen, 1992), provides a mere eleven pages of analysis of patristic covenant thought (half of which is devoted to Augustine), is heavily reliant on secondary literature in its treatment of the covenant idea in scholasticism (again, only 26 pages of survey) and sixteenth-century Reformation thought, shows no knowledge of much important bibliography, and generally rehashes the Torrance/Rolston/Kendall/Heron criticism of seventeenth-century covenant theology.

COVENANT AND THE NEW TESTAMENT THEOLOGIANS

The Essenes had a covenant, but it was not new; the Christians had something new, but it was not a covenant. That is to say, to call what Jesus brought a covenant is like calling conversion circumcision, or like saying that one keeps the Passover with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. For Christians, the coming of the substance made shadows out of a rich array of Old Testament events, persons, and ideas, among them covenant. *Figuram res exterminat*; the reality brings the image to an end.

D. Hillers, Covenant: History of a Biblical Idea, 188.

In order to appreciate the covenant idea in the theologians of the late second and early third centuries, it is expedient to consider the role of the covenant conception in the writings of their predecessors in the Christian era. A survey of covenant in the NT writings would thus provide a useful starting point for establishing a context for comparison and evaluation. Our aims in attempting such an examination will be neither to assess the significance of the covenant idea in the various NT authors⁴⁹ nor to contribute original research to the study

⁴⁹ There have been surprisingly few attempts to give a comprehensive overview of the covenant idea in the NT, perhaps because of preoccupation with the issue of mutuality or unconditionality, but see for example H.A.A. Kennedy's "The Significance and Range of the Covenant Conception in the New Testament," which is excellent but by no means exhaustive; R.V. Moss, to his credit, gets beyond simply treating passages where covenant terminology is explicitly employed and looks for evidence of "covenant thought" even when *διαθήκη* is not present, but gives little detailed analysis in "The Covenant Conception in Early Christian Thought," esp. 82-102, 106-134, 142-153; R.F. Collins gives a helpful overview (but restricts his study to texts where *διαθήκη* is found) in "The Berith-Notion of the Cairo Damascus Covenant and its Comparison with the New Testament," 582-594; see also L. Morris' valuable treatment in The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 65-111; and Mendenhall's and Herion's useful article "Covenant" in the ABD 1:1195-1202. D.N.J. Poole's cursory survey in The History of the Covenant Concept, 28-47, parrots Kutsch's (Neues Testament - Neuer Bund?) unilateralist agenda and, hence, is of little value.

of covenant in the NT,⁵⁰ but to cull the fruit of NT studies with regard to the covenant idea⁵¹ and by exegesis to identify theological concepts explicitly related to the covenant terminology of the NT writings. Hence, we will restrict our study to the consideration of passages where the word *διαθήκη* occurs, resorting to other texts only as they bear on our understanding of these.⁵² Such a review will provide background and parameters for our subsequent investigations.

The Translation and Meaning of *διαθήκη* in the NT

The word *διαθήκη* appears 33 times in the NT (30 times in the singular and 3 in the plural) and is implied another 6 times. As we have previously mentioned, a rather vigorous discussion of the translation of *διαθήκη* in the NT has been going on for some time.⁵³

⁵⁰ Our objective is not to break new ground in NT research on the covenant concept; NT scholarship has much more fully discussed (even if in a piecemeal fashion) the function of the covenant idea than have students of patristics. For further analysis and bibliography, see my Covenant in the New Testament: A New Introduction and Survey (Grand Rapids: Baker, forthcoming).

⁵¹ The fathers were, of course, not privy to the benefits of current NT research; we simply propose, through a minimalistic exegesis of the NT documents themselves (corroborated by the general consensus of NT scholarship), to provide an inventory of usages of the covenant concept in the Christian era prior to our primary period of investigation.

⁵² The disadvantage of this approach is, of course, that it does not attempt to consider every occurrence of covenant thought in the NT (e.g., other terms related to the covenant idea [see Moss, 106-134], the "covenant formula" [i.e., "I will be their God and they will be my people," see Moss, 60-68], and words which substitute for covenant [e.g., kingdom, see E.P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism, 141-142 and n.82]); but the advantage is that our examples of covenant thought are more straightforward.

⁵³ See, for instance, the anonymous DIATHEEKEE, Covenant, Not Testament (London: Trubner, 1856); A. Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, 337-338; J. Behm, Der Begriff DIATHEKE im Neuen Testament; and "*διαθήκη*" in TDNT, 2:124-134; G. Vos, "Covenant or Testament?"; L.G. da Fonseca, "*Διαθήκη*--Foedus an Testamentum?"; G.E. Mendenhall, "Testament"

Because of its implications for understanding later Christian covenant terminology, it is advisable for us to devote some consideration to this matter. The debate concerns whether in the NT διαθήκη is usually to be translated as "covenant" (in the sense of binding agreement or relationship),⁵⁴ "testament"⁵⁵ (in the sense of last will)⁵⁶ or "disposition" (a unilateral [divine] enactment).⁵⁷ This question is further complicated by connotations of the English word covenant (e.g., bargain or contract).

Those who have argued for rendering διαθήκη as "testament" or "disposition" have done so for both philological and theological

in IDB, 4:575; and E. Kutsch, "Bund" [III. NT und frühe Kirche] in TRE, 7:406-410.

⁵⁴ "Covenant" continues to be the preferred translation, though there are various opinions on the significance of this rendering; for examples of studies which favor the translation "covenant," see E. Hatch, Essays on Biblical Greek (Oxford: OUP, 1889), 47-48; H.A.A. Kennedy, "The Significance and Range of the Covenant-Concept in the New Testament Writings;" E.D. Burton, Commentary on Galatians, 500-505; G.E. Mendenhall, IDB 1:715-716, 722-723 and 4:575; D.F. Estes, ISBE 1:793; A. McCaig, ISBE 1:795-797; G.L. Archer, EDT, 278; R.F. Collins, "The Berith-Notion of the Cairo-Damascus Covenant and its Comparison with the New Testament;" W.G. Most, "A Biblical Theology of Redemption in a Covenant Framework;" and O.P. Robertson, Christ of the Covenants, esp. 138-146.

⁵⁵ It is generally assumed that διαθήκη=testament in Hebrews 9:16,17 and Galatians 3:15, although even these occurrences have been disputed (see A. Carr, "Covenant or Testament? A Note on Hebrews 9:16,17;" G.D. Kilpatrick, "Διαθήκη in Hebrews;" and O.P. Robertson, Christ of the Covenants, 138-146), but the debate to which we are referring primarily concerns the meaning of the word elsewhere.

⁵⁶ Deissmann, for example, explicitly prefers "will or testament," Light from the Ancient East, 337.

⁵⁷ For example, Behm says: "Neither 'covenant' nor 'testament' reproduces the true religious sense of the religious term διαθήκη in the Greek Bible. Διαθήκη is from first to last the 'disposition' of God, the mighty declaration of the sovereign will of God in history, by which He orders the relation between Himself and men according to His own saving purpose, and which carries with it the authoritative divine ordering, the one order of things which is in accordance with it," TDNT 2:134.

reasons. LXX and common Hellenistic usage is frequently appealed to as grounds for not translating διαθήκη as "covenant" in the NT. Then, on the theological front, the rendering "covenant" is said to obscure the unilateral character of the διαθήκη idea in the LXX and Paul. For instance Deissmann, who favored "testament" as the proper translation of διαθήκη in the NT, maintained that in the LXX διαθήκη meant a one-sided disposition or, more specifically, a will, and that studies of Hellenistic literature indicated διαθήκη was almost universally understood in a testamentary sense.⁵⁸ He then argued that this LXX and common Hellenistic meaning of διαθήκη was the Pauline meaning. Furthermore, for Deissmann, to translate διαθήκη as "covenant" (*Bund*), which implies bilaterality, was to compromise the Pauline doctrine of grace.⁵⁹ Deissmann encapsulated his linguistic and theological reasons for insisting that διαθήκη be rendered "testament" in this short paragraph:

To St. Paul the word meant what it meant in his Greek Old Testament, "a unilateral enactment," in particular "a will or testament." This one point concerns more than the merely superficial question whether we are to write "New

⁵⁸ Deissmann appeals to new knowledge of Hellenistic law, gleaned from recent [for him] discoveries of papyri, as grounds for translating διαθήκη as will or testament in the LXX and NT, Light from the Ancient East, 337; however, for more background on the Hellenistic usage of διαθήκη, see F.O. Norton's exhaustive survey of διαθήκη in classical Greek, which indicates that though διαθήκη most frequently meant arrangement or disposition, it also was used in a covenantal sense, A Lexicographical and Historical Study of ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ: From the Earliest Times to the End of the Classical Period (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1908), esp. 30-31; and E.D. Burton, who carries the survey into NT times in Commentary on Galatians, 496-505.

⁵⁹ W.G. Most suggests that the a priori notion that any aspect of bilaterality in the idea of διαθήκη would contradict the Pauline teaching on divine grace has long been a weakness in Protestant studies of the covenant idea, "A Biblical Theology of Redemption," 4,5.

Testament" or "New Covenant" on the title-page of the sacred volume; it becomes ultimately the great question of all religious history: a religion of grace, or a religion of works? It involves the alternative, was Pauline Christianity Augustinian or Pelagian?⁶⁰

On the other hand Behm, while affirming Deissmann's emphasis on the one-sided character of the *διαθήκη*, rejects the translation "testament" and prefers to render *διαθήκη* by "disposition."⁶¹ Whereas Deissmann appealed to both the LXX and Hellenistic law to support his translation of *διαθήκη* as "testament" in the NT, Behm sets the two over against one another. He says: "Paul's religious use of *διαθήκη* is shaped by the LXX rather than by the current legal sense."⁶² While Behm concedes that the LXX's *διαθήκη* idea is not univocal, he nevertheless insists that there is only one "religious concept of the *διαθήκη* in LXX." According to Behm, this religious idea of *διαθήκη* in the LXX is that of a unilateral divine disposition, which represents a modification of the OT term *ברית*.⁶³ Indeed, in Behm's view, the LXX's *διαθήκη* concept is so unilateral as to rule out the retention of "covenant" (*Bund*) in its translation in any form. He says that

the religious concept of *διαθήκη* in the LXX . . . represents a significant development of the Hebrew term even while preserving its essential content. To try to keep the actual word covenant [*Bund*], which in any case is not really co-extensive with the Hebrew word, by adopting such compromises as "covenantal disposition," or "covenanted order or ordinance," or by introducing the alien thought of

⁶⁰ A. Deissmann, Light from the Ancient East, 337-338.

⁶¹ See below 3, n.8.

⁶² J. Behm, TDNT 2:129.

⁶³ Behm says that *διαθήκη* in the LXX develops *ברית* as a religious concept by emphasizing "the exclusively determinative will of the divine author," TDNT 2:126-127.

testament, is only to obscure and pervert the linguistic and historical basis of the διαθήκη idea in the NT.⁶⁴

From this he argues to the translation of διαθήκη as "disposition" (i.e., "the mighty declaration of the sovereign will of God in history") in the NT.⁶⁵ In fact he contends that in Paul the διαθήκη concept was "understood even more sharply and consciously in terms of the sole operation of God and of absolute validity for the recipients."⁶⁶

However, there have been a number of effective responses to these arguments by those who favor "covenant" as the usual translation of διαθήκη in the NT. First, it has been suggested that the notion of testament (i.e., will) never appears in the LXX in connection with διαθήκη. Moulton and Milligan, in their Vocabulary of the Greek Testament, responded to Deissmann's contentions and concluded that "we may fairly put aside the idea that in the LXX 'testament' is the invariable meaning: it takes some courage to find it there at all."⁶⁷ Recent scholarship has tended to confirm this judgment.⁶⁸ If this verdict is accepted, then obviously, the case for "testament" as the

⁶⁴ J. Behm, TDNT 2:127.

⁶⁵ Behm, TDNT 2:134.

⁶⁶ Behm, TDNT 2:130.

⁶⁷ J.H. Moulton and G. Milligan, The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1949), 148.

⁶⁸ See J. Behm, TDNT 2:127; W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, and F.W. Danker, "διαθήκη" in BAG, 183; G.E. Mendenhall, "Testament" IDB 4:575; also E. Kutsch, who argues that διαθήκη means "obligation" in the LXX, TRE 7:401; and W.G. Most, who devotes an extensive note to this question in "A Biblical Theology of Redemption in a Covenant Framework," 14,15.

usual rendering of διαθήκη in the NT is substantially weakened.⁶⁹ Second, against the idea that διαθήκη should be translated "disposition" in the LXX (and so in the NT), it has been argued that the term "covenant" adequately conveys the unilateral character of the relationship without losing sight of its bilateral aspect. E. D. Burton has observed that the OT concept of covenant "carried the suggestion both of divine initiative and of mutuality"⁷⁰ and concludes his study of διαθήκη in pre-NT writings with these words:

From the usage, therefore, of writers before N.T. or approximately contemporaneous with it there emerge two distinct meanings of the word. "Testament" or "testamentary provision" is the most frequent use in classical writers, and is the invariable sense in Josephus and the papyri. The meaning "covenant" is very infrequent in classical writers, but is the almost invariable meaning in the LXX, in the O.T. Apocr., both translated and original, both Alexandrian and Palestinian, and in the Pseudepigr. and Philo. The essential distinction between the two meanings is that in a testament the testator expresses his will as to what shall be done after his death, esp. in respect to his property; the covenant is an agreement between living persons as to what shall be done by them while living. . . . It is of prime importance to observe that in the διαθήκη (ברית) between God and men, so often spoken of in O.T., the initiative is with God, and the element of promise or command is prominent; but that it still remains **essentially a covenant**, not a testament. In their emphasis on the former fact some modern writers seem to lose sight of the latter. [Emphasis mine.]⁷¹

The translation "covenant" is thus seen to be more adequate than "testament" because it signifies a relationship established between two

⁶⁹ Furthermore, recent studies in Palestinian Judaism argue for the importance of the covenant conception in Jewish theology contemporary with the NT authors. This may be significant in determining how διαθήκη was understood in early Christianity; see for instance, E.P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, esp. 419-428; Jesus and Judaism, esp. 335-340; Y.K. Yu, "The New Covenant," 83-170; and see below 4, n.11.

⁷⁰ E.D. Burton, Commentary on Galatians, 497.

⁷¹ Burton, Galatians, 500.

living parties and is preferable to "disposition" because it denotes a binding relationship with attendant responsibilities. Accordingly, "disposition" fails to convey the concept of mutuality inherent in the LXX usage of διαθήκη.

One further matter concerning the translation of διαθήκη is worth noting here. We have already mentioned that the case for translating διαθήκη as "disposition/testament" (and rejecting "covenant" [*Bund*]) is, to a large extent, based on an assumption about the LXX's reason for rendering ברית as διαθήκη. The common non-biblical usage of διαθήκη (i.e., testament or disposition) is set forth, and then it is pointed out that the LXX chose to translate ברית as διαθήκη rather than as συνθήκη. The essential distinction between the two is suggested to be that the former is one-sided (determined by the will of one party), while the latter is two-sided (arranged by mutual consent of both parties). It is then concluded that the LXX's choice was motivated by a concern to stress the unilateral nature of the arrangement.¹² Furthermore, the LXX's usage is deemed either to "develop" the meaning of the Hebrew term or, at least, to give new emphasis to an aspect already present in the OT concept of ברית. On the basis of this reasoning, some have rejected "covenant" (*Bund*) as a suitable translation of διαθήκη because it entails bilaterality.¹³ Surely, however, this sort of argument overstretches the inferences on which it is based. Should this distinction between διαθήκη and συνθήκη be the

¹² See BAG, "διαθήκη," 183; Behm, TDNT, 2:124-127; also G.L. Archer, "Covenant," in EDI, 278; G. Vos, "Covenant or Testament?," 403-404; and Burton, Galatians, 498.

¹³ Cf. Barr's response to this in "Some Semantic Notes on the Covenant," 36.

only or primary consideration in determining the meaning of διαθήκη in the LXX? Does it rule out the possibility of διαθήκη involving any aspect of mutuality? Eichrodt maintained of the OT ברית that

the use of the covenant concept in secular life argues that the religious berit too was always regarded as a bilateral relationship; for even though the burden is most unequally distributed between the two contracting parties, this makes no difference to the fact that the relationship is still essentially two-sided. The idea that in ancient Israel the berit was always and only thought of as Yahweh's pledging of himself, to which human effort was required to make no kind of response (Kraetzschmar), can therefore be proved to be erroneous.⁷⁴

Did then the LXX, by its choice of διαθήκη, intend to exclude this mutuality inherent in the OT concept of ברית? Whatever the case may be, D. J. McCarthy has reminded us that "we do not know for sure why the Septuagint chose the rather unusual διαθήκη, 'testament', to translate the Hebrew berit, 'covenant'; somehow, this makes the translation and its fate symbolic."⁷⁵ His words should serve to restrain our deductions based on the reason(s) for the LXX's choice of διαθήκη. As J. C. Hindley has suggested:

We must not allow the LXX choice of διαθήκη to obliterate the fundamental idea of compact leading to mutual relationship. While berith in its religious use certainly means a relationship founded by God and determined by Him, it nevertheless signifies a wideness and richness of relationship which is lost by the translation 'decree' or 'ordinance.'⁷⁶

We conclude then that the English "covenant" proves sufficiently flexible to convey both the unilateral divine initiative and

⁷⁴ Eichrodt, Theology of the Old Testament, 1:37.

⁷⁵ D.J. McCarthy, Old Testament Covenant, 1.

⁷⁶ J.C. Hindley, "The Meaning and Translation of Covenant," BT 13 (1962):100.

administration of the biblical *διαθήκη* (which virtually all commentators agree is comprehended in the scriptural usage) and its character as a mutually binding relationship (which is too often overlooked).⁷⁷

Covenant in the Synoptics and Acts

Of the 33 occurrences of *διαθήκη* in the NT writings, 17 are in the book of Hebrews, as compared to 9 in the Pauline Corpus, 1 in Revelation, and 6 in the Synoptics and Acts. In reviewing these passages, our purpose will be to observe the authors' theological use of the covenant terminology.⁷⁸ The theological role of covenant in their writings (along with those of the apostolic fathers and apologists) can then be compared and contrasted with the covenant thought found in the writings of churchmen of the late second and early third centuries.

The Abrahamic covenant is mentioned explicitly three times in Luke-Acts.⁷⁹ The first occurrence is found in the *Benedictus*, the hymn

⁷⁷ H.S. Gehman, among others, manages to keep together both the unilateral and mutual aspects of *διαθήκη* in his articles "The Covenant--The Old Testament Foundation of the Church," *IT* 7 (1950):38-39; and "An Insight and a Realization: A Study of the New Covenant," *Int* 9 (1955):291-292.

⁷⁸ Critical introductory issues such as authorship and sources are not relevant to the aims of this particular survey, but for general discussion of sources and traditions see H. Koester, *Introduction to the NT*, vol. 2, *History and Literature of Early Christianity* (New York/Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1982), esp. 1-12; C.F. Evans, "The NT in the Making," and R.M. Grant, "The NT Canon" both which are found in *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 1, *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P.R. Ackroyd and C.F. Evans (Cambridge: CUP, 1970), 232-377; dating and usage of the NT writings by later early Christian writers are of more direct concern to our overview.

⁷⁹ Harnack dated the Gospel ca. 60-65, T.W. Manson ca. 70, W.G. Kümmel ca. 70-90, and some have even suggested a second century dating (e.g., J.C. O'Neill), see E.E. Ellis' discussion in *ISBE* 3:183-186 for further details and bibliography; J. Drury notes that "Justin Martyr used Luke's Gospel, and it may be a source for the Gospel of Thomas" in

of Zacharias, where he announced that the Lord God "has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people" [Luke 1:68]. According to Luke 1:72-73, this redemptive visitation of the Lord occurred "to show mercy toward our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant (διαθήκης ἁγίας αὐτοῦ), the oath (ὄρκον) which He swore to Abraham our father." The passage alludes to Psalm 105:8-10,42 and views redemption as God's faithful response to His covenantal promise to Abraham.⁸⁰

Acts 3:25 contains a similar connection. Peter is preaching from the portico of Solomon and says to the crowd: "It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant (διαθήκης) which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.'" Here it is to be noted that Peter is addressing the "men of Israel" [v. 12], whom he identifies as the sons

DBI, 410; the gospel was first associated with Luke in the second half of the second century (see Irenaeus, AH 3.1.1; 3.10.1; 3.11.8); Acts is usually dated between the 60's and 90's (though some have suggested a second-century date), W.M. Ramsay and Harnack both argued for a first-century date for Acts, which F.F. Bruce says is confirmed by its "historical, geographical, and political atmosphere;" see his discussion in ISBE 1:37-38; The Muratorian Canon, Irenaeus (see AH 3.14.1), Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen ascribe Acts to Luke.

⁸⁰ R.F. Collins has noted important similarities and differences between this Lucan canticle and the Cairo Damascus Covenant. Both share the themes of the patriarchal covenant, the remembrance of the covenant, and the oath sworn by God. But they differ in that the visitation envisaged by Luke is salutary, while that of the Zadokites is punitive. Luke speaks of the redemption of the people, while CD emphasizes the remnant. In the Lucan visitation the advent of the Messiah is realized, while in CD the visitation and advent are in the future, and most importantly "for Luke, God has remembered the patriarchal covenant in so far as He has sent the Messiah, whereas, for CD, God is said to remember the covenant in so far as He has raised up the remnant which constitutes the sect." "The Berith-Notion in the CDC and NT," 583-584.

of the Abrahamic covenant.⁸¹ The passage gives a slightly altered rendering of Genesis 22:18 (LXX) and in the context of the sermon links the coming of Christ to the Abrahamic promise. For as God covenanted (διέθετο) with Abraham that in his seed all the families of the earth "shall be blessed" ([ἐν]εὐλογηθήσονται), so He sent the Christ "to bless (εὐλογούντα) you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways" [v. 26]. H.A.A. Kennedy remarks: "Here the Covenant-idea of the Old Testament, as exemplified by the promise made to Abraham, is regarded as consummated in the 'blessing' brought by Christ, the 'servant of the Lord,' the blessing of complete deliverance from sin, which means unbroken fellowship with God."⁸²

Acts 7:8 refers to the Abrahamic covenant again, this time with the sign of circumcision in view. The narrative, which recounts Stephen's speech before the Sanhedrin, links the Exodus to the Abrahamic promise [vv. 17,25,32-34] and views the covenant of circumcision as promissory of Isaac's birth. Verse 8 reads: "And He gave him the covenant of circumcision (διαθήκην περιτομῆς); and so Abraham became the father of Isaac, and circumcised him on the eighth day; and Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob of the twelve patriarchs." Hence, the covenant of circumcision looked to the provision of offspring for Abraham, which was, of course, crucial to the fulfillment of God's promise that Abraham's seed would possess the land [v. 5].

These three passages are important because they provide clear

⁸¹ H.L. Strack and P. Billerbeck suggest that "sons of the covenant" (υἱοὶ τῆς διαθήκης) means "sons of the covenant of circumcision" and is used to distinguish Israelites from non-Israelites. Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch, 4 vols. (Munich: Beck, 1922-28), 2:627.

⁸² Kennedy, "Significance and Range of Covenant," 400.

examples of the NT term διαθήκη being used in the OT sense of ברית, not as "will."⁸³ They also manifest the Lucan connection between the redemptive visitation of the Messiah and the Abrahamic covenant,⁸⁴ as well as alluding to a link between God's fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham and the forgiveness of sins [Luke 1:72,73,77 and Acts 3:19,25,26]. Finally, the Lucan canticle of Zacharias furnishes evidence, even restricting ourselves to explicit instances of the term διαθήκη, that it is incorrect to say "in the Synoptic tradition there is no suggestion of covenant thought except in the narratives of the Last Supper."⁸⁵

However, we do not deny that the eucharistic narratives are of first importance in providing testimony of covenant thought in the Synoptic traditions.⁸⁶ As we approach the three Supper accounts found in the Synoptics, it will be our purpose to discern the theological significance of the covenant idea in the respective texts as we have them.⁸⁷ The Matthean form of the eucharistic words is usually

⁸³ See L. Morris, Apostolic Preaching, 96; Collins' comparisons of these texts with the covenant thought of the Qumran writings also support this verdict, see "Berith-Notion," 583-585.

⁸⁴ For further development of this theme see T.J. Herter, The Abrahamic Covenant in the Gospels (Cherry Hill: Mack, 1972), 48-54, 143-146, 183.

⁸⁵ R.V. Moss, Covenant Conception, 88.

⁸⁶ R.V. Moss calls the Supper accounts "the *locus classicus* of covenant thought in the tradition of the sayings of Jesus," Covenant Conception, 93; and H.A.A. Kennedy observes that the usage of the covenant concept in the eucharistic narratives "is in many respects the most remarkable and the most difficult instance of the Covenant-idea in the New Testament." "Significance and Range of Covenant," 395.

⁸⁷ This course will allow us to steer clear of the historical debate concerning the origins of the accounts and the precise chain of events at the Last Supper, for an introduction to which see I.H. Marshall, Last Supper and Lord's Supper (Exeter: Paternoster, 1980),

recognized as a slight revision of Mark's account.⁸⁸ In Matthew's narrative the cup-word reads as follows: "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant (τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης), which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins" [Matt. 26:27b,28]. There are at least three observations worth mentioning concerning the covenant idea in this passage.

First, the phrase "this is my blood of the covenant" recalls the words of the sacrificial inauguration of the Sinaitic covenant recorded in Exodus 24:8 "Behold, the blood of the covenant (τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης [LXX]), which the Lord has made with you."⁸⁹ Here, Moses sacrificed young bulls and, after the reading of the book of the covenant in the presence of the people, sprinkled the blood of the slaughtered beasts on the people, declaring it to be the blood of the covenant. Thus the covenant was ratified. In the Matthean eucharistic narrative then, the significance of the cup (or its contents) is related in some way to the blood sprinkled in ratification of the Mosaic covenant. Second, and following on the previous point, we may note that Matthew's text

esp. 13-75,107-146; J. Jeremias, The Eucharistic Words of Jesus, 3rd ed., trans. N. Perrin (London: SCM, 1966); A.J.B. Higgins, The Lord's Supper in the New Testament (London: SCM, 1952); and N. Clark, An Approach to the Theology of the Sacraments (London: SCM, 1956), 36-59.

⁸⁸ See D.P. Senior, The Passion Narrative According to Matthew: A Redactional Study (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1975), 76-88; Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 184; and Marshall, Last Supper, 33,99-101. The priority of Mark has been recently questioned by a number of scholars (W.R. Farmer, B. Orchard, and H.H. Stoldt), see ISBE 3:281. Matthew's Gospel has been dated between 70 and 115 (most commonly in the 80's) and was far more frequently cited by the fathers than Mark and Luke, see IDB 3:312-313.

⁸⁹ Some have argued for Zech. 9:11 as the source of the cup-word, see for instance B. Lindars, New Testament Apologetic: The Doctrinal Significance of the Old Testament Quotations (London: SCM, 1961), 132-133; but see also D.J. Moo's effective response in The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives (Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 301-311.

differs from the LXX in the addition of μου to the phrase "the blood of the covenant," so that the cup is said to represent not simply the blood of the covenant, but *Christ's* ("My") blood of the covenant. This explicit connection between Jesus' blood and the blood sprinkling at Sinai points to an understanding of Jesus' death as one of covenantal sacrifice.⁹⁰ Third, the Matthean cup-word alone includes the phrase "for forgiveness of sins (εις ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν)," which serves to indicate the purpose of the shedding of the blood of the covenant and may be suggestive of Isaiah 53:12 or Jeremiah 31:34.⁹¹ Here again we have a connection between the covenant idea and forgiveness of sins.⁹²

The Marcan form of the cup-word is as follows: "This is My blood of the covenant (τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης), which is poured out for many." As we have previously mentioned, it seems to be the precursor of the Matthean cup-word and was apparently based on a primitive tradition in

⁹⁰ For more detailed corroboration of this view see Marshall, Last Supper, esp. 91-93; Moo observes that "the covenant sacrifice (Ex. 24:8) is a unique and foundational event, implying perhaps the taking away of sins as a necessary prelude to a relationship between man and God, but emphasizing more strongly the establishment of fellowship. It has been pointed out that the narrative of Exodus 24 is the only sacrificial ritual recorded in the OT in which the blood was sprinkled on the people, signifying 'eine direkte und reale Gemeinschaft mit dem bundesstiftenden Altargeschehen.' Furthermore, Jewish tradition ascribed atoning sacrifice to this blood. It is not, therefore, with an ordinary sacrifice that Jesus connects his death, but with a unique atoning sacrifice that emphasizes the ultimate involvement of those who participate." Passion Narratives, 311.

⁹¹ Moo, Passion Narratives, 306; and Marshall, Last Supper, 92-93, 100.

⁹² Marshall says: "This is a fresh theological concept. Since there is already a reference to the covenant in the cup-saying, which alludes to the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34, it is likely that the reference to forgiveness of sins takes up the last promise in that passage, 'for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.'" Last Supper, 100.

Hebrew or Aramaic.⁹³ We may again note the presence of the allusion to Exodus 24:8 and the addition of μου, "which is essential to the allusion."⁹⁴ We have not commented on the Marcan phrase, "which is poured out for many (ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν)," though it too is found in Matthew's account. It has been suggested that this is a word of explanation, reminiscent of Isaiah 53:12 (MT rather than LXX),⁹⁵ pointing to the imminent,⁹⁶ vicarious (ὑπὲρ) death of Jesus that would establish the covenant.

When we turn to the Lucan cup-word, we are faced with a textual problem that will warrant brief consideration. In a small number of texts Luke 22:19b-20 is omitted, and despite strong MSS support for the longer reading, many scholars prefer the shorter reading.⁹⁷ The shorter

⁹³ Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 187; and Marshall, Last Supper, 33. It is common to date Mark's gospel in the 60's (see the discussions of C.E.B. Cranfield in IDB 3:268 and R.P. Martin in ISBE 3:253-254).

⁹⁴ Moo, Passion Narratives, 304.

⁹⁵ Moo, Passion Narratives, 130-132; Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 178; and Marshall, Last Supper, 43.

⁹⁶ Jeremias notes: "The striking present tense is explained by the fact that, contrary to Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic possess no participial forms which distinguish time. The participle is atemporal. Its time sphere is determined by the context. In Aramaic the participle is often used for an event expected in the near future. . . . Our passage will therefore have to be translated: '(my blood) that (soon) will be shed'. Failure to notice this fact has led to serious misunderstandings, especially to the view that Jesus speaks of a pouring out of his blood at the Supper--not on the Cross!" Eucharistic Words, 178-179.

⁹⁷ Moo explains: "Verses 19b-20 in this passage were omitted by Westcott and Hort as a "Western non-interpolation," this cumbersome term coined by them to describe the rare occasions when (according to them) the Western text preserved a shorter, and presumably earlier, reading than the other MSS traditions (and especially ⲛ and B). Although considerable doubt now exists as to the validity of this judgment regarding "non-Western interpolations," a great number of scholars continue to regard vv. 19b-20 as secondary." Passion Narratives, 127-128.

reading is probably the harder of the two readings and so reasonably favored according to the canons of textual criticism ("a shorter reading is preferred, and a more difficult reading is given priority").⁹⁸ However, on behalf of the longer reading, we may point out the weakness of the MSS evidence for the shorter reading⁹⁹ and the strength of MSS support for the longer version.¹⁰⁰ Additionally, it can be argued that the presence of two cups in the longer form of the Lucan eucharistic narrative constitutes as difficult a reading as the reversal of the bread-cup order in the shorter form and may indeed account for the existence of the shorter reading.¹⁰¹ Hence, it is not unreasonable to support the longer reading as the original form. Our consideration, then, of the Lucan cup-word will proceed on the presupposition of the authenticity of Luke 22:19b-20.

The Lucan cup-saying reads as follows: "This cup which is poured

⁹⁸ See Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 152-159; Moo, Passion Narratives, 128; and Marshall, Last Supper, 37.

⁹⁹ Marshall says: "A point of particular importance is that manuscript evidence for the short text is poor. It consists of only one Greek MS (D) and some Latin versions, together with some Syriac and Coptic evidence for rearranging the verses, and a variant reading with only one Greek MS (a decidedly erratic one!) in its favour is decidedly weak." Last Supper, 37. See also Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 142-152.

¹⁰⁰ "The Long Form is attested: (1) by all the Greek MSS. (the earliest being at present P⁷⁵, AD 175/225) except D, (2) by all the versions with the exception of the Old Syriac (syr^{cur sin}, see below, pp. 143f.) and a part of the Itala, and (3) by all early Christian writers, beginning with Marcion, Justin and Tatian." Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 139. He goes on to say that "the decisive argument in favour of the Long Text is its overwhelming attestation." Eucharistic Words, 159. A.R. Eagar refers to the MSS testimony as "overwhelming external evidence." "St. Luke's Account of the Last Supper: A Critical Note on the Second Sacrament," E 7th ser. 5 (1908):343.

¹⁰¹ Moo concludes: "The traditional explanation remains the most satisfactory: the longer text has been shortened by a scribe who found the mention of two cups difficult; in the process, v. 19b has been omitted as well." Passion Narratives, 129-130.

out for you is the new covenant in My blood (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου)" [Luke 22:20]. We may make three observations relating to the covenant idea in Luke's cup-word. First, the Lucan account includes the emphasis on the vicarious nature of Jesus' action ("for you"), as do Matthew and Mark ("for many").¹⁰² This idea, as we have previously seen, relates to Jesus as covenantal sacrifice.

Second, and in distinction from the Matthean and Marcan forms, Luke identifies the cup with the *new* covenant, apparently looking back to Jeremiah 31:31-34.¹⁰³ The significance of this is that Christ's death is seen as fulfillment and realization of Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy and promise. At first glance, this allusion to Jeremiah 31 in the cup-word may seem to set the Mark/Matthew tradition (which is, arguably, drawing on Exodus 24:8) over against that of Paul/Luke. Jeremias, however, sees Luke's wording "the new covenant in My blood" as explanatory of "My blood of the covenant" rather than contradictory of it.¹⁰⁴ And Moo observes that "while the covenant in Matthew/Mark is

¹⁰² For discussion of the origin and significance of ὑπὲρ in the Supper narratives, see Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, esp. 195-196, 178-182.

¹⁰³ Some have attempted to deny this connection [e.g., Grässer, Der Alte Bund im Neuen: Exegetische Studien zur Israelfrage im Neuen Testament (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985), 115-126], however the scholarly consensus remains firmly behind the relation between the Pauline/Lucan cup-word and Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy. See Yu, "New Covenant," 183-184.

¹⁰⁴ See Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, "Likewise explanatory is the further definition of the 'covenant' by 'new' (Paul/Luke), a reference to Jer. 31:31-34. The addition is certainly pre-Pauline, as the agreement of Paul with Luke shows, but presumably first arose on hellenistic soil, since the position of the adjective 'new' before 'covenant' is unsemitic" [171-172]. "In the process of transformation, whose result is the Pauline formulation, there are different, partly overlapping, motives at work, which may be briefly summarized: . . . A tendency towards clarification may be recognized: the semitisms εὐλογήσας (p. 175) and πολλῶν (pp. 179ff.) could be misunderstood by

not specifically identified as 'new,' it is idle to deny that the concept is implicitly present in Jesus' claim that a covenant in *His* blood is about to be ratified."¹⁰⁵ It seems likely then that Jeremiah 31:31-34 is in the background of the Mark/Matthew cup-sayings, as well as Luke's.¹⁰⁶ Furthermore, we may note that the Lucan allusion to Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy in the cup-word neither excludes the possibility of reference to Exodus 24:8¹⁰⁷ nor prevents him from elsewhere explaining Christ's death in relation to the Mosaic economy. For instance, in the Lucan transfiguration narrative Jesus appears in glory, talking with Moses and Elijah. Here, Luke seems to be looking to the Exodus event when he says that they "were speaking of His exodus (τὴν ἔξοδον αὐτοῦ) which He was about to accomplish in Jerusalem" [Luke 9:31].¹⁰⁸

non-Jews and were replaced. The second 'this' was clarified by 'cup', 'covenant' by 'new'" [187]. ". . . the thought of the new covenant was not far from [Jesus'] thoughts, even when it is not otherwise attested in the tradition of his words" [195].

¹⁰⁵ Moo, Passion Narratives, 305.

¹⁰⁶ Y.K. Yu has noted: "With regard to the close connection between the new covenant of Jer 31:31ff and that in the NT, it is important to note that the OT allusions in the cup-word indicate that the writers of the Synoptic Gospels and Paul understand the new covenant established by the blood of Jesus by relating the event not to Jer 31:31ff alone but to Jer 31:31ff in combination with other OT texts. In other words, the fulfillment of the promise of the new covenant of Jer 31:31ff in the NT does not seem to have been conceived of as a one (Jer. 31:31ff) to one (the new covenant established at the Last Supper) correspondence. Rather, this fulfillment can be understood by relating the significance of the death of Jesus to Jer 31:31ff through the process of interpretation in the light of other OT texts." "New Covenant," 292.

¹⁰⁷ See Moo, Passion Narratives, 305.

¹⁰⁸ The context argues that more is meant by ἔξοδον than "departure" as it is usually translated, see Moss, "Covenant Conception," 86 and Moo, Passion Narratives, 324; for further discussion of the evangelists' appeal to the Exodus event in interpreting Jesus' life and

Third, we may suggest a connection between the covenant idea and Passover as related to the Lord's Supper. In Luke, as in the other Synoptic eucharistic narratives, Jesus' words "My body" and "My blood" appear. Jeremias has argued that these words designate the component parts of a slaughtered sacrificial animal (cf. Lev. 17:11,14; Deut. 12:23; Ezek. 39:17-19; Heb. 13:11,12).¹⁰⁹ So when Jesus applies these words to Himself, He is speaking of Himself as a sacrifice.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, it is likely, given the context of a Passover meal,¹¹¹ that Jesus is referring to Himself as a paschal lamb.¹¹² If this is the case, then it is possible to argue that the Synoptists understand

ministry, cf. J. Marsh, The Fulness of Time (London: Nisbet, 1952), 84-90; see also J. Daniélou, From Shadows to Reality (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 153-166; and Moss, "Covenant Conception," 82-83.

¹⁰⁹ Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 221-222; and Moo, Passion Narratives, 306-308.

¹¹⁰ "He is applying to himself *terms from the language of sacrifice*, as is also the case with the participle ἐκχυννόμενον ('poured out', Mark 14:24). Each of the two nouns presupposes a slaying that has separated flesh and blood. In other words: *Jesus speaks of himself as a sacrifice.*" Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 222.

¹¹¹ Of course, it has been much disputed whether or not the Last Supper was a Passover meal. For detailed discussions of this important matter see Marshall, Last Supper, 57-75; and Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 15-84. In our subsequent discussion we shall assume that Marshall and Jeremias are correct in their arguments that the Supper was indeed a Passover meal.

¹¹² "With the words *den bišri*, 'this is my (sacrificial) flesh', and *den idmi*, 'this is my (sacrificial) blood', Jesus is therefore most probably speaking of himself as the paschal lamb. He is *the eschatological paschal lamb*, representing the fulfillment of all that of which the Egyptian paschal lamb and all the subsequent sacrificial paschal lambs were the prototype." Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 223. Additionally, Moo observes: "It would not be surprising if Jesus and the evangelists appealed to the Passover traditions in their explication of Jesus' passion, inasmuch as this tradition was supremely influential in Jewish theology and often regarded as a prefigurement of the eschaton." Passion Narratives, 311.

Jesus' death as a paschal sacrifice that establishes the new covenant.¹¹³ As Jeremias says so well:

Jesus describes his death as this eschatological passover sacrifice: *his vicarious (ὑπέρ) death brings into operation the final deliverance*, the new covenant of God. Διαθήκη ('covenant') is a correlate of βασιλεία τῶν οὐρανῶν ('kingdom of heaven'). The content of this gracious institution which is [mediated] by Jesus' death is perfect communion with God (Jer. 31.33-34a) in his reign, based upon the remission of sins (31.34b).¹¹⁴

Covenant in the Pauline Corpus

Romans 9:4 is one of only three passages in the NT where covenant appears in the plural (διαθήκαι),¹¹⁵ all of which are Pauline [Gal. 4:24; Eph. 2:12]. The ambiguity of this rather exceptional plural usage has caused consternation to commentators in their attempts to identify precisely the covenants to which Paul is referring. Roetzel's

¹¹³ "By comparing himself with the eschatological paschal lamb Jesus describes his death as a *saving death*. . . . The blood of the lambs slaughtered at the exodus from Egypt had *redemptive power* and made *God's covenant* with Abraham operative." Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 225. It is worth noting that Jewish interpretation understood the blood of the Passover lamb to be "covenant-blood" which brought about the deliverance from Egypt. For instance, Dalman has pointed out that the Targum on Zech. 9:11 ("because of the blood of My covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit") connects this passage with the Exodus: "'Also ye, for whom an "agreement" over blood was appointed, I have redeemed from slavery of Egypt'. At the same time, the direct reference is to the blood of the Passover lambs, which brings into fruition God's 'covenant' at the redemption from Egypt. . . . All the occurrences at the Exodus meant an "agreement" with the God of Israel, and it was not a far-fetched thought to consider the Paschal blood as the blood of this 'agreement'." G. Dalman, Jesus-Jeshua: Studies in the Gospels, trans. P.R. Levertoft (London: SPCK, 1929), 166-167.

¹¹⁴ Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 226; the brackets are mine where the quotation reads "mediated," because the book reads "meditated" which is, presumably, a typographical error.

¹¹⁵ There is textual variant in this passage, διαθήκη, which is supported by P⁴⁶ B D F G b vg^{cl} sa bo^{nss} and Cyp. R.F. Collins suggests this singular reading in "Berith-Notion," 586-587, but the plural continues to be preferred on internal evidence. Regarding the date of Romans, the epistle is customarily placed in the late 50's (see IDB 4:114-115 and ISBE 4:224).

suggestion that διαθήκαι here be taken as "ordinances, commandments, or perhaps oaths"¹¹⁶ has been rejected by James Dunn as "unnecessary and unjustified."¹¹⁷ Dunn himself suggests that Paul is either referring to "the covenant given to Abraham and renewed to Isaac and Jacob" or, more likely, to the old and new covenants.¹¹⁸ Most commentators, however, do not share Dunn's enthusiasm for the latter interpretation and see here a reference to the patriarchal covenants.¹¹⁹ The references to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that immediately follow the mention of the covenants would seem to support the view that Paul is indicating the various extensions of the Abrahamic covenant. Whatever the case may be, our primary concern with this passage is to note two of Paul's ideas connected with these covenants. The first is that the covenants belong to Paul's kinsmen according to the flesh, Israelites [9:3,4]. Second, and alongside his assertion of the privileges of ethnic Israel, Paul stresses that the legitimate descendants of Abraham and heirs to the promise are not "children of the flesh" but "children of the promise" [9:6-8].¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ C. Roetzel, "Διαθήκαι in Romans 9:4," B 51 (1970):390.

¹¹⁷ J.D.G. Dunn, Romans 9-16 (WBC) (Dallas: Word, 1988), 527.

¹¹⁸ Dunn, Romans, 527 and 534.

¹¹⁹ See W. Sanday and A.C. Headlam, Romans (ICC) (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1902), 230; J. Munck, Christ and Israel (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 31; and J. Zeisler, Paul's Letter to the Romans (London: SCM, 1989), 237. John Murray understands Paul's reference as either "to the two distinct covenantal administrations of Abraham" or "the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants." Romans (NICNT) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 2:5.

¹²⁰ Cf. H.N. Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, trans. J.R. De Witt (London: SPCK, 1977), 354-356. Ridderbos observes: "The remarkable thing is that while Paul's pronouncements on faith and belonging to Christ as the only criterion of what in an enduring sense may count as the seed of Abraham seem to warrant this conclusion [i.e.,

In Romans 11:27 we find the only other usage of *διαθήκη* in the letter. Paul quotes from Isaiah: "and this is My covenant (*ἡ παρ' ἐμοῦ διαθήκη*, lit. "the covenant from Me") with them, when I take away their sins." The first half of the phrase is verbatim from Isaiah 59:21 (LXX) and the second is close to Isaiah 27:9 (LXX). Again, covenant is mentioned in a context where Paul is discussing the election of Israel. We may make two observations about the covenant idea in this passage. First, the covenant idea is explicitly linked to the forgiveness of sins, (in this case, those of "all Israel," [11:26a] to whomever that refers). Second, Paul's emphasis here is clearly on God's faithfulness to His covenantal promises. That is, the unilateral aspect of the covenant is in view. God's covenantal initiative brings forgiveness to, and removes the ungodliness of, His people. As Murray says: "In a way consistent with the concept of covenant the accent falls upon what God will do, upon divine monergism."¹²¹

Turning now to the Corinthian epistles,¹²² we will first attend to Paul's account of the Lord's Supper. Since we have already given some consideration to the covenant idea in the Synoptics' eucharistic narratives, our treatment of the Pauline cup-word in 1 Corinthians 11:25 will be relatively concise. The text reads: "This cup is the new

that national Israel has lost its function in the history of redemption] in every respect, he himself time and again feels the need to guard against the thought of such an exclusion of empirical and national Israel as the people of God and to deny it as not consistent with the historical election of Israel," 355.

¹²¹ Murray, Romans, 2:100.

¹²² The Corinthian letters are commonly dated in the mid-50's (55, argues S. Gilmour, IDB 1:692 & 698), see L. Morris for discussion ISBE 1:777 & 780; First Corinthians is the first NT book to be cited along with the name of its author (1 Clement), and Ignatius and Polycarp quote from it as well; Second Corinthians was first quoted by Polycarp.

covenant in my blood (ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι); do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." The first clause is close to the reading in Luke 22:20.¹²³ The second is a distinctive part of Paul's cup-word. Here, as in the Lucan word of explanation, the cup is said to represent the inauguration of the new covenant by the blood (death) of Christ.¹²⁴ Hence, Paul's account also manifests the allusion to the covenant inauguration by sacrifice in Exodus 24:8¹²⁵ and to the fulfillment of Jeremiah's new covenant.¹²⁶ Paul's cup-word, however, does not include a phrase parallel to Luke's "poured out for you" (which indicated explicitly the vicarious nature of Jesus' death). Nevertheless, the concept of Jesus' vicarious death is clearly implied, both by comparison with Paul's bread-word [11:24, "for you"] and in Paul's understanding of Jesus as the eschatological Paschal lamb, which is made evident in 1 Corinthians 5:7 ("For Christ our Passover also has

¹²³ Paul's cup-word includes ἐστὶν in contrast to Luke, and there is a textual variant behind the phrase "in my blood." The preferred reading in Nestle-Aland, ἐμῷ αἵματι, is supported by \aleph B D F G Ψ and many of the small manuscripts. The reading which is in harmony with the Lucan wording, αἵματί μου, is supported by P⁴⁶ A C and P 33.365.1175. 1241^s.

¹²⁴ "In this context the *new covenant* is understood to have been ratified by the blood of Christ, which means by his death." W.F. Orr and J.A. Walther, 1 Corinthians (AB) (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), 267.

¹²⁵ See C.K. Barrett, First Corinthians (London: Black, 1968), 268-269; P.S. Liao observes of the Pauline eucharistic account: "It seems plain . . . that the event of the Last Supper is a clear recollection of the covenant-event at Sinai. . . . Not only is there a resemblance in words used in the two events, there is also a correspondence in situation." "The Place of the Covenant in the Theology of the Apostle Paul" (Ph.D. Thesis, Hartford Seminary, 1973), 52-52.

¹²⁶ See Y.K. Yu, "New Covenant," esp. 183-186.

been sacrificed").¹²⁷

As we previously mentioned, "do this in remembrance of Me" is unique among the cup-sayings, though found in both Paul's and Luke's bread-words. A. R. Millard sees in this memorial emphasis a recollection of the ancient covenant formula.¹²⁸ Whatever the case may be, it serves to remind that the Supper is about the significance of the Lord's death, which is reiterated by Paul in the phrase "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" [11:26].

When we turn to 2 Corinthians 3 we encounter, for the first time in our survey of διαθήκη in the NT writings, a comparison between the new covenant and the old. Here Paul, in "commending" his ministry to the Corinthians, says: "Our adequacy is from God, who also made us

¹²⁷ Jeremias says of 1 Cor. 5:7b: "the lamb is interpreted as the symbol of the Messiah who was sacrificed as the unblemished lamb." Eucharistic Words, 60.

¹²⁸ Millard, looking for evidence of the covenant scheme (the basic elements of which are "preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, blessings and curses") [Millard is following K. Baltzer's study, The Covenant Formulary, trans. D.E. Green (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971)] in 1 Corinthians, finds a number of traces, especially in the eucharistic narrative. On the subject of the Supper as a remembrance (in dissent from Jeremias' view), he says: "Each time the Corinthian Christians shared the Lord's Supper they purported to show their allegiance to the covenant it symbolized, and therefore could not but expect its provisions to be active upon them for good or for ill. This follows the ancient pattern in which the regular reiteration of the covenant terms by vassals was a condition. . . . Two purposes were accomplished by this prompting of memory: thanksgiving which involved renewal of loyalty to the gracious Suzerain, and recollection of the commitments undertaken in response (well illustrated in Jos. 24:16-18). . . . Remembrance of the establishment of the covenant was, therefore, an integral feature of this pattern. . . . This similarity with the ancient covenant form is important for the interpretation of 11:24-25. . . . Paul's words mean that the Supper of the Lord was initiated to remind the disciples of the Lord of the work he had done." "Covenant and Communion in First Corinthians," in Apostolic History and the Gospel, ed. W. Gasque and R.P. Martin (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), 241-248.

adequate as servants of a new covenant (διακόνους καινῆς διαθήκης), not of the letter, but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" [2 Cor. 3:5b-6]. The verses that follow expand on the theme announced here. In the phrase "servants of a new covenant" Paul is again drawing on Jeremiah 31:31-34.¹²⁹ By this appeal to Jeremiah's new covenant, Paul "defines the character of his ministry."¹³⁰ As Moses was God's minister of the old covenant established at Sinai, so is Paul God's minister of the new covenant that was prophesied by Jeremiah and established in Christ's death (1 Cor. 11:25).¹³¹ Indeed, the very mention of his *new* covenant ministry sets the stage for the comparison of the old and new redemptive administrations that follows.¹³²

In 3:7-11 Paul demonstrates the superior glory of the service of

¹²⁹ See R.P. Martin, 2 Corinthians (WBC) (Dallas: Word, 1986), 53; C.K. Barrett, Second Epistle to the Corinthians (London: Black, 1973), 112; and Y.K. Yu, "New Covenant," 195-226.

¹³⁰ W.L. Lane, "Covenant: The Key to Paul's Conflict with Corinth," TB 33 (1982):7-8. Lane goes on to explain: "The ratification of the New Covenant through Jesus' death (cf. 1 Cor. 11:25) implied the beginning of a new history for the people of God. It created the theological context for the appointment of new prophets committed to the administration of the covenant. In 2 Corinthians 3:1-18 Paul grounds his ministry in the appointment of God who qualified him to be a 'servant of the new covenant' (3:6), in distinction from the Mosaic service of the covenant established at Sinai (3:6-14)," 8.

¹³¹ "The analogy with Moses that Paul develops, and the assertion of the superiority of his ministry because of its eschatological glory, justify the conclusion that Paul regarded himself as the Second Moses to the New Covenant community," Lane, "Covenant in Corinth," 8. "The primary antithesis is Moses/Paul," R.P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, 61; and E.P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 512. See also Yu, who says: "Paul's understanding of himself as a servant of the new covenant and his view of the keeping of the law in the Spirit indicate that Paul understands his ministry of the new covenant in connection with the fulfillment of the promise of Jer. 31:31ff." "New Covenant," 226.

¹³² "This distinction [between the Mosaic and Christian dispensations] is implied in the expression 'new covenant', καινῆ διαθήκη." P.E. Hughes, Second Corinthians (NLC) (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1962), 96.

the new covenant by pointing to distinctions between the older ministry and the new. According to Paul, the old was a ministry of death [v.7], condemnation [v.9], and transient glory [v.11], while the new is one of Spirit [v.8], righteousness [v.9], and abiding glory [v.11]. Paul's concern with *contrasting* the old and new covenants is significant, but not necessarily remarkable, for as Vos has pointed out:

Paul is in the New Testament the great exponent of the fundamental bisection in the history of redemption and of revelation. Thus he speaks not only of the two regimes of law and faith, but even expresses himself in consecutive form of statement: "after that faith is come" [Gal. 3.25]. It is no wonder, then, that with him we find the formal distinction between the "New Diatheke" and the "Old Diatheke" [2 Cor. 3:6,14]. Here also, to be sure, we have in the first place a contrast between two religious ministrations, that of the letter and that of the Spirit, that of condemnation and that of righteousness.¹³³

Because of the diversity of scholarly opinion concerning Paul's conception of the old covenant, his understanding of the relation of the old and new covenants, his view of the Mosaic law, and the precise meaning and implications of his bold distinction between letter and spirit, these matters will warrant brief consideration insofar as they pertain to our understanding of the covenant idea in 2 Corinthians 3.

In 3:14, Paul speaks of "the reading of the old covenant (τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης)."¹³⁴ Some interpreters have suggested that Paul means here, not the Mosaic writings themselves, but "a legalistic, self-

¹³³ G. Vos, Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 301.

¹³⁴ This is the only NT occurrence of the precise phrase παλαιᾶς διαθήκης, as well as its first known use. See Moss, "Covenant Conception," 141, and V.P. Furnish, II Corinthians (AB) (Garden City: Doubleday, 1984), 208.

righteous attitude" in the handling of those writings.¹³⁵ However, in our context, there are at least two good reasons for not understanding "old covenant" in this way. First, the passage makes it clear that the "old covenant" is something that can be read. One can read Moses and misunderstand him but one cannot read a "legalistic attitude" expressive of a "misunderstanding of Moses."¹³⁶ Second, Paul's parallel in 3:14 and 15 between the phrases "the reading of the old covenant" and "whenever Moses is read" strongly argues for an understanding of "old covenant" here as the Mosaic law.¹³⁷ Consequently, when Paul alludes to the *economy* of the old covenant, here and elsewhere, he is speaking of the redemptive administration typified by the giving of the law at Sinai.

In connection with 2 Corinthians 3, D. Hillers has suggested that Paul contrasts the Mosaic and the Christian economies so sharply "that there is no apparent continuity left between the Sinai covenant and the new covenant in Christ."¹³⁸ A closer look at the passage, however, reveals that despite Paul's obvious stress on discontinuity between the two redemptive economies, there is an underlying continuity assumed

¹³⁵ J.O. Buswell, Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1968), 307; W.B. Wallis also argues that "old covenant" does not indicate a body of Scripture per se, "but takes on a special, disparaging, ironic sense, expressive of unbelief's distorted understanding of the Scriptures," "The Pauline Conception of the Old Covenant," p 4 (1978):78; R.S. Rayburn attempts to defend this view in "The Contrast Between the Old and the New Covenants in the NT" (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Aberdeen, 1978).

¹³⁶ Cf. Wallis on the meaning of "old covenant" in 2 Cor. 3:14, "Pauline Conception," 79.

¹³⁷ See Vos, Biblical Theology, 301; V.P. Furnish, II Corinthians, 208-209; R.P. Martin, 2 Corinthians, 68-69; Plummer, Second Corinthians (ICC) (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1915), 100; Moss, "Covenant Conception," 131; and C.K. Barrett, Second Corinthians, 120-121.

¹³⁸ Covenant: History of a Biblical Idea, 183.

throughout. Paul, for instance, is insistent that the old administration reflected the glory of the Lord (v.7, cf. v.18), and the *a minori ad maius* argument¹³⁹ he employs in this passage assumes the continuity of this glory from the old covenant to the new. Alongside the contrasts of ἡ διακονία τοῦ θανάτου [v.7] and ἡ διακονία τοῦ πνεύματος [v.8], of τῆ διακονία τῆς κατακρίσεως and ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης [v.9], and of τὸ καταργούμενον and τὸ μένον [v.11], Paul repeatedly argues "if then" [Εἰ δὲ, v.7; εἰ γὰρ, vv. 9,11] the old covenant was glorious, "how much more" [πῶς οὐχὶ μᾶλλον, v.8; πολλῶ μᾶλλον, vv. 9,11] glorious is the new covenant. The difference, then, between the two economies is in *degree* of glory.¹⁴⁰ The old covenant was glorious indeed, so glorious that the sons of Israel could not look on Moses' face (v.7), but by comparison the new covenant superabounds in glory. It is then misleading to say that "for Paul the new covenant is the opposite of the old."¹⁴¹

Paul's attitude toward the Mosaic law as evidenced in 2 Corinthians 3 has also been widely discussed. Moss, for instance, says that Paul spoke "disparagingly of the written code and the reading of the old covenant, referring, of course, to the Jewish law."¹⁴² But again, a review of the passage will reveal that Paul never criticizes

¹³⁹ Martin points out this literary device (as well as antithetic parallelism) in 2 Corinthians, 59.

¹⁴⁰ Of course, Paul has in mind other distinctions as well; for examples of which, see 48 and below, n.106.

¹⁴¹ D. Hillers, Covenant, 183.

¹⁴² "Covenant Conception," 137.

the Mosaic law.¹⁴³ His concern throughout is to demonstrate the superiority of the new covenant economy (which is characterized by the *letter* written on human hearts by the Spirit [cf. v.3, Jer. 31:33, and Ez. 36:27] and hence designated as the ministry of the "Spirit") over the old covenant economy (which is characterized by the *letter* of the law written on tablets of stone [cf. vv.3,6, and Ex. 24:12] and hence designated as the "letter"), not to depreciate the law.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, the *letter*, the law that had been externally administered in the old covenant, has now been internalized by the Spirit in the new covenant.¹⁴⁵ The closest thing to disparagement of the Mosaic law comes in vv.14-15 where Paul speaks of the "veil" at the reading of Moses. Even here, however, it is arguable that Paul's criticism is of the "veil which remains" rather than the law itself.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Furnish says: "It must be emphasized that Paul does not reject the law as such, either in this passage or elsewhere. . . . Paul can describe the law as 'holy,' 'just,' and 'good' (Rom. 7:12)--indeed, even as 'spiritual' (*pneumatikos*, Rom. 7:14)!" II Corinthians, 200.

¹⁴⁴ Paul describes the ministry of the old covenant as the *γράμμα* and contrasts it with the ministry of the new covenant, the *πνεῦμα*, not because he wants to disparage the Mosaic law nor even because he sees it as incompatible with the Spirit (cf. Rom. 7:14), but because the ministry of the old covenant, which was typified by the *γράμμα*, led to death and condemnation and manifested only a temporal glory. It was not in itself capable of producing the righteousness which it required (Gal. 3:21), and its glory was surpassed by the new covenant to the extent that it is obsolete (v.10). However, Paul does not suggest that there was anything wrong with its standard of righteousness (Rom. 7:7). He speaks of the new covenant as a ministry of righteousness (v.9), but does not indicate a *standard of righteousness* different from that of the old. Indeed, it is interesting to note that one of the purposes of the new covenant, as envisioned in Jer. 31:33 (to which Paul has already alluded), is to internalize the *law*.

¹⁴⁵ See Hughes, Second Corinthians, 94.

¹⁴⁶ These verses are notoriously difficult. For commentators who argue that the *veil* over the reading of Moses is removed in Christ, see K. Chamblin, "The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ," in Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and

Finally, we may note that Paul's contrast between letter and Spirit has produced some curious interpretations. R. M. Grant, for example, suggests that Paul means by "letter" "the literal, verbal meaning of scripture" and that the freedom which the Spirit brings is "exegetical freedom." He continues:

In other words, the only way to understand the Old Testament is under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who removes the veil of literal legalism from the minds of believers. This Spirit gives exegetical freedom. He destroys the tyranny of words. He makes possible a Christian exegesis of the Old Testament, intuitive rather than based on words. Paul's distinction between "letter" and "spirit", as Cohen has pointed out, is not unlike that made by Philo and others between literal and true meaning.¹⁴⁷

However, this view hardly does justice to the context of Paul's discussion in 2 Corinthians 3, which shows little concern with establishing principles by which to interpret the OT Scriptures. Rather, Paul is appealing to the eschatological glory of the new covenant as the grounds for the adequacy of his ministry to the Corinthians. As Furnish has said: "The description Paul gives of the *new covenant* does not so much reflect his hermeneutical perspective on the law or scripture in general as it does his eschatological perspective on God's redemptive work in history."¹⁴⁸

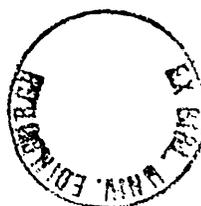
Turning from the Corinthian letters to Galatians,¹⁴⁹ we first

New Testaments, ed. J.S. Feinberg (Westchester: Crossway, 1988), 192; P.E. Hughes, Second Corinthians, 110-113; Robertson, Christ of the Covenants, 191-199; and Plummer, Second Corinthians, 99-103.

¹⁴⁷ The Letter and the Spirit (London: SPCK, 1957), 51.

¹⁴⁸ Furnish, II Corinthians, 200.

¹⁴⁹ The precise dating of Galatians is a notoriously difficult issue in NT introduction. J. Knox discusses three possibilities (see IDB 2: 342-343): 50/51; mid-50's; or late 50's/early 60's; see also ISBE 2: 382-383.



encounter a passage in which the meaning of διαθήκη has been disputed. In Galatians 3:15 Paul says: "Brethren, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man's covenant (διαθήκην), yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it." In the context, Paul is arguing that the law of the Mosaic economy does not nullify the terms of the covenant previously established with Abraham (3:17). In the process, he appeals to the example of a human διαθήκη. This has led many interpreters to suppose that here Paul intends διαθήκη to be understood as "testament." For instance, Bruce says: "Since it is a human analogy that Paul is using, διαθήκη in the immediate context is likely to have its current secular sense of 'will', 'testamentary disposition', rather than its distinctively biblical sense of 'covenant'."¹⁵⁰ However, Paul's appeal to the sphere of human relations does not rule out the possibility that he is referring to a *covenant* between men, of which there are OT examples (e.g., 1 Sam. 20:8; Gen. 21:27; 31:44). More importantly, Paul's argument depends on the διαθήκη of v.15 being of the same kind as the διαθήκη of v.17, which is clearly a reference to God's ברית with Abraham.¹⁵¹ The understanding of διαθήκη as "covenant" in v.17, then, favors the rendering "covenant" in v.15. Burton argues:

¹⁵⁰ F.F. Bruce, Commentary on Galatians (NIGTC) (Exeter: Paternoster, 1982), 169; see also H.N. Ridderbos, Epistle to the Galatians (NLC) (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1961), 130-131; and Behm, who in addition to arguing that Paul's appeal to "ordinary human experience" provides evidence for taking διαθήκη as "testament" in this verse, says: "The many legal terms used in the passage make it clear that he is here using the word διαθήκη in the sense of Hellenistic law; cf. κυροῦν, ἀκυροῦν, ἀθετεῖν, ἐπιδιατάσσεσθαι etc." TDNT 2:129.

¹⁵¹ L. Morris, Apostolic Preaching, 91.

By διαθήκη must be understood not "testament" . . . nor "stipulation," "arrangement," in a sense broad enough to cover both will and covenant, but as the usage of the N.T. in general and of Paul in particular and the context here require, "covenant" in the sense of the O.T. בְּרִית¹⁵²

Whichever way we take διαθήκη here, Paul's argument (from lesser to greater, again) is clear enough. If it is absolutely improper to tamper with a human διαθήκη, then a divine διαθήκη surely cannot be nullified or modified (cf. vv.15,17).¹⁵³

In 3:17, Paul continues the same line of argument: "What I am saying is this: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant (διαθήκην) previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise." It is the Abrahamic covenant to which Paul refers here (see vv.14,16 and 18). His point is that the Mosaic code given at Sinai did not alter the covenantal promise given to Abraham and his seed¹⁵⁴ (which promise, Paul has already argued, has now come to the Gentiles "in Christ" [v.14]).¹⁵⁵ Furthermore, says

¹⁵² E.D. Burton, Galatians, 179. The strongest argument for a rendering of "testament" may well be Paul's use of ἐπιδιατάσσεται in v.15 which, as a technical legal term, may be translated "adds a codicil" (BAG, 292) [the other legal terms in the passage seem to work as well with "covenant" as with "testament" (e.g., κυροῦν, "ratify" and ἀκυροῦν, "nullify")]. If ἐπιδιατάσσεται=adds a codicil, and we continue to place weight on the agreement of meaning between διαθήκη in vv.15 and 17, then the second "broad sense," which Burton rejected, remains a possibility.

¹⁵³ Bruce, Galatians, 168-169.

¹⁵⁴ "If a covenant once in force can not be modified or annulled by any subsequent action, the covenant with Abraham can not be set aside by the subsequent law." Burton, Galatians, 183.

¹⁵⁵ "That Gentiles as well as Jews are in view is confirmed by the emphasis on εἰς τὰ ἔθνη in the continuation of the present sentence (v 14); cf. τὰ πάντα in v 22 (συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφή τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν) and the inclusive language and argument of vv 23-27; 4:4-6. . . . The law makes a distinction between the people of Israel, to whom it was given, and the Gentiles, to whom it was not given. But the promise to Abraham

Paul, if the stipulations for receipt of the inheritance promised to Abraham were modified by the Mosaic law, then God's covenantal promise to Abraham would be contradicted (v.18).¹⁵⁶ Here, Paul's opposition of the Abrahamic covenant to the Mosaic law is so sharp that he pauses to clarify their relation in vv.19-25.

Paul makes two negative assertions concerning the relation of the law to the Abrahamic promise in Galatians 3. He has already stressed that [1] the law does not *invalidate* the covenant so as to *nullify* the promise (v.17), to which he adds that [2] the law is not *contrary* to the promise (v.21). That is, since the Abrahamic covenant entailed a promised blessing, which Paul says was "the gift of the Spirit" (v.14);¹⁵⁷ and since this covenant provided that its promise be received "through faith" (v.14);¹⁵⁸ and since a covenant cannot be modified (v.15); then [1] the coming of the Mosaic law does not make invalid the Abrahamic covenant by adding law-fulfillment as a condition for receipt of the blessing, because the promise is entailed and assured in a previously ratified covenant, and hence the promise is not

explicitly embraced the Gentiles (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) within its scope; they were to have a share in the blessing promised to him." Bruce, Galatians, 167. E.P. Sanders misses the point when he claims that Paul teaches: "The covenantal promises to Abraham do not apply to his descendants, but to Christians." Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 551.

¹⁵⁶ "If the inheritance is by law, it is not by promise." Burton, Galatians, 186; see also Bruce, Galatians, 174.

¹⁵⁷ See Bruce, Galatians, 168; also Ridderbos, who says: "The gift of the Spirit is now designated as the content of the promise to Abraham." Galatians, 128.

¹⁵⁸ "So, Abraham by faith received justification and the promise of blessing; now that Christ has accomplished his redemptive work, Abraham's children (cf. v 7), likewise by faith, receive justification and the promised blessing--the gift of the Spirit." Bruce, Galatians, 168.

annulled,¹⁵⁹ [2] nor does the law provide an alternative way to receive that same blessing.¹⁶⁰

Paul's third and final usage of *διαθήκη* in Galatians occurs in 4:21-31, where he sets out an allegory¹⁶¹ of the "two covenants (*δύο διαθήκαι*)" [4:24]. Here again Paul contrasts the Sinaitic and new covenants. The former is "by the bondwoman" ("Hagar," v.24), "according to the flesh" [v.23], and leads to slavery [vv.24,25]. The latter is "by the free woman" and "through the promise" [v.23] and leads to freedom [vv.26; 5:1]. In this passage, Paul may be intending to censure the Judaizers' misunderstanding of the function of the Mosaic law in God's redemptive economy,¹⁶² as evidenced by his antithesis between the

¹⁵⁹ "If the fulfillment of the law, must add something to the achievement of salvation, then the promise as promise, that is, as unconditional grant of God's salvation, is no longer the source and supporting reason of the promised good." Ridderbos, Galatians, 136.

¹⁶⁰ "Not only did the covenant of law not disannul the covenant of promise; more specifically, it did not offer a temporary alternative to the covenant of promise." Robertson, Covenants, 174.

¹⁶¹ "He is not thinking of allegory in the Philonic sense (allegory in the Philonic sense was introduced into Christian interpretation with Origen and his successors); he has in mind that form of allegory which is commonly called typology: a narrative from OT history is interpreted in terms of the new covenant, or (to put it the other way round) an aspect of the new covenant is presented in terms of an OT narrative." Bruce, Galatians, 217; see also, A.T. Hanson, Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology (London: SPCK, 1974), 159-166; and J.D.G. Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament (London: SCM, 1977), 89-91.

¹⁶² "It is essential to understand Paul's reference to Sinai in the context of the equivalencies which he has developed. The covenant of 'law' corresponds to the 'present Jerusalem,' the Jerusalem of the Judaizers. It is the legalistic misapprehension of the Sinaitic law-covenant that is in the mind of the apostle. Slavery inevitably will result from resorting to natural human resources as a means of pleasing God. Ishmael, the current Judaizers, and unbelieving Israel conjointly find themselves to be slaves." Robertson, Covenants, 181.

"present Jerusalem" [v.25]¹⁶³ and the "Jerusalem above" [v.26].¹⁶⁴ Whatever the case, Paul's connection of freedom, the promise, and the Spirit [v.29] with the new covenant is again apparent.

The only other place where *διαθήκη* occurs in the Pauline corpus is found in Ephesians 2:12.¹⁶⁵ The passage, speaking of Gentile believers [v.11], reads: "Remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise (*τῶν διαθηκῶν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας*), having no hope and without God in the world." The plural "covenants" may, as in Romans 9:4, indicate the various patriarchal administrations of the Abrahamic promise.¹⁶⁶ In the context, at least two things are being stressed that relate to the covenant concept. The first is that the Gentiles, by the blood of Christ [v.13], have become recipients of the covenantal

¹⁶³ According to Bruce, present Jerusalem="the whole legal system of Judaism, which had its world-centre in Jerusalem." *Galatians*, 220; see also Burton, who says present Jerusalem "is manifestly used by metonymy for that Judaism of which Jerusalem was the centre." *Galatians*, 261.

¹⁶⁴ "In our present text, just as he nun Ierousalem is not primarily the geographical site, so he ano Ierousalem is not spatially elevated but is the community of the new covenant." Bruce, *Galatians*, 221.

¹⁶⁵ For introduction to current opinion on the relation of Ephesians to Pauline literature, see B.S. Childs, *The New Testament as Canon: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 311-320; J.C. Kirby, *Ephesians: Baptism and Pentecost* (London: SPCK, 1968), 3-56; and A. Van Roon, *The Authenticity of Ephesians* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974). Those who argue for authenticity usually place Ephesians during Paul's imprisonment (late 50's/early 60's); those who argue that Paul was not the author generally suggest 80-90; see *IDB* 2:111-112 and *ISBE* 2:113. There are allusions to Ephesians in 1 Clement, though those in Ignatius are more definite, and Polycarp apparently quotes from the book in *Philippians* 1.3 & 12.1.

¹⁶⁶ B.F. Westcott suggests the phrase "covenants of promise" indicates that "the one promise was brought nearer to realisation by successive Covenants." *Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 35; cf. also C.L. Mitton, *Ephesians (NCBC)* (London: Oliphants, 1976), 122; and L. Morris, *Apostolic Preaching*, 95.

promises.¹⁶⁷ The second is that by virtue of Christ's covenantal death the Jews and the Gentiles have, in Christ, been made into one [v.14], one new man [v.15], one body [v.16], one household (God's) [v.19], one building [v.21].¹⁶⁸

Covenant in Hebrews and Revelation

As we have already mentioned, *διαθήκη* occurs more times in Hebrews¹⁶⁹ than in the rest of the NT. This relative prominence of the covenant conception in Hebrews may be attributed to the author's preoccupation with the "comparison between the old and the new religious systems" of Judaism and Christianity.¹⁷⁰ In Hebrews 7:22 *διαθήκη* occurs for the first time, in connection with the priesthood of Melchizedek. Here the author says: "Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant (*κρείττονος διαθήκης*)." In the context, the covenant

¹⁶⁷ As Westcott says: "They [the Gentiles] were brought into the same position as the chosen people in the blood of Christ." Ephesians, 34; see also Ridderbos, Paul, 336-341.

¹⁶⁸ "All these indications of unity [i.e., the expressions of oneness in Eph. 2:14ff] elucidate the thought of the one body in Christ. The two parties have become a unity in Christ--when in his flesh, his human mode of existence, he suffered and died for both on the cross. He created them both in himself into one new man (cf. Gal. 3:28), a description equivalent to 'one body in him.'" Ridderbos, Paul, 377.

¹⁶⁹ Hebrews is customarily dated in one of two periods, either before the fall of Jerusalem and Nero's persecution (early 60's) or during the reign of Domitian (80's); see IDB 2:573 and ISBE 2:668. Clement of Rome (Goodspeed argued that Clement's first letter was in response to Hebrews 5:12) seems to know Hebrews, and Hermas may have as well; Clement of Alexandria argued for Pauline authorship (though Origen was more dubious: "only God knows," he said); Tertullian suggested Barnabas; significantly the book is not listed in the Muratorian fragment.

¹⁷⁰ G. Vos, "Hebrews, The Epistle of the Diatheke," in Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, ed. R.B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 163.

idea is introduced in a discussion of the superiority of Christ's priesthood over the Aaronic priesthood.¹⁷¹ Jesus' priesthood, which is according to the order of Melchizedek, brings a change of law [vv.12,18] and a better hope [vv.19-21]. Ultimately, Jesus' priesthood is superior to the older priesthood because it was established by divine oath [v.21, cf. Ps. 110:4]. This oath brings to the author's mind the idea of the establishment of a (better) covenant. This covenant is mentioned only in passing but will dominate the discussion to follow.¹⁷²

The covenant idea is picked up again in 8:6 where the author reiterates that Jesus is "the mediator of a better covenant (κρείττονός . . . διαθήκης), which has been enacted on better promises." Paul had spoken of Moses as covenantal mediator (μεσίτης, cf. Gal. 3:19f); now Hebrews applies the term to Christ.¹⁷³ In 8:5 the whole of the Mosaic cultus is said to be "a copy and shadow (ὑποδείγματι καὶ σκιᾷ)" of Christ's heavenly ministry. As Christ's ministry is superior to that of the priests [8:6a], so also superior is the covenant of which he is a

¹⁷¹ "True to form, the author first introduces a new concept with a simple word or phrase, then returns to it later to give a complete explanation. In 7:22 he mentions the word *covenant*; in the next two chapters he explains the doctrine of the covenant to the fullest extent." S.J. Kistemaker, Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 201.

¹⁷² Bruce observes: "This is the first occurrence of the term "covenant" in this epistle, but the term is about to play such a central part in the argument to follow that the whole epistle has been described as 'The Epistle of the Διαθήκη.' For the moment, however, the designation of Jesus as 'the surety of a better covenant' prepares the way for what is to come," Epistle to the Hebrews (NLC) (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1964), 151.

¹⁷³ For a brief discussion of the terminology of ἔγγυος and μεσίτης as related to the covenant idea, see Morris, Apostolic Preaching, 109-111.

mediator [8:6b]. This covenant is superior in particular because it has been founded on better promises [8:6c]. The author spells out these better promises by quoting Jeremiah 31:31-34 in 8:8-12.

But before quoting from Jeremiah 31, he asserts in 8:7 that "if the first [covenant] had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second [covenant]." In this way, the quotation of Jeremiah that follows functions both as proof of the imperfection of the old covenant (if the old was faultless, why did God speak through the prophet of a new one, *not like* the old one?) and as an inventory of the better promises of the better covenant. There are four promises given in the quotation.¹⁷⁴ The first is that God would put His law in their hearts [8:10b]. Second, He would be their God and they His people [8:10c]. Third, all would know Him from the least to the greatest [8:11]. Fourth, God would forgive their sins.

The second promise expresses continuity with the old covenant because "the covenant formula" or the "Immanuel principle" had been given to the people under the Mosaic economy [e.g., Ex. 6:7, Lev. 26:12].¹⁷⁵ The other three promises evidence the discontinuity between new covenant and old since they represent blessings which the Mosaic cultus was incapable of producing (as Hebrews will argue in the next two chapters). Hence, the author concludes that "when [God] said, 'a new [covenant],' He has made the first obsolete" [8:13]. In the following section, the author of Hebrews illustrates the obsolescence

¹⁷⁴ For a fuller discussion of the promises in 8:10-12, see Bruce, Hebrews, 172-179; Kistemaker, Hebrews, 226-227; and W.H. Oxtoby, "Jeremiah 31:31-34" (Inaugural Address, San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1914), 18-22.

¹⁷⁵ See Moss, "Covenant Conception," 61; and Robertson, Covenants, 45-52.

of the old covenant.

A few preliminary observations may be made at this point concerning Hebrews' use of the covenant idea. First, and most obviously, the author views Christ's ministry explicitly in terms of Jeremiah's new covenant. Second, the idea of covenant as a relationship is prominent in the discussion so far. The author is concerned with the people "drawing near to God" [7:19,25] and the whole thrust of his argument is that there is greater access to God by virtue of Jesus' ministry of the new covenant.¹⁷⁶ Third, the binding character of this relationship is manifest in the author's reference to the divine oath in the establishment of Christ's priesthood [7:21-22]. The better covenant is a better covenant because, among other things, it is permanent (eternal).¹⁷⁷ And it is permanent because of the oath by which God binds Himself to make Christ a priest forever.¹⁷⁸

In showing the superiority of the new covenant, the author of Hebrews now compares the priestly ministry of Christ to that of the

¹⁷⁶ "The new covenant involves a new relationship, based on direct and first-hand knowledge of God." R.M. Wilson, Hebrews (NCBC) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 139.

¹⁷⁷ Kistemaker suggests that "better" actually means "eternal" in the context of Heb. 7:22; Manson, commenting on 8:6, says: "In the Epistle the words 'better' and 'eternal' go together in their application to the Christian realities. The latter are better than the former because they have the nature of eternity in them. The eternal world has become actual in them." Epistle to the Hebrews (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1951), 127.

¹⁷⁸ "God purposely takes the initiative and swears an oath. He confirms his promise to Abraham by swearing an oath to guarantee that his purpose does not change (Gen. 22:16; Heb. 6:13). A second time, when God installs his Son as priest in Melchizedek's order, he swears an oath to vouch for the unalterable nature of the appointment. . . . [W]hen God swears an oath, his purpose is unchangeable. Because he swore an oath when he instituted Christ's priesthood, that priesthood is eternal." Kistemaker, Hebrews, 201.

tabernacle.¹⁷⁹ By focusing on the cultus of the old covenant, and particularly that of the tabernacle, Hebrews is able to bring into bold relief the temporary character of the former order.¹⁸⁰ Διαθήκη is employed twice in 9:4, first with reference to "the ark of the covenant" and again in mentioning "the tables of the covenant" [cf. Deut. 9:9,11,15]. The latter usage of the term reminds us of the close relation in which the Mosaic law and covenant stood. The author reviews the tabernacle furnishings and the ritual of the Day of Atonement in 9:1-7 and concludes by commenting on the role of the ceremonial ordinances in the old economy. First, he says, the old covenant ceremony was *symbolic*. That only the high priest entered the holy of holies, only by blood, and only once a year [vv.6-7] signified that the way into the most holy place had not yet been disclosed.¹⁸¹ And as long as "the first tabernacle" was still standing (that is, by metonymy, as long as "the levitical system" is in operation, cf. vv.9b,10), it symbolized that the way into God's presence had yet to be revealed [vv.8-9a].¹⁸² Second, the author says that the old ordinances were *ineffective*. The levitical atonement ritual was unable to make the

¹⁷⁹ "It is interesting that the writer tests the Old Covenant purely and exclusively by reference to its cultus-provisions." Manson, Hebrews, 130.

¹⁸⁰ Bruce says: "The sanctuary of the old covenant, in its very furnishings and sacrificial arrangements, proclaimed its own temporary character; and while this is shown with more special reference to the tabernacle, the principle holds good equally for the temple, whether Solomon's or Herod's." Hebrews, 182.

¹⁸¹ See Manson, Hebrews, 132.

¹⁸² See Bruce, Hebrews, 195.

worshipper perfect in conscience [v.9b].¹⁸³ Third, the old ordinances are *temporary* measures, "until a time of reformation" [v.10b].¹⁸⁴ Hence, the old covenant ceremonies inherently imply the need for a new order. As Manson says: "The lesson which the writer to the Hebrews draws from the whole facts is the self-attested insufficiency of the old order of grace."¹⁸⁵

Beginning in 9:11, the author of Hebrews proceeds to demonstrate the supreme efficacy of the new covenant. Christ is the high priest of a temple not made with hands [v.11]. He enters the holy place not by the blood of animals but by His own blood [v.12]. His sacrifice was not repetitious, but once for all, and obtains eternal redemption [v.12]. If the blood of bulls and goats was effective for ceremonial cleansing [v.13], how much more will the blood of Christ effect the cleansing of the conscience [v.14]? Hence, in contrast to the symbolic, ineffective, and temporary character of the old covenant ritual, Christ's priestly work and sacrifice were actual, effective, and eternal. Then in v.15 he says: "And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant (διαθήκης καινῆς)." That is, the basis of Christ's mediatorship of the

¹⁸³ "Now we see what our author wishes to teach his readers. The really effective barrier to a man's free access to God is an inward and not a material one; it exists in his conscience. It is only when the conscience is purified that a man is set free to approach God without reservation and offer Him acceptable service and worship. And the sacrificial blood of bulls and goats is useless in this regard." Bruce, Hebrews, 196.

¹⁸⁴ For the sense of διορθώσεως here, see G.W. Buchanan, To the Hebrews (AB) (Garden City: Doubleday, 1972), 146; J. Moffatt, Epistle to the Hebrews (ICC) (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1924), 119; and BAG, 199.

¹⁸⁵ Hebrews, 132.

new covenant is His sacrificial death.¹⁸⁶ Through His mediation the better promises of the new covenant have been effected.¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, in the inauguration of this new covenant, the mediator's death "has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant (πρώτη διαθήκη)" [v.15b]. He has died as a ransom for sins in connection with the first (Mosaic)¹⁸⁸ covenant.¹⁸⁹ In the section following, the author expands on this theme.

The translation of διαθήκη in vv.16,17 has been widely debated,¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁶ "'Because of this' refers to Christ's effectiveness in offering sacrifice and cleansing from sin so that the believer might worship the living God (9:11-14). Jesus is understood as '[the] mediator of a new covenant,' just as Moses was understood to be the mediator of the law which was ordained by angels (Gal 3:19)." Buchanan, To the Hebrews, 150. See also Bruce, Hebrews, 208-209.

¹⁸⁷ "Christ has become the mediator of this new covenant (12:24). He stands between God and man. By his death he removes sin and guilt, and thus all 'those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.' Through the mediatorial work of Christ, they who are effectively called inherit salvation. And that inheritance is eternal." Kistemaker, Hebrews, 255. Morris says: "The better promises are those concerned with forgiveness and man's reconciliation with God, as is seen from the following section." Apostolic Preaching, 103.

¹⁸⁸ "'The first covenant' referred to the covenant associated with the decalogue (Exod 24)." Buchanan, Hebrews, 151. Cf. "first [covenant]" in Heb. 9:18-19.

¹⁸⁹ Morris says: "The death that inaugurates the new covenant is seen as providing the way of forgiveness, even for those transgressions committed under the first covenant. The obvious inference is that such sins could not really be forgiven under the first covenant, and that therefore the new covenant was an absolute necessity." Apostolic Preaching, 103.

¹⁹⁰ The majority of commentators prefer "testament" here, see Bruce, Hebrews, 209-214; Kistemaker, Hebrews, 256-257; Morris, Apostolic Preaching, 91-93; Vos, "Hebrews," 179-182; Buchanan, Hebrews, 151; J. Héring, The Epistle to the Hebrews, trans. A.W. Heathcoate and P.J. Allock (London: Epworth, 1970), 79-80; P. Ellingworth and E.A. Nida, A Translator's Handbook on The Letter to the Hebrews (London: UBS, 1983), 199; Wilson, Hebrews, 158-159; Manson, Hebrews, 139; Kline, Treaty of the Great King, 41; and Behm, TDNT 2:131-132. Many scholars, however,

and the author's precise line of argumentation from 9:15-18 is problematic, however διαθήκη is rendered in vv.16,17.¹⁹¹ A brief consideration of this matter is thus warranted here. The passage seems to indicate *prima facie* that διαθήκη should be understood as "covenant" in vv.15,18 and as "last will and testament" in vv.16,17.¹⁹² The RSV reads:

Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant (διαθήκης καινῆς μεσίτης), so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance (κληρονομίας), since a death has occurred which redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant (πρώτη διαθήκη). For where a will (διαθήκη) is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established (φέρεισθαι). For a will (διαθήκη) takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Hence even the first covenant (ἡ πρώτη) was not ratified without blood.

At least two aspects in the context favor the rendering "testament" in vv.16,17. First, the mention of inheritance in v.15 can easily be correlated with the idea of a last will.¹⁹³ Second, the idea of the

have argued that "covenant" is the best rendering here, see B.F. Westcott, Epistle to the Hebrews (London: Macmillan, 1903), 300-304; A. Nairne, The Epistle of Priesthood (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1913), 18,364-366; E. Hatch, Essays in Biblical Greek, 48; G.D. Kilpatrick, "Διαθήκη in Hebrews," ZNW 68 (1977):263-265; A. Carr, "Covenant or Testament? A Note on Hebrews 9:16,17," E 7th ser. 7 (1909):347-352; Robertson, Covenants, 138-144; Moss, "Covenant Conception," 100-102.

¹⁹¹ Wilson, for example, admits: "The train of the argument is rather difficult to follow, since the author seems to combine two different sets of ideas." Hebrews, 157.

¹⁹² "The root of most of the problems traditionally involved in the interpretation of διαθήκη in the passage is the use of the same word, διαθήκη, in contexts which favor first covenant as the meaning (9,15), then testament (9,16-17), and then covenant again (9,18), with little or no help for the reader to make the transition from one meaning to another." J. Swetnam, "A Suggested Interpretation of Hebrews 9,15-18" CBQ 17 (1965):374.

¹⁹³ "It is quite likely that the testamentary idea suggested itself to our author's mind because of his reference to the 'eternal inheritance' at the end of verse 15." Bruce, Hebrews, 213.

διαθήκη being activated upon its maker's death (vv.16,17) strongly suggests the meaning "testament," since a "covenant" is not effected by its maker's death. This usage of διαθήκη could then be explained as an *ad hominem* argument¹⁹⁴ designed to capitalize on the term's common legal meaning.¹⁹⁵ It may be added that such use of testamentary analogy is not unparalleled in early Christian writings.¹⁹⁶

Nevertheless, a number of difficulties are involved with the translation of διαθήκη as "testament" in vv.16,17. First, v.15 views Christ as covenantal mediator (μεσίτης) and "testaments do not have mediators."¹⁹⁷ Second, the introduction of vv.16,17 with γάρ seems to suggest that the διαθήκαι of vv.16,17 are of the same sort as in v.15 (which are manifestly "covenants").¹⁹⁸ Third, the whole of 9:15-20 is concerned with the *covenant inauguration* ceremony, and v.18 draws the conclusion ("Hence") from vv.16,17 that "even the first covenant was not ratified without blood." If the διαθήκαι of vv.16,17 are different from the διαθήκη of v.18, the author's argument is considerably weakened. This fact argues against a testamentary understanding of

¹⁹⁴ Behm, TDNT 2:131.

¹⁹⁵ See Buchanan, To the Hebrews, 151; and Kistemaker, Hebrews, 256-257.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. the gnostic Christian Gospel of Truth 20.16-28: "Just as there lies hidden in a *will*, before it is opened, the *fortune* of the deceased master of the house, so it is with the all, which lay hidden while the Father of the all was invisible For this reason Jesus appeared; he put on that book; he was nailed to a tree; he published the *edict* of the Father on the cross" [emphasis mine], J.M. Robinson, ed., Nag Hammadi Library in English (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), 39.

¹⁹⁷ Swetnam, "Suggested Interpretation," 374; see also Most, who says: "In the framework of a last will concept, there is neither need nor place for a mediator." "Covenant Framework," 17.

¹⁹⁸ Swetnam, "Suggested Interpretation," 374.

διαθήκη in vv.16,17.¹⁹⁹ Fourth, if διαθήκη (singular) means "testament" in v.17, why the phrase ἐπὶ νεκροῖς (plural)?²⁰⁰

In favor of "covenant" in vv.16,17, it may be argued that by so rendering διαθήκη consistently throughout the passage, each of these difficulties is resolved. And in response to the contextual argument that an inheritance [v.15] implies a testament, it has been pointed out that the idea of inheritance does not rule out the meaning "covenant".²⁰¹ The real challenge for those who prefer "covenant" in vv.16,17, however, is to relate "covenant" to death, particularly with regard to its role in the activation of the covenant (since a covenant inauguration does *not* require the death of the covenant-maker, while the relation between the death of the testator and the activation of the testament is clear). There are two ways in which covenant may be linked with death. There is the symbolic representation of the death of the covenant-maker in the slaying of the animals in the covenant

¹⁹⁹ Robertson says: "The strong connective between verses 17 and 18 must be considered. 'Wherefore [ὅθεν],' according to verse 18, 'the first covenant was not inaugurated without blood.' Now the reference clearly is to the blood-shedding procedure associated with *covenant inauguration*. If verse 18 is drawing an inference from verse 17 with respect to the blood-shedding of covenant inauguration, it would appear mandatory to read verse 17 in terms of covenant inauguration rather than in terms of testamentary disposition." Covenants, 143.

²⁰⁰ See Kilpatrick, "Διαθήκη in Hebrews," 265.

²⁰¹ See Westcott, Hebrews, 302-303; Burton, Galatians, 501-503. Robertson says: "The reference in v.15 to an 'inheritance' should not tempt the interpreter to revert to the 'testamentary' concept. For inheritance also played a most vital role in the Old Testament covenantal framework. The inheritance of life equalled the blessing of the covenant. It was the exact opposite of the curse-option. . . . The possession of this 'inheritance' was not dependent on death, but on covenantal faithfulness." Covenants, below 140, n.9.

ratification ritual,²⁰² and there is the death penalty for the one who breaks the covenantal stipulations.²⁰³

Bearing this in mind, "covenant" fits well with two features of vv.16,17. First, in v.16 the word "established (φέρεσθαι)" can bear the meaning "represented."²⁰⁴ If this is the case, then v.16 may be rendered: "Where a covenant is there must of necessity be represented the death of him that made it."²⁰⁵ The author's point here would be to draw attention to the symbolizing of the oath of self-malediction, which was a *sine qua non* in the covenant-making ritual. Second, "covenant" makes sense of the phrase "over dead bodies (ἐπὶ νεκροῖς)" in v.17a.²⁰⁶ It seems to be an allusion to slain animals in the covenant inauguration ritual (cf. Gen. 15:10; Jer. 34:18-19) and may be rendered: "For a covenant is made firm over dead bodies."²⁰⁷ This

²⁰² "He who makes the covenant (ὁ διαθήμενος) is, for the purposes of the covenant, identified with the victim by whose representative death the covenant is ordinarily ratified. In the death of the victim his death is presented symbolically." Westcott, Hebrews, 267.

²⁰³ Robertson says: "The death of the covenant violator receives historical actualization when covenantal judgment is executed. Once a transgression of covenantal commitment has occurred, death is inevitable." Covenants, 139.

²⁰⁴ See D. McLaren, "The Feast of the New Covenant," Church Quarterly Review 239 (1932):6. Westcott says: "It is not said that he who makes the covenant 'must die,' but that his death must be 'brought forward,' 'presented,' 'introduced upon the scene,' 'set in evidence,' so to speak. This sense of φέρεσθαι appears to be perfectly natural" Hebrews, 267.

²⁰⁵ McLaren's trans., "Feast," 6.

²⁰⁶ See Westcott's discussion of ἐπὶ νεκροῖς, Hebrews, 267-268,256; he says: "If the writer had had in his mind the simple fact of the death of a testator it is unintelligible that he should have used language so strange as ἐπὶ νεκροῖς and φέρεσθαι," 303.

²⁰⁷ Robertson's trans. He comments: "A testament (singular) is not made firm 'over dead bodies' (plural). Only one body is required for the activation of a last will and testament. But a multiple of dead

phrase would then serve as a further elaboration on v.16, reminding the reader of the precise symbolism of the pledge-to-death involved in the ratification of the covenant. Whereas in a testamentary reading of vv.16,17, v.17 is more or less redundant.²⁰⁸ Hence, good reasons exist for consistently understanding *διαθήκη* as "covenant" in 9:15-18. The one difficulty that remains with such an interpretation is the meaning of v.17b: "It [the *διαθήκη*] is never in force while the one who made it lives." For the meaning "covenant" to be sustained in this context, the reference to death here would have to be taken as having in view the symbolic death involved in ratifying the covenant.²⁰⁹

However *διαθήκη* is taken in vv.16,17 of this passage, one point emerges clearly from the author's argument: the connection between the inauguration of the covenant at Sinai by Moses and the inauguration of the new covenant by Christ.²¹⁰ The first covenant's mediator, Moses, inaugurated it with the sprinkling of the blood of calves and goats

bodies is associated immediately with the inauguration of a covenantal relationship. Many beasts are slain to symbolize the potential of covenantal curse." Covenants, 142.

²⁰⁸ See Buchanan, Hebrews, 151.

²⁰⁹ "The greatest difficulty with this interpretation of v. 17b is that it requires the reference to the death of the covenant-maker to be interpreted as a symbolic rather than an actual death. This problem could be resolved by suggesting that the writer has assumed a violated covenant. Given the situation in which stipulations have been violated, a covenant is not made 'strong' so long as the covenant-maker lives. In this case, the death envisioned would be actual rather than symbolical. This line of interpretation contains some commendable features. But the strong contextual emphasis on covenant inauguration points in the direction of symbolic rather than actual death." Robertson, Covenants, below 144, n.13.

²¹⁰ Moss says: "We see here that the tradition represented by the Epistle to the Hebrews looked upon the death of Jesus as the covenant event for Christians and saw in the Sinai-Horeb berith a type of the new covenant mediated by Christ." "Covenant Conception," 102.

[vv.18-20]. The new covenant's mediator, Christ, inaugurated it by the shedding of His own blood [vv.12,15,26b]. The superiority of the new covenant sacrifice of Christ is manifest in that it brings cleansing from sin [v.14,26b,28a;10:10,14], which the sacrifices of the first covenant could not accomplish [10:4], and its efficacy is permanent in duration [v.12,25-26,28;10:10,14]. The author reiterates this in his next usage of *διαθήκη* in 10:16. Here again he quotes from Jeremiah 31:33,34, emphasizing the covenantal promise of the law written on the heart and the forgiveness of sins. He concludes: "Now where there is forgiveness of these things, there is no longer any offering for sin" [10:18]. Now that the forgiveness of sins has been realized in the new covenant, the need for the sacrifices of the old covenant no longer exists. In the termination of the repeated sin-offerings, the finality of the sacrifice of Christ and the new covenant that it inaugurated are confirmed.²¹¹

But Hebrews is not finished with the covenant idea yet. Alongside the greater blessing of the new covenant, there is a severer penalty for the covenant-breaker. In 10:28-29 the author writes:

Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant (*τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης*) by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace?

The author here brings back into view the mutuality of the covenant

²¹¹ "In Ch. 8 the oracle of Jer. 31:31-34 was quoted in order to prove the obsolescence of the old economy; now it is quoted again in order to establish the permanence of the era of 'perfection' inaugurated under the new covenant." Bruce, *Hebrews*, 242.

relationship.²¹² Covenantal fidelity is expected of those who have united themselves to the new covenant community. When the covenant is repudiated, the curses come into play.²¹³ For Hebrews this is just as true (indeed more so) under the new covenant as under the old.²¹⁴

In the next occurrence of *διαθήκη* in Hebrews, the author again contrasts the old covenant and the new [12:18-24]. Christians come not to ominous Mount Sinai [vv.18-21], but to glorious Mount Zion [vv.22-23] "and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant (*καὶ διαθήκης νέας μεσίτη Ἰησοῦ*)" [v.24].²¹⁵ His sprinkled blood has inaugurated this covenant.²¹⁶ This blood speaks better than Abel's blood, which cried to God from the ground [Gen. 4:10].

The author's final use of *διαθήκη* comes in his closing prayer, where he speaks of "the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant

²¹² Westcott says: "The language used suggests the open repudiation of the baptismal confession and covenant: 1 Cor. 12:3. . . . The act of contemptuous rejection of Christ is joined with or rests upon a deliberate judgment. The apostate held the blood of the covenant to be a common thing." Hebrews, 332.

²¹³ Even Hillers admits: "It is probably correct to see in this passage a distant echo of the old conception in which the covenant partner brought a conditional curse on himself through the 'blood of the covenant.'" Covenant, 182.

²¹⁴ See Mendenhall, IDB 1:722. Bruce says: "Anyone who was convicted, on adequate testimony, of a breach of Israel's covenant law was liable to the death penalty: 'thine eye shall not pity him', so ran the inexorable sentence. But that was the penalty of *physical* death; the spiritual death which lies in store for the apostate under the new order is a 'much sorer punishment'." Hebrews, 260.

²¹⁵ *Νέας* is synonymous with *καινῆς* here; see Moffatt, Hebrews, 218.

²¹⁶ Bruce says: "Probably our author is thinking of the covenant-blood of Christ as the antitype of the blood sprinkled at the inauguration of the old covenant." Hebrews, 379.

(ἐν αἵματι διαθήκης αἰωνίου), even Jesus our Lord" [13:20]. Once more, Hebrews emphasizes the everlasting character of the covenant that has been established by the blood of Christ. Kistemaker observes:

Two major themes dominate the epistle: the high-priestly work of Christ, summarized in the expression *blood*, and the covenant that is eternal. In this verse, once again and for the last time these themes are highlighted. God's covenant with his people will remain forever. That covenant has been sealed with Christ's blood which was shed once for all (9:26; 10:10).²¹⁷

For the author of Hebrews then, the first covenant has been set aside in order that a second might be established [10:9], and that second covenant is the new covenant, inaugurated in Christ's blood. This new covenant is a better covenant, not only because it is effective in accomplishing what the first covenant could not, but because it is an everlasting covenant.

There is but one instance of διαθήκη in the book of Revelation (11:19).²¹⁸ It appears in the phrase "ἡ κιβωτὸς τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ." The infrequency of its occurrence in the Apocalypse and its connection here with the ark belie the instructiveness of this mention of the covenant. In the context, the seventh trumpet has sounded (11:15), the final judgment has been introduced (11:18), the ναὸς (temple or holy of holies) of God is opened,²¹⁹ and in the sanctuary is seen "the ark of

²¹⁷ Hebrews, 430-431.

²¹⁸ The Apocalypse is usually dated in the 90's (the reign of Domitian seems to be the general view of the early church, e.g., Melito, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius), though many scholars (e.g., Lightfoot, Westcott, Hort, and Robinson) have argued for a date prior to the fall of Jerusalem, during the Neronian persecution (60's); for a fuller discussion and bibliography see IDB 4: 60-61.

²¹⁹ The fourth of seven such "openings" in the Apocalypse (cf, 4:1 [door], 6:1-8:1 [seals], 9:2 [abyss], 15:5 [sanctuary], 19:11 [heaven], 20:12 [books]), perhaps symbolic of divine disclosure.

His covenant." The ark in the OT had symbolized the presence of God.²²⁰ Here it is introduced to stress God's covenant faithfulness in the fulfillment of His promises²²¹ and to remind His people of the access to Him that has been established as a result of His keeping those promises.²²² Thus, as in Paul and Hebrews, the relational aspect and import of the covenant is in view.²²³ God's people's fellowship with Him is covenantal. It is the result of the covenant promises, assured by God's covenant faithfulness and pre-figured by the picture of the covenant itself.²²⁴

²²⁰ See R.H. Mounce, Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 233; and L. Morris, Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 150.

²²¹ R.H. Charles observes, "As the earthly ark was a witness to the covenant between God and Israel, the heavenly ark is a witness to the covenant between God and the Christian community, which is the true Israel" in A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Revelation of St. John (New York: Scribner's, 1920), 297; Mounce notes, "The entire scene is a gracious reminder that God will faithfully carry out his covenant promises and destroy the enemies of his people," Revelation, 233; and Kiddle says, "The ark is a heavenly sign that God's compact with His people had been fulfilled," The Revelation of St. John (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), 210.

²²² H.B. Swete says, "the appearance of the Ark of the Covenant through the opened doors of the heavenly temple, at the moment when the time had come for the faithful to receive their reward, indicates the restoration of perfect access to God" The Apocalypse of St. John (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 145.

²²³ W.H. Shea argues in "The Covenantal Form of the Letters to the Seven Churches," Andrews University Seminary Studies 21 (1983): 71-84, that the letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3 contain the elements of covenant formularies. If this is the case, it provides more evidence for the relational aspect of the covenant (and even for a corresponding bilateral/obediential emphasis to complement the promissory thrust of Rev. 11:19).

²²⁴ There is, however, evidence of the testament idea also being used for theological reflection in the Apocalypse, see e.g. Rev. 5:1-4, where the "book sealed with seven seals" may well represent a testament. Long ago Zahn suggested: "The word *biblion* itself permits of many interpretations, but for the readers of that time it was designated by the seven seals on its back beyond possibility of mistake. . . . [T]he most simple member of the Asiatic churches knew that a *biblion* made fast with seven seals was a testament. When a

Summary and Conclusion

Having now surveyed each occurrence of the word *διαθήκη* in the NT, it will be appropriate to draw together some common themes related to the covenant idea in the Synoptics and Acts, Paul, and Hebrews. First, we may note that in the Synoptics and Acts, Paul, and Hebrews, the Christ event is seen as fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. Hence, each evidences belief that the blessings of God's covenant with Abraham are now coming to rest on the followers of Christ.

Second, in the Synoptics, Paul, and Hebrews, the new covenant established in the blood of Christ is identified as the fulfillment of the new covenant prophecy in Jeremiah 31.

Third, the Synoptics and Hebrews interpret the death of Christ in light of the covenant inauguration ceremony of Exodus 24. While there may be hints in the Synoptics' eucharistic narratives that Christ's death was also viewed in terms of the Passover lambs of the Exodus, explicit paschal imagery is more likely to be found in 1 Corinthians 5:7, 1 Peter 1:19 and the Johannine writings.

Fourth, in the Synoptics and Acts, Paul, and Hebrews, the covenant idea is explicitly linked with the forgiveness of sins. This forgiveness of sins is seen as a fulfillment of both the Abrahamic promise and Jeremiah's new covenant prophecy, and is a hallmark of the

testator dies the testament is brought forward, and when possible opened in the presence of the seven witnesses who sealed it; i.e., it was unsealed, read aloud, and executed. . . . The document with seven seals is the symbol of the promise of a future kingdom. The disposition long ago occurred and was documented and sealed, but it was not yet carried out," Introduction to the NT 3:393f; quoted in D. Chilton, The Days of Vengeance: An exposition of the Book of Revelation (Fort Worth: Dominion Press, 1987), 166, note the comments of 166-169. See also R.H. Charles, Commentary on Revelation, 1:136-138; and G.R. Beasley-Murray, The Book of Revelation (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 121.

new covenant established by Christ.

Fifth, throughout the NT writings *διαθήκη* is best rendered "covenant." There are two passages, Galatians 3:15 and Hebrews 9:16,17, where it is possible that *διαθήκη* means "testament."

Sixth, Paul (in 2 Corinthians 3 and Galatians 3) and Hebrews each interpret the history of redemption in covenant terms. For each of them, the new covenant is vastly superior to the old. When they are contrasting the new redemptive economy to the old, they represent the era before Christ in the form of the Mosaic economy.

Seventh, Paul tends to stress discontinuity between the Mosaic economy and the new (letter and Spirit), while emphasizing continuity between the Abrahamic covenant and the new (promise and fulfillment). On the other hand, Hebrews, while acknowledging continuity between the Abrahamic covenant and the new, displays *both* continuity and discontinuity between the Mosaic and new covenants. For the author of Hebrews the new covenant not only sets aside the old order, it fulfills it.

Eighth, contrary to the view of Hillers expressed at the beginning of this segment of the introduction, in none of these NT traditions is the covenant idea itself seen as one of the shadows which passes away with the coming of a new era in redemptive history.²²⁵ It is appealed to in the Synoptics and Acts, Paul, Hebrews, and Revelation

²²⁵ As H.C. Kee has observed: "As Christianity reached out ever wider into the Gentile world, the nature of its links with its Jewish heritage became more ambiguous and controversial. Yet all the evidence before and after 70 points to the insistence of the early Christians that they were the heirs, and had the proper keys to interpretation, of the covenant tradition of Israel embodied in the Jewish Scriptures." "After the Crucifixion—Christianity Through Paul," in Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, ed. H. Shanks (Washington: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1992), 124.

as an adequate expression of the relationship between God and His people established by the work of Christ. In both Hebrews and Paul, the covenant relationship transcends the temporal characteristics of the Mosaic administration and finds its ultimate realization in the face-to-face communion with God of the new covenant.

For the NT theologians, then, the covenant idea is inextricably tied to the death of Christ. His blood inaugurated a new covenant and without that bloodshed there would have been no new covenant. His death is the ground of forgiveness of sins in the new covenant, and His covenantal mediation assures everlasting communion with God.

COVENANT IN THE APOSTOLIC FATHERS AND APOLOGISTS

The anti-Judaic Church derived its conception of the covenant primarily from its "New Testament," read as the fulfillment of its "Old Testament." The Old Covenant served to foreshadow or prefigure the New, which was therefore definitive and decisive. The result was a concept of covenant as grace. The focus was almost exclusively on the unmerited gift of divine favor.²²⁶

Paul van Buren, Christ in Context, 69.

Everett Ferguson has pointed out that the word *διαθήκη* occurs in three principal contexts²²⁷ in the NT writings in which the covenant idea functions to explain (1) the significance of Jesus' death; (2) the relationship between the Mosaic and Christian eras, and the carnal and spiritual Israel; and (3) to demonstrate the superiority of the Christian economy.²²⁸ As we continue to provide background for appraisal of the covenant idea in the theologians of the later second and third centuries, we will find that the covenant concept fulfills similar roles in the writings of certain early extra-NT writers.²²⁹

On the other hand, patterns of contrast with the NT writers' covenant thought immediately become apparent in, for instance, Barnabas and Justin. First, the early extra-NT writings do not evince the richness of theological connections evident in the use of the covenant

²²⁶ Paul van Buren, A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality (Part Three): Christ in Context (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 69.

²²⁷ The eucharistic narratives, Paul's discussions of the covenant in 2 Corinthians 3 and Galatians 4, and Hebrews 7-13.

²²⁸ "Covenant Idea in the Second Century," 136.

²²⁹ We may comment in passing that the covenant concept can be shown to be present in the writings of the early church via the explicit employment of covenant terminology, the treatment of key biblical "covenant passages," usage of covenant-related concepts (e.g., election, the people of God), the author's approach to the continuity of redemptive history, and employment of inherited patterns of interpretation and views on the covenants.

idea in the NT (though what their usages of the covenant concept lack in variety and originality, they make up for in demonstrating the continuing significance of covenant thought in the early Christian era²³⁰). Second, a marked difference exists between the NT writings and some of the early extra-NT writings in their view of the historical reality of God's ancient covenant with the children of Israel.²³¹ Third, the emphasis shifts from the issue of Gentile inclusion in the covenant to Jewish exclusion from the covenant. To be sure, scholars like H. C. Kee have detected such a movement within the NT writings themselves. Kee says:

The crisis of 70 C.E. forever altered the situation for both Jews and Christians. . . . The loss of the Temple and its cultus required the Jews to redefine themselves even more sharply in contrast to the new competition—the Christians—who claimed to have the correct insights and to be the true heirs of the covenantal promises.

For the Christians, the primary emphasis in the pre-70 material is on what God had already done through Jesus, how the community was to be defined and how God would accomplish what he began through Jesus—a new perception of what it means to share in the life of God's people. The principle of inclusiveness in the Christian community had already been laid down by Jesus, and firmly established both in the Gospel tradition and by Paul. The post-70 Christian literature devoted itself to the task of establishing a Christian covenantal identity in sharp distinction to the emerging pattern of Jewish definition.²³²

Nevertheless, such a progression of emphasis becomes more apparent in an examination of the covenant idea in anti-Jewish polemics of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists. In his discussion of the use of

²³⁰ *Contra Moss*, "Covenant Conception," 17.

²³¹ For instance, Moss observes: "When we move from Hebrews into the Epistle of Barnabas we cannot help being struck by a tremendous difference with respect to covenant thought. Whereas in both Paul and Hebrews there are profound attempts to defend the positive worth of the old covenant, Barnabas denies that there ever really was a covenant relationship between God and Israel;" "Covenant Conception," 153.

²³² Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, 124.

Abraham in early Christian debate with the Jews, J. S. Siker argues that

Christian controversy with Judaism from about 50 to 150 C.E. began with Gentile inclusion and ended with Jewish exclusion. In this shift we see a nearly complete transition of Christianity from its origins as a sub-group within Judaism to its development into a full-blown Gentile religious movement outside Judaism.²³³

Our survey of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists will manifest these above-mentioned similarities and differences in the role of the covenant concept in NT and early extra-NT writings, and alert us to important trends that will persist and develop in later second century covenant thought.

Covenant in Clement of Rome

The word *διαθήκη* occurs sixteen times in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers and another thirty-three in Justin Martyr.²³⁴ Though there are many evidences of covenant-related concepts in these writings (the people of God, election, covenantal signs, and a unified yet two-part view of redemptive history),²³⁵ the first employment of *διαθήκη*

²³³ Disinheriting the Jews: Abraham in Early Christian Controversy (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 194.

²³⁴ All sixteen usages in the Apostolic Fathers' writings are found in 1 Clement and Barnabas: six times in quotation of or allusion to Scripture, along with ten others (including one passage where it is implied); twelve of Justin's thirty-three uses are in OT quotes (primarily [LXX] Jer. 38, Is. 42 and 55, and Ps. 49). *Διαθήσομαι* is found only once in the Apostolic Fathers, in Barn. 10.2, but numerous times in Justin.

²³⁵ For example, 2 Clement connects the concepts of the church and election [14.1-5]; Ignatius, interestingly, refers to Jesus as being of "David's race" and discusses the "dispensation" or "divine plan" (*οικονομίας*) of the incarnation in Eph. 18 and 20, a word subsequently very important in the covenant thought of later ante-Nicene writers; he seems to indicate a change in the Pauline attitude (liberty of conscience, without binding others) to Christian continuation of Jewish ritual practices in Mag. 10 when he says: "It is utterly absurd to profess Jesus Christ and to practice Judaism;" Ignatius sometimes

outside the NT is found in Clement of Rome's Letter to the Corinthians²³⁶ (15.4). Both of Clement's usages of *διαθήκη* are, characteristically for the Fathers, found in the setting of moral exhortation. Clement is exhorting the flock to unite with those who are humble and practice peace (and not with those who are prideful and merely give peace lip-service) when he says: Ἠγάπησαν αὐτὸν τῷ στόματι αὐτῶν καὶ τῇ γλώσσει αὐτῶν ἐψεύσαντο αὐτόν, ἡ δὲ καρδία αὐτῶν οὐκ εὐθεία μετ' αὐτοῦ, οὐδὲ ἐπιστάθησαν ἐν τῇ διαθήκῃ αὐτοῦ (15.4).²³⁷ In this quotation of Psalm 78 (LXX 77):36–37, both the textual function of covenant and Clement's application of it are to call God's people to covenantal obedience in deed as well as word.

In the only other passage in which Clement utilizes *διαθήκη* (35.7), the stress also falls on the attendant responsibilities of those who claim the covenant blessings. Clement begins the passage with a meditation on the comprehensible, present gifts of God to His people,

employs the language of "election" [see Eph. Int.; Phil. 11.1] and speaks of Christ's people "whether among Jews or Gentiles," being "in one body of His Church" in Smyr. 1.2; Polycarp in Letter to the Philippians 1.1 talks of those "truly chosen of God and our Lord;" there is a reference to the "holy elect" in the Martyrdom of Polycarp 22; Hermas frequently speaks of the church as the "elect of God" [Vis. 1.3.4; Vis. 2.1.3; Vis. 2.2.5; Vis. 2.4.2; Vis. 3.5.1; Vis. 3.8.3], and links "the great tree," "the law," and "the Son" (in a style reminiscent of apocalyptic Judaism)[Sim. 8.3.2]; and Diognetus (which is problematic in both date and authorship) speaks of "the passover of the Lord" [12.9], and in passing, of the Jews' foolish "pride in the mutilation of the flesh as a sign of election" [4.4]; See also T.F. Torrance, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1948), 13,20,40,100f,93,100,103f,106f, *et passim*.

²³⁶ Probably composed ca. 96–98; for background and authorship issues, see EEC 1:181 and EEChr 216–217.

²³⁷ "They loved him with their mouth, but with their tongue they lied to him; their heart was not right with him, nor were they faithful to his covenant," trans. J.B. Lightfoot, J.R. Harmer, and M.W. Holmes, The Apostolic Fathers, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 45.

then directs the reader's attention to the incomprehensible, future inheritance awaiting the faithful (35.1-4). Having listed the qualifications of such as will receive these blessings, he pronounces a warning to the sinner: "Ἴνα τί σὺ διηγῆ τὰ δικαιώματά μου καὶ ἀναλαμβάνεις τὴν διαθήκην μου ἐπὶ στόματός σου; (Ps. 50 [LXX 49]:16).²³⁸

Two things are worth noting about Clement's uses of these OT covenant quotations. First, in both passages the appeal to the covenant is negative: a warning about the people who were *not* faithful to the covenant and a reminder about the sinner who claims the covenant in vain. Hence, though Clement speaks of God's mercies to His people in both contexts, his stress is on the consequences of covenantal disobedience. At this point, his theological argument has a distinctly Jewish flavor, hardly advancing on the moral pleas of the OT prophets with Israel.²³⁹ Second, the force of these OT quotations is to stress the mutuality of the covenant relationship. Clement reminds Christians to keep their covenantal responsibilities, even as Israel was required to maintain faithful obedience and moral rectitude in the bond of the covenant. There are blessings in the covenant, but they are for those

²³⁸ "Why do you recite my statutes, and take my covenant upon your lips?," trans. Lightfoot *et al*, Apostolic Fathers, 67.

²³⁹ Ferguson confirms these observations when he says: "It is characteristic of Clement that in both passages the Old Testament was used for moral exhortation. Perhaps significantly both passages are about unfaithfulness to the covenant. While Clement used the texts as warnings to Christians, the texts could just as well be turned against Jews;" "Covenant Idea," 136; see also J. Daniélou, The Development of Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicea, vol. 1, The Theology of Jewish Christianity, trans. J.A. Baker (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1964), 44-45, who says "Clement's theological setting is Jewish Christian."

who keep the covenant.²⁴⁰

Covenant in Barnabas

The evidence of covenant thought is much more extensive in Barnabas²⁴¹ than in any of the Apostolic Fathers.²⁴² Indeed, Ferguson suggests that "the first extra-canonical author for whom the covenant was an important category was Barnabas."²⁴³ Barnabas' view of the covenant clearly retains the Hebraic covenant ideas of mutuality, conditionality, and relationship, though his rather eccentric view of the ancient covenant of Moses constitutes a substantial departure from the view of Hebrews²⁴⁴ and the rest of the NT writings.²⁴⁵ Barnabas'

²⁴⁰ "[Clement's] outlook was uncomplicated, believing that the New Covenant of Christianity was a continuation of the Old, and that the ethic and organisation of Israel portrayed in the one passed over *en bloc* to the other," W.H.C. Frend, "The OT in the Age of the Greek Apologists A.D. 130-180," SJT 26 (1973):134.

²⁴¹ The date of Barnabas is usually placed in the reign of Hadrian (117-138), and though many still regard it to be of Alexandrian origins (e.g., L.W. Barnard, "The Epistle of Barnabas - A Paschal Homily?," VC 15:9), Syria and Asia Minor have also been suggested (see EEC 1:111).

²⁴² K. Baltzer discovers indications of the OT covenant formulary in Barnabas, see The Covenant Formulary, trans. D.E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 123-127.

²⁴³ "Covenant Idea," 137.

²⁴⁴ Westcott said: "In . . . [Hebrews] it is shown that there lies a deep meaning for us under the history and the law of Israel. The old Covenant was real, though not "faultless," and its ordinances were "patterns of the things in heaven," though not the heavenly things themselves. But in . . . [Barnabas] it is assumed throughout that the Law was from its first institution misunderstood by the Jews. . . . Judaism is made a mere riddle, of which Christianity is the answer. It had in itself no value, not even as the slave (παιδαγωγός) which guards us in infancy from outward dangers, till we are placed under the true teacher's care. . . . The worth of the Law, as one great instrument in the education of the world, is disregarded." A General Survey of the History of the Canon of the NT (New York: Macmillan, 1896), 45-46.

²⁴⁵ L.W. Barnard, however, argues that there are affinities between Barnabas and the theology of Stephen's speech in Acts; see his article, "The Epistle of Barnabas," VC 15:15, n. 25; and id., Studies in the

first usage of διαθήκη is found in a long and significant passage (4.6-8):

προσέχειν νῦν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ μὴ ὁμοιοῦσθαί τισιν, ἐπισωπεύοντας ταῖς ἁμαρτίαις ὑμῶν λέγοντας ὅτι ἡ διαθήκη ἡμῶν μένει ἐκεῖνοις· ἡμῶν μὲν ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνοι οὕτως εἰς τέλος ἀπώλεσαν αὐτήν, λαβόντος ἤδη τοῦ Μωϋσεως. λέγει γὰρ ἡ γραφή· Καὶ ἦν Μωϋσῆς ἐν τῷ ὄρει νηστεύων ἡμέρας τεσσαράκοντα καὶ νύκτας τεσσαράκοντα καὶ ἔλαβεν τὴν διαθήκην ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, πλάκας λιθίνας γεγραμμένας τῷ δακτύλῳ τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ κυρίου. ἀλλὰ ἐπιστραφέντες ἐπὶ τὰ εἰδῶλα ἀπώλεσαν αὐτήν. λέγει γὰρ οὕτως κύριος· Μωϋσῆ Μωϋσῆ, κατὰβηθι τὸ τάχος, ὅτι ἠνόμησεν ὁ λαός σου, οὓς ἐξήγαγες ἐκ γῆς Αἰγύπτου. καὶ συνῆκεν Μωϋσῆς καὶ ἔριψεν τὰς δύο πλάκας ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν αὐτοῦ, καὶ συνετριβή αὐτῶν ἡ διαθήκη, ἵνα ἡ τοῦ ἡγαπημένου Ἰησοῦ ἐνκατασφραγισθῆ εἰς τὴν καρδίαν ἡμῶν ἐν ἐλπίδι τῆς πίστεως αὐτοῦ.²⁴⁶

Its content is not unlike the exhortation we saw in Clement. Barnabas pleads: "Be on your guard now, and do not be like certain people; that is, do not continue to pile up your sins while claiming that your covenant (ἡ διαθήκη ὑμῶν) is irrevocably yours, because in fact those people lost it completely"²⁴⁷ Whatever textual decision one

Apostolic Fathers and Their Backgrounds, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966), esp. 62-72.

²⁴⁶ "Be on your guard now, and do not be like certain people; that is, do not continue to pile up your sins while claiming that your covenant is irrevocably yours, because in fact those people lost it completely in the following way, when Moses had just received it. For the Scripture says: 'And Moses was on the mountain fasting for forty days and forty nights, and he received the covenant from the Lord, stone tablets inscribed by the fingers of the hand of the Lord.' But by turning to idols they lost it. For thus says the Lord: 'Moses, Moses, go down quickly, because your people, whom you led out of Egypt, have broken the law.' And Moses understood and hurled the two stone tablets from his hands, and their covenant was broken in pieces, in order that the covenant of the beloved Jesus might be sealed in our heart, in hope inspired by faith in him," trans. Lightfoot *et al*, 281.

²⁴⁷ There is a textual problem here; this translation is Holmes' which follows Codex Hierosolymitanus [see J.B. Lightfoot, J.R. Harmer, eds. and trans., and M.W. Holmes, ed. and reviser, The Apostolic Fathers, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 280-282]. Both Lightfoot and Ferguson follow the Latin version "Be not like some, heaping up your sins, by saying that the covenant is theirs and ours," Ferguson, "Covenant Idea," 137. I am following Hierosolymitanus because it fits better into the overall context of Barnabas' exhortation; ultimately though, the sense of the passage is not materially affected on either

makes on this passage, it is clear that the failure of Israel to abide in the covenant is held up here as a warning to complacent Christians. Barnabas' main point is: "be on guard" (cf. 4.9,14). Nevertheless, in making this appeal Barnabas also manages (1) to deny that Israel really received the covenant ("they lost it completely"); (2) to link the law and the covenant ("[Moses] received the covenant from the Lord . . . and their covenant was broken in pieces");²⁴⁸ and (3) to intimate that Christians are the (only) recipients of the old covenant through Christ. It is no surprise that Barnabas never speaks of the new covenant. His "covenant of the beloved Jesus" sounds very much like the effective reinstatement of the Mosaic covenant.²⁴⁹

Barnabas' next mention of the covenant takes a futuristic turn as he contemplates the rule that believers will one day exercise when they have been made perfect. Then, Barnabas says, they will become "heirs of the Lord's covenant (κληρονόμοι τῆς διαθήκης κυρίου)" Barn. 6.19. In the context, Barnabas does show a belief in present Christian possession of the blessings of the new creation, but his emphasis is on a future reception of the inheritance by such as are living "by faith and by the word" (Barn. 6.17). Two things are worth mentioning in connection with this passage. First, Barnabas again stresses the mutuality inherent in the covenant relationship--those who "have been made perfect" inherit

reading.

²⁴⁸ It is hard to say whether this connection is due to the text he is working out of, which links the covenant with the tablets of the ten words, or whether this connection may owe something to the influence of post-biblical Jewish thought; see Daniélou, Theology of Jewish Christianity, 165.

²⁴⁹ Moss sees this, though he states it poorly, in "Covenant Concept," 134.

the covenant (Barn. 6.19). Second, Barnabas here links the covenant with the idea of inheritance (as he does elsewhere, e.g. Barn. 13.1,6), without implying a testamentary conception of διαθήκη.

In Barnabas 9 and 10, the usages of διαθήκης and διαθήσομαι confirm patterns that we have already detected. Barnabas uses the covenant as an argument to spiritualize the circumcision commands of Genesis 17. If fleshly circumcision was truly a seal (σφραγιδα), he contends, then the Syrians, Arabs, and Egyptians must also be heirs of the covenant because they practice circumcision (Barn. 9.6). Therefore, he concludes, the intention of God's command to Abraham must have been the requirement of "heart circumcision" (cf. Barn. 9.5), not the physical ritual. In 9.9, according to the text found in Sinaiticus and Hierosolymitanus, Barnabas says: οἶδεν ὁ τὴν ἔμφυτον δωρεάν τῆς διαθήκης αὐτοῦ θέμενος ἐν ἡμῖν.²⁵⁰ If this is the correct reading, then we have here an explicit example of Barnabas' stressing the unilateral divine aspect of the covenant with his words: "the implanted gift of his covenant." This emphasis fits nicely with both his accent on circumcision of the heart and the blessings which Christians receive because of ancient Israel's rejection of the covenant. Barnabas' use of διαθήσομαι in 10.2 comes in a rough quotation of Deuteronomy 4:13, flows naturally from the previous section, and occurs in the context of elaborating on his instructions for a proper spiritual understanding of the Mosaic code. Here again he links the law and covenant in such a way

²⁵⁰ "He who placed within us the implanted gift of his covenant understands," trans. Lightfoot, *et al*, 299. The later Greek manuscripts and the Latin translation attest to a reading of διδαχῆς rather than διαθήκης.

as to stress human obligations in the divinely-established relationship.

The longest sustained discussion of the covenant in Barnabas is found in 13-14. It begins with Barnabas' posing a specific question: "Ἴδωμεν δέ εἰ οὗτος ὁ λαὸς κληρονομεῖ ἢ ὁ πρῶτος, καὶ ἡ διαθήκη εἰς ἡμᾶς ἢ εἰς ἐκείνους."²⁵¹ Barnabas argues, through the stories of Jacob and Esau, and Ephraim and Manasseh, that Christians are the rightful heirs of the covenant, since in each case the younger son was divinely ordained to rule the older. Note that Barnabas continues to refer to Israel as "the people" (ὁ λαὸς, cf. Barn. 14.1), though he usually qualifies the appellation (e.g., ὁ πρῶτος). Barnabas' agenda is to show from the OT writings themselves that the church was destined to become "heir of the covenant" (τῆς διαθήκης κληρονόμον, Barn. 13.6). The end result is, for Barnabas, that though there is a continuity between God's promises to Abraham and "the new people" that links God's plan from the time of the patriarchs to Christ, yet there is a discontinuity between the children of Abraham according to the flesh and "this people" (Barn. 13.6), the followers of Christ.²⁵² Ferguson is indubitably right when he says:

²⁵¹ "Now let us see whether this people or the former people is the heir, and whether the covenant is for us or for them," trans. Lightfoot, *et al*, 311.

²⁵² L.V. Crutchfield in his curious article, "Rudiments of Dispensationalism in the Ante-Nicene Period (1): Israel and the Church in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," *BS* 144 (1987):254-260, wishfully finds in this view an embryonic antecedent of the "dispensational" approach to scriptural interpretation (the popular fundamentalist nineteenth and twentieth century theology originating in the writings of J.N. Darby and popularized in the Scotfield Reference Bible), because it suggests an absolute distinction between "Israel" and "the church." This, however, misses the point, because unlike standard dispensational theology, Barnabas (though he does not emphasize, for obvious reasons, the continuity of the "two peoples" of God) sees the church as the rightful and only inheritor of the Abrahamic promises and Mosaic

The covenant of Jesus and the covenant of Moses [*and, we could add, the covenant of Abraham*] are essentially identical in their meaning. Barnabas did not speak of a new covenant, but of a new people (5.7). The covenant had not changed, but the recipients were different.²⁵³

Here we have a classic illustration of the movement from concern for Gentile inclusion in the Abrahamic program (exemplified in certain NT passages) to concentration on Jewish exclusion from the Abrahamic covenant (epitomized in Barnabas' argument). Not only are the Jewish people of apostolic times excluded by virtue of their rejection of Jesus as the covenant (Barn. 14.5), but so also the Jewish people of old.²⁵⁴ It is not that the history of God's interaction with Israel is denied. No, according to Barnabas, God *gave* the covenant (*δέδωκεν*, Barn. 14.1) to Israel. But Israel forfeited it by their sins. Their failure to receive *τὴν διαθήκην κυρίου* (Barn. 14.2) is made clear, asserts Barnabas, in Exodus 32:7-8,19 when the people sinned and in response "the tablets of the covenant of the Lord" (Barn. 14.3) were broken by Moses.

The passage that immediately follows this one is rich with

covenant. It may be noted that Barnabas' views were so problematic that they were not taken up without modification by his successors. For more helpful and detached discussions of early Christian views of the relation between Israel and the church, see M. Simon, Verus Israel (Oxford: OUP, 1986), 65-97; and P. Richardson, Israel in the Apostolic Church (Cambridge: CUP, 1969), esp. 1-32.

²⁵³ "Covenant Idea," 138.

²⁵⁴ There is one glimmer of emphasis to be found in Barnabas which suggests that he does not think that this failure to receive the covenant was the universal case in Israel. Barnabas acknowledges that *Μωϋσῆς θεράπων ὃν ἔλαβεν* (Barn. 14.4); Barcellona says: "This negative judgement on Israel and Judaism excepts only the patriarchs and prophets, to whom a spiritual understanding of the divine will was conceded (cf. esp. chs. 9-10): the same understanding as that of the Christians, who are circumcised in heart and ears and so can understand the true sense of the divine commands expressed in Scripture," EEC 1:111.

theological connections of the covenant idea. "How did Christians come into possession of the covenant?" Barnabas asks. "Through the gracious gift of Jesus: ὁ κύριος ἡμῖν ἔδωκεν" (Barn. 14.4), he answers. Here, God's redemptive plan and forgiveness (cf, 6.11,19), Jesus' suffering, and our receipt of the inheritance are directly linked with the covenant (Barn. 14.4-7). According to Barnabas, Jesus gave τὴν διαθήκην κυρίου to Christians δι' ἡμᾶς ὑπομείνας (Barn. 14.4),²⁵⁵ in order that they might become "the people of the inheritance." Furthermore, Jesus was revealed that the Jews might τελειωθῶσιν τοῖς ἁμαρτήμασιν (perhaps an allusion to Genesis 15:16) and that Christians might receive "the covenant" via the Lord Jesus who inherited it in order that he might διάθῃται ἐν ἡμῖν διαθήκην λόγῳ (Barn. 14.5). In 14.7, Jesus is identified not merely as the inheritor of the covenant, but as the covenant itself in Barnabas' quotation of Isaiah 42:6-7.

Upon reflection, it becomes apparent that in his preoccupation with showing that Christians are "the people of God," Barnabas so stresses continuity with the Mosaic covenant that he ends up, not with a new covenant in Christ, but with the old Mosaic covenant and new beneficiaries. On the other hand, by his adamant denial of Israel's reception of the covenant, Barnabas ends up with a radical discontinuity between Israel and the "new people." Hence, Barnabas' presentation of redemptive history is hampered by the ambiguity of both an extreme continuity and discontinuity.²⁵⁶ Nevertheless, he manages

²⁵⁵ Jesus' suffering is one of Barnabas' favorite themes, L.W. Barnard, "The Epistle of Barnabas," 10-11.

²⁵⁶ This dual presence of radical continuity and discontinuity may explain the absence of certain allegorical/typological maneuvers which one might have expected in Barnabas, e.g., he neither explicitly

to preserve the Hebraic relational view of the covenant, stress both gracious²⁵⁷ and obligatory aspects of the covenant (though he does more of the latter), make the NT connection of covenant with the forgiveness of sins, attempt a covenantal (if unprogressive) presentation of redemptive history, and link Jesus' death to both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. For Barnabas, Jesus inherits the covenant, gives the covenant, and is the covenant. Frend has adeptly observed:

In their different ways *Clement* and *Barnabas* reflected the outlook of the christianised synagogues of the Greek lands at the beginning of the second century A.D. Christianity was the natural fulfilment and prolongation of the prophetic tradition of Judaism. . . . So long as the intellectual leadership of the Church remained with men such as the writer of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, the Church would not stray far from its Jewish parentage.²⁵⁸

Covenant in Justin Martyr²⁵⁹

appeals to the Passover as a type of Christ's death (though Barnard thinks Barnabas is a paschal homily) nor identifies a link between circumcision and baptism in his chapter on old covenant precursors of the later (11). This ritual connection would have forced him to ease his stress on discontinuity between Israel and the church, hence (apparently) he avoids it; see L.W. Barnard, "The Epistle of Barnabas," 15-16.

²⁵⁷ Ferguson suggests (see "Covenant Idea," 138) that the Hellenistic idea of "testament" is present in Barnabas covenant thought because of his linking of the concepts of covenant and inheritance. While this may be the case, Burton long ago observed that inheritance fits as well with the Hebraic covenant idea as it does with the Hellenistic will. There is little or no other internal evidence to demand a testamentary reading of Barnabas' διαθήκη. At any rate, the inheritance concept (whether connected to covenant or testament) adequately evidences the gracious side of the covenantal relationship.

²⁵⁸ W.H.C. Frend, "OT in the Age of Greek Apologists," 135.

²⁵⁹ Among the more important monographs concerning Justin and his theology are L.W. Barnard, Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought (Cambridge: CUP, 1967); E.R. Goodenough, The Theology of Justin Martyr (Jena: Frommann, 1923); E.F. Osborne, Justin Martyr (Tübingen: Mohr, 1973); O. Skarsaune, The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 1987); see also EEC 1:463-464, and TRE 17:471-478 for bibliography.

The most extensive (and consequential) mid-second-century presentation of early Christian covenant thought is found in Justin Martyr, for whom "the covenant was an important category for interpreting God's saving plan as it related to Jews and Christians."²⁶⁰ Justin's influence on his successors makes him an important link in the church's covenant tradition.²⁶¹ Not surprisingly, Justin's clearest display of his covenant theology occurs in the Dialogue with Trypho.²⁶²

The first mention of the covenant in this work is placed on the lips of Trypho the Jew, who accuses Christians of despising the covenant (τῆς διαθήκης, Dial. 10) because of their rejection of circumcision (among other things). The interpretive dilemma then is for Justin to explain how Christians can claim to worship the God of Israel and to believe the Jewish Scriptures, while rejecting so much of Jewish practice and explicit OT commands. Justin's response is one of two extended expositions of his covenant thought in the Dialogue (11-12,

²⁶⁰ E. Ferguson, "Covenant Idea," 139; Ferguson elsewhere says, "Justin Martyr is a good object of study, furthermore, because his frequent references to the covenant express the viewpoint that came to prevail in Christianity," in "Justin Martyr: On Jews, Christians, and the Covenant," in Early Christianity in Context: Monuments and Documents, ed. F. Manns and E. Alliata (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), 395.

²⁶¹ T. Stylianopoulos observes, "[Justin] proved to be one of the preeminent interpreters of the Christian faith between the apostle Paul and Origen, integrating the insights of his Christian predecessors and laying new foundations for future thinkers, such as Irenaeus, Tertullian, and the Alexandrians," EEChr 514.

²⁶² Ca. 160 (see Frend, OT in the Age of Greek Apologists, 139); Justin's knowledge of Judaism has been widely debated. Frend, Simon, and Ferguson argue for a real apologetic contact and familiarity with Judaism, whereas Harnack and others suggest only a second-hand "Biblical" acquaintance. See, e.g., Ferguson, "Covenant Idea," 159, n.15; and M. Simon, Verus Israel, 173.

122-123). He asserts emphatically that the God of the Christians is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, thus rejecting the Marcionite solution (Dial. 11). The OT covenant and law, says Justin, have been replaced by a new,²⁶³ final law and covenant (τελευταῖος νόμος, καὶ διαθήκη). The law of Horeb was for the Jews alone, but this new law is universal (Dial. 11). Justin here relates law and covenant in the closest possible way, and Ferguson is probably right to suggest that Justin understood διαθήκη as "disposition,"²⁶⁴ though Justin's linkage of covenant and inheritance (κληρονομίας) should not be overlooked.²⁶⁵

According to Justin, this new διαθήκη puts an end to the previous one, just as Christ--a new and final law--replaces the OT laws, ordinances, and commands (Dial. 11). This he proves by appealing to Isaiah 51:4,5 (LXX): ὅτι νόμος παρ' ἐμοῦ ἐξελεύσεται and Jeremiah 31:31,32. For Justin, Christ *is* the new law, the new covenant, and the expected one, and the "true spiritual Israel" (Ἰσραηλιτικὸν ... τὸ ἀληθινόν, πνευματικόν) are those who have been led to God through Him (Dial. 11). This passage makes it clear that Justin understands the διαθήκη to be

²⁶³ The idea of a "new law" is only implied here, but will become explicit and will be deployed repeatedly later on (cf., Dial. 11; 24; 34).

²⁶⁴ "Justin," 396.

²⁶⁵ We have already noted (see n. 251) that Ferguson argues for Barnabas' understanding of διαθήκη to be hellenistic and testamental, based on the linkage of the διαθήκη with inheritance (Barn. 14.4); yet here Justin does the same and Ferguson opts for understanding διαθήκη as "disposition," presumably on the basis of Justin's linkage of law and covenant. However, Barnabas displays a similar (if less frequently repeated) connection of law and covenant (Barn. 4.6-8). The internal evidence is slim, either way, and hence the choice of rendering difficult; perhaps "administration" best captures its connotation in Justin.

a divine administration or way of approach to God. Israel of old had its peculiar way of access to God (external and preliminary as it was); now Christians come to Him in a new way, through Christ. Hence, the relational element of the *διαθήκη* is present.

Justin concludes this section, after quoting (LXX) Isaiah 55:3-5, which speaks of God making an everlasting covenant and the nations coming to David, by turning the tables on Trypho and maintaining that it is the Jews who have despised the covenant: "His new holy covenant" (*τὴν καινὴν ἁγίαν αὐτοῦ Διαθήκην*, Dial. 12). A number of things should be noted in this passage. First, Justin sees the *διαθήκη* as the divinely provided way for fellowship and piety. Both the old law and covenant and the new covenant are provisions of God and directed toward the same purpose. The latter has merely superseded the function of the former. Second, Christians are said to worship the same God of Abraham as did Israel, but through a different medium (Christ, not the law or Moses). Third, Justin's "final law and covenant" not only replaces the Mosaic economy, but fulfills the OT prophecies concerning the Gentiles and is both universal and everlasting. Fourth, *διαθήκη* occurs eleven times in Dial. 11-12, three of which are in LXX quotations (Jer. 38:31,32; Is. 55:3).

Justin's next several references to the covenant are rather isolated. In Dial. 14 he returns to Isaiah 55:3-13 (LXX) while defending his spiritualized views of the OT rituals, appealing to the prophecy concerning "an everlasting covenant" as support for the new Christian program of piety. He quotes Psalm 49 (LXX), in which *διαθήκην* occurs twice (vv. 5,16), in Dial. 22 as he explains his view to Trypho that OT Sabbaths were instituted as a punishment for Israel's sins.

Justin provides no commentary on the significance of the passage for his argument, but we may note that Clement had already appealed to this Psalm in his exhortations to Christians (1 Clem. 35:7-12, quoting Psalm 49:16-23 [LXX]) to follow the way of truth.

In Dial. 24, after hinting that a foreshadowing of Christ's day of resurrection and the Christian day of worship could be found in the OT command of eighth-day circumcision, Justin again links law and covenant. The blood of circumcision is now obsolete because *ἄλλη διαθήκη τὰ νῦν, καὶ ἄλλος ἐξῆλθεν ἐκ Σιών νόμος.*²⁶⁶ It is interesting that Justin says here that the purpose of "the circumcision of Christ" is *ἵνα γένηται ἔθνος δίκαιον, λαὸς φυλάσσων πίστιν, ἀντιλαμβανόμενος ἀληθείας, καὶ φυλάσσων εἰρήνην.*²⁶⁷ Clearly, there remains a mutuality in the new covenant administration.

Justin appeals to Isaiah 42:6,7 (*ἔδωκά σε εἰς διαθήκην γένους, εἰς φῶς ἐθνῶν*) in Dial. 26, as proof that the Gentiles will share in the inheritance of the patriarchs, prophets, and just men descended from Jacob. Here again Justin manages to hold together his view that Christians worship the same God as did Israel and will receive the same inheritance (*τὴν ἁγίαν τοῦ Θεοῦ κληρονομίαν*), but that there is now a different (new) covenant. Again the identification of Christ with the covenant (cf., Dial. 65) and the connection of the covenant with the inheritance are conspicuous.

In Dial. 34, immediately prior to a quotation from Psalm 72 that

²⁶⁶ "there is now another covenant, and another law has gone forth from Zion," trans. Roberts and Donaldson, ANCL 1:206.

²⁶⁷ "that they may be a righteous nation, a people keeping faith, holding to the truth, and maintaining peace," ANCL 1:206.

Justin says is fulfilled in Christ (rather than Solomon), Justin insists that the phrase ὁ νόμος τοῦ κυρίου ἁμωμος (Ps. 18:8 [LXX]) does not refer to the law of Moses but to the "new law and new covenant" (καινὸν νόμον καὶ καινὴν διαθήκην διαθήσεσθαι) that God had promised to establish. Justin later unambiguously declares Christ to be "the everlasting law and everlasting covenant" in whom the rituals of Abraham and Moses have come to an end (Dial. 43), then subsequently provides (Dial. 44-45) a categorization of the OT law that anticipates the later moral, civil, ceremonial distinction.²⁶⁸ Christ is once again recognized as the new covenant (καινὴ Διαθήκη), in Dial. 51.

Justin's twentieth usage of διαθήκη (Dial. 65) is drawn again (see Dial. 26) from Isaiah 42:6, "I have given you as a covenant of the people, as a light of the Gentiles" in his attempt to show Trypho that God had ordained to give Christ His glory. The word διαθήκη occurs three times in a connected argument in Dial. 67. Once again, Justin is endeavoring to compel Trypho to admit that the OT Scriptures clearly look forward to the inauguration of a new covenant. Justin asks, "Did not the Scriptures foretell that God promised to establish a new covenant (καινὴν Διαθήκην διαθήσεσθαι ὁ Θεὸς ἐπήγγελλται)?" Having elicited an affirmative response from Trypho, Justin then asks if the old covenant (Παλαιὰ Διαθήκη) was one of fear and trembling. Again Trypho agrees. Justin follows up by asserting (in allusion to Jeremiah, and seemingly Hebrews) that God promised another covenant (ἐτέραν διαθήκην) not like the old one. This is Justin's only use of "old covenant," and

²⁶⁸ Ferguson notes this in "The Covenant Idea," 141; see also T. Stylianopoulos, Justin Martyr and the Mosaic Law (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1975), 104ff and 116ff.

thus provides a unique example of Justin's bi-covenantal structuring of redemptive history.

Dial. 74 includes a quote from Deuteronomy 31:16 (LXX) that contains reference to the people's breaking of the covenant, and Dial. 118 evidences the nexus between Christ and the covenant in Justin's theology when he equates "the new and eternal covenant" with Christ (τῆς καινῆς καὶ αἰωνίου Διαθήκης, τουτέστι τοῦ Χριστοῦ). These passages lead up to the third connected treatment of the covenant in Justin (Dial. 122-123, cf., 10-12 and 67).

These chapters constitute the second important (see 10-12) sustained presentation of covenant thought²⁶⁹ in Justin and begin with his third appeal to Isaiah 42:6, "I will give you as a covenant of the people." Justin is responding to the Jewish interpretation of the passage as referring to the law and proselytes. He argues that if the law were able to enlighten the nations, there would have been no need for a new covenant. Furthermore, Justin says, since God has announced in the Jewish Scriptures that He would send a new covenant and an everlasting law and commandment, He must not be referring to the old law and Jewish converts but to Christ and the Gentiles. In confirmation of his view, he cites Isaiah 49:8 (LXX) "I have given you as a covenant of the people (ἔδωκά σε εἰς διαθήκην ἐθνῶν . . . καὶ κληρονομίαν κληρονομῆται ἐρήμους)" [cf., Dial. 26, and Is. 42:6,7 (LXX)]. Note also the connection of the covenant idea and inheritance in the quotation (and subsequent context), which may indicate an alternative source for early Christian thought concerning the correlation of διαθήκη and inheritance

²⁶⁹ Διαθήκη occurs seven times in the section.

other than hellenistic testamentary ideas.

Justin continues by identifying Christ's inheritance as the nations, and the covenant as Christ (Τίς ἡ διαθήκη τοῦ Θεοῦ; οὐχ ὁ Χριστός;). He goes on to say again that proselytes have no need of a (new) covenant, since they were provided for under the law. Justin concludes this passage with a bitter diatribe against the Jews, in the midst of which he charges them with being incompetent to know ἡ διαθήκη Κυρίου πιστήν and asserts (in answer to the question: "Are you Israel?") that Christians are the true sons of God, along with Israel, Judah, Joseph, and David. Ferguson observes:

These passages show that the "people" and "relationships" were still important aspects of the covenant for Justin despite his frequent identification of covenant with law. The covenant which was Christ was for the "true spiritual Israel" (11:5). This association of covenant with Christ also implied the continued association of covenant with God's promises.²⁷⁰

The final instance of covenant in Justin is found in a quotation in Dial. 126. Here Justin appeals to Exodus 6:4, "I established my covenant with them," relying on his linkage between the covenant and Christ to provide him with another OT proof of Christ's divinity.

Summary and Conclusion

It will perhaps be useful for us to summarize here our findings in this survey of the covenant concept in the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists in preparation for our study of the covenant idea in their successors. First, Clement and Barnabas employ the covenant in the context of moral exhortation (see, e.g., 1 Clem. 15.4 and 35.7; Barn. 4.6-8). Clement in particular stresses the consequences of Christian disobedience and the attendant responsibilities in the covenant

²⁷⁰ "The Covenant Idea," 141-142.

relationship. Barnabas also uses the story of Israel's loss of the covenant as a warning to Christians (Barn. 4.9,14). While Justin's accent on mutuality is less pronounced than Barnabas' or Clement's, he nevertheless recognizes the bilateral aspects of the covenant.

Second, according to Barnabas, Israel lost the covenant at the start through disobedience (Barn. 4.6,8) and never understood it rightly (i.e., allegorically, see Barn. 7-12), whereas Justin affirms the historical reality, reception, and function of the old covenant. He simply teaches that it has now been superseded in Christ.

Third, both Barnabas and Justin connect law and covenant closely and view Jesus as the covenant, via Isaiah 42:6-7 (Barn. 14.7 and Dial. 26). However, for Barnabas Jesus is the covenant, for Justin He is the *new* covenant.

Fourth, and following on the last point, for Barnabas there is only one covenant (he never speaks of a new covenant), and Christians are the only recipients of it (Barn. 13.1,6). For Justin there is an old and a new covenant, and Christians are the recipients of the new, as Israel was of the old (Dial. 11-12).

Fifth, both Barnabas and Justin relate the covenant idea to inheritance (Barn. 13.6;14.5; Dial. 122). This does not necessarily mean they view the *διαθήκη* to be testamentary. It may well simply reflect themes they have lifted from Isaiah (see, e.g., Isaiah 49:8) in their Christological exegesis.

Sixth, in Barnabas, Israel is "the people," though he sometimes qualifies this appellation (e.g., "the first people" or "those people," Barn. 13.1). For Justin, the church is fulfillment of OT prophecy concerning the salvation of the Gentiles and is the true spiritual

Israel (Dial. 11).

Seventh, Barnabas links the covenant idea with God's redemptive plan, forgiveness, the person of Christ, Jesus' suffering, and our receipt of the inheritance (Barn. 14.4-7). Clement employs the covenant as an example for Christians to follow or rather, not to follow (1 Clem. 15,35). Justin links the covenant with Christ (virtually equating the new covenant with Christ), the law, the people of God, God's promises, and the Gentiles (Dial. 122,11,24).

Eighth, without denying the influence of NT interpretive patterns,²⁷¹ we may note that Barnabas', Justin's and Clement's covenant thought appeals to OT, rather than NT, covenant passages for support of their respective discussions.²⁷² This is a hallmark of second-century *demonstratio evangelica*.

Ninth, the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants are mentioned or alluded to in writings of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists (Barn. 4.6-8; Dial. 11,12,24). However, neither an Adamic nor a Noahic covenant is cited.

Tenth, variations in covenant thought are evident in the second-century theologians. Indeed, Ferguson identifies seven contemporary

²⁷¹ Daniélou also finds traces of the influence of apocalyptic Judaism on Barnabas' and Justin's thought (e.g., "the personal identification of the Son of God with the Law and the Covenant"), Theology of Jewish Christianity, 165.

²⁷² On Justin's use of *testimonia* see R.M. Grant, Greek Apologists of the Second Century (London: SCM, 1988), 58; Grant observes "Generally speaking, [Justin] quotes testimonies in Apology 32-54 and Septuagint texts in the Dialogue"; Daniélou adds "Justin was not content to derive his quotations purely from the ready-made anthologies of *testimonia*, but referred to the actual text of Scripture...", Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture, 213; Daniélou cites Dialogue as "a major document in the expansion of the stock of *testimonia*," *ibid*.

²⁷³ "Justin," 398-402. In this article, Ferguson surveys seven varieties of covenant thought in the second century, identifying Justin's as the version that later came to be predominant (as taken up and modified by Irenaeus). The following is a synopsis of his review of competing solutions to the question of the Christian attitude toward the Jewish Scriptures and the Jewish heritage of the church: (1) *Justin, Martyr* – a. taught that covenant meant disposition (not testament); b. was primarily concerned with the questions, "Who are God's people?;" c. commonly associated "law" and "new" with "covenant;" d. in his history-of-salvation view taught that "the covenant with Israel at Sinai was replaced with another covenant inaugurated by Jesus" (Ferguson, 396); e. affirmed one and same God of Israel and Christians; f. taught that Christians are not led to God through Moses or the law; g. viewed the final law and covenant as ethnically universal; h. asserted that Christ *is* the new law and new covenant; i. deemed Christians to be the true Spiritual Israel; j. maintained the New covenant accomplished the purpose of the old; k. identified a number of LXX passages as significant for Christian covenant thought (e.g., Is. 51:4; Jer. 38:31; Is. 55:3; cf., Is. 43:6); l. argued for the identification of the New covenant with Christ via Is. 42:6 (LXX); m. taught that the New covenant replaced the Mosaic covenant; n. viewed the New covenant to be everlasting; o. held that the Church fulfills the OT Gentile passages; 2) *Barnabas* – a. distinguished between covenant and law; b. saw the covenant as still binding, but for Christians not Jews; c. taught that the Jews misunderstood the law and lost the covenant by disobedience; d. did not speak of a new covenant, only new people; e. associated covenant with the idea of inheritance, and hence probably had a testamentary understanding of διαθήκη; f. argued that Christians had superseded the Jews as God's people; 3) *Marcion* – a. rejected the Jewish heritage of the church; b. viewed OT as a Jewish book; c. attempted a radical separation of law and gospel; d. argued for two dispensations (fundamentally distinct); e. taught that Christians and Israel worshipped different gods; f. Ferguson calls Barnabas' and Marcion's resolutions "all or nothing approaches;" 4) *Ptolemy* – a. suggested that the NT attributes part of Pentateuch to God, part to Moses, and part to elders; b. believed that God wrote the Ten commandments, and that they were perfected by Jesus; c. said OT civil legislation had been abolished by Jesus, being foreign to His nature; d. taught that OT ceremonial laws were transformed from material to spiritual in the new covenant; 5) *Ebionites* – a. attempted to be both Jews and Christians; b. saw (some) OT ritual law as binding on Gentile converts; c. posited a distinction in the OT Scriptures (false pericopes) and hence could maintain loyalty to Moses while rejecting certain portions of the law (sacrifices, monarchy, false prophecy); d. maintained that Moses and Jesus taught the same things; 6) *Didascalia* – a. viewed moral law (Ten commandments) as eternal; b. taught that ceremonial law (second law) was temporary; c. considered Sabbath as part of the deuterosis; 7) *Irenaeus* – a. taught that one and the same God administered His saving plan through successive covenants; b. did not have the same anti-Jewish concerns as Justin; c. built on Justin's distinction between dispensations of God, to explain differences between old and new covenant; d. acknowledged each covenant

Finally, in response to the assertion of Paul van Buren at the beginning of this section, our examination of the occurrences of covenant thought in the Fathers and Apologists reveals two fallacies in his assessment. First, it is apparent (at least in Clement, Barnabas, and Justin) that covenant is often used in the context of exhortation to moral responsibility and, hence, clearly retains its Hebraic sense of mutuality. Now the early church had no interest in denying the grace of God, but to allege that in their covenant conception "the focus was almost exclusively on the unmerited gift of divine favor" is to ignore the weight of evidence.²⁷⁴ Second, though the early Christian writers did indeed claim "to have the correct insights [into the Jewish Scriptures] and to be the true heirs of the covenant promises,"²⁷⁵ there is good reason to believe that their covenant thought was as much influenced by the OT and apocalyptic Judaism, as it was by the outlook

to be historical and valid in its own time; e. taught that the covenants find their consummation in Christ; f. explained the similarities in covenants by noting that the same God arranged them all; g. identified several covenants, but most commonly two; h. made the (later) common connection between Moses and law, Jesus and gospel; i. principle discussion of covenants is found in AH 4.32-34; j. said there were two covenants for two peoples, but only one God; k. with the illustration of the returning king, explained that Jesus is the new thing about the new covenant; l. taught two successive covenants, one for Jews, the other for all; m. maintained that both covenants were adapted by God to level of human maturity.

²⁷⁴ This is corroborated by reference to T.F. Torrance's study, The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers, the fundamental thesis of which is that grace was conceptually separated from the person of Jesus Christ and thus obscured in the theology of the earliest Christian writers. Even if we part company with some of Torrance's conclusions, the evidence he accumulates definitively contradicts van Buren's claim. Additionally, we may note that Philo's διαθήκη thought is much more explicitly unilateral and gracious than any of his NT contemporaries or the early second-century Christian writers. See also C.M. Nielsen, "Clement of Rome and Moralism," CH 31(1962):132-150, for a more complimentary estimate of Clement's theology and critical interaction with Torrance.

²⁷⁵ H.C. Kee, Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism, 124.

of the NT writings. Indeed, Daniélou commented of Justin and Barnabas that some of their "speculations on the Bible [took] as their starting-point the concepts of post-biblical Judaism,"²⁷⁶ and W.H.C. Frend has even more forcefully asserted:

In [Celsus', ca. 175] day the thought-world of Christianity still belonged largely to Judaism. It was the Jewish concept of God, of creation, of history and morality that the Christian accepted on Baptism, and the Jewish arguments against paganism that he adopted in his defence of his new faith.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ Daniélou, Theology of Jewish Christianity, 165.

²⁷⁷ "OT in the Age of Greek Apologists," 130.

PART I:

**ASIA MINOR:
COVENANT, PASSOVER,
AND REDEMPTIVE HISTORY**

Chapter 1

MELITO OF SARDIS: A New Covenant Exposition of an Old Covenant Text

Melito of Sardis, as his predecessors generally, did not employ the word "covenant" in writings directed to the church. His homily *On the Passover*, however, offered an original illustration to explain the relationship between the Jewish scriptures and Christian faith and practice. This illustration certainly places him in the tradition of the covenant interpretation of salvation-history found in Justin and Irenaeus.

Everett Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 151.

In covenant typology various persons, events and institutions of Old Testament Israel are viewed as prophetic prefigurations of New Testament realities. The Exodus events, Paul writes, were intended as 'types for us' and 'were written down for our admonition upon whom the ends of the ages have come' or, more negatively, the ritual laws from Sinai were only 'a shadow ... of the good things to come.' In a typological correspondence oriented more specifically to Jesus, the royal and the servant Psalms are applied to the Messiah who represents or incorporates in himself God's servant people and who is heir to David's throne. Similarly, the Exodus 'Passover Lamb' is a type of Jesus, who in his sacrificial death brings the covenant of Sinai to its proper goal and end and establishes a new covenant.¹

E. Earle Ellis, *OT in Early Christianity*, 107

Introduction

"Covenant signifies a relationship based on commitment, which includes both promises and obligations, and which has the quality of reliability and durability."² Thus the covenant epitomized the union between God and his people in the OT.³ The metaphor remained significant for both Jews and Christians in the Roman era. Indeed, it has been pointed out that covenant was connected with a complex of ideas in both early

¹ E. E. Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity: Canon and Interpretation in the Light of Modern Research* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 107; see also 77-121 for comments on and review of early Christian patterns of interpretation.

² B. W. Anderson, *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan, eds. (New York: OUP, 1993), 138.

³ "'Covenant' in the Bible is the major metaphor used to describe the relation between God and Israel (the people of God). As such, covenant is the instrument through which one can recognize and appreciate the biblical ideal of religious community." Mendenhall and Herion, *ABD* 1:1179.

rabbinic Judaism and Christianity.⁴ Before commencing our survey of the covenant concept in the later second- and third-century Christian theologians it is advisable (in light of both limited treatment of second-century covenant thought and some scholars' denial of its significance in this era) to offer some estimation of the state of covenant thought in the first half of the second century. Such a précis would surely be useful — providing an outline of the standard components and functions of the covenant idea and reconfirming its presence and import.

Covenant in NT Traditions: Synoptics and Acts

Our review of the NT writings, Apostolic Fathers, and Justin has revealed the contours of Christian covenant thought in the early second century. For instance, in the Synoptics and Acts the Christ event is sometimes seen as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant [esp. Luke 1:72; also Acts 3:25]. As Jeremias observed: "When Luke 1.72 says that God remembers his covenant, this means that he is now fulfilling the eschatological covenant promise."⁵ More specifically, in Acts 3:25, the coming of Christ is seen as the fulfillment of God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham [Gen. 22:18]. In the context of both Luke

⁴ Mendenhall and Herion summarize: "In early rabbinic Judaism, 'covenant' was largely a formal or symbolic dogmatic concept that gave meaning mainly to those already within a group whose base of solidarity and cohesion was primarily ethnic. In early apostolic Christianity, on the other hand, 'covenant' was largely a socially enacted historical reality that accompanied sufficient functional changes in old patterns of behavior so as to rupture old ethnic and political bases of social solidarity and cohesion and to replace these with a larger vision of the human community." They later argue, "As long as biblical scholars remain content to deal with covenant 'ideas' in terms of formal elements and rigidly defined categories, most of the matrix of ideas associated with covenant will remain unnoticed and unappreciated." ABD 1:1201.

⁵ Jeremias, Eucharistic Words, 249.

1:72 and Acts 3:25, the idea of forgiveness of sins is present and understood as part of the fulfillment of the covenantal promise to Abraham.

In the Mark/Matthew cup words, the words of explanation ("my blood of the covenant") allude to the institution of the Mosaic (Sinaitic) covenant in Exodus 24:8, and Jesus' death is understood as a covenant inaugurating sacrifice [Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24],⁶ which provides the atoning basis for a (new) covenant relationship between God and his people.⁷ In Matthew 26:28, the covenantal sacrifice is explicitly said to bring about the forgiveness of sins. In addition to the allusion to Exodus 24:8 that has already been noted, Isaiah 53:12 and/or Jeremiah 31:34b seem to be in the background, thus amalgamating the idea of fulfillment of the (new) covenant with the Isaianic Servant concept.⁸ In any case, the connection here between the covenant idea

⁶ "There can be little question that the words of institution, as they have been preserved in the gospel eucharistic accounts, explicitly associate Jesus' death with a sacrifice." Moo, Passion Narratives, 310.

⁷ "The sacrifice which inaugurated the covenant in the wilderness was intended to atone for the sins of the people so that they might then belong to God in a covenant relationship. This point has been emphasised by R. Pesch, who has drawn attention to the way in which the Targum on Exodus 24:7f stresses the atoning effect of the blood which was thrown against the altar by Moses. The sacrifice was in effect the means authorised by God for cleansing the people from their sins. By analogy, therefore, Jesus here interprets his own death as a substitutionary sacrifice for the sins of the people that they may become partakers in the new covenant." Marshall, Last Supper, 92.

⁸ Marshall says: "The concepts of the covenant and of the suffering Servant who bears the sins of the many fit in with one another and form a unified whole (cf. Is. 42:6; 49:8). There is a fundamental unity between them which means that they belong together theologically and neither of them need be regarded as a secondary development of an originally simpler interpretation of the death of Jesus." Last Supper, 92.

and forgiveness of sin is unambiguous.⁹ The Mark/Matthew cup-word also manifests this connection with Isaiah 53:12 in the phrase "poured out for many." This provides further evidence for the Synoptists' relating of the covenant and suffering servant ideas.

The Lucan cup-word explicitly identifies the cup with the new covenant [Luke 22:20]. It is possible to argue then that it looks back to Jeremiah 31:31-34 and that Luke understands Jesus' death as inaugurating the new covenant spoken of by Jeremiah.¹⁰ The presence of an allusion to Jeremiah 31:31-34 in the Lucan cup-word does not, however, *ipso facto* rule out the possibility that it may also (with the Mark/Matthew form) recall Exodus 24:8, and it is not implausible to argue that Luke elsewhere explains the death of Christ in terms of the Exodus event [Luke 9:31].

In both the Mark/Matthew and the Paul/Luke traditions, the eucharistic words and their context may suggest that Jesus was understood as the paschal lamb.¹¹ If this is so, then for the Synoptists a connection is established between the significance of the

⁹ Moo comments: "Specifically, two types of sacrifice seem to be referred to in the Last Supper accounts: the covenant sacrifice and the expiatory sacrifice (comprising the $\alpha\lambda\theta\epsilon\iota\alpha$ and the $\pi\alpha\sigma\chi\alpha$). The latter is certainly not as prominent as the former, but the phrase $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\phi\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu\ \alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\iota\omega\acute{\nu}$ in Matthew is probably to be related to this type of sacrifice." Passion Narratives, 310-311.

¹⁰ "There is no doubt, however, that the New Testament writers saw the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy in the new covenant which Jesus claimed to establish by his sacrificial death. Here in this saying at the Last Supper we have the basis for their conviction that they lived in the era of the new covenant. The death of Jesus represents God's sovereign disposition of grace to the people." Marshall, Last Supper, 93.

¹¹ See Marshall, Last Supper, 148.

Passover and the Last Supper.¹² That is, as the Passover recalls that the blood of the slaughtered lambs established the covenant and delivered Israel from destruction, so also the Supper signifies that Jesus' sacrificial death as the paschal lamb brings the ultimate Passover, redemption from sin in the establishment of the new covenant.¹³ Hence, it may be argued that in the eucharistic narratives the Synoptic authors see in the Passover (and in the Exodus event in general¹⁴) a pattern for Jesus' work of covenantal deliverance. Nevertheless, paschal imagery is conspicuously absent in the Synoptics outside of the Supper narratives, and "it is in John's Gospel that references to the Passover are most clearly found."¹⁵

The covenant idea is at the heart of the meaning of the cup-word in each of the Synoptics' eucharistic narratives. Covenant terminology is present in the words of interpretation of each.¹⁶ This is indicative of the importance of the covenant idea in the Synoptic writers' understanding of the meaning of Jesus' death. We may also note that in each of the passages in the Synoptics and Acts where *διαθήκη* is

¹² Moo, Passion Narratives, 324-325.

¹³ See, again, Jeremias on Jesus as the "eschatological Passover lamb," Eucharistic Words, 220-226.

¹⁴ Marsh says, "There are so many indications that both Jesus and the Evangelists interpreted his life and ministry in terms of the Exodus that it is difficult to give an adequate treatment in a small space." The Fulness of Time (London: Nisbet, 1952), 84-90. See also J. Daniélou, From Shadows to Reality (London: Burns and Oates, 1960), 153-166; and Moss, "Covenant Conception," 82-83.

¹⁵ See Moo, Passion Narratives, 312-324.

¹⁶ Jeremias says: "The possibility that Jesus spoke of the covenant at the Last Supper cannot be disputed." Eucharistic Words, 195; Marshall adds: "Since all our sources contain the covenant idea and since there is no good reason for denying that Jesus could have used it, we are justified in regarding it as an integral part of the saying." Last Supper, 91.

employed, the context argues for understanding διαθήκη as "covenant" and there are no compelling contextual reasons for rendering it as "testament."

Pauline Literature

When we turn to the Pauline Corpus we find both repetition and augmentation of these patterns. In 2 Corinthians, Paul sees his ministry as based upon the realization of the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah.¹⁷ As Moses was the messenger of a covenant characterized by the law, so Paul is the messenger of a (new) covenant characterized by the Spirit [1 Cor. 3:6,12,13]. According to Paul, this new covenant was established by the death of Christ [1 Cor. 11:25]. That is, Jesus in his sacrificial death effected the new covenant relationship and its attendant blessings, which had been predicted by Jeremiah.¹⁸ Elsewhere, Paul can also speak of Christ's death in paschal terms [1 Cor. 5:7].

The new covenant is, for Paul, the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant [Gal. 4:24]. Paul makes this clear in his identification of Christ as Abraham's "seed" to whom the promises were given [Gal.

¹⁷ See Lane, "Covenant," 8-10.

¹⁸ "This New Covenant is grounded in the blood shed by Christ on the Cross, in which the congregation receives a share in the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:25). And the evidence that this New Covenant has taken effect and that the church of Christ may understand itself in terms of it is the spiritual renewal of the church itself, which he terms an epistle of Christ, prepared by his labor as a minister of the New Covenant, written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tables of stone but on tables of flesh in the hearts (2 Cor. 3:3). In all these qualifications the apostle is clearly reflecting on that which had been promised in prophecy concerning the New Covenant (Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 11:19; 36:26)." Ridderbos, Paul, 336.

3:16].¹⁹ This can also be seen from Paul's view of the nature of the Abrahamic blessing and the ministry of the new covenant. The Abrahamic covenant entailed a blessing for the Gentiles and that blessing, according to Paul, is the gift of the Spirit [Gal. 3:14]. The new covenant ministry, the ministry of the Spirit, is based on the realization of the promise of the Spirit [2 Cor 3:5,6,8; also cf. 3:3; Ezek. 36:26-28; and Jer. 31:33].

Paul uses the covenant idea to provide structure for his presentation of redemptive history.²⁰ He identifies three covenants, points of epochal significance in God's dealings with humankind, the Abrahamic [Gal. 3:17], Mosaic [Gal. 4:24] and new [2 Cor 3:6]. These covenants, in turn, indicate different economies in salvation history. Paul does not designate these economies as "covenants" but refers to them by implication (e.g., "before faith came" for "Mosaic economy" [Gal. 3:23] and "now that faith has come" for "Christian economy" [Gal.3:25]).²¹ When Paul employs the term "old covenant" in 2 Cor.

¹⁹ Moss says: "Paul regarded Christ as the fulfiller of the Abrahamic covenant. In a sense, this great covenant overarches history and finally achieves realization in the coming of the one who was the 'offspring' of Abraham." "Covenant Conception," 145.

²⁰ Moss suggests that "in Gal. 3 we find Paul's attempt to work out history in covenant terms" and concludes his discussion by asserting that "Paul interprets redemptive history in covenant terms, and more specifically in terms of the covenant with Abraham." "Covenant Conception," 142,144. See also Liao, "Place of Covenant in Paul," who says: "For Paul, the significance of the history of salvation is unfolded in the covenant relationship of God with His people," 181. Our argument, however, is not that Paul structures his redemptive history *exclusively* via the covenant concept.

²¹ Bruce comments: "The 'coming of faith'--the 'faith in Jesus Christ' just mentioned (in other words, the gospel)--may be understood both on the plane of salvation-history and in the personal experience of believers. On the plane of salvation-history the coming of faith coincides with the appearance of Christ...." Galatians, 181. Burton says: "The coming of faith is a historic event, identical with the giving of the gospel (see 4:4,5 Rom. 1:16,17, not an experience of

3:14, he means the Torah. When he speaks of "new covenant" in 2 Cor. 3:6, he seems to mean the new covenant established by Christ rather than the redemptive economy that resulted from Christ's establishment of the new covenant.

For Paul, the fundamental dividing-point of salvation history is the incarnation of Christ; hence there are two redemptive economies (which we designate for convenience as the old economy and the economy of the new covenant).²² The former was temporary, spanning the time before and terminating with Christ [Gal. 3:25; 2 Cor. 3:11]. The new covenant economy is permanent and was initiated in Christ [2 Cor. 3:11; 1 Cor. 11:25]. Within redemptive history in the old economy, Paul sees a distinction between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant [Gal. 3:16-18].²³ The Abrahamic covenant is characterized by promise, while the Mosaic covenant is characterized by law.

Paul stresses discontinuity when comparing the old (Mosaic)

successive individuals." Galatians, 201-202.

²² "Paul contrasts the whole of the historical period before the coming of Christ with the age of the new covenant. The period 'before faith came' contrasts drastically with the time in which 'faith has come' (Gal. 3:23,25). The coming of Christ, and his consequent position as object of faith, has altered the entire course of history. God's dealings with men cannot return to the old patterns once the Christ has come." Robertson, Christ of the Covenants, 58.

²³ Kline says: "the unquestionable fact emerges in Galatians 3 that Paul saw in the Old Testament alongside the covenant of promise another covenant which was so far from being an administration of promise as to raise the urgent question whether it did not abrogate the promise. In the Galatians 3 passage Paul calls only the revelation of promise by the name 'covenant.' It would, however, be indefensible to assume that Paul repudiated the propriety of the terminology of the Old Testament according to which that administration of law which Paul here distinguishes so sharply from the covenant of promise was itself known as a 'covenant.' Moreover, in the following chapter of Galatians Paul himself applies the designation 'covenant' to the Sinaitic administration." Kline, By Oath Consigned, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 24-25.

economy with the new covenant economy [2 Cor. 3:6-11; Gal. 3:16-18,24-25; 4:21-26].²⁴ The old economy is one characterized by law, death, condemnation, and fading glory, whereas the new economy is superior, being characterized by the Spirit, life, righteousness, and unfading glory. This does not mean, however, that Paul's view of the relation between God's redemptive economies with Israel and the Church is essentially one of discontinuity, because he stresses continuity when relating the Abrahamic covenant to the new covenant. This continuity is expressed in the principle of promise (covenantal promise to be precise) and fulfillment.²⁵

Paul, in some passages, tends to stress the sovereign disposition of the covenant [e.g., Rom. 11:27; Gal. 3:17],²⁶ and links the covenant idea to the forgiveness of sins [Rom. 11:27].²⁷ He also simultaneously affirms the historical election of Israel [Rom. 9:4; 11:5,26-27] and asserts that the promise of Abraham is not to his descendants according to the flesh but to the children of promise [Gal. 3:26-29; 4:28-29;

²⁴ Vos says: "Paul, while recognizing the greatness [of the Mosaic economy], dwells on its limitations, as compared with the glory of his own ministration under the New Diatheke, in 2 Cor. 3." Biblical Theology, 105.

²⁵ Bruce says: "The gospel is the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham that in him and his offspring all nations would be blessed." Galatians, 219. For a discussion of the relation of the covenant idea to the promise and fulfillment motif in Paul, see Liao "Place of the Covenant in Paul," 199-216.

²⁶ However, Paul can apply the term διαθήκη to a relationship which he recognizes to be distinctly two-sided (see Gal. 4:24). Kline observes of this passage that "in the vocabulary of Paul the Sinaitic administration as such, that is, the administration of law, bondage, condemnation, and death (cf. II Cor. 3:6ff.) was a 'covenant.'" By Oath Consigned, 25.

²⁷ See Morris, Apostolic Preaching, 102-103.

Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6-8].²⁸ We also noted that Paul's usage of διαθήκη suggests that he means "covenant"²⁹ not "testament," with the possible exception of Galatians 3:15.³⁰

Hebrews

Hebrews provided the single richest source of data for the study of NT covenant thought. The author of Hebrews sees the priestly work of Christ as the fulfillment of Jeremiah's new covenant [8:6-13] and, less prominently, the Abrahamic promise [6:13-20].³¹ The sacrificial death of Christ establishes the new covenant [9:15]. As the blood of the covenant sprinkled at Sinai inaugurated the first covenant, so Christ's blood shed at Calvary inaugurated a new covenant. Christ also functions as the mediator of the new covenant [8:6; 9:15; 12:24], as did Moses and the high priests under the old administration [7:26-28; 9:7,18,19]. This new covenant is superior to the first (Mosaic) covenant because whereas the first was unable to effect a complete cleansing of the conscience [9:9], the new covenant brings realization of the forgiveness of sins [10:14,18]. Hence, in Hebrews, the (new) covenant idea is closely connected with the forgiveness of sins. Furthermore,

²⁸ Paul is able to argue for continuity between ethnic Israel and the Church by appealing to the principle of the remnant [Rom. 9-11]. See Liao, "Place of Covenant in Paul," 188-195,198; and Ridderbos, Paul, 327-261.

²⁹ Liao observes that Paul "inherits the Old Testament concept that 'covenant' is a relational term, defining the relationship between God and His people. Paul sees in the New Covenant, inaugurated by the blood of Christ, the perfect fulfillment of this relationship." "Place of Covenant in Paul," 113.

³⁰ See Liao's extensive survey of this issue, "Place of Covenant in Paul," 62-69; he favors the translation "testament" in Gal. 3:15.

³¹ See Kaiser, "Old Promise and New Covenant: Jeremiah 31:31-34," Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society 15 (1972): 21-23.

while the first covenant was temporary, the new covenant is permanent. In it "the whole religious process comes to rest."³² In both of these aspects of the new covenant the author stresses its discontinuity with the old order. Nevertheless, there is continuity between the first and second covenants. In both economies, the same God has revealed himself [1:1,2] (though the latter revelation is ultimate) and in both, drawing near to God is the aim of the priesthood and covenant.³³ "I will be your God and you will be my people" is the motto of both covenants, though its fulness is only realized in the new priesthood and covenant.

Following on this, the idea of covenant as a relationship is manifest in Hebrews. The mutually-binding character of the covenant is illustrated on both the divine and human sides. God binds himself by oath to covenant faithfulness in establishing Christ's priesthood [7:21-22,25]. Those who repudiate the covenant relationship into which they have been brought by virtue of Christ's blood are liable to the full force of the covenantal curse [10:29].

Again, as elsewhere in the NT traditions, every occurrence of διαθήκη in Hebrews can be reasonably rendered as "covenant," though it is possible to translate it as "testament" in 9:16,17. Whatever the case there, the idea of "covenant" is clearly dominant in the author's general usage of διαθήκη.³⁴ Indeed, the importance of the covenant idea in the author's presentation of redemptive history is readily apparent.

³² Vos, "Epistle of the Diatheke," in Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation, 183.

³³ Vos says: "The priesthood fulfills itself in being and bringing near to God, and the purpose of the covenant is precisely the same. Both look to communion with God. There is no risk in affirming that the author was clearly conscious of this parallelism." "Epistle of the Diatheke," 220-221.

³⁴ See Mendenhall, IDB 1:723.

The first (Mosaic) covenant and the second (new) covenant mark epochs in salvation history. The new covenant abrogates the Mosaic covenant, but it does so by fulfilling it. In this way he asserts both the continuity and discontinuity of the divine plan. As Vos has said: "More than any other New Testament document Hebrews develops what might be called a philosophy of the history of revelation."³⁵

Johannine Writings

The covenant concept is not absent from the Johannine literature.³⁶ Not only the paschal teaching and covenantal imagery of the divine presence (e.g., John 1:14; Rev. 11:19; 21:3), but also the Johannine ecclesiology reveals covenantal influence.³⁷ The testament idea is apparently deployed in Revelation 5:1-4 (though not in connection with *διαθήκη*), but covenant thought is clearly dominant and covenantal mutuality is highlighted throughout the Johannine writings. Pryor astutely observes, "It is in the area of obligations, which result from the community's status as covenant people, that the covenant ideas in John are most visible."³⁸

³⁵ "Epistle of the Diatheke," 192.

³⁶ H. A. A. Kennedy noted this long ago in his study "The Covenant-Concept in the First Epistle of John," *EI* 28 (1916-17):23-26; more recently the covenant motif in the Gospel of John has been highlighted by J. W. Pryor in John: Evangelist of the Covenant People - The Narrative and Themes of the Fourth Gospel (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 157-180.

³⁷ As Pryor has noted, "The accumulated evidence of the gospel leads to the conclusion that John looks upon the church(es) as the true, eschatological people of God gathered by its covenant Lord, Jesus." John, 157.

³⁸ Pryor, John, 161.

Covenant in Extra-NT Traditions: Josephus and Philo

NT era contemporaries Flavius Josephus (ca. 35–100) and Philo Judaeus (ca. 20 BCE–50 CE) provide interesting material for contrast with the NT data and the usages of *διαθήκη* in the post-apostolic era. Josephus employs *διαθήκη* or its variants some 39 times in Antiquitates Judaicae [AJ] and De Bello Judaico [BJ]. Almost invariably these are references to Herod's will³⁹ and hence have little to offer in the way of theological significance. But Josephus also uses *συνθήκη* 39 times, and though in most of those instances he is speaking of non-biblical events in which agreements, conditions or contracts,⁴⁰ or articles of surrender⁴¹ are made, yet he begins AJ with an interesting set of references to biblical covenants. In AJ 4.118, Josephus calls the agreement between Balaam and Balak (Num. 22) a *συνθήκη*, and in 5.54–55 identifies the covenant established between Israel and the Gibeonites as a *συνθήκη* (Josh. 9). Again, in AJ 6.230,236,252–253 and 7.111, the covenant between David and Jonathan is classified as a *συνθήκη* (1 Sam. 18), as is David's peace treaty with Abner (AJ 7.25; 2 Sam. 3). Rehoboam's (broken) settlement with Shishak (cf. 2 Chron. 12) and Ahab's with Benhadad (1 Kings 20) are cited as *συνθήκαι* respectively in AJ 8.258 and 8.388. Finally, the macabre arrangement between two

³⁹ Josephus discusses the intrigues surrounding Herod's succession in detail in AJ 17–18 and BJ 1–2, and so comes back to the subject of Herod's testament often (see, e.g., AJ 17.53,78,146,188,195,202,224,226,228,238,244,246,249,321,322, and 18.156; BJ 1.451,573,588,600,625,646,664,668,669, and 2.3,20,21,31,35,38,98,99).

⁴⁰ See, e.g., AJ 2.253, 13.392, 15.173, 16.118,270,346,351,390, 17.111, 18.110–111, and BJ 1.104,116,182,586, 2.397,602,640, 4.112,382, 6.320, 7.221.

⁴¹ See BJ 2.452–453.

starving mothers in 2 Kings 6:28–29, Josephus reports as a *συνθήκη* (AJ 9.65–66).

At least two things about Josephus' usage are worthy of mention. First, we may note that *διαθήκη* never means covenant for him, but rather testament.⁴² Second, pacts designated as *ברית* in OT narratives are uniformly referred to as *συνθήκη* by Josephus. Many of these instances are naturally classified as compacts between equals, but certain ones are clearly prominent OT *ברית* types: suzerainty–vassal treaty (Josh. 9) and royal grant (AJ 7.111–114; 2 Sam. 9).⁴³ Unfortunately, Josephus uses neither *διαθήκη* nor *συνθήκη* in connection with divine–human covenants, so we do not know what terminology he would have employed and cannot draw further theological inferences from his terminology.

Philo, on the other hand, provides a very different picture. The great majority of his covenant references are connected to biblical divine covenants, and his emphasis on grace (divine blessing or favor) is unmistakable. The term *διαθήκη* appears some 23 times in his writings,⁴⁴ while *συνθήκη* is found only twice,⁴⁵ yet Philo proves to be a far more fruitful source for assessing the theological usage of

⁴² See E. D. Burton, Galatians, 497.

⁴³ See "covenant (religion)" in AAE, online edition (Danbury, CT: Grolier Electronic, 1993), by J. J. M. Roberts.

⁴⁴ We will not review the less significant passages, e.g., Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat 67–68 (which expounds Deut. 33:9, but sheds little light on the meaning of *διαθήκη*), Quis rerum divinarum heres sit 313 (which is interesting for its quotation of Gen. 15:18 — a passage overlooked in early patristic covenant thought— but otherwise uninformative), or De specialibus legibus 2.16 (where *διαθήκη*=oath).

⁴⁵ Philo uses *συνθήκη* in the sense of agreement, in Legatio ad Gaium 37 and, apparently, in the sense of covenant, in De congressu eruditionis gratia 78, where the allegory is drawn from Gen. 16.

covenant terminology than is Josephus. In Legum Allegoriarum 3.85, he refers to God's ratification of his promises to Abraham concerning Isaac, in rough quotation of Gen. 17:19, "I will establish my covenant towards him [Isaac] for an everlasting covenant." Philo's point is to show that God shows favor to some men before they are even born. He returns to the same theme in De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini 56-57, where he says that no one should look to himself as the cause of God's blessing, rather, God's covenant is the source of benediction. God blessed Israel (cf. Deut. 9:4-6) not because of her own righteousness, but because of the nations' wickedness and in order that God might "establish the covenant which he swore to our fathers." Significantly, Philo also says here, "Now by the covenant of God his graces are figuratively meant..." (Sac 57).

Philo's emphasis on the gracious character of the covenant is conspicuous in De mutatione nominum [Mut] and De somniis [Som]. In Mut 51-53⁴⁶ where Philo mentions having written two commentaries *περι*

⁴⁶ The portion of the passage with which we are concerned reads: εὐλόγως οὖν ἔφη "γίνου ἀμεμπτος," μέγα πλεονέκτημα πρὸς εὐδαιμόνα| βίον ὑπολαβῶν εἶναι τὸ ἀναμάρτητον καὶ ἀνυπαίτιον. τῷ δὲ ἡρημένῳ ζῆν τὸν τρόπον τοῦτον καὶ κλῆρον κατὰ διαθήκας ἀπολείψειν ὁμολογεῖ τὸν ἀρμόζοντα δοῦναι μὲν θεῷ, λαβεῖν δὲ σοφῷ. φησὶ γάρ· "θήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου ἀνὰ μέσον ἐμοῦ καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον σοῦ." διθῆκαι δὲ ἐπ' ὠφελείᾳ γράφονται τῶν δωρεᾶς ἀξίων, ὥστε σύμβολον εἶναι διαθήκην χάριτος, ἣν μέσῃν ἔθηκεν ὁ θεὸς ἑατοῦ τε ὀρέγοντος καὶ ἀνθρώπου λαμβάνοντος. ὑπερβολὴ δὲ εὐεργεσίας τοῦτο ἐστὶ, μὴ εἶναι θεοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς μέσον, ὅτι μὴ τὴν παρθένον χάριτα. Philo (Loeb) vol. V (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1968), 166,168. "With good reason did He say, 'Become blameless,' for He holds that freedom from sin and guilt is a great furtherance towards a happy life. And to him who has elected to live in this fashion He promises to leave a covenanted portion such as is fitting for God to give and man to receive, for He says, 'I will set my covenant between Me and between thee' (Gen. xvii.2). Now covenants are drawn up for the benefit of those who are worthy of the gift, and thus a covenant is a symbol of the grace which God has set between Himself Who proffers it and the man who receives. And this is the crowning benefaction, that there is nothing between God and the soul save the virgin grace." Trans. F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Philo (Loeb) V.169.

διαθηκῶν,⁴⁷ he declares ὅστε σύμβολον εἶναι διαθήκην χάριτος and μὴ εἶναι Θεοῦ καὶ ψυχῆς μέσον, ὅτι μὴ τὴν παρθένον χάριτα, though earlier he asserts that the covenant is for those who are worthy (Mut 51).⁴⁸ Furthermore, Philo maintains that God himself is the ultimate expression of the covenant (Mut 58)⁴⁹ and that his covenant with Israel had a universalistic aspect (Mut 263), being intended to produce virtue in all humankind.⁵⁰ The connection between covenant and grace is again evident in Som 223–224, as is the identification of law (νόμος), word (λόγος), justice (δίκαιον), and covenant (διαθήκη)[cf., Som 237].⁵¹

Our review of the covenant idea in early Christian writers such as Clement of Rome, Barnabas, and Justin reveals a more theologically

⁴⁷ "I have dealt with the whole subject of covenants in two treatises, and I willingly pass it over to avoid repetition...." Trans. Colson and Whitaker, Philo (Loeb) V.169.

⁴⁸ The themes of God's gracious bestowal of the covenant and that of the covenant being received by righteous persons, appear in tandem in each covenant passage in Mut and Som.

⁴⁹ "There are very many kinds of covenants, which distribute graces and gifts to those who are worthy to receive them; but the highest kind of covenant of all is *I myself*: for God, having displayed himself as far as it was possible for that being to be displayed who cannot be shown by the words which he has used, adds further, 'And I too, behold my covenant;' the beginning and fountain of all graces is I myself." Trans. C. D. Yonge, The Works of Philo (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 346; see also the introductory comments of Colson and Whitaker, Philo (Loeb) V.131.

⁵⁰ "...I will make my covenant with Israel, that the race of mankind may receive each kind of virtue...." Mut 263, trans. C. D. Yonge, Philo, 363.

⁵¹ "God says that he is about to erect firmly his covenant full of grace (and that means his law and his word) in the soul of the just man as on a solid foundation...." Trans. C. D. Yonge, Philo, 404. "...justice and God's covenant are identical...." Trans. Colson and Whitaker, Philo (Loeb) V.543. "Since then all steadiness, and stability, and the abiding for ever in the same place unchangeably and immovably, is first of all seen in the living God, and next in the word of the living God, which he has called his covenant...." Trans. C. D. Yonge, Philo, 405.

developed usage of the covenant than one finds in Philo, and also (of course) a Christological focus.

The Covenant Idea in Melito of Sardis

The extant fragments of Melito of Sardis reveal noticeable differences from and similarities to the covenant thought of those who went before him. For instance, his discussions of the role of Israel in redemptive history stand in stark contrast with Barnabas' quasi-Gnostic rhetoric, yet Melito's *adversus Judaeos* polemic surpasses that of Ignatius and is as brutal as any of his successors'.⁵² On the other hand, while never employing the term "covenant" in *Περὶ Πάσχα* [PP], he will duplicate current usages of covenant thought in explaining the church's receipt of the blessing of Israel, the Jewish people's loss of the inheritance, and the newness and oldness of the divine economy.

The only surviving passage from Melito's writings in which the word *διαθήκη* occurs is found in a fragment⁵³ preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea: ἀνελθὼν οὖν εἰς τὴν ἀνατολὴν καὶ ἕως τοῦ τόπου γενόμενος ἐνθα ἐκηρύχθη καὶ ἐπράχθη, καὶ ἀκριβῶς μαθὼν τὰ τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία (HE

⁵² Considerable differences are apparent in the various evaluations of Melito's anti-Jewish rhetoric. See e.g., S. G. Wilson, "Melito and Israel" in *Anti-Judaism in Early Christianity*, vol. 2, *Separation and Polemic*, S. G. Wilson, ed. (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1986), 81-102. Wilson notes the opposing treatments of the subject evidenced in the work of E. Werner, "Melito of Sardis: The First Poet of Deicide," *Hebrew University College Annual* (1966):191-210, and S. G. Hall, "Melito in the Light of the Passover Haggadah," *JTS* 22 (1971):29-46. D. P. Efroymson takes up a similar debate (in evaluation of Tertullian) with R. Ruether in his "The Patristic Connection" A. T. Davies, ed., *Anti-Semitism [sic] and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) 98-117.

⁵³ S. G. Hall expresses no doubt as to the authenticity of this fragment (no. 3). See *On Pascha and fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), xxx.

4.26).⁵⁴ Here, Melito designates the older Scriptures as the "books of the Old Covenant," an appellation which would soon after become commonplace in Christian writings, but which (as far as we know) had not heretofore been employed in written reference to the church's Jewish Scriptures.⁵⁵ There is little internal evidence to assist in determining Melito's exact understanding of διαθήκη in the phrase τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης βιβλία.⁵⁶ What is clear is that in Melito's time⁵⁷ the διαθήκη idea was deemed important enough in the church's understanding of redemptive history to serve as a standard designation for her sacred writings.⁵⁸ In fact, not long after this time (ca. 192/3), an anonymous Christian writer applies καινῆς διαθήκης to the newer Christian

⁵⁴ "So, going back to the east and reaching the place where it was proclaimed and done, I got precise information about the books of the Old Covenant," trans. Hall. A. D. Nock and others have disputed the historicity of this claim, but see S. G. Hall, PP, 66-67 [n.10,n.12], and 53 [n.55]. For further argument for the genuineness of the event, see R. Beckwith, The OT Canon of the NT Church (London: SPCK, 1985), 184-185.

⁵⁵ Of course, Paul had referred to the writings of Moses as the "Old Covenant" (2 Corinthians 3:14). J. N. D. Kelly believes that Christian designation of the Scriptures as Old and New Testaments/Covenants can be traced to this usage in Paul; see Early Christian Doctrines, 5th ed., rev. (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 56. W. C. van Unnik rejects Kelly's view, see, "Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη — a Problem in the early history of the Canon," SP 4 (1961):220.

⁵⁶ Does the phrase involve a covenantal (relational), dispositional (administrative), historical (epochal), or testamentary (legal documentary) understanding of διαθήκη? Hall translates "books of the Old Covenant," G. A. Williamson, "the Old Testament books," History of the Church (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), 189; and A. C. McGiffert, "books of the Old Testament," ANCL 1:206 (Second Series).

⁵⁷ This text dates from ca. 170; see van Unnik, "Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη," SP 4 (1961):218.

⁵⁸ Certainly Melito would not have prefixed a label to his list of Jewish Scriptures which would have been unintelligible or unfamiliar to his Christian correspondent Onesimus.

Scriptures.⁵⁹ In light of the instinctive usage of this terminology in the last quarter of the second century, it is safe to assume that the connection between covenant and Scriptures was a conventional one for Christians at least as early as the mid-second century. Even Kinzig, who finds the covenant references in Melito and the anonymous anti-Montanist to be inconclusive as evidence of the use of *διαθήκη* as a title for Scripture, concedes that "it is no doubt correct to assume that there is a close relation between 'New Testament' as a book title and the theology of the time." He furthermore admits that "the development of this type of theology ["the theological concept of God's covenant with his people"] is one of the necessary preconditions for the emergence of the title under discussion."⁶⁰ Whatever the case may be, Melito's PP provides us with testimony to another representative use of covenant thought in this same era.

Melito's Use of Covenant Thought in PP

Ferguson and Kinzig both have concluded that a covenantal history-of-salvation approach was typical of the second-century

⁵⁹ The full phrase is τῷ τῆς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου καινῆς διαθήκης λόγῳ, HE 5.16.3 (which seems to allude to Rev. 22:18-19) the presence of ἐπιδιατάσσεσθαι in the context confirms that *διαθήκη* is here employed in a documentary (perhaps even a testamentary) sense; see the comments of van Unnik in SP 4:217-218. However, note that Ferguson believes this is a reference to "the total message" or "an era" not only a collection of books, "Covenant Idea," 150. In contrast, J. N. D. Kelly argues that Irenaeus is the first to apply *καινή διαθήκη* to the NT Scriptures, Early Christian Doctrines, 56. More recently, W. Kinzig has put forward yet another view, asserting that "the first unequivocal testimonies" to *καινή διαθήκη* being employed to designate the NT "are found around the year 200 in the writings of Clement of Alexandria," see "*Καινή διαθήκη: The Title of the New Testament in the Second and Third Centuries*," JTS n.s. 45.2 (1994):529.

⁶⁰ Kinzig, "*Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT*," 522.

Christian theologians.⁶¹ This is confirmed in Melito's PP, which was produced sometime in the third quarter of the second century (160-170?).⁶² It is an ancient homily, bearing the distinctive marks of Greek rhetoric,⁶³ and commemorating "the whole saving work of Christ as the fulfillment of the ancient Pascha...."⁶⁴

In PP, we find Melito employing a covenant approach to redemptive history not dissimilar to that of Justin Martyr, but without using the term διαθήκη. This is evidenced in three ways: (1) Melito's treatment of continuity and discontinuity in redemptive history; (2) his anti-Jewish polemic; and (3) the possible sacramental significance of PP.

Melito's stress on redemptive historical continuity may be seen in a variety of ways. In the first lines of PP, Melito takes as the starting point of his sermon, Exodus as scripture: Ἡ μὲν γραφή τῆς ἑβραϊκῆς Ἐξόδου ἀνέγνωσται (PP 1). Here we have a parallel with Clement of Rome's exhortation to Christians based on OT covenant texts

⁶¹ Ferguson, "Covenant Idea," 155. Kinzig corroborates Ferguson's claim when he says that Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian and Clement "championed the theology of the covenants," "Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 522. See also his volume Novitas Christiana: Die Idee des Fortschritts in der Alten Kirche (Göttingen, 1994). I have not yet been able to access the latter work myself. Colleagues in Göttingen and Tübingen have helped me by summarizing his conclusions, the most pertinent of which (for this thesis) are included in Kinzig's "Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT."

⁶² Exact dating is perilously dependent on Eusebius' identification of the work Περὶ τοῦ Πάσχα with Melito's Περὶ Πάσχα (HE 4.26.3-4), and the resolution of the difficulties connected with the attendant chronological note. See Hall's comments in PP, xix-xxii. R. J. Daly suggests 165-170 in Origen, Treatise on the Passover and Dialogue with Heraclides (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 7.

⁶³ See A. Wifstrand, "The homily of Melito on the passion," VC 2 (1948):201-223.

⁶⁴ Hall, On Pascha, xxv.

(cf. 1 Cor. 15.4 and 35.7).⁶⁵ Hence, OT historical events are seen to relate directly to God's dealings with the church (PP 40).

Furthermore, though the Pascha is interpreted as a "Christian event," the historical reality of God's relationship with his people Israel is neither denied nor down-played (as is the case with Barnabas). It is Israel who is marked (PP 16) and guarded (PP 30-31) in the Pascha. Israel is "the people" and Egypt is the uninitiated enemy (PP 16). Melito freely asserts that God chose and guided Israel "from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Isaac and Jacob and the twelve patriarchs" (PP 83).⁶⁶ In contrast to Barnabas who contends that Israel lost the covenant from the start, in the shadow of Sinai (Barn. 4.6,8), Melito insists that Israel received real divine benefits from God throughout her history: the manna, the inheritance of the land, the law, the prophets, and kings (PP 85).

Melito's typological exegesis also approximates the covenant patterns of other second-century theologians and manifests his emphasis on continuity. According to Melito, the angel of death in Egypt honored the life, model, and Spirit of the Lord in the slaughter, death, and blood of the sheep (PP 31-33). The whole Passover event was a comparison (παραβολῆς), prefiguration (προκεντήματος), and preliminary type (προτυπώσεως) (PP 35) of the gospel, the church, and the Lord (PP 39-43). The salvation and reality of the Lord were prefigured in "the people" (PP 39), meaning OT Israel, and "the people" were also a type (τύπος) of "the church" (PP 40). The law "pre-proclaimed" (προεκηρύχθη)

⁶⁵ Incidentally, if Melito is doing here what Clement was doing there, then it is possible to read even the strongly anti-Jewish polemic in the sermon as admonitory exhortation for Christians.

⁶⁶ Trans. Hall, On Pascha, 47.

the gospel (PP 39). Indeed, whereas the law was a parable (παραβολῆς) of the gospel, the gospel is the fulness or fulfillment (πλήρωμα) of the law (PP 40). Both "sides" of these redemptive-historical events (both shadow and reality) are clearly part of the same divine plan in Melito's thought.

According to Melito, the Lord set forth his sufferings clearly in the OT that they might be more readily believed:

The Lord made prior arrangements for his own sufferings in patriarchs and in prophets and in the whole people, setting his seal to them through both law and prophets. For the thing which is to be new and great in its realization is arranged for well in advance, so that when it comes about it may be believed in, having been foreseen well in advance (PP 57).⁶⁷

This is why τοῦ κυρίου μυστήριον is both old and new, and not merely new. It was revealed of old in the law. (PP 58). It was proclaimed in the voice of the prophets Moses, David, Jeremiah, and Isaiah (PP 61-65). The OT was filled with types of the Paschal mystery: Abel, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, David, the prophets, and the Passover sheep (PP 59-60).

Even when Melito is highlighting the superiority of the new covenant blessings (e.g., the life, salvation, and Spirit of Lord, the spotless Son, the Christ and Jerusalem above) he refuses to deny the reality or devalue the original quality of the corresponding old covenant blessing. He repeatedly insists on the value of the slain sheep, the death of sheep, the blood of sheep, the speechless lamb, the temple below, the Jerusalem below, the narrow inheritance and little plot [of Canaan] (PP 44-45, cf. 85,88). They are each of great worth (τίμιος), he says, though the new covenant realities are of relatively greater value and though the typical blessings have now become

⁶⁷ Trans. Hall, 31.

worthless with the arrival of their realization (PP 43). In other words, Melito's contrast between old covenant and new covenant realities is not absolute (that is, between what was not valuable and what is truly valuable), but relative (that is, between what was once valuable and what is now valuable). The type was valuable before the coming of the fulfillment (PP 41).

Melito is not one-sided, however, in his redemptive history and so also vividly displays the discontinuities of the divine economy. This (as with his approach to continuity) he does in various ways. The mystery of the Pascha itself attests to these discontinuities. According to Melito, the Pascha is "old as regards the law, but new as regards the word; temporary as regards the type, eternal because of the grace; perishable because of the slaughter of the sheep, imperishable because of the life of the Lord; mortal because of the burial in earth, immortal because of the rising from the dead" (PP 3-4).⁶⁸ This is the discontinuity of progress rather than of opposition or contradiction, as has been seen in Melito's typology: "the type existed, but then the reality appeared" (PP 4). The type, from the beginning, was designed to be discontinued. The appearance of the reality, then, though discontinuous in certain aspects with the type, is actually proof of an underlying unity of design. Hence, the discontinuity is complementary to, confirmatory of and, indeed, absolutely essential for redemptive continuity.

Melito also contends that since the coming of Christ, the ancient law can be contrasted with the recent word, though they are both about Christ (PP 6). According to Melito: the law has become the word, the

⁶⁸ Trans. Hall, 3 (slightly modified).

old has become new, the commandment has become grace, the type has become reality, the Passover lamb has become the Son, the Passover sheep has become Man, and the representative Man has become God (PP 7). Indeed, Melito can employ the strongest words of contrast possible. At the revelation of the Lord, the type was abolished (ἐλύθη), made empty (κενοῦται), and is now worthless (ἄτιμος) (PP 42-45). Nevertheless, this is for Melito "a relative contrast in absolute terms." This is not only evident from the above discussion, but also from Melito's explanatory word on the way in which the gospel fulfills the law. He says the gospel fulfills the law in the way that an interpretation fulfills a parable. The content of the two is not different (much less opposed), but that of the latter is better elucidated (PP 43).

It is important to note that for Melito, this discontinuity was part of the divine plan from the beginning and was historically effected by the coming of the reality (Christ), not by the disobedience of OT Israel at Sinai (as in Barnabas). Melito very emphatically asserts that the sin of Adam against the law brought about the wickedness of humanity, for whose redemption the sufferings of Christ were necessitated (PP 47-49). Melito does later argue (PP 72-99) that the Jewish rejection of the Son and subsequent involvement in his death brought the divine judgment and rejection of Israel. But this is in stark contrast to Barnabas who suggested Israel had been rejected at Sinai.

This leads naturally to a discussion of the second type of evidence of standard second-century covenant thought found in PP:

redemptive history in controversy with the Jews.⁶⁹ We have already noted that Melito charges Israel with the responsibility of Jesus' death (PP 72-99). Melito's graphic rhetoric in his accusation against Israel is well known. The Lord was murdered by Israel in the middle of Jerusalem (PP 72). Israel has committed a strange crime (PP 73). Though even the gentiles admired him, Israel cast the opposite vote against their Lord (PP 92). Indeed, Melito says, "You killed your Lord at the great feast" (PP 79) and "the King of Israel has been put to death by an Israelite right hand" (PP 96).⁷⁰

This sensational language usually draws most of the attention in evaluating Melito, and hence his more conventional and covenantal arguments in the debate with Judaism are often overlooked. Though his homily on the Pascha is brief, he manages to employ a covenantal redemptive-historical approach in at least two areas that were significant in the ongoing Jewish-Christian controversy and that are reflective of characteristic second-century covenant theology.

First, instead of denying that Israel had ever been a part of the covenantal economy of God (in the manner of Barnabas or gnostic

⁶⁹ The reader will remember this as one of the categories of covenant thought mentioned by Ferguson: "'covenant' was an important topic in the dialogue and debate between Christians and Jews." "Covenant Idea," 135.

⁷⁰ M. R. Wilson claims there is a difference between NT and extra-NT second-century anti-Jewish polemic: "Portions of the New Testament and other early Christian literature contain rather striking anti-Jewish rhetoric. It is crucial, however, to make an important distinction about these polemical outbursts against Jews and Judaism. In the New Testament the *adversus Judaeos* polemic was 'an intra-family device used to win Jews to the Christian faith, in the second century it became anti-Semitic and was used to win Gentiles,'" Our Father Abraham: Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith (Grand Rapids/Dayton: Eerdmans/Center for Judaic-Christian Studies, 1989), 91-92; the quote within the quote is from R. N. Longnecker, New Testament Social Ethics for Today (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 40.

writings), Melito explains the exclusion of Israel from the promises in terms of her rejection of the Son. Israel "did not turn out to be 'Israel'" (PP 82, cf. Rom. 2:28-29; 9:6). Consequently, Israel was cut off from the covenant blessings (PP 90, 99). Though the Pascha of Christ was part of God's plan, Israel's involvement in those sufferings brought the decisive judgment of God against the nation (PP 74).¹¹ This assertion helped the Christian theologians of the second century explain the shift from Judaism to Christianity, from Israel to the church, within the framework of a unified redemptive economy.

Second, and following on this first point, his emphasis on the greater glory of the new covenant fulfillments, and the obsolescence of the old covenant types provided a useful argument against Judaism. It also bears resemblance not only to Hebrews, but also to Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. This approach to the OT types allowed Melito to "Christianize" the OT texts and to offer an implicit apologetic for Christians as the legitimate heirs of the OT (since they were the recipients of the new covenant realities, and not merely the old covenant shadows).

There is, perhaps, a third kind of evidence for second-century covenant thought to be found in Melito's PP: the presence of Christian sacramental language in the Paschal sermon. Though it is a point of dispute among patristic scholars as to whether baptism was administered in connection with the Paschal homily,¹² it is clear that Melito

¹¹ Cf. Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho 95.2.3 and 141.1.

¹² See Hall, On Pascha, xxvii, and G. F. Hawthorne, "Christian Baptism and the contribution of Melito of Sardis reconsidered," in Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren, (Novum Testamentum supplements), ed. D. Aune (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 241-251. Hawthorne sees little reference to baptism, and Hall says that he "exaggerates the anti-sacramental

employs the vocabulary of sacred signs in PP. For instance, after quoting portions from the institution of the passover (Ex. 12) he says:

But while the sheep is being slain
and the Pascha is being eaten
and the mystery is being performed
and the people is making merry
and Israel is being marked [σφραγίζεται],
then came the angel to strike Egypt,
the uninitiated [ἀμύητον] in the mystery,
the non-participating in the Pascha,
the unmarked with the blood,
the unguarded by the Spirit,
the hostile,
the faithless (PP 16).⁷³

S. G. Hall finds evidence of baptismal terminology in this passage: "Melito regards the Pascha as an initiatory rite with apotropaic effect, and insinuates into 14-16 the language of Christian baptism and unction, especially σφραγίζειν, χρίειν, πνεῦμα, ἀμύητος."⁷⁴ Other traces of baptismal terminology can be found in PP 30, 67 and 103. If this is the case then we have an example of Christian baptismal theology being read back into and connected with the OT covenant tradition. This may be all the more significant if Cross and Hall are correct about the influence of Haggadah and Mishnah on PP.⁷⁵

Summary and Conclusion

The relatively meager evidence of covenant thought in the writings of Melito currently accessible to us allows us neither to assess the total shape of his opinions, nor to estimate the significance of the covenant idea in his theology. Nevertheless, there is more than enough material

case."

⁷³ Trans. Hall, 9; see also PP 13b-15.

⁷⁴ On Pascha, 9 (n.5).

⁷⁵ See On Pascha, xxvi-xxvii, and xxvii, n.1.

for comparison with the covenant thought of his predecessors and contemporaries.

First, as "Israel" served as an OT sacral term for the people of God, and as NT writers saw themselves to be essentially related to "the people" (Rom 9-11), so also Melito sees Israel as "the people" and "the church" as its new covenant fulfillment (PP 40, 41), indeed, "an eternal people personal to him" (PP 68).

Second, whereas Melito repeats the NT identification of Jesus as the paschal lamb (PP 4 *et passim*), he does not duplicate the NT connection of the incarnation and work of Christ and the Abrahamic covenant, nor does he link the death of Christ with the Mosaic covenant and Jeremiah's new covenant. Barnabas' and Justin's covenant thought is much more explicit in this area than is Melito's in PP.

Third, Melito shares with the NT and Justin an emphasis on both continuity and discontinuity when relating the old and new covenants (PP 3, 40-45), but neither explicitly employs the covenant motif as an instrument to structure redemptive history, nor makes express linkage of the covenant idea and forgiveness of sins (though he treats the latter in PP 103).

Fourth, it perhaps goes without saying that Melito's extant writings do not offer enough evidence to determine the denotation and connotation of *διαθήκη* in his theology. It is clear, however, that the *διαθήκη* idea is significant enough for Melito that the term *διαθήκη* can serve as part of his appellation for the church's Hebrew Scriptures.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ The question is not whether Melito intends τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης to indicate "a collection of OT books" in the sense in which we use the term OT. Kinzig makes much of the fact that Melito uses the genitive and that therefore the meaning of the phrase is clouded ("Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 527-528. But this misses the point. Whether Melito

Fifth, whereas Clement and Barnabas employ covenant thought in the service of moral exhortation, Melito's covenant thought primarily serves the didactic cause of gospel explanation (e.g., PP 6-10).

Sixth, Melito stands with Justin and over against Barnabas, in his view of Israel's reception of the old covenant (PP 83-85).

Seventh, like Barnabas, Justin and Clement of Rome, Melito appeals to OT rather than NT passages as the basis of his teaching (in the standard manner of second-century *demonstratio evangelica*) and manifests the influence of the OT and Judaism (PP 1, 66, 68, 86, 93).¹¹

Eighth, whereas the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants are mentioned or alluded to in writings of the NT, Apostolic Fathers and Apologists, Melito never explicitly does so in PP. He does speak of Adam (PP 83), Noah (PP 83), Abraham (Frag. 15), Isaac (as a type of Christ, Frag. 9), Moses (PP 59, 61), David (PP 59, 62), and Jeremiah (PP 63), but never links them with a covenant. Melito does, interestingly, articulate the giving of the law to Adam (an important theme in Tertullian) in the garden as a major part of his discussion of the need for human redemption (PP 47-48). There he explicitly equates the command with the prohibition and designates Adam's sin as disobedience.

Ninth, as with the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists, we note slight variations in the covenant thought of Melito and his

means τῆς παλαιᾶς διαθήκης itself to refer to a list of books, or as a theological concept (the time or administration in which the said books were written), it is beyond question that he is employing it here as at least part of a designation of a list of books! Zahn, Harnack, and even Kinzig seem to miss this obvious point in their detailed musings on διαθήκη as a title for the Scriptures.

¹¹ See Hall, On Pascha, xxvi-xxvii.

predecessors and contemporaries.

Chapter 2

IRENÆUS: COVENANT THEOLOGIAN

According to Irenæus, there were several distinct covenants made by God. His estimate of their number varies. Sometimes he reckons four (Adam, Noah, [Abraham], Moses, Christ; more often only two. He regards the study of the differences between these as a legitimate subject for churchly (i.e., orthodox) Gnosis. There is both agreement and difference. Yet the difference is only relative, since the two are "of the same nature."

W. A. Brown, The Essence of Christianity, 64.

In the second half of the second century the theological concept of God's covenant with his people enjoyed renewed currency among Christians. The coming of Christ was now regarded as the establishment of the 'new covenant' prophesied in Jer. 31:31-34.

W. Kinzig, "Κανὴ διαθήκη: The Title of the New Testament," 522.

ταῦτά σοι τὰ γράμματα προετρεψάμεθα τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ κοινωνὸν
Εἰρηναῖον διακομίσαι, καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἔχειν σε αὐτὸν ἐν
παραθέσει, ζηλωτὴν ὄντα τῆς διαθήκης Χριστοῦ.

The Martyrs of Lyons, in Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 5.4.2

Introduction

In his seminal article "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century," Everett Ferguson suggests that "Irenæus was a 'covenant' theologian." He makes clear what he intends by that designation when he says: "the covenant scheme of the interpretation of holy history became the foundation of Irenæus' theological method."¹ Nevertheless, the Irenæan contribution to second-century covenant theology remains a generally unrecognized and relatively neglected subject, in spite of the recent work of Bacq,² Ferguson, Kinzig³ and others;⁴ in spite of

¹ Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century," 144.

² Bacq has made a splendid contribution to the discussion of Irenæus' theology with his de l'ancienne à la nouvelle Alliance selon S. Irénée. His work counters the opinions of earlier source critics of Irenæus (in particular Harnack) and argues for the literary and theological unity of Adversus Haereses. The theological unity of the work, according to Bacq, is built upon the concept of the unity of God and the consequent unity of the covenants in salvation history; see P. Bacq, de l'ancienne à la nouvelle Alliance selon S. Irénée (Paris: Lethielleux, 1978), pp. 41-46, 153-161, 235-240 and especially 290-293.

Irenaeus' significance as a second-century Christian theologian;⁵ and in spite of the ongoing interest in Irenaeian theology.⁶ Indeed, W. C.

While Bacq's work concentrates on book four of Adversus Haereses and is not intended to oppose the importance of the idea of "recapitulation" (or any other theme for that matter) in Irenaeus' thought, it does serve to make clear the significance of "covenant" in Irenaeus' argument for the unity of God and salvation history. This aspect of Irenaeian thought has been virtually overlooked in most of the work on his writings before Bacq.

³ See W. Kinzig, Novitas Christiana, and also Erbin Kirche (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 1990), 78-96.

⁴ Among them, W. C. van Unnik, see "Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη - a Problem in the early history of the Canon," in SP 4 (1959):225.

⁵ Irenaeus has been described as the "most considerable Christian theologian" of his time [F. L. Cross, The Early Christian Fathers, (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1960), 110]; see also A. Cunningham, "Saint Irenaeus" in AAE (online), and J. Quasten, Patrology, 4 vols. (Utrecht: Spectrum, 1950), 1:287. B. Altaner says, "Irenaeus is the most important of the second century theologians and in a certain sense the Father of Catholic dogmatics," in Patrology, trans. H. C. Graef (Edinburgh-London: Nelson, 1960), 150.

⁶ Irenaeus' theology has been the subject of a number of major works in the last century. Early this century, Aulén, in his famous Christus Victor, put Irenaeus in the theological spotlight by suggesting that Irenaeus' presentation of the central ideas of the Christian faith provided the basis for a *via media* (between "objective" and "subjective" views) in the construction of a theology of the atonement. Aulén saw Irenaeus' theology of the atonement as revolving around the idea of Christ's triumph over the forces of sin, death and Satan, which in turn was part of the larger idea of "recapitulation." Aulén's work assured that *recapitulatio* would be considered by subsequent students to be Irenaeus' "most comprehensive theological idea" [see Christus Victor, trans. A. G. Hebert (New York: Macmillan, 1969), 37 {orig. ET 1931}], and consequently Irenaeus' covenant thought has been ignored. J. Lawson reviewed Irenaeian theology in his The Biblical Theology of St. Irenaeus, (London: Epworth Press, 1948), see esp. 140ff., all but ignoring Irenaeus' contribution to second-century covenant theology. G. W. Wingren continued the focus on recapitulation in his book Man and the Incarnation, trans. R. Mackenzie (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1959). A. Benoit, in Saint Irénée: Introduction à l'étude de sa théologie (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1960) discusses Irenaeus' relation to the OT, but neglects the covenant idea. Only F. R. M. Hitchcock, in Irenaeus of Lugdunum: A Study of His Teaching (Cambridge: CUP, 1914), and Auguste Luneau, L'Histoire de salut chez les Pères de l'Eglise (Paris: Beauchesne, 1964) pay much attention at all to the significant role of the covenants in Irenaeus' history of salvation.

van Unnik complains that it is "remarkable that so little attention is given to this theme [covenant] in the descriptions of Irenaeus' theology."⁷ It will be our purpose to survey the covenant thought of Irenaeus in this chapter. We will review his use of covenant terminology and his covenantal program of salvation history, as well as certain passages concerning the covenants in his writings. First, we will deal with a few preliminary issues.

Irenaeus and the Title of the NT

J. N. D. Kelly has argued that "the first writer to speak unequivocally of a 'New' Testament parallel to the Old was Irenaeus" and "after Irenaeus's time . . . the fully scriptural character of the specifically Christian writings was universally acknowledged, and the description of them as the 'New Testament' (a title harking back to St. Paul's designation of the Jewish Scriptures as 'the old covenant') came into vogue."⁸ W. C. van Unnik, while questioning the conclusiveness of Kelly's claim that Irenaeus was the first writer to speak unequivocally of a "New" Testament, generally confirms Kelly's assessment of Irenaeus' importance in the development of this terminology.⁹ Significantly, however, he expands on and modifies Kelly's view¹⁰ of the origin of the use of the term *καινή διαθήκη* for the Christian

⁷ "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη," 225.

⁸ J. N. D. Kelly, Early Christian Doctrines (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 56.

⁹ "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη," 217; see also H. von Campenhausen, Formation of the Christian Bible, trans. J. A. Baker (London: A. & C. Black, 1972), 264-265.

¹⁰ He points out that it is improbable that Irenaeus took the term from Paul because Irenaeus never quotes from 2 Corinthians 3:14, "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη," 220-221.

Scriptures, linking this terminology to Irenaeus' covenant theology and insisting the NT idea of διαθήκη is not Hellenistic ("testament") but rather "covenant."¹¹ The background of καινή διαθήκη for Irenaeus, according to van Unnik, is the Old Testament prophetic promise of a "New Covenant."¹² With Irenaeus, says van Unnik, "it is remarkable that διαθήκη has here always the biblical notion of 'covenant' and never any relation to 'testament.'"¹³ He concludes:

In this climate were the Gospels and Apostolic writings first styled "books of the καινή διαθήκη". . . .
. . . This rich title was generally accepted. But soon afterwards it lost its dynamic weight and became nothing more than just a title. . . . In the West the translation *testamentum* and not *foedus* for διαθήκη had, as far as I can see, very serious consequences. In the Greek speaking world διαθήκη was soon misunderstood as "testament" and a change in outlook robbed it of its influence.¹⁴

This view has been recently challenged by W. Kinzig who gives some evidence of a testamentary usage of διαθήκη by Irenaeus (cf. Adversus Haereses [AH] 5.9.4)¹⁵. Whatever are the precise origins of διαθήκη becoming employed as a scriptural title, even Kinzig (as we have already seen) does not deny that the development and prevalence of covenant thought in the second century are necessary preconditions for its eventual service as a designation for the Scriptures. In this

¹¹ "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη," 225.

¹² "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη," 222-225.

¹³ "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη," 225.

¹⁴ "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη," 226-227.

¹⁵ Kinzig, "Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 519-544, esp. 524-525; and D. van Damme, Pseudo Cyprian, Adversus Iudaeos. Gegen die Judenchristen. Die älteste lateinische Predigt (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1969), 46-50.

foundational work, Irenaeus played an undoubted role.

Furthermore, it has been argued that Irenaeus' stress on the essential unity of salvation history paved the way for the consolidation of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian Writings into the Christian Bible. Greer says, "In this way [by speaking of the differing economies of the same God], Irenaeus offers a Christian transformation of the Hebrew Scriptures that makes them wholly integral to a Christian Bible."¹⁶ Irenaeus argued against Marcion's rejection of the Hebrew Scriptures, as will be seen later, by stressing the unity of the old and new covenants. Hence it can be argued that the church's bipartite Bible is, at least in part, a legacy of Irenaeus' covenant theology.¹⁷

The Pastoral Contexts of Irenaeus' Covenant Theology

Of Irenaeus' many works, we have but two: AH and Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching [DAP]. They were written for different pastoral purposes, yet display a unified picture of Irenaeus' covenant thought. DAP was only recently re-discovered in an Armenian manuscript retrieved in 1904.¹⁸ It is a shorter, non-polemical catechetical work¹⁹ that was written to Irenaeus' "beloved Marcianus" and largely confirms the positive teaching contained in AH. In it, Irenaeus "explains Christian

¹⁶ R. A. Greer, Early Biblical Interpretation (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 154.

¹⁷ Campenhausen, Formation of the Christian Bible, 209.

¹⁸ s.v., "Irenaeus," EEC, 1:413.

¹⁹ J. P. Smith, while acknowledging its catechetical use, has drawn attention to the apologetic function of the work. See Irenaeus, Proof of the Apostolic Preaching, trans. J. P. Smith (New York: Newman Press, 1952), 20-21.

doctrine and then proves it from Old Testament prophecies."²⁰ DAP was divided into a hundred chapters in Harnack's translation. The following outline follows that scheme of division. The first three chapters form an introduction which, among other things, commends the rule of faith. Chapters 4-42 constitute the first of two major divisions of the work, setting forth essential content of the Christian faith. This section may be subdivided into two parts: chapters 4-16 which treat of God, creation and the fall, and chapters 17-42 which recount the history of redemption. The second major division, which is made up of chapters 42-100, is concerned with Old Testament proof of New Testament revelation. It, too, may be subdivided into two sections. Chapters 42-85 set forth the old covenant promises and prophecies about Christ. Chapters 86-100 show the progress and superiority of the new covenant. DAP is significant as a brief outline of Irenaeus' salvation history, and the covenant theology of AH can be seen both implicitly and explicitly in DAP.

AH²¹ is Irenaeus' epic refutation of the various schools of

²⁰ M. T. Clark, s.v., "Irenaeus," EEChr, 472.

²¹ It is, perhaps, appropriate to mention a few words about the organization of AH. A number of authors have charged AH with being disorganized. For instance, Altaner says, "These five books [of AH] are no more a homogeneous work than the apologies of Justin; the individual parts grow gradually by way of enlargements and addition," Patrology, 151. Cross suggests that AH "strikes the reader as untidy, chiefly because Irenaeus did not write it on any prearranged plan," The Early Christian Fathers, 111. Quasten corrects the misconception that AH was not based on a prearranged plan but nevertheless states: "The whole work suffers from a lack of clear arrangement and unity of thought. Prolixity and frequent repetition make its perusal wearisome. The reason for this defect is most probably that the author wrote the work intermittently. . . . But it seems that the project was designed from the beginning, because the author refers already in the third book to his later remarks about the Apostle Paul, which follow only in the fifth book. . . . But it would appear that Irenaeus inserted additions and enlargements from time to time," Patrology, 1:289. While granting that the work is frequently wordy and repetitious, and that it bears

Gnosticism. In the preface to AH 1, we have the author's own words concerning the treatise' purpose and plan:

Et quemadmodum nos elaborauimus, olim quaerenti tibi discere sententiam eorum, non solum facere tibi manifestam, sed et subministrationem dare, uti ostenderemus eam falsam, sic et tu efficaciter reliquis ministrabis secundum gratiam quae tibi a Domino data est, ut iam non abstrahantur homines ab illorum suadela, quae est talis . . . (AH 1. Preface.3). . .²²

Irenaeus, then, hopes to help his friend's ministry by providing him with the polemical ammunition to deal with the heretics. Hence, we have Irenaeus' reason for engaging himself in the project. According to Daniélou:

The form of Gnosticism which Irenaeus was particularly concerned to combat in his principal work, the Adversus Haereses, was that of a disciple of Valentinus, the teacher Ptolemaeus. By great good fortune a work by the latter on the meaning of the O.T., the Letter to Flora, has survived. In it he begins by asserting that so far no one has rightly understood the Law of Moses. One school of thought attributes it to God the Father

the marks of additions and enlargements, it is not terribly difficult to argue for its basic unity. Bacq has done this so successfully with book four that one reviewer wonders why no one else has picked up on this unified structure (M. Donovan, "Irenaeus in Recent Scholarship," in SCe 4:4 [1984]: 223.) The broad outline of the work is apparent: the first two books concern the exposition of the Gnostics' own doctrines and the last three books supply the positive Catholic response intermingled with some polemical sparring. Books three and four are most obviously unified by the themes of the oneness of God and the over-arching unity of the Covenants (or economies). The necessity to set forth the Gnostic teachings, then, explains why the first two books might seem disjointed from the rest of the work. The concept of covenantal unity is apparent in the arrangement of the remainder. A complete outline of the work, along the lines of what Bacq has done with book four, would make the thematic unity of AH more apparent. Once the significance of the idea of covenant is recognized for the structure of AH, its unity of thought becomes clearer.

²² "Finally, as I (to gratify your long-cherished desire for information regarding the tenets of these persons) have spared no pains, not only to make these doctrines known to you, but also to furnish the means of showing their falsity; so you will, according to the grace given you by the Lord, prove an earnest and efficient minister to others, that men may no longer be drawn away by the plausible system of these heretics, which I now proceed to describe." ANCL trans. 1:316 (slightly modified).

himself (here he is apparently thinking of the Catholics), and another ascribes it to the Devil (this, no doubt, is meant to represent the views of Marcion, but it is a caricature of his thought). Both these extreme views he sweeps aside.²³

Whatever external differences were maintained between the various Gnostic factions, they shared a common ground in their rejection (to different extents) of the God of the Old Testament and his words. For the Gnostic, there was essential discontinuity between the God of the old covenant and the new, and hence between the religion of the old covenant and the new. "This is the central thesis of Gnosticism, the contrast between the inferior god, the god of creation and the god of the Old Testament, who is the righteous god, and the god of redemption and of the New Testament, who is the good god."²⁴

In order to repudiate the Gnostics' main premise, Irenaeus had to demonstrate conclusively that the one true God was both creator and redeemer, the God of the old and the new covenants. In AH (and particularly in the fourth book), Irenaeus set about the task of defending the concept of the unity of God by manifesting the unity of the Hebrew Scriptures and teaching with the Christian Scriptures and teaching, against the Gnostics' assertions of incongruity. It is of significance that in so doing, Irenaeus chose to use the idea of covenant to stress the unity and continuity of OT and NT religion and revelation. According to Irenaeus, the old covenant Scriptures looked forward to the Christ and the church of the new covenant Scriptures. The commands of the old covenant, as epitomized in the Decalogue, since they were functional before Moses (AH 4.15.1; 4.16.3), remain

²³ J. Daniélou, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture, vol. 2: A History of Early Christian Doctrine (London and Philadelphia: Darton, Longman and Todd, and Westminster Press, 1973), 221.

²⁴ Daniélou, Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture, 224.

authoritative in the new covenant (AH 4.16.1). Christ does not contradict the Ten Words. He fulfills and expands them (AH 4.13.1). Any incidental differences between the covenants are explained by Irenaeus as accommodation on the part of God to the weaknesses of his people, in order to help them mature in their faith (AH 4.16.5). Indeed, covenant thought is apparent throughout Irenaeus' argument. As Ferguson says: "Against the attacks of Marcion and the Gnostics, the only hope of salvaging the old Bible was to acknowledge different eras. The covenant scheme of the interpretation of holy history became the foundation of Irenaeus' theological method."²⁵

For instance, Irenaeus defends the idea that both covenants (old and new) come from one and the same God by means of the story of the scribe instructed in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 13:52). This scribe will bring forth out of his treasure things new and old. What does this mean? Irenaeus explains: *Ea autem quae de thesauro proferuntur nova et vetera sine contradictione duo testamenta dicit, vetera quidem, quae ante fuerat legisdatio, novum autem, quae secundum Evangelium est conversatio, [ostendit]* (AH 4.9.1).²⁶ The covenants are means by which men make progress in their belief. Irenaeus puts it this way:

Novo enim Testamento cognito et praedicato per prophetas, et ille qui illud dispositurus erat secundum placitum Patris, praedicabatur, manifestatus hominibus, quemadmodum voluit Deus; ut possint semper proficere credentes in eum, et per testamenta

²⁵ "The Covenant Idea," 144.

²⁶ "Now, without contradiction, He means by those things which are brought forth from the treasure new and old, the two covenants; the old, that giving of the law which took place formerly; and He points out the new, that manner of life required by the Gospel. ANCL trans. 1:472.

maturescere perfectum salutis (AH 4.9.3).²⁷

It is because of this covenantal unity, which reflects the oneness of God, that Irenaeus can say *Moysi litterae verba sint Christi* (AH 4.2.3.).²⁸ In light of these and many other passages in Irenaeus, it is not surprising that Kelly says:

The fullest statement . . . of the orthodox position [on the relationship between the Testaments] is to be found in Irenaeus, one of whose favorite themes is that the Law of Moses and the grace of the New Testament, both adapted to different sets of conditions, were bestowed by one and the same God for the benefit of the human race.²⁹

Hence, it clear that the idea of covenant is of central importance to Irenaeus' response to the Gnostics in AH. The significance of Irenaeus' covenantal view of history lies in his stress on the essential unity and continuity of salvation history.

The Meanings of διαθήκη in Irenaeus

There has been some discussion of the range of meaning that διαθήκη bears in Irenaeus.³⁰ We may suggest three ways it is used: in a relational sense (a divine-human relationship with blessings and obligations), in an historical sense (an era typified by a particular stage of divine-human relations), and in a testamentary sense (a divine

²⁷ "For the new covenant having been known and preached by the prophets, He who was to carry it out according to the good pleasure of the Father was also preached, having been revealed to men as God pleased; that they might always make progress through believing in Him, and by means of the covenants, should gradually attain to perfect salvation." ANCL trans. 1:472 (slightly modified).

²⁸ "The writings of Moses are the words of Christ." ANCL trans. 1:464.

²⁹ Kelly, Doctrines, 68.

³⁰ See Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 145; van Damme, Pseudo-Cyprian, Adversus Iudaeos, 46-50; van Unnik, "Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη," 225; Kinzig, "Καινὴ διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 525.

will).

The most common meaning of *διαθήκη* [*testamentum*] in Irenaeus is that of a divine-human relationship with attendant commitments and favors.³¹ This sense is apparent in AH 4.9.3 where Irenaeus asserts that both the new covenant and Christ were preached by the OT prophets *ut possint semper proficere credentes in eum, et per testamenta maturescere perfectum salutis*. Clearly, *διαθήκη/testamentum* does not here refer to a legal disposition (which would seem to have nothing to do with spiritual maturation), nor does it denote an era of redemptive history (which again would seem to have little subjective influence on the perfecting of humanity). Irenaeus means, here and elsewhere, by covenant: a special kind of divine-human association (with behavior requirements on the human side and bountiful promises on the divine side), carefully designed and modified by God from time to time for the sake of restoring and confirming his image in his people. This is confirmed in the same context when Irenaeus compares the old and new covenants, offering descriptions of each: *vetus quidem, quod ante fuerat, legisdatio; novum autem, quae secundum Evangelium est conversatio, ostendit* (AH 4.9.1). The idea of the new covenant as "manner of life required by the gospel" points to this first, relational definition.

The second way *διαθήκη/testamentum* is employed in Irenaeus is as a designation of an era (or eras) or the grand redemptive economy. For instance, in AH 4.11.3, while stressing the greater blessings of the new covenant Irenaeus declares: *sic ergo et posterioribus majorem, quam*

³¹ Ferguson (in "The Covenant Idea," 145) and van Unnik ("Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη," 225) both concur on this point.

quae fuit in veteri Testamento, munerationem gratiae attribuit unus et idem Dominus per suum adventum. Irenaeus' temporal references in the context (greater grace for those of a later time) suggests that he means by *veteri Testamento* a specific era of salvation history.

Finally, hints of a testamentary sense of *διαθήκη/testamentum* can also be found in Irenaeus.³² In AH 5.9.4 Irenaeus says:

*Propter hoc autem et Christus mortuus est, uti testamentum Evangelii apertum et universo mundo lectum primum quidem liberos faceret servos suos, post deinde heredes eos constitueret eorum quae essent ejus, hereditate possidente Spiritu, quemadmodum demonstravimus: hereditate enim possidet ille qui vivit, hereditate autem acquiritur caro.*³³

The legal language of inheritance, possessions, reading of a document, and setting servants free strongly suggests a common testamentary reading of *διαθήκη/testamentum* in the passage. We only add that the latter two meanings are not common — even rare — in Irenaeus.

An Overview of Irenaeus' Salvation History

In AH 1.10.1, in the midst of his extensive account of the vagaries of Gnosticism, Irenaeus pauses to present a compendious statement of the Christian faith: a list of the central elements of Christian teaching. Irenaeus declares that the church believes in God, the Father Almighty, the creator; in Christ Jesus, who became incarnate for our salvation; and in the Holy Spirit. Then Irenaeus declares that the Holy Spirit proclaimed through the prophets:

³² *pace* van Unnik.

³³ Kinzig translates: "Therefore Christ died that the open testament (will) of the Gospel read in the wide world should first set his servants free, and then should make them heirs of all his possessions, the Spirit inheriting them, as we have shown. For he who lives inherits, and it is the flesh which is acquired as inheritance." "*Καινή διαθήκη*: Title of the NT," 525.

*dispositiones Dei et adventam et eam quae est ex virgine generationem et passionem et resurrectionem a mortuis et in carne in caelos ascensionem dilecti iesu Christi Domini nostri et de caelis in gloria patris adventum eius ad recapitulanda universa.*³⁴

That Irenaeus should begin with the economies of God and include the recapitulation of all things in Christ in this account of the church's faith should come as no surprise in light of our previous observations. We should recognize that Irenaeus is not here simply claiming that this summary reflects the beliefs of his contemporaries. He is asserting that this faith has been received "from the apostles and their disciples" (AH 1.10.1). Irenaeus goes on to say that the good teacher will expound to his pupil "the means and economy of God in humankind's salvation," which includes explaining *quare testamenta multa tradita humano generi, adnuntiare, et quis sit uniuscuiusque testamentorum character, docere* (AH 1.10.3).³⁵ An understanding of the covenants was, for Irenaeus, part of the very foundation of the faith. The centrality of the covenant idea in Irenaeus' thought, then, is apparent even in his summarization of Christian truth.

Irenaeus emphatically asserts the apostolic origins of his covenant theology. At one point he appeals to the teaching of a presbyter who was a "disciple of the apostles." He says: *Hujusmodi quoque de duobus Testamentis senior Apostolorum discipulus disputabat,*

³⁴ "The dispensations of God, and the advents, and the birth from a virgin, and the passion, and the resurrection from the dead, and the ascension into heaven in the flesh of the beloved Christ Jesus, our Lord, and his future manifestation from heaven in the glory of the Father 'to gather all things in one.'" ANCL trans. 1:330.

³⁵ "why it was that more covenants than one were given to mankind; and teach what was the special character of each of these covenants." ANCL trans. 1:331.

ab uno quidem et eodem Deo utraque ostendens (AH 4.32.1).³⁶

Furthermore, claims Irenaeus, this presbyter's covenantal approach to salvation history and argument for the unity of God reflect not simply one strand of the apostolic tradition but the entirety of it:

Apostoli enim omnes duo quidem Testamenta in duobis populis fuisse docuerunt, unum autem et eundem esse Deum, qui disposuerit utraque ad utilitatem hominum, secundum quod Testamenta dabantur qui incipiebant credere Deo, ex ipsa demonstravimus Apostolorum doctrina in tertio libro (AH 4.32.2).³⁷

Against the abbreviated redemptive program of the Gnostics, Irenaeus urged the unity of the covenants in the economy of God and credited the idea to apostolic teaching.

Though several of Irenaeus' predecessors used the term "covenant" (notably Clement of Rome, Barnabas, Justin and Melito), Irenaeus is apparently the first of the second-century Christian theologians to use the plural: *διαθήκαι/testamenta*. The idea of covenant, of course, also plays a more significant role in the structuring of his account of redemptive history than it did in the writings of his forerunners. Everett Ferguson observes that "with Irenaeus the various covenants were integrated as progressive and ordered phases in a total, organic history of salvation."³⁸

As has been noted previously, Irenaeus' theology of redemptive history was articulated in his great conflict with the Gnostics.

³⁶ "After this fashion also did a presbyter, a disciple of the apostles, reason with respect to the two covenants, proving that both were truly from one and the same God." ANCL trans. 1:505.

³⁷ "For all the apostles taught that there were indeed two covenants among the two peoples; but that it was one and the same God who appointed both for the advantage of those men (for whose sakes the covenants were given) who were to believe in God, I have proved in the third book from the very teaching of the apostles." ANCL trans. 1:506.

³⁸ Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 148.

Against their conception of redemptive history, which disassociated Christ's work from what had come beforehand, Irenaeus urged a diametrically opposing plan. He presented a view that he claimed to represent the true apostolic doctrine concerning God and the history of salvation (AH 4.32.2). Irenaeus argued for the unity of God and for the unity of redemptive history. The God of the old covenant era was the same as the God of Christianity (AH 4.11.3). The faith of God's people of old was the same faith as those living in the blessed time of the gospel (AH 4.9.1), and the writings of the old covenant were the precious possession of the church of Christ for they set forth his advent and "preached beforehand" his words (AH 4.2.3). Hence, Irenaeus' task in overthrowing the Gnostic idea of God and salvation history, was twofold. To effectively demonstrate the unity of God and his redemptive plan, Irenaeus had to establish the similarity between the various stages of the overall economy for which he was arguing, as well as explain the differences in these administrations. To accomplish this task he did two things. First, he appropriated the oldest form of early Christian apologetic, the proof of Christ by prophecy, and adapted it to the need of the hour. It was common practice for the Christian apologete to appeal to Christ's fulfilling of the OT prophecies as proof of his claims, particularly in debate with Jews (Justin provides a good example in Dialogue with Trypho). Irenaeus took the argument and reversed its direction (as later would Tertullian), thus adapting an argument originally employed for Jewish evangelism to the cause of anti-Gnostic polemics. Whereas formerly the church had appealed to the *testimonia* as proof of Christ's claims, Irenaeus appealed to the church's appeal to the *testimonia*. He argued: If Christ and his apostles cited the old covenant writings as divine and authoritative

for the Christian religion, and taught that the God of Israel is the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, then this must be the case. If then one is true to Christ and the apostles' instruction, he will acknowledge this unity of God and Old Testament revelation. The argument was particularly effective against the Gnostics who would desire to be seen as faithful to the teachings of Christ and the apostles (especially Paul). Secondly, Irenaeus gave a detailed exposition of redemptive history based on the covenants. This covenantal approach to God's economy he learned from "a certain presbyter, a disciple of the apostles," and the apostles themselves (AH 4.32.1,2).³⁹

Irenaeus says in one place that there are "four general covenants which have been given to humanity" (AH 3.11.8) and in DAP speaks of covenants with Noah (DAP 22), Abraham (DAP 24) and David (DAP 64), as well as the promise of the new covenant (DAP 90). By combining these two lists alone, we can identify six covenants which, arranged chronologically, cover the whole of redemptive history: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and the new covenant. This does not exhaust Irenaeus' covenantal terminology by any means. He speaks of the "first covenant" (*primum habuissent Testamentum* - AH 3.12.15) referring to the old covenant commands. He calls the Noahic covenant a "covenant with the whole world" (DAP 22). Irenaeus describes the Abrahamic covenant as

³⁹ Kinzig has noted the potential two-edged polemical application of the church's second-century covenant thought in the debate with the Jews and Marcionites: "The theologians of the Greater Church realized that the Marcionite division of the Bible into Old and New Testaments came in handy because, ironically enough, it could be understood not only in an anti-*Jewish*, but also an anti-*Marcionite* sense, once the concept of a bipartite canon had been developed. The concept allowed for an emphasis both on the continuity between the old covenant and the new (against Marcion) and on the discontinuity (against the Jews)," "*Καινη διαθηκη*: Title of the NT," 543-544.

the "covenant of circumcision" (*testamentum circumcisionis* - [AH 3.12.11](#)). He refers to the "old covenant" (*veteri testamento* - [AH 4.15.2](#)) and it is not always clear whether he intends to apply this title exclusively to the Mosaic administration or to the whole of the old covenant economy. He uses the designation "two covenants" (*duo testamenta* - [AH 4.9.1](#)) in reference to the old and new covenants. On one occasion he denominates the new covenant as the "gospel covenant" (*testamentum Evangelii* - [AH 5.9.4](#)). And, of course, his special descriptive designation of the new covenant was "new covenant of liberty" (*libertatis nouum Testamentum* - [AH 3.12.14](#)). In addition to this covenant terminology, he also uses the related nomenclature of the economy such as "new economy of liberty" ([AH 3.10.4](#)), the "economy of the Law" ([AH 3.11.7](#)) and the "Mosaic economy" ([AH 3.10.2](#) and [3.12.15](#)).

When Irenaeus uses *διαθήκη/testamentum* in connection with a reference to an era in redemptive history, he generally uses it to refer to a specific period or administration in God's economy. Occasionally he seems to use "old covenant" to designate the whole period of God's redemptive work up to the first advent of Christ, but he apparently never employs *διαθήκη/testamentum* in the singular to indicate the whole redemptive plan of God — though he may use "the covenants" in this way ([AH 3.12.12](#)). His most common designation of that plan is "economy" (*dispositio*) or "universal economy" (*universam dispositionem*), which in function is not dissimilar to the sixteenth-century Protestant idea of the Covenant of Grace.

According to Irenaeus' design, the history of redemption is as follows. Humanity was created in a state of innocence ([DAP 11](#)). Adam and Eve were given a command to keep. If they obeyed they would remain

immortal, but if they disobeyed they would die (DAP 14,15). Adam and Eve, at the prompting of Satan, rebelled against God and fell away in sin (DAP 16). The consequence of their fall for humankind is made evident in Cain's murder of Abel (DAP 17). God sent the flood as a just judgment on a wicked world (DAP 19) but spared Noah and his family. God made a covenant with Noah which, among other things, contained a promise of the incarnation of Christ (DAP 22). God's blessing was then given to Shem, which was eventually carried on to Abraham (DAP 21,23, 24). God revealed Himself to Abraham and led him from Mesopotamia to Judea, where He reckoned Abraham's faith to him as righteousness (DAP 24). Abraham's promise included land and descendants, and when Isaac was born (and Jacob to Isaac afterward) it was not only partial fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham, but God's blessing of Shem being extended to them (DAP 24). Abraham was given the Covenant of Circumcision as a sign (AH 4.16.1) and a seal of the faith he had while uncircumcised (DAP 24). In this he became a type of the two covenants and of the two peoples that will enter into the one faith of Abraham (AH 4.25.3). Abraham, then, is the father of all who believe under both covenants (AH 4.23.1). During a famine 75 members of Jacob's household migrated to Egypt, where in 400 years they grew to 660,000 people--but were cruelly oppressed. By means of the blood of the Passover (which showed forth Christ's passion) they were freed from Egypt (DAP 25). The Exodus was a type of the "exodus" that the church would make from among the Gentiles (AH 4.30.4). At Sinai, Moses established the Economy of the Law (AH 3.12.15) and God wrote the Ten Words with His own hand (DAP 26). These Ten Words remain in force in the new covenant (AH 4.16.4) but the "laws of bondage" do not (AH 4.16.5). After wandering in the desert because of sin, Israel was given an additional book of

commandments by Moses called Deuteronomy in which are many prophecies about Christ, the Jews, the calling of the Gentiles, and the Kingdom (DAP 28). After Joshua brought Israel into Canaan, God sent them prophets. They admonished the people and announced that the Lord Jesus Christ would come, according to the flesh, as the son of David (who was himself a son of Abraham) to sum up all things in himself (DAP 30). Through the incarnation, Jesus took on our flesh so that we might "overcome through Adam what had stricken us through Adam" (DAP 31). In Christ, Adam was saved (AH 3.23.1). In Christ, the seed of woman crushed the serpent's head (AH 5.21.1). In Christ, God's promise to Shem was realized (DAP 22). In Christ, the promise of Abraham was fulfilled (DAP 35). In Christ, the promise to David of an everlasting king was fulfilled (DAP 36). In one sense Christ's work of recapitulation was realized in his first advent (AH 4.34.2) but in another sense it continues on to and will culminate in his second advent (AH 4.33.1).

Irenaeus' covenant theology operates in and around his history of redemption. A covenantal line can be clearly traced from Adam to Noah to Shem to Abraham to Moses to David to Christ. But even though he speaks of a number of specific covenants,⁴⁰ he is most concerned to

⁴⁰ One of the most frequently discussed and intriguing passages regarding the covenant in Irenaeus' writings is found in AH 3.11.8: *Et propter hoc quatuor data sunt testamenta humano generi: unum quidem ante catclysmum sub Adam; secundum vero post cataclysmum sub Noe; tertium vero legislatio sub Moyse; quartem vero quod renovat hominem et recapitulat in se omnia, quod est per Evangelium, elevans et pennigerans homines in caeleste regnum.* The later Greek texts differ from the old Latin, giving "Noah," "Abraham," "Moses," and "Gospel" as the four covenants. The Latin text is usually considered the most accurate here. It has some affinities with Melito's list in PP 83. Whatever one's textual decision, the only covenants brought into question--Abraham and Adam--are attested elsewhere in Irenaeus implicitly if not explicitly.

articulate a theology of the two covenants; the old--the giving of the law which took place formerly--and the new--the way of life required by the gospel (AH 4.9.1). There were differences in these covenants. Nevertheless they evidence an essential unity. Irenaeus explains:

Plus est enim, inquit, templo hic. Plus autem et minus non in his dicitur quae inter se communionem non habent et sunt contrarie naturae et pugnant adversus se, sed in his quae ejusdem sunt substantiae et communicant secum, solum autem multitudine et magnitudine differunt, quemadmodum aqua ab aqua et lumen a lumine et gratia a gratia (AH 4.9.2).⁴¹

This unity of the covenantal plan of God is manifested in a number of ways. The believer's code of life is the same in both covenants (AH 4.12.3). The ten words are equally binding in each covenant. Christ did not abolish these commands but extended and fulfilled them (AH 4.13.1). The way of salvation is the same in the old and the new covenants (AH 4.21.1). There were differences between the covenants as well. Men's faith in God has been increased in the new covenant and along with it God's punishment for those who despise the advent of the Word of God (AH 4.28.2). God has granted a greater gift of grace in the new covenant (AH 4.11.3). In the new covenant the Jews cease to be the exclusive people of God, but men from all nations are gathered to him (AH 4.17.5). God's covenantal plan is unified but never static. It is always pressing on to a goal: the summing up of all things in Christ (AH 4.32.2).

Unity and Diversity in Salvation History

⁴¹ "He declares: For in this place is One greater than the temple. But 'greater' and 'less' are not applied to those things which have nothing in common between themselves, and are of an opposite nature, and mutually repugnant; but are used in the case of those of the same substance, and which possess properties in common, but merely differ in number and size; such as water from water, and light from light, and grace from grace." ANCL trans. 1:472.

In its stress on continuity and progress in salvation history, Irenaeus' covenant theology leaves, perhaps, its most distinctive mark. Against the Gnostics, Irenaeus argued for the unity of God and his plan of redemption, but this left him with the task of explaining certain phenomena in revelation that seemed to contradict this unity. How could the law be compatible with the gospel? Were not the ethical standards given by Moses different from those enunciated by Christ? To these issues Irenaeus brought to bear his theology of the covenants, which allowed him to explain both unity and diversity in redemptive history. So effective was his covenantal response that Irenaeus moved beyond explanation and articulated a theology of the rich complexity of God's economy. For Irenaeus, there is never merely similarity but rather deliberate continuity in the covenants; never merely diversity but rather designed progress from old to new. The continuity in God's plan originates in God himself. One and the same God is the author of both covenants (AH 4.32.1) and so there is a manifest unity in God's plan. The reason for progress in the divine economy resides in the nature of persons as created beings. That which is created must, by definition, have a beginning and middle, addition and increase (AH 4.11.2). Therefore God accommodated himself to human capacity. The covenants were "fitted for the times" (AH 3.12.11) and through them God adjusted men to salvation (AH 4.14.2). In this way, Irenaeus explained the difference and harmony in the covenants (AH 3.12.12).

Irenaeus gave great attention to expounding the themes of continuity and progress from the revelation possessed by the church: the books of the old covenant, the Gospels, and the Epistles. Indeed, revelation itself is in continuity. The writings of Moses are the words of Christ (AH 4.2.3). The Scriptures do not contradict themselves but

are perfectly consistent (AH 4.28.3). The Decalogue remains in force in both covenants (AH 4.15.1). There are sacrifices in both covenants (AH 4.18.2). The old covenant sacrifices did not save people, rather the consciences of the offerer made the sacrifice acceptable worship (AH 4.18.3). The same is the case in the new covenant. The sacrifice of the new covenant is the Lord's Supper (AH 4.176.5). All believers offer this sacrifice and hence are levites and priests (AH 4.34.3). In Abraham, God has prefigured the two covenants (AH 4.25.3). Abraham represents both "the people" (Jewish believers before the advent) and the church (all believers since Christ's advent). Abraham's seed is the church and the promise to Abraham belongs to the church (AH 4.8.1). But "the people" and the church are so similar that Irenaeus can call them "the two churches" and "the older and younger church" (AH 4.31.2). In fact, there is one people of God in all ages (AH 4.23.1; 5.32.2; 5.34.1).⁴²

Just as important as the unity in God's economy is the discontinuity (AH 4.9.3). Covenantal progress does not contradict covenantal continuity. Indeed, the very fact that we can compare the economies of God in terms of "greater" and "lesser" proves that the covenants are the same in substance, because one cannot compare things that have nothing in common (AH 4.9.2). Faith has increased in the new covenant (AH 4.28.2). God has given greater grace in the new covenant (AH 4.9.3; 4.11.3). Though the Gnostics characterize the God of the old covenant as a God of wrath and the Christian God as the God of love, Irenaeus says that God's wrath has increased under the new covenant in potency and duration (AH 4.28.1). The Decalogue remains in the new

⁴² *Contra* L. V. Crutchfield, "Israel and the Church in the Ante-Nicene Fathers," *BS* 144 (1987):254-275, esp. 256-257, 266-269.

covenant but "the laws of bondage" are abrogated (AH 4.16.5). These laws, peculiar to the Mosaic administration (as distinct from the Ten Words, which according to Irenaeus existed before Moses), were given as types for the people's instruction and as bondage because of the people's sin (AH 4.16.5). Because Christ has fulfilled the law these peculiar Mosaic laws are no longer needed (AH 4.4.2). Therefore the new covenant may be characterized by "freedom" as opposed to "bondage." In the new covenant, Gentile believers have replaced the Jews as "the people" of God (AH 4.17.5). As for charges concerning the incompatibility of the practices of some Old Testament saints with new covenant standards, Irenaeus explains them as types (AH 4.31.1-2). Finally, we note (again) that the progress of the covenants is progress towards a fixed goal: the consummation (AH 4.34.2).

Summary and Conclusion

Irenaeus' teaching on the covenants has received very little attention from those who have studied his theology.⁴³ But we have seen,

⁴³ Only E. Ferguson (in "The Covenant Idea") and A. A. Woolsey (in "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought") have deliberately concentrated on the subject of Irenaeus' covenant theology. Woolsey's survey, though brief (three pages), accurately concludes: "Here, then, in outline is the 'covenant theology' of one of the early church fathers. Several points are worth underlining. Irenaeus regarded the covenant relationship between God and man as a divine arrangement, involving a condescension by God to man's capacity and condition. He saw the covenant as the central factor in the unfolding of salvation history. While there were different expressions of covenant, the covenant in Christ was requisite for the saints of all ages, with one way of salvation for the church going back to the time of Adam. Irenaeus distinguished between the mere letter of the law and its spirit. He identified both the natural law, the moral law and the love of God with the righteousness of God. Ceremonial laws were abrogated with the coming of Christ, but the moral law continued in force and has a continuing function in the lives of those who have been liberated by the gospel as a means of testing the reality and strength of their faith. The covenant of grace, therefore, while unilateral in its initiation and accomplishment, had for Irenaeus a strong bilateral and ethical emphasis in its outworking in Christian experience." "Unity and

even in this brief survey, that it is a theme of no small significance in the writings of this great theologian of the second century. Woolsey suggests that "Irenaeus was one of the clearest expositors of the covenant amongst the fathers."⁴⁴ It seems then that Irenaeus' fellow Christians in Lyons spoke precisely and appropriately (and perhaps with a little prescience) when they described him as "zealous for the covenant of Christ" (Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 5.4.2). W. C. van Unnik comments on this lacuna in Irenaeian studies:

In reading the passages where Irenaeus deals with the New Covenant one notices that he is using general notions with a typically polemical application viz. to show to the Gnostics who rejected the O.T. that it is the same God in both. It is a fundamental part of his theology as may be seen from the *Epideixis* where he gives the positive exposition. This combined with the fact that he is called "zealous for the covenant of Christ" makes it the more remarkable that so little attention is given to this theme in the descriptions of Irenaeus' theology. It is too important to be dealt with in a chapter on the relation between the two parts of the bible by way of introduction as is generally done.⁴⁵

This expression ("zealous for the covenant of Christ"), according to van Unnik, is unique in patristic literature.⁴⁶ In any case, it is certainly a most apposite denomination for Irenaeus. We may summarize some of the emphases of his covenant theology as follows.

First, Irenaeus understood *διαθήκη* primarily as a relationship between God and his people (what van Unnik calls the "Hebraic" sense) (AH 4.9.3). This relationship was so essential to the purposes of the divine economy that *διαθήκη* often serves him to delineate the main eras

Continuity in Covenantal Thought," 1:204.

⁴⁴ Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought," 1:202.

⁴⁵ "Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη," 225.

⁴⁶ "Ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη," 212-213.

of redemptive history (AH 4.11.3). He is also fond of speaking of covenants in the plural (AH 4.32.2). Hence, covenant (rather than testament or disposition) is the primary sense of διαθήκη in Irenaeus.

Second, with the NT writers and Justin, Irenaeus sees the incarnation and work of Christ as fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah (AH 4.13.1; DAP 24, 90). In contrast, Melito nowhere makes this connection explicitly in his extant writings.

Third, the covenant concept is of major significance in Irenaeus' presentation of redemptive history (AH 1.10.1,3). He perhaps makes more of the covenants than any of his contemporaries. He emphasizes both continuity and discontinuity when relating the old (Mosaic and Abrahamic) and new covenants (AH 4.11.3).

Fourth, the linkage of the covenant idea with forgiveness of sins is not as prominent in Irenaeus as it is in the NT and Justin. Irenaeus does however affirm the graciousness of the divine economy, especially in stressing the divine adaptation of the various covenants for the education and glorification of humanity (AH 3.11.8; 3.12.11-12).

Fifth, Irenaeus (like Clement and Barnabas) employs covenant thought in the service of moral exhortation, and his obdiential emphasis is unmistakable (AH 4.15-16).⁴⁷

Sixth, Irenaeus stands with the NT, Melito, and Justin over against Barnabas and the Gnostics in his view of Israel's reception of

⁴⁷ See also Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity," 1:203-204. Even J. W. Baker see this, Bullinger and the Covenant, 23. Consequently, D. A. Stoute is quite obviously wrong when he claims that there is no discussion of mutual obligations in the patristic teaching on the covenant, "The Origins and Early Development of the Reformed Idea of the Covenant," 23.

the old covenant (AH 4.15.2).

Seventh, like Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Justin, and Melito, Irenaeus makes a strong appeal to the OT in establishing covenant thought (in the standard manner of second-century *demonstratio evangelica*).

Eighth, the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants are mentioned or alluded to in writings of the NT, Barnabas and Justin (note: Melito never explicitly does so in PP). Irenaeus refers to these frequently and additionally to covenants with Adam and Noah (AH 3.11.8; DAP 22).

Ninth, Irenaeus links natural law and moral law (epitomized in the Ten Words), and sees this law both as extant prior to Moses (indeed, like Melito, Irenaeus speaks of God's giving of the law to Adam), and binding in the new covenant as well as the old (AH 4.15.1; 4.16.3).

PART II:

**NORTH AFRICA:
COVENANT, HOLINESS, AND THE CHURCH**

Chapter 3

TERTULLIAN: *LEX ET TESTAMENTUM*

Tertullian, in his enthusiasm for Christianity, came into conflict with all the authorities which he himself had set up. In the questions as to the relationship of the Old Testament to the New . . . he was also of necessity involved in the greatest contradictions. This was the case not only because he went into more details than Irenaeus; but, above all, because the chains into which he had thrown his Christianity were felt to be such by himself. This theologian had no greater opponent than himself, and nowhere perhaps is this so plain as in his attitude to the two Testaments.

A. Harnack, History of Dogma, 2:311.

In Tertullian, whatever his idiosyncracies, we find a reaffirmation of the Irenaeian solution to the Gnostic challenge, and this legacy which Irenaeus and Tertullian bequeathed to the church (with regard to Old Testament interpretation and the unity of old and new covenants), Harnack reckons, has remained with us to the present day.¹ This observation alone warrants an investigation of Tertullian's biblical theology.

It has already been suggested that the covenant idea was deployed in three contexts in the early church. Covenant was important in the discussion between the Jews and Christians. It remained conspicuous during the Gnostic controversies when the Jewish heritage of the church was called into question. And, as the establishment of a two-part canon came about, discussion naturally arose about the role of the old covenant in the Christian religion.² This certainly holds true for Tertullian. His theology of the Testaments and redemptive history is

¹ A. Harnack, History of Dogma, 7 vols., trans. N. Buchanan (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), 2:305.

² Ferguson, "Covenant Idea in the Second Century," 135-136; and D.L. Baker, Two Testaments, One Bible (Leicester:IVP, 1976), 43-48.

most clearly expressed in his controversial writings against the Jews and Gnostics. It is surely no accident that Tertullian's covenant terminology (e.g. *testamentum*, *instrumentum* and *dispositio*) is more pronounced and appears more frequently in his polemical works, Adversus Iudaeos, De Anima, De Carne Christi, De Praescriptione Haereticorum, Adversus Praxean, De Resurrectione Mortuorum, Adversus Hermogenem, and, most importantly, Adversus Marcionem. Furthermore, Tertullian's theological formulations concerning Old and New Testament relations and salvation history bear striking resemblances to those of the great anti-Gnostic polemicist and bishop of Lyons, Irenaeus.³ Indeed, Tertullian acknowledged this debt to Irenaeus and occasionally reproduced his arguments without modification.⁴ Hence, in Tertullian as in Irenaeus, there is the emphasis on the continuity of salvation history, the movement from old covenant to new covenant, the unity of the two Testaments, and God's maturing of humanity by bringing humankind along in successive stages of revelation. In fact, Harnack

³ Note that throughout this chapter, for sake of clarity, "Old Testament" and "New Testament" specifically refer to the writings of the Old and New Testaments, while "old covenant" or "new covenant" refers to the particular era/administration within redemptive history.

⁴ In Adversus Valentinianos 5, Tertullian says: "...*Nec utique dicemur ipsi nobis finxisse materias, quas tot iam viri sanctitate et praestantia ignis, nec solum nostri antecessores sed ipsorum haesiarcharum contemporales, instructissimus voluminibus et prodiderunt et retulerunt, ut Iustinus, philosophus et martyr, ut Miltiades, ecclesiarum sophista, ut Irenaeus, omnium doctrinarum curiosissimus explorator, ut Proculus noster, virginis senectae et Christianae eloquentiae dignitas, quos in omni opere fidei, quemadmodum in isto, optaverim adsequi.*" Though the context refers explicitly to the refutation of Gnosticism, it effectively illustrates the theological debt which Tertullian self-consciously owed to Irenaeus (among others). Furthermore, De Praescriptione Haereticorum provides evidence of Tertullian's borrowing from Irenaeus' Adversus Haereses. See The Prescriptions against the Heretics, trans. S.L. Greenslade, in Early Latin Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), "Appendix I: Irenaeus," where Greenslade gives examples of Tertullian's use of Irenaeus' Adversus Haereses.

said that, in regard to the theology of Old and New Testaments, Tertullian "only differs from Irenaeus in the additions he invented as a Montanist."⁵ This is a provocative statement that will bear future attention. However, it should not be appropriated for the purpose of minimizing the differences between Irenaeus' and Tertullian's respective presentations of salvation history. A comparison of the two yields variations and emphases, which are subtle but momentous. It will be our purpose in surveying Tertullian's biblical theology to highlight these distinctions without losing sight of the similarities, as well as to characterize the main emphases of his covenant thought.

Tertullian's Covenant Terminology

A survey of Tertullian's vocabulary for old and new covenant scriptures provides our first opportunity to contrast the role of covenant in the writings of Irenaeus and Tertullian. Tertullian uses the word *testamentum* in a number of different senses. *Testamentum* can denote "last will and testament" as in the following passage:

So, not being Christians, they [heretics] acquire no right to Christian literature. and we have every right to say to them: "Who are you? When did you arrive, and where from? You are not my people; what are you doing on my land? By what right are you cutting down my timber, Marcion? By whose leave are you diverting my waters, Valentinus? By what authority are you moving my boundaries, Apelles? This property belongs to me. And all the rest of you, why are you sowing and grazing here at your will? It is my property. I have been in possession for a long time, I came into possession before you appeared. I have good title-deeds from the original owners of the estate. I am heir to

⁵ A. Harnack, History of Dogma, 7 vols., trans. N. Buchanan (New York: Dover Publications, 1961), 2:311. Harnack writes these words as justification for not reviewing Tertullian's presentation of old and new covenant relations (having already surveyed Irenaeus'). This seems to intimate that Harnack thought the differences between the two to be relatively insignificant. If so, then surely the great historian under-estimated the differences of emphasis between the schemes of Irenaeus and Tertullian.

the apostles. As they provided in their will [*testamento*], as they bequeathed it in trust and confirmed it under oath, so, on their terms. I hold it. You they permanently disinherited and disowned as strangers and enemies."⁶

The significance of this passage lies in the fact that Tertullian is arguing that heretics have no right to appeal to Scripture. Tertullian, using an abundance of legal metaphors, claims that the orthodox alone have "rights" to the Scriptures. He possesses "title-deeds" from the original owners. He is an "heir." This has been settled in the owners' "will" (*testamento*). Previously, in this work, Tertullian has used *testamentum* to refer to the New Testament (De Praescriptione Haereticorum 30). Could he be intending a double meaning here--the New Testament as last will and testament? It may be possible to read this passage so as to connect *testamento* with the Scriptures. A better reading, however, is that *testamento* has reference to the *regula* which is mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. In that case, the *regula* is the "will" of the apostles and the New Testament is that which is bequeathed by means of the "will." At any rate, this is one example of Tertullian's use of *testamentum* as last will and testament.⁷

Tertullian also uses *testamentum* to signify the Old Testament. For instance, in Adversus Marcionem 2:27 he says: "That the Father has become visible to no man is the testimony of that gospel which you share with us, in which Christ says, 'No one knoweth the Father save the Son.' It was he also who in the Old Testament [*veteri testamento*] had already declared, 'No man shall see God and live,' thus pronouncing

⁶De Praescript. Haer. 37, trans. S.L. Greenslade, p. 58.

⁷ Other examples may be found in De Monogamia 16 and Adversus Iudaeos 7.

that the Father cannot be seen. . . ."⁸ Elsewhere Tertullian, while recounting components of the Old Testament law which were ridiculed by the Gnostics, says: "As far as I know, the whole Old Testament [*vetus testamentum*] is a matter of scorn to every heretic: for 'God hath chosen the foolish things of the world,' that he may confound its wisdom...."⁹ These are but two of a number of passages in which Tertullian employs *testamentum* as the title of the older Scriptures.¹⁰

We also find Tertullian calling the New Testament writings *testamentum*. Twice in Adversus Marcionem 5:11, in the context of a somewhat obscure argument against the possibility of Marcion's god existing, Tertullian speaks of the New Testament:

So also the New Testament [*testamentum novum*] will belong to none other than him who made the promise: even if the letter is not his, yet the Spirit is: herein lies the newness. Indeed he who had engraved the letter upon tables of stone is the same who also proclaimed, in reference, to the Spirit, "I will pour forth of my Spirit upon all flesh."¹¹

The thrust of the argument being that the New Testament writings belong to God just as do the Old Testament writings (some of which he had written himself on stone tablets) even if he did not actually write the New Testament with his own hand. For God had promised the New Testament, and this witnesses to the fact that it came from him. The important thing to note about the passage is that the Testament is spoken of as something written and is juxtaposed with the Old Testament (in the figure of "the letter upon tables of stone"). Hence, the

⁸ This translation is from Adversus Marcionem, 2 vols., trans. E. Evans (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 1:163

⁹ Adv. Marc. (5:5), trans. Evans, 2:541.

¹⁰ See also De Exhortatione Castitatis 10 and Adv. Marc. 4:6; 4:22.

¹¹ Adv. Marc. (5:11), trans. Evans, 2:579.

context strongly argues for understanding *testamentum novum* here as New Testament. The paragraph continues with Tertullian countering Marcion's appeals to Paul as ground for his rejection of the Old Testament. Tertullian argues:

He [Paul] also refers to Moses' veil with which he covered his face, which the children of Israel could not bear to look upon. If his [Paul's] purpose there was to maintain that the brightness of the New Testament [*novi testamenti*], which remaineth in glory, is greater than the glory of the Old Testament, which was to be done away, this too is in agreement with my faith....¹²

The argument for translating *novi testamenti* as New Testament here depends on the organic nature of Tertullian's argument in the first part of Adversus Marcionem 5:11 and his constant emphasis throughout on the "letter." There are, of course, several other passages where Tertullian intends New Testament by *testamentum*. In De Praescriptione Haereticorum 30 he says: "If Marcion separated the New Testament [*novum testamentum*] from the Old, he is later than what he separated."¹³ The reference here to the New Testament is indisputable, for his point is that Marcion arrived on the scene long after the Scriptures, which he divided, had been written. As a final example, in Adversus Praxean 15 Tertullian says: "If I cannot clear up this point by appealing to passages in the Old Scripture [*scripturae veteris*] which are under dispute, I will establish our interpretation out of the New Testament [*novo testamento*]."¹⁴ This is an additional instance where the meaning of *testamentum* is clear-cut.

Along with "last will and testament" and "Old/New Testament" the

¹² Adv. Marc. (5:11), trans. Evans, 2:579.

¹³ De Praescript. Haer. 30, trans. Greenslade, p. 51.

¹⁴ Adversus Praxean 15 (my translation). See also these other examples of this usage: Adv. Marc. 4:1; 4:6 and De Oratione 1.

word *testamentum* also designates a divine dispensation, whether old covenant or new.¹⁵ One of the best examples of this usage of *testamentum* by Tertullian is found in Adversus Marcionem 4:1. After quoting from Jeremiah 31:31,32, Tertullian says:

Thus he indicates that the original testament [*pristinum testamentum*] was temporary, since he declares it changeable, at the same time as he promises an eternal testament [*aeternum*] for the future. For by Isaiah he says: 'Hearken to me and ye shall live, and I shall ordain for you an eternal testament [*testamentum aeternum*],' adding also the holy and faithful things of David, as to point out that testament [*testamentum*] would become current in Christ.¹⁶

That this passage is concerned with dispensations in the divine economy and not the two Testaments is confirmed one sentence later when Tertullian speaks of "other laws and other words and new dispensations of covenants [*novas testamentorum dispositiones*]" being sent by the Father.¹⁷ Elsewhere Tertullian treats specifically the old and new covenants. In Adversus Marcionem 4:22 he says: ". . . even though there has been a transference made of this hearing from Moses and Elijah to Christ, this is not from one god to another god, nor to a different Christ, but by the Creator to his own Christ, in accordance with the demise of the old covenant [*veteris*] and the succession of the new [*novi testamenti*]" ¹⁸ Again, in Adversus Iudaeos 6, while

¹⁵ At this point in the discussion we are not particularly concerned about whether Tertullian conceives these dispensations to be "testamental or covenantal" in character. Our main interest is to see that Tertullian is using *testamentum* to refer to divine arrangements and stages in redemptive history. We will comment on the issue of the testamental/covenantal character of his biblical theology later.

¹⁶ Adv. Marc. (4:1), trans. Evans, 2:259.

¹⁷ Adv. Marc. 4:1 (my translation). Evans translates: ". . . other laws and other words and new ordainings of testaments . . ." 2:259.

¹⁸ Adv. Marc. (4:22), trans. Evans, 2:383.

teaching of the abrogation of the Jewish law, Tertullian says that since it was obvious that carnal circumcision and sacrifice foreshadowed spiritual circumcision and sacrifice, then it was equally obvious that a time would come when "the precepts of the ancient law and the old ceremonies would cease and the promise of the new law and the recognition of the spiritual sacrifices and the promise of the new covenant [*novi testamenti*] would supervene."¹⁹ To these examples others could be added.²⁰

Before proceeding in our review of Tertullian's vocabulary and its relation to the covenant idea, we should pause for some preliminary reflection. A contrast is already emerging between Irenaeus and Tertullian even in this matter of the meaning of *διαθήκη*/*testamentum*. First, Tertullian uses the term to indicate a "last will and testament." There are only traces of this meaning for *διαθήκη* (*testamentum*) in the writings of Irenaeus, and though this sense is found but a handful of times in Tertullian, it may be symptomatic of a different connotation of the word in Tertullian. The legal imagery of last will frequently finds its way into the context of passages in which Tertullian is using *testamentum* in other ways and so influences his understanding of the covenant.²¹ This legal emphasis in his expression of *testamentum* indicates Tertullian's modification of the Irenaeian usage, and should be neither overstated nor ignored. Second, Tertullian's use of *testamentum* to denote the Old or New Testament

¹⁹ *Adversus Iudaeos* 6 (my translation), CCSL 2:1352.

²⁰ See also *Adv. Marc.* 1:20 [Jeremiah 4:4]; 5:4; 5:11; 5:17 [Ephesians 2:12].

²¹ For instance, see *De Monogamia* 16 where Tertullian speaks of "the last will and testament of God [*testamento Dei*]."

provides another area of contrast. The predominant meaning of διαθήκη (*testamentum*) in Irenaeus is that of a divine-human relationship (and secondarily as a designation for particular dispensations of redemptive history) and so Tertullian's regular use of it as a title for Scripture may mark a distinction between the two. Irenaeus apparently does not employ διαθήκη (*testamentum*) specifically as a title for the New Testament.²² On the other hand, Tertullian explicitly uses *testamentum* as a title for both Old and New Testaments.²³ It should be made clear, however, that *testamentum* is not Tertullian's preferred denomination of the Old or New Testament, nor does *testamentum* most frequently indicate testament when it is used by Tertullian. Indeed Tertullian's most common use of *testamentum* is in reference to a dispensation of the divine economy: a secondary usage of the term διαθήκη for Irenaeus. Nevertheless, *testamentum* occurs as a more than occasional denomination for the Old and New Testaments in Tertullian, and this is in contrast with the more restricted Irenaean usage.

These comments raise a question that leads us naturally to our next topic of discussion: If *testamentum* is not Tertullian's preferred term for the titles of the older and younger Scriptures, then what is? The answer is readily found in the word *instrumentum*, for it is

²² W.C. Van Unnik argues this persuasively in "Ἡ καινή διαθήκη - a problem in the early history of the Canon," in *Studia Patristica* 4 (1959): 196-228. See also Kinzig, "Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 519-534. For opposing views see J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978) p. 56; and E. Flesseman-van Leer, *Tradition and Scripture in the Early Church* (Assen, 1953), 132.

²³ R.V. Moss says: "it appears to be Tertullian who first clearly applies covenant or its equivalent to the canon of Christian scripture." In "The Covenant Conception in Early Christian Thought" (PhD thesis, University of Chicago, 1954), 137.

Tertullian's favorite designation for the Scriptures by a margin of about two to one over *testamentum*. In Adversus Hermogenem 20 we find Tertullian, after an extended appeal to Old Testament passages in support of his argument, saying: "In conclusion I will apply the Gospel as a supplementary testimony to the Old Testament [*instrumenti veteris*]." ²⁴ In Adversus Iudaeos 1 he speaks of "the Book of Divine Scriptures [*instrumento divinarum scripturarum*]" In Adversus Marcionem 4:2 he calls the New Testament the "Gospel Testament [*instrumentum*]," and in Adv. Marc. 5:1 calls the Old Testament the "Testament of the Creator [*instrumento creatoris*]." The relation of the terms *instrumentum* and *testamentum*, as designations for Scripture, is clarified by his important comments in Adv. Marc. 4:1. Tertullian's opening remarks of book four are as follows:

Every sentence, indeed the whole structure, arising from Marcion's impiety and profanity, I now challenge in terms of that gospel which he has by manipulation made his own. Besides that, to work up credence for it he has contrived a sort of dowry, a work entitled Antitheses because of its juxtaposition of opposites, a work strained into making such a division between the Law and the Gospel as thereby to make two separate gods, opposite to each other, one belonging to one instrument [*instrumenti*] (or, as it is more usual to say, testament [*testamenti*]), one to the other, and thus lend its patronage to faith in another gospel, that according to the Antitheses. ²⁵

This interchangeable character of *instrumentum* and *testamentum* tends to confirm our hypothesis that, in Tertullian, *testamentum* is moving away from its Irenaean status and meaning. The first confirming factor is the documentary stress in Tertullian's treatment of the old and new covenants. Though we have noted that Tertullian intends a divine

²⁴ Adversus Hermogenem 20, trans. P. Holmes, in ANCL 3:489.

²⁵ This is Evans' translation of the passage (2:257), marred only by his failure to render *testamentum* as testament. This meaning is inescapable here.

dispensation by *testamentum* more often than he means testament, when the instances of this latter meaning are added to Tertullian's references to the writings of the old and new Scriptures where he uses *instrumentum*, it becomes clear that in his anti-Gnostic polemics he is preoccupied with the unity of the writings (rather than the unity of the covenants in redemptive history) when he uses these two terms. Second, the term *dispositio* (which we will attend to later) is more frequently employed by Tertullian in expressing his theology of old and new covenants than is *testamentum*. Irenaeus also uses the concept of the divine arrangement (πραγματεία, οίκονομία: *dispositio*), but the language of διαθήκαι is the hallmark of his biblical theology. Hence, comparatively speaking, *testamentum* does not have the prominence in Tertullian's theology that διαθήκη does in Irenaeus'. Third, along with *instrumentum* and especially *testamentum* come legal connotations that are not present in Irenaeus' use of διαθήκη (*testamentum*). Bruce Metzger highlights this when he says:

Tertullian's New Testament is not perceptibly different from that of the preceding period. The new element that he added is the judicial character which he gave to its authority. Of the Latin equivalents for the Greek word for the Bible (βιβλία) employed by Tertullian and other Latin writers in the West, the most important and suggestive were the words *Instrumentum* and *Testamentum*. Both terms were used in Roman law, one meaning a written contract or agreement (sometimes a public document), the other a last will and testament. Tertullian, who uses both for the Scriptures, seems to prefer *Instrumentum*²⁶

It is pertinent to note at this point that J. E. L. van der Geest has argued that Tertullian uses *testamentum* in reference to the Old and New Testaments only exceptionally and comparatively late in his

²⁶ B. M. Metzger, The Canon of the New Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 158-159.

writings.²⁷ Undoubtedly, Tertullian uses *testamentum* of the Testaments more in the works of his Montanist period than in his earlier writings. In fact, in those writings which are "consensus" pre-Montanist products, Tertullian uses *testamentum* only three times in all (ten if Adv. Iudaeos is included).²⁸ But, of those three times at least one is an indisputable reference to the New Testament (De Praescript. Haer. 30). So we would not want to go so far as to say that Tertullian uses *testamentum* of OT/NT only in his late writings. However, that *testamentum* is more prominent in the later writings, should be taken into account. In regard to the infrequency of *testamentum* as OT/NT, it should be noted that of the roughly eighty times that the word is used, about one-fourth of those occurrences are definitely to be understood as testament. So, though this meaning of *testamentum* as testament does not constitute the lion's share of the term's appearance, it is by no means to be seen as an infrequent meaning in the works of Tertullian.

In his book Deus Christianorum, Rene Braun has shed light on the relatively limited role of *testamentum* (in comparison to *instrumentum*) as a title for OT/NT. Braun has convincingly argued that Tertullian's favorite designation for the Scriptures (*instrumentum*) comes from the context of Carthaginian Judaism. He contends that *instrumentum* was used by the Latin-speaking Jews as a common designation for their

²⁷ See J. E. L. van der Geest, Le Christ et L'Ancien Testament chez Tertullien (Nijmegen: Dekker and Van de Vegt, 1972), 29-35.

²⁸ Of the pre-Montanist works of Tertullian (as determined by construction of a "consensus" chronology from the sequences proposed by Barnes, Kaye, Neander, the CCSL listing, Braun and Altaner), only De Oratione and De Praescript. Haer. contain the word *testamentum*. Adv. Iudaeos is disputed, with Barnes, Kaye, and Braun assigning it to Tertullian's pre-Montanist period, while Neander and the CCSL put it in the Montanist period. Altaner makes no suggestion.

Scriptures.²⁹ He goes on to suggest that Tertullian's use of *instrumentum* for the Scriptures is not his invention but is a common term borrowed from the Latin-speaking Jews of North Africa. He also asserts that the judicial sense of *instrumentum* is absent in the Jewish usage of the term and thus also in Tertullian's. However, as we have already noted, the term *instrumentum* had judicial overtones in the Latin-speaking world that would have been picked up by Tertullian's readers, and the accompanying juridical language of his arguments may have added to the legal connotations of the term. On the other hand, if Braun is correct about the judicial sense of *instrumentum* being absent (or at least balanced by the documentary meaning of the term as found in Jewish circles) from Tertullian's writings, it could explain his preference for *instrumentum* over *testamentum* as his most general designation for the Scriptures. *Instrumentum* would in this case, stress the documentary character more than the legal (testamentary) character of the revelation. This, in turn, would modify our assertion about the general legal character of Tertullian's covenant terminology, without altering (and possibly heightening) our estimation of the legal aspect of *testamentum*. In fact, both van der Geest's and Braun's observations tend to confirm our opinion that in Tertullian *testamentum* does not have quite the status or meaning that it has in Irenaeus. One further reflection may be apposite here. If Braun is correct in his

²⁹ R. Braun, *Deus Christianorum* (Paris: Presses Universitaires De France, 1962), pp. 470-471. Braun cites as confirmation of his theory that archaeological research has revealed the third century synagogue of Naro (Hamman-Lif) had a small chamber where the Scriptures were kept. There was an inscription on this little room that contained the designation: *INSTRUMENTA*. Hence, he takes this as supporting evidence to his idea that Latin-speaking Jews had linked the word to their sacred writings, and that it was commonly used as such in the North Africa of Tertullian's time.

contention about Tertullian taking *instrumentum* from a context of Latin-speaking Carthaginian Judaism and we couple this with the fact that *testamentum* occurs far more commonly in the writings of his Montanist period, we might be able to postulate that *testamentum*, as one of his designations for Scripture, is derived from influences (Irenaeus or Montanist?) outside his Carthaginian circles. As these outside influences increased (in his movement towards Montanism?) and were added to a specific polemical context where covenantal terminology was at a premium (his anti-Gnostic writings), he tends to take up *testamentum* more readily. This, in turn, serves to remind us that *testamentum* was in common use as a title for Scripture in Tertullian's time (as he himself tells us in Adv. Marc. 4:1) and that however influential he was in the development and popularization of the term (whatever legal connotations he attached to it or were associated with it after his time), the original significance of this term's application to the Scripture by the early church cannot be determined by exclusive reference to his writings, even if they provide the earliest extant examples of the use of *testamentum* as New Testament.³⁰

³⁰ Perhaps we should call attention to the fact that when we speak of Tertullian's use of *testamentum* having a "legal" aspect not present in Irenaeus, we are not using "legal" in the pejorative sense. This is mentioned simply because some have despaired of the "legalization" of the covenant concept. R. V. Moss, for instance, speaks disparagingly of the "tendency in the third and fourth century to legalize the covenant idea by reducing it to *γρόμιμα*" (Moss, "Covenant Conception," p. 137). How this constitutes a "legalization" of the covenant concept is another matter. It should be pointed out that the Hebrew concept of covenant had a legal/contractual element itself, as has been demonstrated from near-eastern treaty forms and the OT. It may be that the use of *testamentum* in Latin-speaking Christianity contributed to the acquisition of alien legal connotations for the church's inherited covenant concept, but the covenant idea was never completely without legal significance. This is clearly seen in the "בְּרִית" pattern in the preaching of the Hebrew prophets, where they brought "covenantal lawsuits" against the disobedient children of Israel.

Before we conclude our discussion of the vocabulary in Tertullian that is related to the covenant idea, we must consider two more terms: *dispositio* and *dispensatio*. The term *dispositio* means for Tertullian something divinely ordained or arranged (most frequently) and so it is, not surprisingly, employed by him to denote a stage, a dispensation, an administration of the divine economy. In Apologeticum 48 he speaks of the "eternal economy [*dispositionis aeternitatis*]." In De Anima 48, after asserting that Adam's sleep was a foreshadowing of Christ's death and that the formation of Eve from Adam's side was comprehended in the wound inflicted on Christ's side, Tertullian says that God "in his dispensation [*dispositione*] brought nothing to pass without such types and shadows."³¹ He speaks of God putting Christ in charge of his "whole design and purpose [*dispositioni*]" at the incarnation.³² Additionally, Tertullian uses *dispositio* in reference to the old and new dispensations such as we find in Adv. Marc. 4:1 where he says: "So then I do admit that there was a different course followed in the old dispensation under the Creator [*veteri dispositioni apud creatorem*], from that in the new dispensation under Christ [*nova apud Christum*]." ³³ Indeed, the close relation of *dispositio* to the covenant idea is best illustrated by three passages in Adv. Marc. 3:20. In a quotation of Isaiah 42:6, we find: "I have given thee for a covenant [*dispositionem*] of the human race, a light for the nations" ³⁴

³¹ De Anima 43, trans. P. Holmes, ANCL, 3:222.

³² Adv. Marc. (2:27), trans. Evans, 1:161.

³³ Adv. Marc. (4:1), trans. Evans, 2:257.

³⁴ Adv. Marc. (3:20), trans. Evans, 1:233. The word for which Tertullian "substitutes" *dispositionem* is ברית in the Masoretic text and διαθήκη in the LXX.

Here *dispositio* is synonymous with covenant, as is demonstrated by the fact that Tertullian quotes this same verse in Adv. Marc. 4:1 and uses *testamentum* in place of *dispositio*. Only a few lines down, in a quotation of Isaiah 55:3 (another verse with *διαθήκη* behind covenant in the LXX), we find: "And I will ordain for you an eternal covenant [*dispositionem aeternam*], the religious and faithful things of David."³⁵ So we are not surprised when Tertullian concludes: "And therefore this new covenant [*nova dispositio*], which today is found to exist in Christ, must be that which the Creator was then promising when he told of the religious and faithful things of David, which were Christ's things, because Christ is from David."³⁶ These instances of *dispositio* being used in place of *testamentum* to express the idea of covenant serve to highlight the importance of *dispositio* in the presentation of Tertullian's biblical theology. In fact, *dispositio* occurs 125 times in Tertullian (as compared to around 80 for *testamentum*) and is applied as a description of a stage in God's economy more frequently than *testamentum*. A brief review of Tertullian's use of *testamentum* and *dispositio* reveals that many of his uses of *testamentum* as the designation of the old or new economy are, in fact, quotations from Scripture. His own preferred term to describe the divine economy is clearly *dispositio*.³⁷ This is confirmed by a comparison of the instances in which the terms are used in Adv. Marc., especially book five. In this book *testamentum* is found eleven times,

³⁵ Adv. Marc. (3:20), trans. Evans, 1:233.

³⁶ Adv. Marc. (3:20), trans. Evans, 1:233.

³⁷ See E. Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 148-149

seven of which are in quotations of Paul. On the other hand, *dispositio* occurs twelve times, none of which is a scriptural quote and all of which have reference to God's economy. If Irenaeus was a covenant theologian, we might say that Tertullian was a dispensationalist (no modern connotations intended!). Of course, as we have already noted, Irenaeus also uses the concept of the divine arrangement (*πραγματεία, οικονομία: dispositio*), and there is not much conceptual difference between Irenaeus' redemptive-historical use of *διαθήκη* and Tertullian's *dispositio*. The real contrast is found in Irenaeus' characteristic appeal (and Tertullian's lack thereof) to the various biblical covenants: Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, and New. But this will be considered later.

Finally, we come to *dispensatio* which is employed only infrequently (14 times) and most often has behind it the Greek term *οικονομία*. Hence, it is found in Tertullian's quotations of and allusions to Ephesians 1:10, when he speaks of a "dispensation [*dispensationem*] of the fullness of times" (Adv. Marc. 5:17) and also in Adv. Praxean 2 where *dispensatio* is explicitly identified with *οικονομία* and applied to the Trinity.³⁸ The term only appears in its economic sense late in the writings of Tertullian and therefore plays but a minor role in his presentation of biblical theology.

By way of summary, we have noted in this review of covenant vocabulary that Tertullian uses *testamentum* occasionally as "last will and testament" in relative contrast to Irenaeus. He also frequently applies it as a title for the Testaments and so designates the New

³⁸ See G. L. Prestige, God in Patristic Thought (London: SPCK, 1952), 57-67.

Testament, which Irenaeus apparently does not do. Then we saw that his most general use of *testamentum* was similar to the Irenaeian practice. Tertullian then, while retaining the Irenaeian meaning (*testamentum* as a covenant within God's economy), has employed the word in other senses and thus moved away from Irenaeus' more restricted use of the term. We also observed that there seem to be legal overtones to Tertullian's use of *testamentum* that are in contrast to Irenaeus' use of *διαθήκη/testamentum*. Additionally, we have seen that *instrumentum* is Tertullian's favorite designation for the Scriptures and have suggested that its consistent use indicates Tertullian's preoccupation with the writings of the old and new covenants in his anti-Gnostic polemics. Finally, we have noted that Tertullian most frequently designates the divine economy by the term *dispositio*. This term is in fact his own preferred expression of the old and new covenant administrations. This also stands in contrast to Irenaeus' usage, and yet *dispositio* by and large conveys the content of Irenaeus' *testamentum*.

The Relationship between the Older and Younger Scriptures

Having completed our survey of covenantal/Testamental terminology in the writings of Tertullian, we turn to consider his theology of the connection between the Old Testament and the Christian Scriptures. In so doing, we will be concerned with obtaining from Tertullian answers to three questions. How are the Old and New Testaments related? What is the nature of their unity? And, how is the diversity of the Testaments to be explained? Tertullian, like Irenaeus, produces his answers to these questions in the context of the Gnostic controversy and against Marcion, and to a great extent reproduces the Irenaeian

solution to their criticisms of the Old Testament. Therefore, Tertullian's polemics with Marcion provide a natural foil for the investigation of his theology of the relationship between the Old Testament and the Christian writings. Consequently, we will give attention to Tertullian's arguments in his debate with Marcion.

In his criticism of Marcion's theology, Tertullian was especially concerned with emphasizing the origins of Marcion's error. This was important because Tertullian's positive response to Marcion was designed to cut down Marcion's system at the root. His first censure of the thought of Marcion concerned his obsession with the question of the origin of evil. Tertullian says: "For like many even in our day, heretics in particular, Marcion had an unhealthy interest in the problem of evil--the origin of it--and his perceptions were numbed by the very excess of his curiosity" (Adv. Marc. 1:2).³⁹ This speculation concerning evil and its source had serious repercussions when Marcion combined it with his beliefs about the essentially benevolent nature of God. Marcion saw in Christ "a different dispensation of sole and unadulterated benevolence" (Adv. Marc. 1:2) but chafed at the picture of God found in the Old Testament that he thought was typified by the word of the Creator "*Ego sum qui condo mala.*"⁴⁰ To this statement in Isaiah, says Tertullian, Marcion applied the dictum of Christ that the good tree does not bring forth bad fruit nor does the bad tree bring forth good fruit. From this Marcion determined that if the god of the Old Testament admitted to being the cause of evil he could not be the good god revealed by Christ, because a good god cannot bring forth evil

³⁹ Adv. Marc. (1:2), trans. Evans, 1:7.

⁴⁰ Adv. Marc. 1:2, quoting Isaiah 45:7, trans. Evans, 1:7.

nor can an evil god bring forth good. This, according to Tertullian, led to Marcion's invention of two gods--one of the Old Testament, another the benevolent god of Christ and Paul. In his development of this dualistic theology, Tertullian suggests that Marcion has gone wrong in at least two ways. He has applied Jesus' words about the trees and fruit (cf. Luke 6:43ff) wrongly. They are applicable only to men, not God. As Tertullian expresses it: "The unhappy man became afflicted with the idea of this wild guess [the idea of two gods] in consequence of that plain statement which our Lord made, which applies to men, not to gods, the example of the good tree and the bad"⁴¹ But more fundamentally Marcion's theological conceptions are flawed because of their philosophical origins. Marcion's preoccupation with evil and his doctrine of the nature of god are things that he has learned from the sophists, not from the Scriptures. Tertullian utterly rejects philosophy as a legitimate source for one's doctrine of God:

These are human and demonic doctrines, engendered for itching ears by the ingenuity of that worldly wisdom which the Lord calls foolishness, choosing the foolish things of the world to put philosophy to shame. For worldly wisdom culminates in philosophy with its rash interpretation of God's nature and purpose. It is philosophy that supplies the heresies with their equipment. From philosophy come the aeons and those infinite forms--whatever they are--and Valentinus's human trinity. He had been a Platonist. From philosophy came Marcion's God, the better for his inactivity. He had come from the Stoics Heretics and philosophers perpend the same themes and are caught in the same discussions. What is the origin of evil, and why?⁴²

In this way, Tertullian identifies what seems to him to be a fundamental flaw in Marcion's theology: Marcion's doctrine of god is philosophically derived. Further, Marcion's mental disposition has been influenced by the philosophers and he is, in consequence,

⁴¹ Adv. Marc. 1:2, trans. Evans, 1:7.

⁴² De Praescript. Haer. 7, trans. Greenslade, 35.

excessively curious and wont to concern himself with obscure philosophical dilemmas. Doubtless, Marcion was not far from his thoughts when Tertullian penned these words: "Nor need we wonder if the speculations of the philosophers have perverted the older scriptures. Some of their brood, with their opinions, have even adulterated our new-given Christian revelation, and corrupted it into a system of philosophic doctrines, and from the one path have struck off many and inexplicable by-roads."⁴³ Tertullian's condemnation of this Gnostic proclivity to philosophical preoccupation was unqualified and is nowhere more sharply expressed than in his famous words: "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic? Our principles come from the porch of Solomon, who had himself taught that the Lord is to be sought in simplicity of heart. I have no use for a Stoic or a Platonic or a dialectic Christianity."⁴⁴

Tertullian's second great censure of Marcionite theology concerned the separation of Law and Gospel. This separation, according to Tertullian, was related to and inspired by Marcion's philosophical presuppositions. Tertullian returns again and again to the theme of Marcion's separation of the Testaments. He charges in Adv. Marc. 1:19, "The separation of Law and Gospel is the primary and principal exploit of Marcion."⁴⁵ Furthermore, Marcion's Antitheses have been composed to demonstrate the contradictory character of the two Testaments and thereby argue for two gods: "For such are Marcion's Antitheses, or

⁴³ Apologeticum 47, trans. S. Thelwall, ANCL, 3:52.

⁴⁴ De Praescript. Haer. 7, trans. Greenslade, p. 36.

⁴⁵ Adv. Marc. (1:19), trans. Evans, 1:49.

Contrary Oppositions, which are designed to show the conflict and disagreement of the Gospel and the Law, so that from the diversity of principles between those two documents [*instrumenti*] they may argue further for a diversity of gods."⁴⁶ Elsewhere Tertullian says of Marcion's god that "the very idea of that heretical god originated with this separation between the gospel and the law"⁴⁷ In a passage that we have previously quoted but that bears repeating, Tertullian says that Marcion's Antitheses is "a work strained into making such a division between the Law and the Gospel as thereby to make two separate gods, opposites to each other, one belonging to one [I]nstrument (or, as it is more usual to say, [T]estament), one to the other"⁴⁸ Marcion, according to Tertullian, had found the New Testament to be more amenable to his concept of god (and those parts which were not, he conveniently removed). The character of the Old Testament (as envisaged by Marcion), however, was irreconcilable with his own ideas about god. This led him to suspect that there were two gods — one of the Old and the other of the New Testament. The diversity between the Testaments confirmed in Marcion's mind that his theory of different gods was correct. Thus he set out to write the Antitheses with the object of establishing the diversity of the Testaments as evidence for his own doctrine of god. Tertullian puts it this way:

⁴⁶ Adv. Marc. (1:19), trans. Evans, 1:49.

⁴⁷ Adv. Marc. 1:21, trans. Evans, 1:55,57.

⁴⁸ Adv. Marc. 4:1, trans. Evans, 2:257. I have inserted upper case "I" in "instrument" and "T" in "testament" in Evans' translation to make clear the fact that Tertullian has in mind the two Testaments. That he is concerned with the writings of the old and new dispensations is made clear by the juxtaposition of instrumentum and testamentum. I cannot conceive of any other possible way of translating this passage, and why "testament" appears in Evans' text is a mystery to me.

I now advance a step further, while I call into account, as I have promised, Marcion's gospel in his own version of it, with the design, even so, of proving it adulterated. Certainly the whole of the work he has done, including the prefixing of his Antitheses, he directs to the one purpose of setting up opposition between the Old Testament and the New, and thereby putting his Christ in separation from the Creator, as belonging to another god, and having no connection with the law and the prophets. Certainly that is why he has expunged all the things that oppose his view, that are in accord with the Creator, on the plea that they have been woven in by his partisans; but has retained those that accord with his opinion.⁴⁹

The connection between Marcion's separation of law and gospel, and the influence of philosophy on his thinking, according to Tertullian, is as follows. Marcion's curiosity was engendered by his philosophical bent, and this led him to excessive speculation on questions such as the origin of evil. At the same time his own conception of god derived from the philosophers (presumably the Stoics). These influences led him to postulate two gods when trying to explain the phenomenon of diversity between the two Testaments. He resolved the tensions between the older and younger Scriptures by attributing them to different gods. Those new covenant Scriptures that could not be reconciled with his own preconception of the god announced by Christ, he simply ignored. He then wrote the Antitheses to demonstrate this opposition of the Old and New Testaments in support of his own doctrine of god. Hence, Marcion's god is shown to be the god of Christ and Paul by a process of circular reasoning. So when Tertullian says that Marcion's heretical god had originated with his separation of law and gospel, he does not mean that he believes Marcion to have derived his doctrine of god by a misreading of Scripture. Tertullian never gives him this much credit. Tertullian means that Marcion's alien concept of god, derived from philosophy, had

⁴⁹ Adv. Marc. 4:6, trans. Evans, 2:275.

never entered into anyone's mind until Marcion separated the law and the gospel.

These two major criticisms of Marcionite theology (the philosophical origins of Marcion's god and his consequent separation of law and gospel) by Tertullian are important for his positive assertions concerning the Old and New Testaments. Since, in Tertullian's view, Marcion's dependence on heathen philosophy led to his unorthodox doctrine of god(s), and that led him to separate law and gospel (which, by way of circular reasoning, was his most important justification for his doctrine of god), Tertullian will argue that diversity between the Testaments does not justify the rejection of the Old, thus breaking down Marcion's major support for his theology proper, after which Tertullian can pinpoint the origins of Marcion's (and indeed all) heresy — philosophy.

We now turn to consider Tertullian's positive response to Marcion. It is in this response that Tertullian's theology of Old and New Testament relations is most clearly seen. The argument can be grouped under three headings, the first of which is Tertullian's appeal to the time-honored prophecy and fulfillment motif. The apologists had effectively appealed to Christ's fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies as proof of claims to be the Son of God. Irenaeus was the first major extant writer to take this argument and adapt it to the needs of the Gnostic controversy. He had argued that if Christ and the apostles appealed to the old covenant writings as predictive of him, then the God spoken of in those older Scriptures must be the same as the Father of Jesus Christ. Tertullian followed on Irenaeus' lead and used this "argument from the argument from prophecy" extensively against Marcion. In book three of Adv. Marc. he argues that the Old

Testament foreshadowed the new covenant dispensation in exhaustive detail. Both of Christ's advents were foretold: the first one a coming in humility, and the second one in power and glory (Adv. Marc. 3:7). Isaiah's prophecy concerning Christ's name "God with us" is deemed to be an appropriate designation for Jesus (since even some Marcionites call Christ "Emmanuel"). Psalm 45 also speaks of Christ as the one "fairer than the sons of men" and its reference to girding on "the sword" signifies the "divine word," which John speaks of in the Apocalypse, saying that the word was "doubly sharp with the two Testaments of the Law and Gospel" (Adv. Marc. 3:14. Joshua was typical of Christ (Adv. Marc. 3:16). Christ's death is also set forth in prophecy (Adv. Marc. 3:19). Tertullian then draws a conclusion from the old covenant prophecies fulfilled by Christ:

It is enough so far to have traced out Christ's course in these matters, far enough for it to be proved that he is such a one as was foretold, and consequently ought not to be taken as any other than he who it was foretold would be such as this. And so now, because what happened to him is in harmony with the Creator's scriptures, the prior authority of the majority of instances must restore credibility to those others which in the interest of opposing opinions, are either brought into doubt or completely denied.⁵⁰

Thus Tertullian argues that the fulfillment of the prophecies of the Old Testament in the person of Christ should restore our confidence in those Scriptures as a whole. That old covenant prophecies are fulfilled in new covenant Scriptures witnesses to the unity of both Testaments and exonerates those old covenant prophecies which the Gnostics have brought into question.

Tertullian, however, is prepared to make more out of the announcement of Christ in the Old Testament. In sharp contrast to

⁵⁰ Adv. Marc. 3:20 trans. Evans, 1:231.

Marcion's unexpected Christ, Tertullian develops a theology of the prediction of Christ. Even Christ's miracles would have been insufficient testimony to his person had not the Father testified to him beforehand (Adv. Marc. 3:3). Tertullian characterizes Marcion's savior as "a son unexpected, an agent unexpected, a Christ unexpected" then adds: "But I suggest that with God nothing is unexpected, because with God nothing exists unordained. If then it was ordained beforehand, why was it not also announced beforehand, so that the announcement might prove it ordained, and the ordaining prove it divine."⁵¹ So then, the fact that Christ has fulfilled the prior announcements testifies not only that he is the one looked for but also that the announcements themselves are divine. Behind the prophecy and fulfillment relationship between the Old and New Testament is the concept of divine providence: a single divine plan ordained by the Creator, announced by the Creator, fulfilled in Christ (which fulfillment reciprocally confirms the divine character of the announcement). Thus Tertullian's first argument against Marcion's separation of law and gospel is dependent upon Old Testament prophecy with New Testament fulfillment. As he himself puts it:

So also the New Testament will belong to none other than him who made that promise [of the new covenant]: even if the letter is not his, yet the Spirit is: herein lies the newness. Indeed he who engraved the letter upon tables of stone is the same who also proclaimed, in reference to the Spirit, "I will pour forth my Spirit on all flesh."⁵²

The Creator made the promise of a new covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:31) and the pouring out of the Spirit on all people (Joel 2:28). Since these prophecies are attested by the New Testament Scriptures as being

⁵¹ Adv. Marc. 3:2, trans. Evans, 1:173.

⁵² Adv. Marc. 5:11, trans. Evans, 2:579.

fulfilled in the incarnation of Christ and the coming of the Paraclete at Pentecost, the Creator who promised these things must be the God of the older and the younger Scriptures. In the scheme of Tertullian's argument, his appeal to prophecy and fulfillment serves to contradict Marcion's emphasis on the diversity that is apparent between the Testaments. Promise and fulfillment, according to Tertullian, is a phenomenon of Scripture which attests to its unity. Marcion had failed to come to grips with the evidence that Scripture itself provided for this unity. And so Tertullian turned to the "argument from the argument from prophecy" as witness to the homogeneity of the two Testaments.

The second component of Tertullian's response to Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament may be designated: the acknowledgment of diversity between the Law and Gospel. This constitutes the broadest segment of his argument and is of prime importance in understanding Tertullian's theology of the relation between the Testaments. Marcion had charged that there were many contradictions in the Old and New Testaments that made the two irreconcilable. Tertullian countered, not by denying the diversity that existed between the Testaments, but by appealing to that same diversity as proof of the essential unity. Tertullian's rejoinder on diversity draws on Irenaeus' argument concerning the differences between the old and new dispensations. But whereas Irenaeus had explained how the diversity did not contradict the inherent unity of the covenants, Tertullian employed that very diversity between the covenants as proof of the unity. Tertullian opens book four of Adv. Marc. by commenting on the purpose of Marcion's Antitheses, which is to drive a wedge between law and gospel so as to make two gods (Adv. Marc. 4:1). To this he responds:

So then I do admit that there was a different course

followed in the old dispensation under the Creator, from that in the new dispensation under Christ. I do not deny a difference in records of things spoken, in precepts of good behavior, and in rules of law, provided that all these differences have reference to one and the same God, that God by whom it is acknowledged that they were ordained and also foretold.⁵³

Elsewhere, Tertullian is equally willing to admit of diversity between the law and gospel (Adv. Marc. 4:34) while emphatically asserting the unity of the dispensations (Adv. Marc. 4:12). But, as we have previously mentioned, Tertullian was not content to reconcile the diversity with the unity of the covenants. He set out to turn the differences into a positive argument on behalf of his own position. He says:

Now I have already postulated, in opposition to the Antitheses, that Marcion's purpose is in no sense served by what he supposes to be an opposition between the law and the gospel, because this too was ordained by the Creator, and in fact was foretold by that promise of a new law and a new word and a new testament.⁵⁴

In other words, Tertullian contends that there had to be a diversity in God's economy because he had made a promise for a new covenant and a new law. How could this newness come about, as predicted in the Old Testament, unless there was a diversity between the old and new dispensations? Hence diversity, opposition, and newness constitute proof that both dispensations are ordained by the same God since he had previously indicated that this diversity would be present in the new covenant. As the divine providence is behind prophecy and fulfillment, which demonstrates the unity of the covenants, so also is it behind the ordination and prediction of the new covenant, which show diversity to be an integral part of the divine economy. This approach to the

⁵³ Adv. Marc. 4:1, trans. Evans, 2:257.

⁵⁴ Adv. Marc. 4:9. trans. Evans, 2:289.

problem of tension between the Testaments gives Tertullian a free hand in responding to Gnostic claims about the contradictory character of the Jewish and Christian revelation. He is able not only to explain the reasons for the difference but also to argue that the diversity constitutes no disadvantage to the orthodox position on the relationship of the Testaments and, indeed, is a positive confirmation of the unity of the dispensations.

Tertullian employs this argument and expands on the nature of the relationship between law and gospel in the following passage:

When by Isaiah he declares, "The old things are passed away, behold these are new things that I make," is he not turning them round to new things? I have long since established the fact that this termination of the ancient things was rather the Creator's own promise made actual in Christ, under the authority of that one same God to whom belong both old things and new Consequently, if Christ was applying the parable [of the old and new wineskins] to this purpose, of indicating that he separated the newness of the gospel from the oldness of the law, he made it clear that from which he separated it was his own So he made it plain that the things which he was separating had once been a unity, as they would have continued to be if he were not separating them. In that sense we admit this separation, by way of reformation, of enlargement, of progress, as fruit is separated from seed, since fruit comes out of seed. So also the gospel is separated from the law, because it is an advance from out of the law, another thing than the law, though not an alien thing, different, though not opposed.⁵⁵

According to Tertullian then, the nature of the diversity or separation of law and gospel is one of reformation, enlargement, and progress. The old dispensation is the seed. The new dispensation is the fruit. There is diversity, but there is also organic unity. The progress of reformation and amplification serves to explain both unity and diversity of the covenants. One cannot reform or expand that which does not exist. Hence, the enlargement and reformation of the older

⁵⁵ Adv. Marc. 4:11, trans. Evans, 2:311.

dispensation, which occurred in the new dispensation, bear witness to the intimate relation between the covenants. Tertullian gives a general outline of how the various components of the Old Testament carry over into the New in De Oratione 1. In his opening remarks, he informs the reader that Christ had instituted a new form of prayer for "the disciples of the new covenant." Tertullian justifies this change by appealing again to the parable of the wineskins and then adds:

For the rest, whatever had been in the past either has been changed [*demutatum est*], such as circumcision; or enlarged [*suppletum*], such as the rest of the law; or fulfilled [*impletum*], such as prophecy; or perfected [*perfectum*], such as faith itself. The new grace of God has renewed all things from carnal to spiritual by adding on the Gospel: the obliterater of the entire system of antiquity.⁵⁶

Once again Tertullian is able to emphasize the diversity found in the dispensations by defining that diversity as change, enlargement, fulfillment, and perfection. These examples of progress from old to new covenant are reminiscent of Irenaeus' formulations on the subject. However, Tertullian is less apologetic about the existence of this diversity in God's economy, and so is unafraid to point out and appropriate it as an argument against the Gnostics.

The final component of Tertullian's response to Marcion on the role of the Old Testament in the Christian era may be called the "historical" argument. It takes the form of Tertullian's claim that the Old and New Testaments may not be separated because they have always been together (De Praescript. Haer. 30). This in turn is added to his law of *principalitas veritatis*--the priority of truth. By this Tertullian meant that, chronologically speaking, truth always precedes error (De Praescript. Haer. 31). This idea Tertullian had borrowed

⁵⁶ De Oratione 1 (my translation), CCSL 1:257.

from Irenaeus' anti-Gnostic arsenal. It was used by Irenaeus in his appeal to the relative ancientness of the Catholic churches, to apostolic teaching, and to the rule of faith (all of which in existence before the heretics). Tertullian used it as a "prescriptive argument," that is, an argument that aimed to invalidate Gnosticism before formal discussion even began. He employed it to repudiate all aspects of Gnostic teaching: their teaching of two gods, their separation of the Old and New Testament, and their altering of the New Testament texts. Tertullian sets down this principle in De Praescript. Haer. 29: "The real thing always exists before the representation of it; the copy comes later."⁵⁷ He then chides:

If Marcion separated the New Testament from the Old, he is later than what he separated. He could only separate what was united. And if it was united before it was separated, its subsequent separation shows that the separator came later. Again, when Valentinus reinterprets and corrects whatever he corrected precisely as having been faulty before, he proves that it had belonged to someone else.⁵⁸

This blend of historical and tautological argument was apparently effective enough for Tertullian in polemical situations that it bore repeating in later combat. In Adv. Marc. 1:19 he launches an attack on Marcion's god with the words:

Therefore, as it is precisely this separation of Law and Gospel which has suggested a god of the Gospel, other than and in opposition to the God of the Law, it is evident that before that separation was made, that god was still unknown who has just come into notice in consequence of the argument for separation: and so he was not revealed by Christ, who came before the separation, but was invented by Marcion, who set up the separation in opposition to the peace between Gospel and Law which previously, from the appearance of Christ until the impudence of Marcion, had

⁵⁷ De Praescript. Haer. 29. trans. Greenslade, 50.

⁵⁸ De Praescript. Haer. 30, trans. Greenslade, 51.

been kept unimpaired and unshaken⁵⁹

Earlier in the same chapter Tertullian gleefully reminds the reader that Marcion lived approximately 115 years (and 6 1/2 months!) after Christ. Hence, when Tertullian points out in this exchange that Marcion's god had not been proclaimed until after he separated the Testaments, the discussion is over. The priority of truth rules in favor of the unity of the Testaments and the unity of God. In Tertullian's own words: "*Praeiudicant tempora*—the dates already decide the case."⁶⁰ Since, as Tertullian asserts, the Testaments have always been together, then anyone disrupting that unity must be subsequent to the unity of scripture. Which, in turn, means that the disrupter is subsequent to the truth, and authentic Christianity.⁶¹

In conclusion to our discussion of Tertullian's theology of Old and New Testaments, it will be appropriate to make a few observations and offer a brief summary. First, there seems to be no evidence that Tertullian's opinions on the relationship between the Testaments changed as he entered his Montanist period. Tertullian's statements on the subject in his earlier writings create no tensions with those found

⁵⁹ Adv. Marc. 1:19, trans. Evans, 1:49,51.

⁶⁰ Adv. Marc. 1:19 (my translation), CCSL 1:460.

⁶¹ Of course, some have suggested of late that Marcion's Εὐαγγέλιον and Ἀποστολικὸν either precede Luke-Acts or are nearly contemporary. For a brief discussion see F. F. Bruce, The Canon of Scripture (Glasgow: Chapter House, 1988), pp. 137-144, and B. Metzger, Canon of the New Testament, pp. 90-99. This idea had been broached in Tertullian's own time. He reacted violently to it (not surprisingly) and attempted to squelch it in Adv. Marc. 1:20: "This short and sharp argument calls for justification on our part against the clatter and clamor of the opposite party. They allege that in separating the Law and Gospel Marcion did not so much invent a new rule of faith as refurbish a rule previously debased" (trans. Evans, 1:51).

in his later writings.⁶² Tertullian apparently was conscious of the Gnostic threat from his earliest literary output. Apologeticum, De Praescript. Haer., and Adv. Hermogenem, all of which are pre-Montanist and relatively early, mention or directly address Gnostic doctrine. Hence, he would have had to develop his thought on the relations between the Testaments early on. This is confirmed by the fact of his comments on the differences between law and gospel in De Oratione, which is uniformly considered to be very early.⁶³ Since his teaching on Old Testament and New Testament was formulated early and constituted no threat to his later Montanistic opinions, there would have been no need for him to alter his original opinions. Secondly, it is worth noting that Tertullian's expression of the nature of the diversity between Testaments, which was to be of use to him in arguing for ethics more rigorous than those in the New Testament, was already intact in his early writings (cf. De Oratione 1).

Thirdly, it is not surprising to find that Tertullian's use of *dispositio*, *instrumentum*, and *testamentum* increases dramatically in passages where he is interacting with the Gnostics. A glance at their frequency in Adv. Marc. 4 and 5, De Praescript. Haer. (especially 37-40), Adv. Praxean, and De Resurrectione Mortuorum (especially 21-63) will confirm this. Fourthly, we may add that Tertullian's concern to

⁶² For discussion of the dating of Tertullian's writings see T. D. Barnes, Tertullian (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 30-56; J. Quasten, Patrology, 4 vols. (Westminster, Maryland: Christian Classics, 1986), 2:251-319; R. Braun, Deus Christianorum, 563-577; and B. Altaner, Patrology, trans. H. C. Graef (Edinburgh-London: Nelson, 1960), 169-178.

⁶³ Barnes, Braun, Altaner, the CCL, Kaye and Neander all put it early in Tertullian's "Catholic period."

condemn Marcion's rejection of the Old Testament and to overthrow his textual emendation of Luke and the Pauline writings might have naturally led him to emphasize the documents of the old and new covenants at the expense of the covenants themselves. However, we find that Tertullian maintains considerable concern for the dispensations while he, understandably, speaks more often of the Testaments than did Irenaeus. When he wants to stress the writings, he does so with the terms *instrumentum*, *paratura*, *armarium*, and *testamentum* (sometimes).⁶⁴ When he wants to stress the dispensations or covenants, he employs *dispositio* and *testamentum*.

Finally, Tertullian's explanation of the relationship between the older and younger Scriptures is substantially the same as Irenaeus'. Tertullian is more detailed and occasionally stresses arguments which were not so prominent in Irenaeus' anti-Gnostic polemics. Tertullian's theology of Old and New Testament relations may be summarized as follows. The Old Testament and the Christian Scriptures (which have apostles for authors) have been unified since the time of Christ. Their unity is founded in God's economy and illustrated by Old Testament prophecy and new covenant Scripture fulfillment. The diversity exhibited between the Testaments has its source also in God's economy, which progresses in stages and thus introduces reforms. Indeed, the Old Testament itself predicts the diversity of the new covenant. This diversity in the covenants evidences itself in the Scriptures as the ceremonial law is abolished, the moral law is reasserted, prophecy is fulfilled, and the standards of the faith are

⁶⁴ For more discussion of Tertullian's terminology for Scripture, see R. Braun, Deus Christianorum, 454-473; F. F. Bruce, Canon of Scripture 181; and J. E. L. van der Geest, Le Christ et L'Ancien Testament, 3-62.

heightened.

Law, Covenant, and Redemptive History

The subject of Tertullian's structure of redemptive history is of some importance in assessing the role of covenant in his theology. It is another area that allows for comparison and contrast with the writings of Irenaeus. Some historians have thought Irenaeus' and Tertullian's presentations so similar as to identify them, while others argue that Montanism altered Tertullian's ordering of salvation history.⁶⁵ Seeberg has suggested that Irenaeus and Tertullian share a three-covenant view of redemptive history.⁶⁶ The first covenant was one of natural law given to all humanity from the beginning. The second was given by Moses, the ten commandments. And the third came in the person of Christ, the new covenant. He also adds that Tertullian differs from Irenaeus by adding an era of the Paraclete.⁶⁷ This is an interesting description of Tertullian's structure of salvation history, and it certainly reflects some of the emphases of his writings (the primordial law, the role of the Paraclete in the new covenant) but it

⁶⁵ R. Seeberg, Text-book of the History of Doctrines, 2 vols., trans. C. E. Hay (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1977), 1:118-124, lumps the biblical theology of Irenaeus and Tertullian together. He suggests that they each had three main covenants. G. Bray, Holiness and the Will of God (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1979), pp. 66-123, on the other hand contrasts their theologies by arguing that Tertullian had three covenants (though not the same three as Seeberg suggested). Harnack, History of Dogma, 2:302-312, falls somewhere in between in contrasting Irenaeus' and Tertullian's theologies of old and new covenants. He says that Tertullian had two covenants and added an era of the Paraclete, which is accurate as far as it goes.

⁶⁶ Seeberg described this tri-dispensational redemptive history in this way: "God has by means of three covenants . . . sought to win the race." In R. Seeberg, History of Doctrines, 1:123.

⁶⁷ Seeberg, 1:123-124.

fails to take into account Tertullian's constant stress on two covenants: the old and the new. Gerald Bray has also argued that Tertullian's redemptive history is structured by three covenants, but these covenants are not the same as Seeberg's, and they mark a contrast to Irenaeus' pattern rather than make a repetition of it. Furthermore, Bray contends that this triple dispensation of redemptive history corresponds to the Persons of the Trinity. He says: "Tertullian saw the unfolding of salvation as a historical process in three distinct phases, which corresponded to the Old Testament, the Incarnation of Christ and the Pentecostal reign of the Holy Spirit."⁶⁸ To this he adds that God's instruction of the human race "was given in three historical stages (*dispositiones*), in each of which a different Person of the Trinity took the leading role."⁶⁹ Bray then goes on to describe each of these three dispensations: "The first dispensation was that of the Father, and Tertullian was at great pains to point out the logical continuity of the plan of God through the trinitarian dispensations, in opposition especially to the Marcionites, who rejected the Old Testament."⁷⁰ This first era covers the period from Abraham to the time of the John the Baptist. In it God the Father plays the most important role, though Bray is mute on whether the Creator was dispensationally active before the time of Abraham. The second era of the trinitarian economy, according to Bray, is the new covenant. Bray says: "For our purposes we may assume that it was the baptism of Christ which marked the beginning of the second dispensation, in which the chief role was

⁶⁸ G. Bray, Holiness and the Will of God, 104.

⁶⁹ Bray, 105.

⁷⁰ Bray, 105.

played by the Son." ⁷¹ In this era Christ revealed the truth that had been present (but hidden) from the beginning. To these two eras, Bray adds a third: the dispensation of the Spirit. This, he suggests, is Tertullian's unique contribution to the structure of salvation history: "It was in the final element of his dispensational scheme, however, that Tertullian was at his most original, and where his views, often in remarkably unmodified form, are still capable of provoking controversy."⁷² Bray then goes on to suggest when this era began: "In Tertullian's scheme, the transition from the second to the third dispensation was neither as neat nor as sudden as the switch from the first to the second. Instead of being instantaneous, it occurred in two steps over a ten-day period."⁷³ This two-stage transition occurred at the Ascension and at Pentecost. In this dispensation the Holy Spirit was to enable humankind to live up to the ethical truth revealed under Christ. The Paraclete brought no new truth, only the power of holiness. Bray says: "In the third dispensation, the Law-fulfilling life of the one Man was to become the standard for all, and it was the task of the Paraclete to make this feasible."⁷⁴ This three-stage structure of redemptive history was crucial to Tertullian's ethical system, according to Bray. He says, "Tertullian needed dispensationalism not for supernatural reasons, but in order to provide a solid basis on which to build his disciplinary structure."⁷⁵ And so,

⁷¹ G. Bray, 106.

⁷² G. Bray, 106.

⁷³ G. Bray, 107.

⁷⁴ G. Bray, 107-108.

⁷⁵ G. Bray, 108.

Bray has suggested that Tertullian's structuring of redemptive history is closely related to his trinitarian theology and is the means of justifying his ethical system--a pattern of living that exceeds the demands of the New Testament.⁷⁶

Bray's reconstruction is indeed an impressive attempt to come to grips with and correlate the sometimes perplexing data that one finds in Tertullian's presentation of salvation history. However, three criticisms must be made of it. First, while Seeberg makes the primordial natural law, of which Tertullian speaks, into a covenant and thus oversteps the evidence of the text, Bray ignores this concept, which definitely plays a part in Tertullian's disciplinary structure. Second, Bray fails to reflect in his proposal of a three-covenant redemptive history the fact that Tertullian never speaks of a threefold economy in his writings. Instead, Tertullian's constant concern is focused on the two dispensations: old and new. Finally, and most importantly, Tertullian does not speak of a dispensation of the Spirit.⁷⁷ Bray appeals to Tertullian's De Monogamia as embodying this teaching. Indeed, De Monogamia 14 contains the best possible textual basis for a dispensation of the Spirit that is to be found in Tertullian's writings.⁷⁸ In this important passage Tertullian argues that remarriage is unlawful for the Christian, even though Paul permitted it in some circumstances. His rationale for the imposition of an ethic stricter than Paul was that just as Moses permitted divorce,

⁷⁶ G. Bray, 109-111.

⁷⁷ It is interesting that neither Seeberg, with his era of the Paraclete, nor Bray, with the dispensation of the Spirit, produces a reference to a passage in Tertullian's writings that speaks of such.

⁷⁸ Bray, however, does not appeal to this passage.

on account of hardness of heart, so also Paul had permitted remarriage as a temporary option because of the weakness of the flesh. And since Christ had abrogated the Law of Moses on this point, could not the Spirit abrogate this indulgence granted by Paul? He then pronounces: "'Hardness of heart' reigned till Christ's time; let 'infirmity of the flesh' (be content to) have reigned till the time of the Paraclete. The New Law abrogated divorce — it had (somewhat) to abrogate; the New Prophecy (abrogates) second marriage, (which is) no less a divorce of the former (marriage)."⁷⁹ Tertullian goes on to announce that the time of Paul's indulgence is up because the "Spirit is willing" even though "the flesh is weak." This passage may, at first glance, seem to provide support for Bray's third dispensation, but upon closer observation it is contrary to Bray's presentation at a minimum of three points.

First, no dispensation (*dispositio*, etc.) of the Spirit is mentioned. Second, the interval of the "weakness of the flesh" would have been over before Paul ever made his concessions to such weakness if we take Bray's dating of the inauguration of the dispensation of the Spirit (the Ascension and Pentecost). Third, it appears from the preceding that Tertullian conceives of this "weakness of the flesh" as something running concurrently with the operations of the Spirit in the new covenant. His very point, is that now (around 160 years after Paul) the Spirit is ready to wean Christians from this concessionary allowance. It is to be inferred from this passage that this weaning is a gradual process rather than part of a suddenly established dispensation of the Spirit, but this inference is made explicit

⁷⁹ "*Regnavit duritia cordis usque ad Christum, regnaverit et infirmitas carnis usque ad Paracletum. Nova lex abstulit repudium (habuit quod auferret). Nova prophetia secundum matrimonium, non minus repudium prioris.*" De Monogamia 14 (ANCL trans. 4:71), CCSL 2:1249.

elsewhere by Tertullian. For instance, in De Monogamia 3, a passage to which Bray appeals, Tertullian defends himself from the charge of novelty (having introduced teaching on marriage which had not been taught by the apostles). He does not argue that the Spirit has introduced truth previously known but says that the Spirit has enabled humanity to be holier than heretofore was possible (and, interestingly enough, he argues that his teaching on second marriage is in accord with the "spirit" of Paul). He then asks what objection could be raised if subsequent to the age of the apostles, the Spirit who came for the purpose of "leading discipline into all truth by stages of time (as the Preacher says: 'a time for everything'), now imposed a final bridle on the flesh."⁸⁰ It is, of course, striking that Tertullian has determined that now (his own time) was the time when concessions to the flesh were to be eliminated. Perhaps the appearance of the New Prophecy confirmed to him that the Spirit was ready to bring Christians into a "higher life." But the important thing to note is that these operations of the Spirit do not constitute a new dispensation but are the predicted functioning of the Holy Spirit in the new covenant instituted by Christ (Adv. Marc. 5:8). The gradual character of the Paraclete's work is again emphasized by Tertullian in De Virginibus Velandis 1: "The reason why the Lord sent the Paraclete was, that, since human mediocrity was unable to take in all things at once, discipline should, little by little, be directed, and ordained, and carried on to perfection, by that Vicar of the Lord, the Holy Spirit."⁸¹ These passages seem to indicate that in Tertullian's mind

⁸⁰ De Monogamia 3 (my translation), CCSL 2:1232.

⁸¹ De Virginibus Velandis 1, trans. S. Thelwall, ANCL 4:27.

the Paraclete's work is gradual and alongside Christ's work in the new covenant, not in an isolated dispensation of his own.

Returning now to our assertion that the work of the Spirit in the New Prophecy does not constitute a dispensation in Tertullian's structuring of redemptive history, we shall give consideration to an important passage in Adv. Marc. 4:22. Here, Tertullian is recounting to Marcion the fact that Christ's appearance with Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration testifies to the unity of the Old and New Testaments. In this passage where Tertullian is stressing the unity of the two covenants, he defends Peter's rash suggestion by saying that he was in an ecstasy, which is a sign of the influence of the New Prophecy. Tertullian says that Christ appeared with Moses and Elijah,

. . . one of whom had of old been the informer of his people, the other afterwards to be its reformer, the one the beginner of the Old Testament, the other the finisher of the New? So it is with good reason that Peter also, because of their inseparable connection with him, recognizes who his Christ's companions are, and offers the suggestion, *It is good for us to be here*—good to be, evidently, where Moses and Elijah are—and *let us make here three tabernacles, one for thee and one for Moses and one for Elijah, but not knowing what he said.* How 'not knowing'? Was it by a mere mistake? or was it for the reason by which we, in our argument for the new prophecy, claim that ecstasy or being beside oneself is a concomitant of grace? For when a man is in the spirit, especially when he has sight of the glory of God, when God is speaking by him, he must of necessity fall out of his senses, because in fact he is overshadowed by the power of which there is disagreement between us and the natural men.⁸²

It may be noted that we have here a passage concerning the old and new dispensations that explicitly treats the New Prophecy and yet there is no hint of a third dispensation, only Tertullian's usual stress on the old and new covenants. We may also suggest that if Tertullian means that Peter's ecstasy was of the sort experienced in the New Prophecy,

⁸² Adv. Marc. (4:22), trans. Evans, 2:379.

then we have here an example of the New Prophecy before the Ascension or Pentecost! This certainly would not square with Bray's proposal concerning the dispensation of the Spirit.

Whatever significance we attach to this intriguing paragraph, we conclude our argument against a third dispensation by pointing out it would have been in every way advantageous in his polemics with the Catholics for Tertullian to have explicitly spoken of a *dispositio Spiritus* (if he actually held to a three dispensation redemptive history) as a justification for his Montanistic beliefs. The fact that he did not speaks loudly against any proposal that Tertullian's salvation history was structured by three eras.

But if Tertullian's biblical theology was not divided into dispensations, then how was it structured? As we have mentioned previously, Tertullian's scheme of redemptive history is explicitly duo-covenantal. His interest is consistently directed at the distinction between old and new covenants. In this matter of structure, Tertullian is following on Irenaeus whose primary concern was the movement from old to new. However, Tertullian differs from Irenaeus in not using the covenant idea to mark different periods within the old covenant. In his general presentation of old and new covenants, Irenaeus spoke of covenantal stages within the old covenant that reflected God's work of adapting humanity for salvation. Irenaeus treats of God's covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham (Isaac and Jacob, as well), Moses and David. In contrast to this, Tertullian fails to refer to any covenantal arrangements with persons in the Old Testament as being part of the sub-structure of the old covenant. There is only the vaguest of references to circumcision being the seal of the covenant [*testamenti signaculum*] given to Abraham, but Tertullian does not argue

that this covenant constitutes a distinct stage in salvation history.⁸³ Unlike Irenaeus, then, Tertullian does not employ the covenant idea to structure distinct eras of the old economy. Instead, he concerns himself with the old and new covenants/dispensations. For instance, when arguing that the Christ of the transfiguration was the Creator's Christ, Tertullian draws an inference from the fact that the transfiguration occurred on a mountain. He says:

He withdrew into a mountain: I recognize his normal place, for it was in a mountain that both by vision and by his own voice the Creator had first instructed his ancient people. It was necessary that the new covenant should receive attestation in a high place such as the old covenant had been written in, and beneath the same covering of a cloud⁸⁴

Here we see one example of Tertullian's typical summation of redemptive history in two covenants, old and new. According to Tertullian the old covenant was temporary but the new covenant is eternal.⁸⁵ And so it was appropriate that Christ's superiority over Moses and Elijah was stressed in God's words "This is my beloved Son, hear him" at the transfiguration. As Tertullian says:

. . . even though there has been a transference made of this hearing from Moses and from Elijah to Christ, this is not as from one god to another god, nor to a different Christ, but by the Creator to his own Christ, in accordance with the demise of the old covenant and the succession of the new⁸⁶

Thus, Tertullian sums up the history of redemption in two covenants, the new covenant being inaugurated by Christ. Tertullian, additionally, employs the term *dispositio* to speak of the two-part

⁸³ De Monogamia 6, CCSL 2:1235-1236.

⁸⁴ Adv. Marc. 4:22, trans. Evans, 2:381.

⁸⁵ Adv. Marc. 4:1.

⁸⁶ Adv. Marc. 4:22, trans. Evans, 2:383.

economy of God. In Adv. Marc. 4:1 he says: "So then I do admit that there was a different course followed in the old dispensation [*veteri dispositione*] under the Creator, from that in the new dispensation [*nova*] under Christ."⁸⁷ Elsewhere, the interchangeableness of *testamentum* and *dispositio* as designations for an era of redemptive history is again illustrated. In Adv. Marc. 3:20, Tertullian quotes Isaiah 42:6 thus: "I have given you for a covenant [*dispositionem*] for mankind." The LXX word for 'covenant' is *διαθήκη*, and this seems to be a plain example of Tertullian using *dispositio* for covenant. Clearer still, in the same passage Tertullian quotes Isaiah 55:3, which says: "And I will ordain an eternal covenant [*dispositionem aeternam*], the religious and faithful things of David."⁸⁸ However, this very verse is appealed to again with a slightly different wording in Adv. Marc. 4:1: ". . . and I will ordain for you an eternal covenant [*testamentum aeternum*]"⁸⁹ This verse, according to Tertullian, is a prediction of the new covenant to come in Christ. So, here we have witness to both the synonymity of *testamentum* and *dispositio* when Tertullian is applying them to periods of redemptive history, and to Tertullian's two-covenant structuring of that history. Like Irenaeus, Tertullian appeals to Jeremiah 31:31 as the key proof-text for his exposition of God's two-part economy. In his slightly modified

⁸⁷ Adv. Marc. (4:1), trans. Evans, 2:257.

⁸⁸ Adv. Marc. (3:20), trans. Evans, 1:233.

⁸⁹ The complete phrase in Adv. Marc. 3:20 reads: "*Et disponam vobis dispositionem aeternam, religiosa et fidelia David.*" The phrase runs thus in Adv. Marc. 4:1: "*Nam per Esaiam, Audite me et vivetis, et disponam vobis testamentum aeternum, adiciens sancta et fidelia David*" Both renderings are similar in order to the LXX which has: "και διαθήσομαι ὑμῖν διαθήκην αἰώνιον, τὰ ὅσια Δαυιδ τὰ πιστά."

quotation of that passage, he justifies his view of the old and new covenants:

"Behold the days come, says the Lord, when I will make for the house of Jacob and the house of Judah a new covenant, not according to the covenant which I ordained for their fathers in the day when I took hold of their dispensation [*dispositionem*] in order to bring them out of the land of Egypt." Thus, he shows that the original covenant was temporary, when he declares it changeable and also when he promises an eternal covenant for the future.⁹⁰

Here again we see Tertullian's customary emphasis on the two covenants in God's redemptive economy. This is one of three times when Tertullian turns to this passage in Jeremiah to set forth his theology of salvation history.⁹¹ Tertullian's old covenant, then, covers the whole field of God's economy up to the time of Christ. It is characterized by him as a legal and temporary economy. Its temporary nature is seen in the fact that the old Scriptures themselves predict the coming day of a new covenant. It is also closely linked with Moses' giving of the law (though it is conceived of as being in force before Moses). Tertullian's new covenant commences with Christ and is eternal in duration. This covenant is superior to the old covenant in every way, and this change for the better accounts for the differences between the covenants. All in all the framework of Tertullian's history of redemption is not altogether unlike the Book of Hebrews.

We have suggested both that two covenants form the shell of Tertullian's depiction of God's economy and that he, unlike Irenaeus, does not speak of progressive covenantal stages within the old covenant framework. This is not, however, to suggest that Tertullian does not see different eras within the overall covenantal framework--for he most

⁹⁰ Adv. Marc. 4:1 (my translation), CCSL 1:546.

⁹¹ See also Adv. Marc. 1:20 and Adv. Iudaeos 3.

certainly does. But, Tertullian does not use the covenant concept to explain this phenomenon. Given his two covenant redemptive economy, what then accounts for the differences within the old covenant dispensation? In the answer to this question we find again points of similarity and of great difference in the biblical theologies of Irenaeus and Tertullian. Irenaeus argued that God accommodated humanity by means of a succession of covenants that helped him gradually attain to perfect salvation.⁹² Within the old covenant stage of this economy, Irenaeus saw covenantal adjustments being made from Adam to the Patriarchs to the giving of the Law to the establishment of the Davidic kingdom.⁹³ Along with this covenantal progress came changes in the law. The natural law written in men's hearts from the time of Adam was codified by Moses. To this law, Moses added many precepts for the education of the children of Israel. However, according to Irenaeus, the causes of dissimilarity of legislation are to be found in the difference of each covenant.⁹⁴ For Tertullian, on the other hand, it is the progressive revelation of law that provides the sub-structure for his presentation of redemptive history. He follows very closely Irenaeus' teaching on the development of the law in the old covenant era. But the idea of legal progress within God's economy ends up being of far greater consequence in Tertullian's theology than the covenant idea for two reasons. First, Tertullian expands on Irenaeus' teaching on the law and thus gives the development

⁹² Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses 4.9.3.

⁹³ For instance: Adversus Haereses 3.11.8 (Adam, Noah, Moses, and Christ); Proof of the Apostolic Preaching 22 (Noah); 24 (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob); and 64 (David).

⁹⁴ See Adversus Haereses 3.12.12.

of law a prominence that it does not have in Irenaeus. Second, while Irenaeus sets the modification of the law alongside and within the covenantal development of the old dispensation, Tertullian does not delineate such a covenantal program. This means, for Tertullian, that the progress of law alone provides the distinctiveness of the eras within the old covenant, which in turn serves to highlight the law's importance in Tertullian's scheme. To summarize, we might say that whereas Irenaeus taught that God adapted mankind for salvation by means of covenants, Tertullian teaches that God's accommodation of humanity was by the modification of law. This contrast can be readily illustrated by reference to two illuminating passages. In Adversus Haereses 4.9.3, Irenaeus argues that Christ was revealed to the Old Testament prophets so that humanity "could always advance by believing in him and by means of the covenants mature to a complete salvation."⁹⁵ On the other hand, Tertullian, while treating of the various stages in the giving of the law says: "Neither should we deny this power of God to reform the precepts of the law according to the conditions of the times, for the salvation of man."⁹⁶

Tertullian's presentation of the stages of law in the old covenant is as follows. According to Tertullian, God gave to Adam and Eve a law in Eden.⁹⁷ This law was the seed from which all of the

⁹⁵ Adversus Haereses 4.9.3 (my translation), SC 100:486.

⁹⁶ "*Nec adimamus hanc dei potestatem pro temporum condicione legis praecepta reformantem in hominis salutem.*" Adv. Iudaeos 2 (my translation), CCSL 2:1343.

⁹⁷ "*Namque in principio mundi ipse Adae et Evae legem dedit.*" Adv. Iudaeos 2, CCSL 2:1341.

decalogue grew.⁹⁸ He puts it this way: "For the primordial law which was given to Adam and Eve in paradise was like the womb of all God's precepts."⁹⁹ At the proper times, these precepts that were already present in the primordial law were extended and advanced by God for the purpose of training humankind in righteousness.¹⁰⁰ As Tertullian reminds: "What is so surprising if he augments a discipline who institutes it? If he perfects a discipline who began it?"¹⁰¹ Thus Tertullian argued that long before Moses had given the ten commandments, the patriarchs had naturally kept them.¹⁰² He follows Irenaeus in calling this the "*lex naturalis*."¹⁰³ The natural law was obeyed by Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, and Lot, according to Tertullian.¹⁰⁴ From this Tertullian concludes that there were three stages in old covenant law: the law in paradise, the law under the patriarchs, and the law reformed for the Jews by Moses.¹⁰⁵ There is

⁹⁸ "*In hac enim lege Adae data omnia praecepta condita recognoscimus, quae postea pullulaverunt data per Moysen,*" Adv. Iudaeos 2, CCSL 2:1341.

⁹⁹ "*Primordialis enim lex data est Adae et Evae in paradiso quasi matrix omnium praeceptorum dei.*" Adv. Iudaeos 2 (my translation), CCSL 2:1341.

¹⁰⁰ Adv. Iudaeos 2 CCSL 2:1341.

¹⁰¹ Adv. Iudaeos 2 (my translation), CCSL 2:1342.

¹⁰² "*Denique ante legem Moysei scriptam in tabulis lapideis legem fuisse contendo non scriptam, quae naturaliter intellegebatur et a patribus custodiebatur.*" Adv. Iudaeos 2, CCSL 2:1342.

¹⁰³ See Adv. Iudaeos 2, CCSL 2:1343-1344.

¹⁰⁴ Adv. Iudaeos 2, CCSL 2:1343-1344.

¹⁰⁵ "*Unde intellegimus dei legem etiam ante Moysen nec in Choreb tantem aut in Sina, nec in eremo primum, sed [antiquiorem] primum in paradiso, post deinde patriarchis, atque ita et Iudaeis certis temporibus datam, quando voluit, et certis temporibus reformatam,*" Adv. Iudaeos 2, CCSL 2:1343.

a legal transition moving into the new covenant as well. The Mosaic additions are abrogated, but the primitive statutes of righteousness are not only valid, they are extended. Tertullian says:

Since there are those who occasionally say that they have nothing to do with the law (which Christ did not dissolve, but fulfilled), and sometimes take hold of whichever laws they please; we also clearly assert that the law has deceased in this way--its burdens, which according to the judgment of the apostles not even the patriarchs were able to sustain, have dropped off, however, the laws that aimed at righteousness, not only are permanently reserved but are amplified; in order, of course, that our righteousness might be to abound above the Scribes' and Pharisees' righteousness.¹⁰⁶

As can be seen in the above quotation, Tertullian believes that God's program of adjustment of the law has for its goal an increase in righteousness. These stages of law are crucial to Tertullian's conception of the divine discipline instituted for the purpose of bringing about holiness in man. The rule of faith (*regula fidei*) is unchangeable, according to Tertullian, but the rule of discipline (*regula disciplinae*) admits of the novelty of correction in order that humanity may advance in holiness.¹⁰⁷ The advance in the pattern of divine discipline is based on the stages of the law. After the fall, all people lived according to the natural law, but after the Exodus more precepts were given, in addition to the primordial law, which was codified in the form of the ten commandments. When the gospel came, these extra laws (which were given on account of man's infirmity) were dropped from the law. And so, according to Tertullian, the precedent

¹⁰⁶ De Monogamia 7 (my translation), CCSL 2:1237.

¹⁰⁷ "*Regula quidem fidei una omnino est, sola immobilis et irreformabilis . . . Hac lege fidei manente cetera iam disciplinae et conversationis admittunt novitatem correctionis, operante scilicet et proficiente usque in finem gratia Dei.*" De Virginibus Velandis 1, CCSL 2:1209.

has been set to remove any laws given on account of the weakness of the flesh, even by the apostles. Hence, Tertullian envisions four legal stages within his two covenant structure of God's economy. In the old covenant, there is natural law first, then the addition of laws of ceremony and for the infirmity of the flesh (for instance, Moses' allowance of divorce on many grounds) at Sinai. In the new covenant the first stage came when Christ did away with the laws of bondage, restored the natural law, and gave the Spirit that we might excel in holiness. In the second stage, however, the Paraclete may cancel any allowances made by the apostles for the flesh (for instance, Paul's allowance of remarriage under certain circumstances). Tertullian applies this legal pattern to his scheme of practical holiness in the following passage:

So, too, righteousness--for the God of righteousness and of creation is the same--was first in a rudimentary state, having a natural fear of God: from that stage it advanced, through the Law and Prophets, to infancy; from that stage it passed, through the Gospel, to the fervor of youth: now, through the Paraclete, it is settling into maturity.¹⁰⁸

This emphasis on spiritual discipline is not incidental in the writings of Tertullian. Much earlier, in the Apology, Tertullian said of those who departed from the *regula disciplinae*: "we no longer consider them to be Christians."¹⁰⁹ As Quasten notes: "Whereas Irenaeus conceived salvation as a divine economy, Tertullian speaks of a *salutaris*

¹⁰⁸ "*Sic et iustitia (nam idem Deus iustitiae et creaturae) primo fuit in rudimentis, natura Deum metuens; dehinc per legem et prophetas promovit in infantiam, dehinc per evangelium efferbuit in iuventutem, nunc per Paracletum componitur in maturitatem.*" De Virginibus Velandis 1, CCSL 2:1210.

¹⁰⁹ Apologeticum 46, CCSL 1:162.

disciplina, a divine discipline ordained of God through Christ."¹¹⁰

At this point, it will be appropriate to consider again Gerald Bray's hypothesis about the connection between Tertullian's plan of redemptive history and his teaching on holiness. Bray is surely right when he says: "There is no doubt that spiritual discipline was the keystone of Tertullian's scheme of sanctification."¹¹¹ But, as we have already seen, Bray also contends that Tertullian's redemptive history contained three dispensations. According to Bray it is this three-era salvation history (and especially the third stage — the dispensation of the Spirit) on which Tertullian's ethical program depends. He says: "Tertullian needed dispensationalism not for supernatural reasons, but in order to provide a solid theological basis on which to build his disciplinary structure."¹¹² Bray is correct in suggesting the connection between Tertullian's theology of holiness and his redemptive history. But this connection is not to be found in Tertullian's dispensational scheme, which is unquestionably bi-covenantal not tri-covenantal. Tertullian's disciplinary structure is based on his theology of the modification of law. The legal stages in his salvation history provide Tertullian with the justification he needs for an ethic that goes beyond even apostolic demands. This intimate relation between his theology of law and his pattern of holiness (which was a central concern for Tertullian) bears witness to the importance of the concept of modification of law in Tertullian's history of redemption.

However, there are other indications of the importance of law in

¹¹⁰ J. Quasten, Patrology, 2:322.

¹¹¹ Bray, p. 95.

¹¹² Bray, p. 108.

the framework of Tertullian's exposition of God's economy. For instance, Tertullian represents the movement from old covenant to new covenant as one of old law to new law. In De Ieiunio he responds to the charge of committing the Galatian error with regard to the role of the law in the Christian life:

Do we, therefore, by observation of seasons and days and months and years Galatianize? Clearly, if we are observers of Jewish and legal festivals--for these the apostle taught us to unlearn, by suppressing the continuation of the old covenant which was buried in Christ and setting up the new covenant. But if there is a new creation in Christ, our festivals must also be new."¹¹³

Tertullian's point is obvious enough in this response to his Catholic opponents. One can only commit the error of the Galatians if one demands observation of the old Jewish ordinances. But this does not apply to followers of the New Prophecy because their solemnities are new covenant ordinances. Hence, the old law has simply been replaced by a new law. Elsewhere, Tertullian picks up this theme of the new law when he says that "we may without doubt believe the new law has been given by [Christ]."¹¹⁴ Tertullian completes the parallel between old covenant and new covenant, between old law and new law when he compares the two great lawgivers. According to Tertullian, Christ is "the second Moses [*secundus Moyses*]."¹¹⁵ He also treats specifically of the solemnities of the new law in Adversus Iudaeos: circumcision, sabbath and sacrifice. These do not simply pass away in Tertullian's plan of legal accommodation but are shadows of parallel new covenant

¹¹³ De Ieiunio 14 (my translation), CCSL 2:1272.

¹¹⁴ "*indubitate etiam legem novam ab ipso datam esse credamus . . .*" Adv. Iudaeos 7 (my translation), CCSL 2:1353.

¹¹⁵ De Monogamia 6, CCSL 2:1237.

realities. Circumcision in the old covenant, for instance, looked forward to a spiritual circumcision in the new. He say: "Thus, just as carnal circumcision, which was temporary, was instruction by sign for an obstinate people so also spiritual circumcision is given for salvation to an obedient people."¹¹⁶ And so, after the old law had passed away, there remained a circumcision to be observed in the new law. As Tertullian puts it: "Therefore, just as we have demonstrated above that the cessation of the old law and the carnal circumcision was announced, so also the observation of the new law and the spiritual has shown forth by obedience in peace."¹¹⁷ The sabbath command, too, has old covenant and new covenant manifestations. Accordingly, Tertullian says: "The Scriptures designate an eternal sabbath and a temporary sabbath."¹¹⁸ The temporary sabbath of the old covenant points to the eternal sabbath of the new covenant.¹¹⁹ How then were Christians to observe this eternal sabbath? By abstaining from "servile labor" every day of the week for all time, says Tertullian, not just one day in seven.¹²⁰ The ritual sacrifices of the Jewish law also have a new

¹¹⁶ "*Sic ergo circumcisio carnalis quae temporalis erat, imbuta est in signum populo contumaci, ut spiritalis data est in salutem populo.*" Adv. Iudaeos 3 (my translation), CCSL 2:1345.

¹¹⁷ "*Igitur sicuti, supra quod ostendimus, vetus lex et circumcisio carnalis cessatura pronuntiata est, ita et novae legis et spiritalis circumcisionis observantia in pacis obsequio eluxit.*" Adv. Iudaeos 3 (my translation), CCSL 2:1346-1347.

¹¹⁸ Adv. Iudaeos 4 (my translation), CCSL 2:1348.

¹¹⁹ "*Sic igitur ante hoc sabbatum temporale erat et sabbatum aeternum praeostensum et praeindictum, quomodo et ante circumcisionem carnalem fuit et spiritalis circumciso praeostensa.*" Adv. Iudaeos 4, CCSL 2:1349.

¹²⁰ "*Unde nos magis intellegimus sabbatizare nos ab omni opere servili semper debere et non tantum septimo quoque die, sed per omne tempus,*" Adv. Iudaeos 4, CCSL 2:1347-1348.

covenant corollary. Tertullian appeals to Isaiah 50:15. "Sacrifice to God a sacrifice of praise and render to the Most High your vows," and concludes: "Thus, as carnal sacrifices are understood to be rejected . . . so also spiritual sacrifices are predicted to be accepted."¹²¹ What are the sacrifices of the new law? According to Tertullian, the sacrifice of praise and a contrite heart.¹²² Tertullian concludes his discussion of these solemnities with these words:

Therefore, since it is clear that a temporary sabbath was exhibited and an everlasting sabbath predicted; a carnal circumcision predicted and a spiritual circumcision foretold; a temporal law and an eternal law announced; carnal sacrifices and spiritual sacrifices pre-disclosed; it follows logically that, whereas in previous time all these precepts had been given in the flesh to the people of Israel, there was to come a time when the precepts of the ancient law and the old ceremonies would cease and the promise of the new law and the recognition of the spiritual sacrifices and the promise of the new covenant would supervene.¹²³

We may observe from this passage that the movement from law to gospel in Tertullian's theology is, in one sense, simply progress from old law to new law. Though Irenaeus had spoken of a "greater legislation" in the new covenant, he never identified the gospel as being *nova lex*.¹²⁴ Tertullian, however, explicitly makes this connection between gospel and law in De Monogamia, where he opens his appeal to the New Testament Scriptures with these words: "Now turning to the law which is

¹²¹ "*Itaque, quomodo carnalia sacrificia reprobata intelleguntur . . . ita sacrificia spiritalia accepta praeindicantur.*" Adv. Iudaeos 5 (my translation), CCSL 2:1351.

¹²² Adv. Iudaeos 5, CCSL 2:1351.

¹²³ Adv. Iudaeos 6 (my translation), CCSL 2:1352.

¹²⁴ Adversus Haereses 4.9.2.

especially ours--that is the gospel"125 This may be said to be characteristic of Tertullian's understanding of the gospel and hence illustrative of the influence of the concept of legal eras in the divine economy on Tertullian's theology of law and gospel. Tertullian's propensity to draw on legal terminology to describe the relationship between God and humanity has long been noted. Quasten has said: "Law, too, suggested a great number of the concepts, figures and terms that he introduced into theology and that remain to the present day. Law permeated his representation of the relation between God and man."¹²⁶ This legal terminology we have seen reflected in Tertullian's biblical theology. However, it is not his legal vocabulary but a legal idea, that of God's adaptation of humankind through the modification of law, which attains to a greater significance in Tertullian's presentation of redemptive history than the covenant concept.

We have previously suggested that the idea of primordial law exerts no small influence in Tertullian's interpretation of the role of the law in the old and new dispensations. Perhaps then it will be of some usefulness to consider briefly a few of Tertullian's key principles of biblical interpretation and offer some background to his concept of the ancient, natural law, in order to show how it was influential as a hermeneutical principle. Tertullian's statements on biblical interpretation usually come in the context of his polemics with the Gnostics. It is not surprising then to find him dealing with this issue in De Praescript. Haer. At one point, Tertullian is

¹²⁵ "*Nunc ad legem proprie nostram, id est evangelium*" De Monogamia 8 (my translation), CCSL 2:1239.

¹²⁶ J. Quasten, Pastorology 2:322; see also J. Morgan, The Importance of Tertullian in the Development of Christian Dogma (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, & Co., 1928), 52,69-76.

responding to the Gnostic appeal to Christ's words, "Seek and you will find," as justification for their own philosophical/theological speculations. Tertullian initially answers this assertion by saying that Jesus' words actually were a direction to his hearers to consider divine revelation: the Scriptures and their testimony to Christ. But he additionally sets forth what are two important hermeneutical principles for him. First, the "seeking" must not be indefinite because one may seek only until one has found. This is based on the following postulation: "My first principle is this. Christ laid down one definite system of truth which the world must believe without qualification, and which we must seek precisely in order to believe it when we find it."¹²⁷ The second principle is one concerning the importance of context. Tertullian says: "we must not forget *when* the Lord said these words [emphasis Greenslade's]."¹²⁸ Tertullian's plea is for us to take into account the circumstances in which Christ delivered his word, "Seek and you will find." He expands on the reasons for this just a little later: "All the Lord's sayings, I admit, were set down for all men. They have come through the ears of the Jews to us Christians. Still, many were aimed at particular people and constitute for us an example rather than a command immediately applicable to ourselves."¹²⁹ Again, Tertullian's point is that the context of a passage must be considered if proper interpretation is to occur. To whom was Jesus addressing this word? What was the intent of his message to them? These things had to be attended to before one

¹²⁷ De Praescript. Haer. 9, trans. Greenslade, 37.

¹²⁸ De Praescript. Haer. 8, trans. Greenslade, 36.

¹²⁹ De Praescript. Haer. 8, trans. Greenslade, 37.

could understand the meaning of the verse for all Christians. This general concern for context reflects itself in Tertullian's other comments on hermeneutics, which all might be grouped under the heading of "Scripture interprets Scripture." First, in his challenge against those who denied the bodily resurrection, Tertullian sets forth a principle for interpretation of obscure passages. He says: "At any rate, it is surely right, as we have commended above, that uncertain passages must be judged by certain ones and obscure passages by clear ones."¹³⁰ This comes in the background of a discussion on the use of figurative language by the prophets and leads us to his second principle. The Gnostic opponents of Tertullian were arguing that the prophets always spoke in a figurative sense and so the Gnostics, according to Tertullian, took the wildest liberties with the prophetic record. Against this practice Tertullian lays down a second principle of interpretation. He says: "The allegorical pattern is not always used in all the prophetic pronouncements, though it is sometimes used in certain parts."¹³¹ Tertullian asserts that the prophecies contain both literal and figurative elements, and as proof of this he appeals to literal fulfillments which had already occurred. One should not seek to attach a metaphorical interpretation to a passage that clearly has in view a literal fulfillment.¹³² A third rule of Tertullian is that many passages overrule the few. This he argues against Praxeas.

¹³⁰ "*Et utique aequum sit, quod et supra demandavimus, incerta de certis et obscura de manifestis praeiudicari.*" De Resurrectione Mortuorum 21 (my translation), CCSL 2:946.

¹³¹ "*Ita non semper nec in omnibus allegorica forma est prophetici eloquii, sed interdum et in quibusdam.*" De Resurrectione Mort. 20 (my translation), CCSL 2:946.

¹³² De Resurrectione Mort. 20, CCSL 2:945-946.

Tertullian claims that the heretics can appeal to only three verses in all of the Scriptures to support anti-trinitarian theology. He chides: "They would have the entire revelation of both Testaments yield to these three passages, whereas the only proper course is to understand the few statements in the light of the many."¹³³ A fourth canon of interpretation found in Tertullian's writings is that later revelation overrides earlier revelation. For instance, when confronted with the proposition that baptism is not necessary for those who have faith since Abraham was not baptized, Tertullian appeals to this principle of the primacy of later revelation. He says: "But in all matters later instances are conclusive, and things that follow have greater validity than those which have gone before."¹³⁴ This principle is closely related to Tertullian's views concerning the successive stages of law. If later laws can override earlier legislation, it is almost axiomatic that later revelation takes primacy over the earlier. This brings us again to the question of Tertullian's use of the concept of primordial law and its influence on his interpretation. As we have noted before, Tertullian borrows and develops this idea from Irenaeus' writings. In his argument against the Gnostics Irenaeus was, among other things, interested in explaining Jesus' relation to the old covenant law in order to refute the Gnostic opinion that Christ rejected the old law wholesale. In the course of this debate, Irenaeus explained that there was a natural law given before the law of Moses. He further suggested that much of the Mosaic legislation had been appended at Sinai because of the hardness of heart displayed by the children of Israel during the

¹³³ Adv. Praxean 20, trans. P. Holmes, ANCL 3:615.

¹³⁴ De Baptismo 13, trans. E. Evans (London: SPCK, 1964), 31; see also De Oratone 1 and De Pudicitia 6.

Exodus. He says: "The Lord has shown that certain precepts were established for them by Moses because of their hardness and unwillingness to be in submission."¹³⁵ Irenaeus then used this to explain Christ's abrogation of the law. Jesus did not strike down the whole law, just those laws which were of bondage. Then, in a passing observation, Irenaeus remarks that it should not be surprising to find laws enacted because of the infirmity of the flesh in the old dispensation since the same thing occurs in the new dispensation. He says:

But why should I say these things about the old covenant? Since also in the new covenant the apostles are found doing the same If, therefore, even in the new covenant the apostles are found conceding certain precepts according to indulgence because of the incontinence of some . . . it is not necessary to wonder about, if also in the old covenant the same God ordained precepts of a similar kind for his people's advantage.¹³⁶

Irenaeus does not develop his remark further. It is a passing thought in his anti-Gnostic polemic. But it did not escape the attention of Tertullian. He appropriates the argument for his controversy with the Jews to explain why Christians do not keep peculiarly Mosaic precepts and yet venerate the law.¹³⁷ He also employs it, like Irenaeus, in refuting the Gnostic position on the relation of law and gospel. But his own unique application of this Irenaeian comment comes in the area of his teaching on holiness. Irenaeus had argued that new covenant concessions to human weakness served to vindicate charges against old covenant allowances for the flesh. Tertullian reversed the direction of the argument and contended that if Christ abrogated the parts of the

¹³⁵ Adversus Haereses 4.15.2 (my translation), SC 100:554.

¹³⁶ Adversus Haereses 4.15.2 (my translation), SC 100:554, 556.

¹³⁷ Adv. Iudaeos 2 CCSL 2:1343.

Mosaic code which were given for the infirmity of the flesh then why cannot the Spirit abrogate those parts of the new covenant code (for instance, Paul's allowance of remarriage) which were given as indulgence to men's incontinence.¹³⁸ Irenaeus never dreamed of such an application of his words. Tertullian made it a theological principle and based his disciplinary system on this understanding of the purpose of the Mosaic code. Tertullian declares: *Regnavit duritia cordis usque ad Christum, regnaverit et infirmitas carnis usque ad Paracletum. Nova lex abstulit repudium (habuit quod auferret). Nova prophetia secundum matrimonium, non minus repudium prioris.*¹³⁹ Tertullian, by his assumption that the content of primordial law in comparison with the Mosaic statutes was that of the law in its essence as opposed to the law augmented for the hardness of men's hearts, could argue that Christ had stripped away the concessions added to the original law. Then, taking a further cue from Irenaeus with regard to new covenant indulgence of the weakness of the flesh, he could insist that the Spirit had now removed the allowances made by the apostles. All this was for the purpose of bringing humanity along by stages of righteousness to maturity in holiness, that is, the development of humanity by the modification of law.¹⁴⁰ And so, his own understanding of the Mosaic code's relation to the natural law (when combined with his beliefs that Christ had abrogated only the additions to the original law, that concessions to the flesh had been made by the apostles, and that the Spirit had now decided to wean us from these

¹³⁸ See De Pudicitia 6, De Virginibus Velandis 1, and De Monogamia 14.

¹³⁹ De Monogamia 14, CCSL 2:1249.

¹⁴⁰ De Virginibus Velandis 1, CCSL 2:1210.

indulgences) became a central interpretational principle in defense of his rule of discipline. This principle, especially when employed against his Catholic opponents in his ethical treatises, overshadows his more mundane (but more helpful) hermeneutical observations and illustrates the influence of the idea of modification of law on Tertullian's biblical interpretation.

Before we close this segment of our discussion it will be appropriate to consider the connection between Tertullian's biblical theology and theology proper. It will be remembered that Gerald Bray has suggested that Tertullian envisioned salvation history in three dispensations, each one corresponding to a Person of the Trinity.¹⁴¹ Since we have argued that Tertullian emphatically depicted the economy of God as divided into two covenants, one might assume that there is no connection between these two covenants and one or other of the three Persons of the Godhead to be found in Tertullian's theology. However, in his defense of the doctrine of the Trinity in Adv. Praxean, Tertullian does link the covenants to the Persons of the Trinity. He says to Praxeas:

But (this doctrine of yours bears a likeness) to the Jewish faith, of which this is the substance [*res*]--so to believe in One God as to refuse to reckon the Son besides Him, and after the Son the Spirit. Now, what difference would there be between us and them, if there were not this distinction which you are for breaking down? What need would there be of the gospel, which is the substance [*substantia*] of the New Covenant, laying down (as it does) that the Law and the Prophets lasted until John the Baptist, if thenceforward the Father, the Son, and the Spirit are not believed in both as three, and as making One Only God? God was pleased to renew His covenant [*sacramentum*] with man in such a way

¹⁴¹ "This instruction [in the Divine Law] was given in three historical stages (*dispositiones*), in each of which a different person of the Trinity took the leading role." Bray, Holiness and the Will of God, 105.

as that His Unity might be believed in, after a new manner, through the Son and the Spirit, in order that God might now be known openly, in His proper Names and Persons, who in ancient times was not plainly understood, though declared through the Son and the Spirit.¹⁴²

For Tertullian, then, of the very essence of the new covenant is the work of the Son and Spirit testifying to the trinitarian nature of God. Tertullian frequently refers to the old covenant as the dispensation of the Creator.¹⁴³ Here he characterizes the new covenant as being of both the Son and Spirit. It is significant that he does so, because he has only a few sentences before mentioned the work of the Spirit in the New Prophecy.¹⁴⁴ That he is able in the context to talk about the New Prophecy and still speak of the Son and the Spirit jointly working in one new covenant (without suggesting a separate dispensation of the Spirit) gives a clear indication of how he sees the work of the Persons of the Godhead in the different phases of the divine economy. The old covenant is primarily the Father's dispensation (though Tertullian says that the Son and Spirit bore witness to the Godhead, not being clearly apprehended, even in those days). The new covenant is peculiarly the age of the Son and Spirit (though God the Father is not inactive in this time). In this way, Tertullian acknowledges the work of the three

¹⁴² *Ceterum Iudaicae fidei ista res, sic unum Deum credere, ut Filium adnumerare ei nolis et post Filium Spiritum. Quid enim erit inter nos et illos nisi differentia ista? Quod opus evangelii, quae est substantia novi testamenti statuens legem et prophetas usque ad Iohannem, si non exinde Pater et Filius et Spiritus sanctus, tres crediti, unum Deum sistunt? Sic Deus voluit novare sacramentum, ut nove unus crederetur per Filium et Spiritum, ut coram iam Deus in suis propriis nominibus et personis cognosceretur qui et retro per Filium et Spiritum praedicatus non intellegebatur.* Adv. Praxean 31, trans. P. Holmes, ANCL 3:627, slightly modified; Latin text from CCSL 2:1204. The words in parentheses () in the text above are part of Holmes' translation. The words in brackets [], I have added.

¹⁴³ See for instance: Adv. Marc. 4:16; 4:22; 4:31; 4:39; and 5:1.

¹⁴⁴ See Adv. Praxean 30, CCSL 2:1204.

Persons to be comprehended in the two covenants, old and new.

Irenaeus and Tertullian: A Comparison

Tertullian's theology of redemptive history is in many ways similar to that of Irenaeus. They both employ the old and new covenants as the basic components in the outline of their salvation history. They both acknowledge the unity and diversity within God's economy by means of the covenants, and Tertullian is much indebted to Irenaeus in his own expression of the covenant concept and for the idea of the progressive development of the law in God's redemptive plan. But to suggest that Tertullian's use of these two ideas or that his emphases in redemptive history are the same as Irenaeus' would be a serious mistake. First of all, with regard to the structure of redemptive history, the covenant concept provides Irenaeus with the only architectonic he needs in presentation of the history of redemption. This is not to say that covenant is the central theme of his redemptive history, but that it provides the framework he requires to express the various ideas of importance in that history. His Adam and Christ parallel, his teaching on creation and redemption, and his theology of incarnation and recapitulation are all able to fit in covenantal outline, without producing competing structures for God's economy. Even Irenaeus' idea of movement from natural law to Mosaic law is expressed within the covenantal structure of the old dispensation. On the other hand, in Tertullian the covenants function only as the broader framework of God's economy. This allows Tertullian sufficiently to reproduce Irenaeus' (and Hebrews') general emphasis on the movement from old covenant to new. But within (and alongside) these two covenants is his pattern of legal eras in salvation history. This

scheme of legal stages is pronounced enough to provide a rival structure for the overall economy and to confuse some readers into thinking that Tertullian envisions three or four covenants/dispensations in his redemptive history.¹⁴⁵ Thus, even though the idea exists in a less developed form in Irenaeus, Tertullian's use of legal stages marks a contrast with the Irenaeian structure of the history of redemption. Second, in terms of the content of the covenant idea, it may be observed that Irenaeus is concerned to set forth the major covenants of the biblical record (Adam?, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and New) and gives some evidence of a "Hebraic" understanding of the term. On the other hand, we have noted that Tertullian's use of the term is almost exclusively restricted to discussion of old and new covenants as they represent eras in salvation history. This indicates a movement from Irenaeus' more "biblical" approach to the covenants. Tertullian also intends a "testament" and "Testament" by *testamentum* upon occasion. The former understanding of *testamentum* (or rather διαθήκη) is rare in Irenaeus. The latter, if present, is less prevalent than in Tertullian. Third, concerning covenant as an idea in its own right within the structure of redemptive history, we may note that for Irenaeus, God is preparing humanity for salvation by means of covenants (AH 3.11-12). By this he does not mean that God's people are being carried through successive eras of history toward a goal (though he may convey that idea implicitly). He means that the divine-human covenant

¹⁴⁵ Bray argues for three eras mainly because he combines the two ideas of dispensations and legal stages and then drops the distinction between pre- and post-Mosaic law (Bray, 104-111). Harnack thought Tertullian had four eras (Harnack, p. 311). If one harmonizes the concepts of covenant and legal progress in Tertullian (which is fairly feasible), one ends up with two covenants/dispensations each with two sub-stages of law.

relationship itself is God's arrangement for bringing about humankind's progress in salvation. God is accommodating humanity to the image of the One Man through the covenant relationship.¹⁴⁶ In Tertullian, however, covenant never gets much beyond being a divinely ordained stage in redemptive history. When God prepares humankind for salvation he does so by law, not by covenants. This is what we mean by development through the modification of law. By making adjustments in the law, God alternately heightens the standards expected of persons and makes allowance for the weakness of the flesh until they are gradually brought to perfect spiritual discipline. In the new covenant the power of the Paraclete has been bestowed on men, so that the purest of discipline can be attained. And so, Tertullian's idea of spiritual progress through the modification of law provides another area of contrast with Irenaeus' covenantal program of redemption.

What, theologically speaking, accounts for the differences in the content of the biblical theology of these two theologians? Harnack, as we previously observed, attributed these variations to Tertullian's Montanism. However, granting that Tertullian's anti-Catholic polemics gave him the best opportunity to express the distinctive aspects of his biblical theology, Frend seems to be correct when he says that Tertullian's appeal to the New Prophecy in his writings was "to corroborate and to sustain the opinions of the author."¹⁴⁷ Even admitting a motion toward "higher" standards of personal holiness in his Montanistic writings, Tertullian's concern with spiritual discipline is one that manifests itself in the earliest of his

¹⁴⁶ See Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 146, and F. R. M. Hitchcock, Irenaeus of Lugdunum, chapter 11.

¹⁴⁷ W. H. C. Frend, The Early Church (London: SCM, 1982), 81.

writings. It is this disciplinary concern that best explains the different emphases in Tertullian's and Irenaeus' biblical theology. In Irenaeus, the center of God's economy is the incarnation and the purpose of the economy, recapitulation. As a result of this recapitulation, all humanity in Christ undergoes a glorification (a process that some have called "divinization"). Because of the importance of this concept (recapitulation) to Irenaeus' theology, he also emphasizes the eschatological aspect of God's economy. But Tertullian marches to the beat of a different drum. The incarnation is also at the center of his redemptive history, but its purpose is to establish a divine discipline. People were made to be righteous, according to Tertullian. It is the goal of God's economy to bring this about.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, we find that his eschatological emphasis is conspicuously moderate when compared to Irenaeus', which is all the more striking in view of Tertullian's Montanist leanings. This may be another indication that Tertullian's attraction to Montanism was primarily because of its ascetic reputation and this more restrained millennialism is certainly consonant with his constant concern for the practice of personal holiness in this life.¹⁴⁹ There is no need to postpone fulfillment of the divine economy for humanity to the days of eternity, when one is living in the new covenant and the Paraclete has established on earth the spiritual discipline of the last days.

Summary and Conclusion

¹⁴⁸ Adv. Iudaeos 2.

¹⁴⁹ Bray, 61.

It will be helpful, before we move to our consideration of Cyprian, to review and summarize our findings concerning Tertullian's theology of redemptive history. First, Tertullian teaches that the Jews have been rejected, because of disobedience and idolatry, from the covenant. The Gentiles, to the contrary, have turned from idolatry to God and so Christians are now "the people" (Adv. Iud. 1.52-54; Praes. Haer. 8.17-20). Second, Tertullian argues that the Testaments have always been (that is, from apostolic times) together. The Marcionites have only recently tried to separate them (Praes. Haer. 30.28-30). Third, in his debate with the Marcion, Tertullian replied to the contention that the differences in the covenants prove the discontinuity of the Testaments (and hence between the Gods of the Testaments) by arguing that, in fact, the unity of the Testaments is proven by the diversity of the covenants (Adv. Mar. 4.1,6,12,34). Fourth, the movement from old to new is not an afterthought in God's economy but had been planned by God, and predicted from the beginning in such passages as Genesis 25:23 (Adv. Mar. 4.9). The one God has one plan but the Old Testament itself, in its earliest chapters (Cain and Abel, for instance), foretells diversity in the economy (Adv. Iud. 5.1-7). God's eternal dispensation is a unified plan that deliberately contains diversity. Fifth, the law did not originate with Moses or Abraham but in paradise with Adam (Adv. Iud. 2.11-12,22-23). The law in Eden contained all of the principles of the decalogue in seed form. (Adv. Iud. 2.15-17) Law existed among all nations between the time of Adam and Moses (Adv. Iud. 2.46-47). Tertullian calls this "natural law" (Adv. Iud. 2.9), and argues for progressive stages of its development in the law of the old dispensation. In this way the law is adapted to the times (Adv. Iud. 2.66-67). Sixth, circumcision

foreshadowed spiritual circumcision (Adv. Iud. 4.24-28). Seventh, the Jewish sabbath foreshadowed the eternal sabbath (Adv. Iud. 4.24-28). Eighth, sacrifices foreshadowed spiritual sacrifices (a contrite heart and praise) (Adv. Iud. 5.1-7,21-30,39-45). Ninth, the old law foreshadowed the new law. Tenth, mankind's knowledge of God precedes Moses' writings and originates with God's revealing of himself to Adam (a corollary of the fifth point) (Adv. Mar. 1.10). Thus Tertullian's salvation history is not just one movement from old to new, but a succession of stages or administrations that advance mankind in knowledge of God and his law, and hence, the law is truly preparatory to the gospel. Eleventh, though Marcion's doctrine of God seems to be at the bottom of his rejection of catholic teaching, his view of old and new covenant relations is near the heart of the issue. So also, Tertullian's biblical theology is intimately related to the rest of his theology.

Chapter 4

CYPRIAN: THE JEWS AND THE CHURCH

Ad Quirinum had a great and enduring influence on the teaching and preaching of the Church. Its Scripture texts were quoted again and again. Pseudo-Cyprian, *Adv. aleatores*, Commodianus, Lactantius, Firmicus Maternus, Lucifer of Calaris, Jerome, Pelagius, Augustine used them.

J. Quasten, *Patrology*, 2:363.

Cyprian's prestige reinforced some dubious theology. He applied OT priestly and sacrificial categories to the ministry and sacraments, and in *Work and Almsgiving* spoke crudely of purchasing salvation.

D. F. Wright, "The Latin Fathers," in *Early Christianity* 150.

Introduction

Even those few scholars who have scrutinized the patristic covenant concept in one way or another have overlooked Cyprian.¹ Kinzig and Ferguson pass him by with a cursory reference to the Pseudo-Cyprian *Adversus Iudaeos* [AI].² No doubt the relative scarcity of covenant thought in Cyprian's extant writings, and his proverbial unoriginality in theology³ have something to do with this situation. However, there are traces of covenant theology in Cyprian, the best example of which (in a connected passage) is found in *Ad Quirinum* (*Testimoniorum libri*

¹ M. M. Sage, *Cyprian* (Cambridge: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1975) is perhaps the best introduction to Cyprian's theology. For background and bibliography see B. Altaner, *Patrology*, 193-205; R. Mackenzie, s.v. "Cyprian, Saint," *AAE* (Online); R. D. Sider, *EEChr* 246-248; V. Saxer, *EEC* 1:211; and the annual "Chronica Tertulliana et Cypriana," in *Revue des études Augustiniennes*.

² Kinzig, "Καὶνὴ διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 524-525, 532-533; Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 152.

³ Fahey and others, however, have shown Cyprian's remarkable independence from his theological predecessors in his approach to the text. See, for instance, E. Fasholé-Luke, "Who is the Bridegroom? An Excursion into St. Cyprian's use of Scripture," *SP* (1975) 12, 1:229.

III) [AQ].⁴ This covenant thought of Cyprian is important, not only because of his influential legacy to the Church, but also because (not being an innovator) he may offer a reflection of the Church's typical use of covenant ideas in his time.⁵

Cyprian's Covenant Thought

AQ is a *florilegium*⁶ compiled⁷ for pastoral reasons.⁸ The work was originally made up of two books (later increased to three), and Cyprian described his purpose for the first book as follows:

I have endeavored to show that the Jews, according to what had been foretold, had departed from God, and had lost God's favor, which had been given them in past time, and had been promised them for the future; while the Christians had succeeded to their place, deserving well of the Lord by faith, and coming out of all nations and from the whole world.⁹

Cyprian uses *testamentum* eight times in this first book, four times in section headings, but not as a title for the Scriptures.¹⁰ Not

⁴ AQ dates from about 248. See Fahey, Cyprian and the Bible: a study in Third-Century Exegesis (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1971), 19.

⁵ Fahey makes this same point regarding Cyprian's views and use of the Scriptures, Cyprian and the Bible, 624.

⁶ Sage notes that AQ is "the first extant Biblical *florilegium*. Greek Christianity provides no parallel, though there are Jewish predecessors." Cyprian, 147.

⁷ There is discussion about whether Cyprian compiled his own *florilegium*, or relied on an extant list. For a brief appraisal of the debate, see Sage, Cyprian, 395-397 (Appendix V).

⁸ See A. Quacquarelli, "Note retoriche sui Testimonia di Cipriano," Vetera Christianorum 8 (1971):181-209.

⁹ AQ, 1, preface, ANCL trans. 5:507.

¹⁰ Kinzig, "Καὶνὴ διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 532-533; M. A. Fahey points out that "Cyprian never uses the word testamentum to refer to the OT or NT. The expression "dispositio alia et testamentum novum" (Test I,11; 46.17) refers to the general notion of covenant (cf. Jer 38:31-32a LXX) and not to Scripture itself." Cyprian and the Bible, 38.

surprisingly there are many affinities with Tertullian's covenant thought found, in outline, in this brief *testimonium*.

The *capitula* of each section supply the themes that the proof-texts following are intended to demonstrate. They also provide a profile of Cyprian's covenant thought. The Jews have fallen under the judgment of God because they have forsaken him and sought after idols (AQ 1.1) and also because they did not believe the prophets and indeed killed them (AQ 1.2). It had been foretold that this would happen: that they would not know the Lord, understand or receive him (AQ 1.3). The Jews did not understand the Holy Scriptures, which were made clear after Christ came (AQ 1.4). In this section, *testamentum* appears in the text for the first time, in quotation of 2 Cor. 3:14-16 (*veteris testamenti*). The Jews could not understand anything in the Scripture until they first believed Christ (AQ 1.5). The Jews would lose Jerusalem and leave the land of Zion (AQ 1.6). Finally, the Jews would lose the light of the Lord (AQ 1.7).

He continues by asserting that the first circumcision was made void, and in its stead the circumcision of the spirit was promised (AQ 1.8). The former law (the law of Moses) was to cease (AQ 1.9), and a new law was to be given (AQ 1.10). Another dispensation and covenant was to be given as well (AQ 1.11) *Testamentum* occurs three times in the text of this section (and once in the heading), in quotation of Jer. 31:31-34 (*testamentum novum, testamentum, hoc testamentum*). The old baptism was to cease and a new one to begin (AQ 1.12). The old yoke was made void and a new yoke given (AQ 1.13). The old shepherds would cease and new ones take their place (AQ 1.14). Christ was to be the house and temple of God, the old temple to cease, and a new one to begin (AQ 1.15). The ancient sacrifice was made void and a new one was celebrated

(AQ 1.16). The old priesthood should cease and a new, eternal priest come in its place (AQ 1.17). Another prophet, like Moses, would give a new testament (*testamentum novum*) and ought to be heard (AQ 1.18). Two peoples were foretold: the old people-- the Jews-- and the new people-- the Christians (AQ 1.19). The Church would have more converts from the Gentiles than did the synagogue (AQ 1.20). The Gentiles would believe in Christ (AQ 1.21). The Jews would lose the bread and cup of Christ and his grace, while the Christians receive it and the "new name" is blessed in all the earth (AQ 1.22). The Gentiles, rather than the Jews, inherit the kingdom (AQ 1.23). Jews can be forgiven if they wash in the blood of Christ, are baptized, come into the Church, and live obediently (AQ 1.24).

Because each occurrence of *testamentum* in this passage is either in *capitula* or in a quotation of Scripture, it is very difficult to determine the precise meaning of the word for Cyprian. The most helpful clue is the connection between *dispositio* and *novum testamentum* in AQ 1.18. Here, as in Tertullian, these terms are closely related, refer to a divine economic arrangement, and may have testamentary overtones (cf., Pseudo-Cyprian, AI 31).

Several things stand out upon review of the covenant thought of Cyprian as manifested in AQ: the influence of Tertullian, interesting differences with Tertullian, Cyprian's apparent theological inconsistencies, and his stress on progress and discontinuity in the divine economy.

When Cyprian takes up his discussion of the rejection of the Jews, he is clearly following Tertullian (cf. Tertullian Adversus Iudaeos [T-AI] 1.52-54; Praescriptione Haereticorum [PH] 8.17-20). The emphasis in T-AI is the progress from the old to new in God's economy.

Tertullian begins the work with an exposition of Genesis 25:21-23, particularly the phrase "the older shall serve the younger" (T-AI 1; cf. Cyprian's AQ 1.19 & 21). Tertullian says that since the Jewish people are the ancient and first received grace in the law, they are the "older" referred to in the passage. On the other hand, since the Christians have received mercy only in the last, they are the "younger." Tertullian insists that the Jews have been divorced from divine favor because of their idolatry, while the Christians have turned from idolatry and received divine grace from God (T-AI 1.52-54). This is precisely Cyprian's view as is apparent in the *capitula* in AQ 1.1-7.

We may note in passing that Cyprian's AQ was apparently an instrument designed to appeal to pagans, not Jews. Sage remarks,

For Cyprian the Jews were an even less pressing concern than for Tertullian. Aside from the first book of the *Testimonia*, they only appear in Biblical contexts for the bishop. No evidence is preserved in the correspondence of any Jewish actions against the Christians. They seem to have had no impact at all upon the Christian community. Though the Jews were active in the Decian persecution at Smyrna no mention of them occurs during the trial and execution of Cyprian. Though there was a Jewish community in Carthage, their existence seems to have been of no importance for Cyprian, except as a warning that disobedience to God would result in the loss of his favour.¹¹

The evident emphasis of Cyprian's *capitula* in AQ is on the progress of and discontinuity in redemptive history. In AQ 1.8 he says *Quod circumcisio prima carnalis euacuata sit et secunda spiritalis repromissa sit*. The verses quoted do not serve to make clear the precise nature of this "circumcision of the spirit," but the idea and phrase find a parallel with Tertullian's "new circumcision" in T-AI 3 and 6. Tertullian had argued that circumcision was not necessary for

¹¹ Sage, *Cyprian*, 145-146.

salvation, even in the old covenant, because Abraham pleased God before he was circumcised (T-AI 3). The purpose of circumcision was to be a sign (*signum*, T-AI 3). This sign primarily looked forward to a curse, and the sign's purpose was to set Israel apart so that in the future, when they disobeyed, they could be denied entrance to Jerusalem (T-AI 3). This temporary, carnal circumcision has passed away and is now replaced by a spiritual circumcision for salvation to obedient people (T-AI 3), which is not identified with any NT sacrament but with Jeremiah's prophecy to "circumcise your hearts" (T-AI 3). As a result of receiving the new circumcision and the new law, Christians have become the people of God (T-AI 3). If Cyprian is following Tertullian here, then this is perhaps how he understands "spiritual circumcision." However, in Epistle [E] 64¹² Cyprian seems to equate infant baptism with "spiritual circumcision," something that Tertullian does not do, but there is apparently little connection between this and a structured covenantal view of redemptive history. Cyprian's discussion of the Sabbath in E 64.4 does bear marks of Tertullian's influence.¹³

Cyprian also asserts, *Quod lex prior quae per Moysen data est cessatura esset* (AQ 1.9) and *Quod lex nova dari haberet* (AQ 1.10), again finding a parallel with Tertullian's "new law" in T-AI 6. A

¹² E 58 in the ANCL 5:353-354.

¹³ Tertullian argues in T-AI 4 that just as this fleshly circumcision has been abolished, so also the sabbath is shown to be temporary. The Jews have failed to recognize that there is a temporal and eternal, a human and divine sabbath (T-AI 4). The temporal Mosaic sabbath was a foreshadowing of the eternal, just as carnal circumcision foreshadowed the spiritual (T-AI 4). The fact that the Mosaic sabbath was a temporary ordinance, not binding for all ages, is demonstrated in Joshua's victory at Jericho. God commanded the Israelites to march around the city walls for seven consecutive days and hence they broke the sabbath on one of them, thus proving the temporary character of the Mosaic sabbath (T-AI 4). Cyprian's reliance on Tertullian would explain his inclusion of a discussion of Sabbath in E 64.4.

difference does emerge elsewhere between Cyprian and Tertullian on this issue though. Whereas Tertullian tended to argue for the continuity of the law by stressing the distinction of moral and ceremonial law, by emphasizing the pre-Mosaic natural law¹⁴ and then arguing for covenantal discontinuity of the ceremonial code, Cyprian tends to be more extreme in both directions: tending to present his view in terms of total discontinuity and at the same time appealing to the OT levitical regulations as to the conduct of the Christian ministry.¹⁵

Tertullian had asserted that the law was given to Adam (T-AI 2) and hence was prior to the Mosaic dispensation. This law was not unrelated to God's later giving of the law; in fact, the Mosaic law can be detected in seed form in the precepts given to Adam (T-AI 2). This natural law has a wider application than merely to Adam, indeed, it was observed by the patriarchs from Adam to the time of Moses and given to all nations. The importance of this doctrine of primordial law in Tertullian's system is apparent: Moses' law is not the prototype for all future divine legislation, but rather itself a reflection of the primordial law. God is continually reforming this [natural] law for the times, with regard for the salvation of mankind, and so there have been successive stages of reform of this law. This view allows Tertullian conveniently to dispose of undesirable elements in the Mosaic legislation (such as the sabbath and circumcision) without resorting to the radical rejection of the old covenant proposed by

¹⁴ Cyprian does hint a belief in the existence of such in AQ 3.99: *Iudicium secundum tempora futurum vel aequitatis ante legem vel legis post Moysen*. This law of equity is, perhaps, parallel to Tertullian's natural law.

¹⁵ See Fasholé-Luke, "Who is the Bridegroom?" SP 12, 1:229-230, and Fahey, Cyprian, 82.

Marcion. In fact this theology of law gives Tertullian considerable flexibility in responding to objections against the Old Testament. These emphases are missing in Cyprian, and so we see an example of a distinction (at least of accent) between Cyprian's and Tertullian's theology of law in redemptive history.

Cyprian again echoes Tertullian when he says, *Quod dispositio alia et testamentum novum dare haberet* (AQ 1.11) and *Quod baptisma vetus cessaret et novum inciperet* (AQ 1.12). The language and content of both these *capitula* are found in I-AI 6. Given the unexplained metaphors of "old baptism" and "new baptism" (like fleshly and spiritual circumcision), the redemptive-historical significance of this progress is difficult to assess.

In AQ 15 Cyprian says, *Quod domus et templum Dei Christus futurus esset et cessasset templum vetus et novum inciperet*, thus indicating Christ's role in fulfillment of the OT temple prophecies, but also seeing the Church as a new temple in fulfillment of the old. Then he contrasts old and new sacrifice and old and new priesthood. Apparently in AQ 16 Cyprian intends the new sacrifice to be understood as a sacrifice of righteousness and praise (he quotes Ps. 50:23; 4.5, and Mal. 1:10-11) in the manner of Tertullian,¹⁶ rather than referring to

¹⁶ Tertullian speaks of the abolition of the sacrifices of the old covenant and the inauguration of new ones in I-AI, 5. But instead of pointing to their new covenant fulfillment in Christ (in the manner of Hebrews), he follows the same pattern that he had set in his discussions of circumcision and sabbath. From the very beginning the distinction between earthly sacrifices and spiritual offerings were foretold, according to Tertullian. The story of Cain and Abel provides the example. Cain, the older son, represents Israel, and Abel, the younger son, represents the Christian church. In God's rejection of Cain's offering and his acceptance of Abel's is contained a prediction of earthly and spiritual sacrifices (I-AI 5). The prophets also foretold of a time when sacrifices-- spiritual sacrifices that is-- would be offered up in every place (I-AI 5). This, of necessity, shows that the ceremonial laws of Israel must pass away because the law

some NT sacrament. Furthermore, his concept of new covenant priesthood is Christological in AQ 1.17. There the "new priest" is Christ himself.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Cyprian elsewhere speaks in definite terms of a new covenant human priesthood corresponding to the old covenant priesthood (E 37, 63). Altaner says that for Cyprian:

The sacrifice of the priest is the repetition of the sacrifice of Christ at the Last Supper, both being the representation of the unique sacrifice on the cross. The celebration of the eucharist consists in *oblatio* and *sacrificium* (Ep 37,1; 63,9; 66,2); the *oblatio* is bread and wine and becomes *sacrificium Christi* through the Holy Spirit (Ecc1. un. 17): *Jesus Christus... sacrificium patri se ipsum obtulit* (Ep. 63, 14). Cyprian is the first to enunciate with all clarity the belief, so far known only *implicite*, that the body and blood of Christ are sacrificial gifts (Ep. 63, 14). The sacrifice is offered also for the martyrs (Ep. 39, 3).¹⁸

How do we explain Cyprian's competing interpretations of OT priesthood and sacrifice? Probably by noting it as another inconsistency in his thought (testimony that a well-developed concept of redemptive history is not driving his rather random interpretative approach). W. H. C. Frend has suggested that the tendency of North African Christians to attribute levitical status to their ministry may be because of the

demands that sacrifice be made only in Jerusalem (T-AI 5). The spiritual sacrifices, which the earthly merely foreshadow, are revealed in the old covenant writings. A humble and a contrite heart and a sacrifice of praise, according to the prophets, are the spiritual offerings that God expects (T-AI 5). Tertullian sums up his argument in these words: *Igitur cum manifestam sit et sabbatum temporale ostensum et sabbatum aeternum praedictum, circumcisionem quoque carnalem praedictam et circumcisionem spiritalem praeindicatam, legem quoque temporalem et legem aeternalem denuntiatam, sacrificia carnalia et sacrificia spiritalia praeostensa, sequitur, ut praecedenti tempore datis omnibus istis praeceptis carnaliter populo Israelii superveniret tempus, quo legis antiquae et caeremoniarum veterum praecepta cessarent et novae legis promissio et spiritalium sacrificiorum agnito et novi testamenti pollicitatio superveniret* (T-AI 6). In AQ 1.16, Cyprian apparently is following this line of thinking.

¹⁷ See Fahey, Cyprian and the Bible, 103.

¹⁸ Patrology, 203-204.

early links between the Christian and Jewish/Christian communities.¹⁹ Hence, Fasholé-Luke suggests that "Cyprian may only have been giving precise formulation to the idea of priesthood as a levitical community, which goes back to the early traditions of the North African Church."²⁰

Moving ahead to AQ 1.18, Cyprian indicates, *Quod propheta alius sicut Moyses promissus sit, scilicet qui testamentum novum daret et qui magis audiri deberet*. This may be a testamentary usage of *testamentum*. The clearest example of such a usage is actually found in the Pseudo-Cyprian AI. Ferguson summarizes the covenantal/testamentary thought of that work as follows:

The writer of the Pseudo-Cyprian sermon *Adversus Iudaeos* used the traditional themes associated with the covenant in Christian thought with the intention of "de-Judaizing" the church. The sermon declared its theme as the transfer under the new covenant of the inheritance (the fusion of the testamentary with the relational idea of the covenant) to the Gentiles. The heirs of Christ are able to understand the spiritual nature of his covenant. The old people have been disinherited because of their crimes, and God has written a new covenant (testament), witnessed by heaven and earth. The new covenant invites the Gentiles to enter the eternal inheritance which Israel rejected. "Christ tore up your old covenant and wrote a new one by which he called Gentiles to the possession of your privileges" (ch 31). Chapter 43 refers to the new covenant on the mount of transfiguration to be revealed after the resurrection. The appeal is to a spiritual understanding.²¹

As we have mentioned before, it is difficult to expound the meaning of *testamentum* in AQ because of the comparative lack of context.

In AQ 1.19, Cyprian says, *Quod duo populi praedicti sint, maior et minor, id est vetus Iudaeorum et novus, qui esset ex nobis futurus*. Again, this heading finds a corollary in Tertullian I-AI 5. This

¹⁹ "The *Seniores Laici* and the Origins of the North African Church," JTS n.s. 12:281-294.

²⁰ "Who is the Bridegroom?," 230.

²¹ "The Covenant Idea," 152.

heading is elaborated in *capitula* for AQ 20–24. AQ 20–22 deal, respectively, with: the expansion of Church (rather than the synagogue) among the Gentiles; the Gentiles coming to belief in Christ; and the Jews' loss of the grace of Christ. This last heading, again, finds some conceptual precedent in I-AI 8.

Cyprian concludes his first book with the following headings: *Quod ad regnum caelorum magis gentes quam Iudaei perveniant* (AQ 23) and *Quod solo hoc Iudaei accipere veniam possint delictorum suorum, si sanguinem Christi occisi baptismo eius abluerint et in ecclesiam transeuntes praeceptis eius obtemperaverint* (AQ 24). Both statements, that the Gentiles (rather than Jews) inherit the kingdom of heaven and that the Jews are now only saved through faith, baptism, joining the Church, and obedience, make it clear that Cyprian is not operating with a "dual covenant" theology.

It is apparent, even from this brief review, that Cyprian's covenant thought was neither as significant to his overall theology, nor as fertile and varied as that of his predecessors, especially Irenaeus and Tertullian.

Summary and Conclusion

First, Cyprian's meaning of *testamentum* is unclear, but there are probably testamentary overtones to it (AQ 1.18), whereas Irenaeus had understood *διαθήκη* primarily as a relationship between God and his people, and Tertullian had employed *testamentum* to designate the various eras of redemptive history.

Second, Cyprian lacks the NT writers', Justin's, and Irenaeus' rich covenantal linkage of the incarnation and work of Christ with fulfillment of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenant, though he does

recognize the new covenant fulfillment of Jeremiah 31 (AQ 1.11). Like Melito, Cyprian nowhere makes this connection explicitly in his extant writings.

Third, the covenant concept is of minor significance in Cyprian's theology and serves to emphasize progress in redemptive history (AQ 1.8-19).

Fourth, the linkage of the covenant idea with forgiveness of sins is not as prominent in Cyprian as it is in the NT and Justin (AQ 1.11). Cyprian does however affirm the graciousness of the divine economy, especially in stressing the grace of Christ to the Gentiles (AQ 1.20-23).

Fifth, if Sage is right,²² then Cyprian's AQ could be intended to serve the purpose of moral exhortation to Christians (AQ 1. preface). We have already noted this emphasis in Irenaeus, Clement, and Barnabas.

Sixth, Cyprian agrees with the NT, Melito, Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian. and over against Barnabas and the Gnostics, in his view of Israel's reception of the old covenant, but stresses the Jews' loss of the covenant (AQ 1.1-7).

Seventh, like Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Justin, Melito, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, Cyprian makes a strong appeal to the OT in establishing covenant thought (in the standard manner of second-century *demonstratio evangelica*) (esp. AQ 1).

Eighth, Cyprian only mentions the old and new covenants, in contrast to the NT, Barnabas, Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian, who mention or allude to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants.

²² Cyprian, 144-146.

Ninth, Cyprian has a concept of *aequitas* which may correspond to Tertullian's "natural law" (AQ 3.99) but he never explicitly argues in the manner of Tertullian that this same law is binding in the new covenant as well as the old.

PART III:

**ALEXANDRIA:
COVENANT, GENTILES, AND HERMENEUTICS**

Chapter 5

CLEMENT OF ALEXANDRIA

The first unequivocal testimonies [to the use of $\delta\iota\alpha\theta\acute{\epsilon}\iota\kappa\eta$ as a title for the Scriptures] are found around the year 200 in the writings of Clement of Alexandria. In Clement's theology, too, the idea of God's covenant with his people plays a major role.

W. Kinzig, " $\delta\iota\alpha\theta\acute{\epsilon}\iota\kappa\eta$: The Title of the NT," 529.

The term "covenant" entered Clement's vocabulary fully apart from a political context. . . . Clement's writings present a many-sided theology of the relationship of the covenants.

E. Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 152.

Clement of Alexandria had latent within his theories a philosophy of history controlled by the covenant conception.

P. Y. DeJong, The Covenant Idea in New England Theology, 17.

Clement of Alexandria readily used the language of old and new covenant, and his theology reflected a well-developed view of the relationship of the covenants. In his impressive survey of the historiography of covenant, Andrew Woolsey has conclusively laid out many of the aspects of Clement of Alexandria's thought concerning the covenant.¹ He clearly illustrates Clement's idea of only one true covenant which applied to all believers throughout salvation history.² Clement saw that, even though the Law of Moses served the purpose of training believers in the fear of God, Christ was nevertheless central to the covenant faith of both Old and New Testaments.³ Finally,

¹ A. A. Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity in Covenantal Thought" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1988).

² Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity," 205.

³ Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity," 207.

Woolsey points out that the covenant involved both the grace of God and man's ethical obligations in response.⁴

Woolsey's general conclusions have been confirmed not only by our study, but also by an important more specific treatment by Everett Ferguson.⁵ Although pre-dating the later study, it is clear that Woolsey was unaware of Ferguson's work.⁶ Thus, the range and depth of conclusions drawn from Clement's writings on covenant may be expanded to several more specific points raised by Ferguson.

First, for Clement, the covenants were good gifts given by God:

For God is the cause of all good things; but of some primarily, as of the Old and the New Testament; and of others by consequence, as philosophy."⁷

Second, Clement taught that there were two covenants and two peoples; the older and the new people:

⁴ Woolsey, "Unity and Continuity," 209.

⁵ E. Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea in the Second Century," In Texts and Testaments, ed. by W. March (San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press, 1980), 135-162.

⁶ Woolsey displays no knowledge of Ferguson's work directly or indirectly.

⁷ Translation in Ante-Nicene Fathers, edited by Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, 10 vols. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1885; reprint, edited by A. Cleveland Coxe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969-73), 2:305. "πάντων μὲν γὰρ αἴτιος τῶν καλῶν ὁ θεός, ἀλλὰ τῶν μὲν κατὰ προηγούμενον ὡς τῆς τε διαθήκης τῆς παλαιᾶς καὶ τῆς νέας, τῶν δὲ κατ' ἐπακολούθημα ὡς τῆς φιλοσοφίας." Clement of Alexandria Stromateis (Athens: Ekdosis tes Apostolikes Diakonias tes Ekklesias tes Hellados, 1956), v.1, 1.5.28.

Formerly the older had an old covenant, and the law disciplined the people with fear, and the Word was an angel; but to the fresh and new people has also been given a new covenant⁸

Third, the Logos was the teacher under both covenants, and so the teaching of the new covenant is written in the old: "This is my new covenant written in the old letter."⁹

Fourth, Clement names four Old Testament covenants: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and one New Testament covenant: Christ.¹⁰

Fifth, he had a periodization of the law: before the law, under the law, and under Christ.

Sixth, he described philosophy as a covenant to the Greeks, "philosophy more especially was given to the Greeks, as a covenant peculiar to them."¹¹

⁸ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:224. "τὸ μὲν οὖν πρότερον τῷ πρεσβυτέρῳ λαῷ πρεσβύτερα διαθήκη ἦν καὶ νόμος ἐπαιδαγωγεῖ τὸν λαὸν μετὰ φόβου καὶ λόγος ἄγγελος ἦν, καινῷ δὲ καὶ νέῳ λαῷ καινὴ καὶ νέα διαθήκη δεδῶρηται . . ." Paidagogos (Athens: Ekdotis tes Apostolikes Diakonias tes Ekklesias tes Hellados, 1956), v.1, 1.7.59.

⁹ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:224. "αὕτη μου ἡ νέα διαθήκη παλαιῷ κεχαραγμένη γράμματι." Paidagogos 1.7.59

¹⁰ ((Οἱ οὐρανοὶ διηγούνται δόξαν θεοῦ.)) οἱ οὐρανοὶ λέγονται πολλαχῶς, καὶ οἱ κατὰ διάστημα καὶ περίοδον καὶ ἡ κατὰ διαθήκην τῶν πρωτοκτίστων ἀγγέλων ἐνέργεια προσεχῆς, κυριωτέρα γὰρ παρουσίᾳ ἀγγέλων αἱ διαθήκαι ἐνηργήθησαν ἢ ἐπὶ Ἀδάμ, ἢ ἐπὶ Νῶε, ἢ ἐπὶ Ἀβραάμ, ἢ ἐπὶ Μωυσέως. διὰ γὰρ τοῦ κυρίου κινηθέντες <οἱ> πρωτόκτιστοι ἄγγελοι ἐνήργουν εἰς τοὺς προσεχεῖς τοῖς προφήταις ἀγγέλους <δι>ηγούμενοι ((δόξαν θεοῦ)), τὰς διαθήκας. ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ ἔργα τὰ κατὰ τὴν γῆν γενόμενα ὑπ' ἀγγέλων διὰ τῶν πρωτοκτίστων ἀγγέλων ἐγένοντο εἰς ((δόξαν θεοῦ)). καλοῦνται δὲ οὐρανοὶ κυρίως μὲν ὁ κύριος, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ οἱ πρωτόκτιστοι, μεθ' οὓς καὶ οἱ ἅγιοι πρὸ νόμου ἄνθρωποι, ὡς οἱ πατριάρχαι, καὶ Μωυσῆς καὶ οἱ προφῆται, εἶτα καὶ οἱ ἀπόστολοι. Ek Ton Prophetikon Eklogai (Athens: Ekdotis tes Apostolikes Diakonias tes Ekklesias tes Hellados, 1956), v.2, 51ff.

¹¹ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:495. "τὴν δὲ φιλοσοφίαν καὶ μᾶλλον Ἑλληνισμὸν διαθήκην οἰκείαν αὐτοῖς." Stromateis 6.8.67.

Seventh, the New Covenant brought by Christ, as a fulfillment of Jer 31, made both the Jewish law and Greek philosophy outmoded:

He made a new covenant with us; for what belonged to the Greeks and Jews is old. But we, who worship Him in a new way, in the third form, are Christians.¹²

Eighth, the different covenants were in continuity because they came from the same Lord:

"But all things are right," says the Scripture, "before those who understand," that is, those who receive and observe, according to the ecclesiastical rule, the exposition of the Scriptures explained by Him; and the ecclesiastical rule is the concord and harmony of the law and the prophets in the covenant delivered at the coming of the Lord.¹³

Ninth, the old and new covenants are administered through the Son by one God:

"Now the just shall live by faith," which is according to the covenant and the commandments; since these, which are two in name and time, given in accordance with the divine economy--being in power one--the old and the new, are dispensed through the Son by one God.¹⁴

¹² Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:489. "νέαν ἡμῖν διέθετο, τὰ γὰρ Ἑλλήνων καὶ Ἰουδαίων παλαιά, ἡμεῖς δὲ οἱ καινῶς αὐτὸν τρίτῳ γένει σεβόμενοι Χριστιανοί." Stromateis 6.5.41ff.

¹³ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:509. "πλὴν ((ἅπαντα ὀρθὰ ἐνώπιον τῶν συνιέντων)), φησὶν ἡ γραφή, τουτέστι τῶν ὅσοι ὑπ' αὐτοῦ σαφηνισθεῖσαν <τὴν> τῶν γραφῶν ἐξήγησιν κατὰ τὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸν κανόνα ἐκδεχόμενοι διασφζουσι, κανῶν δὲ ἐκκλησιαστικῶς ἢ συνφδιά καὶ ἢ συμφωνία νόμου τε καὶ προφητῶν τῆ κατὰ τὴν τοῦ κυρίου παρουσίαν παραδιδόμενη διαθήκη." Stromateis 6.15.125.

¹⁴ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:354. "((ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζῆσεται)), τῆς κατὰ τὴν διαθήκην καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς, ἐπειδὴ δύο αὐταὶ ὀνόματι καὶ χρόνῳ, καθ' ἡλικίαν καὶ προκοπὴν οἰκονομικῶς δεδομένοι, δυνάμει μία οἶσαι, ἢ μὲν παλαιά, ἢ δὲ καινὴ, διὰ υἱοῦ παρ' ἑνὸς θεοῦ χορηγοῦνται." Stromateis 2.6.29.

Tenth, Clement parallels Irenaeus' idea of covenantal education.¹⁵

Eleventh, on the basis of Genesis 17:4, he identifies the Lord himself with the covenant:

And Moses manifestly calls the Lord a covenant: 'Behold I am my Covenant with thee,' having previously told him not to seek the covenant in writing. For it is a covenant which God, the Author of all, makes.¹⁶

Twelfth, Clement affirmed that the different covenants were in reality one:

. . . we say that the ancient and Catholic Church is alone, collecting as it does into the unity of the one faith--which results from the peculiar Testaments, or rather the one Testament in different times by the will of the one God, through one Lord--those already ordained . . ."¹⁷

Thirteenth, Clement gives us some of the fullest statements on the purpose of the law found in patristic literature. He considered it to be preparatory discipline:

But since God deemed it advantageous, that from the law and the prophets, men should receive a preparatory discipline by the Lord, the fear of the Lord was called the beginning

¹⁵ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:504. "μία μὲν γὰρ τῶ ὄντι διαθήκη ἡ σωτήριος ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἰς ἡμᾶς διήκουσα, κατὰ διαφόρους γενεάς τε καὶ χρόνους διάφορος εἶναι τὴν δόσιν ὑποληφθεῖσα." Stromateis 6.13.106.

¹⁶ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:341. "Μωυσῆς δὲ φαίνεται τὸν κύριον διαθήκην καλῶν, ((ἰδοὺ ἐγώ)), λέγων, ((ἡ διαθήκη μου μετὰ σοῦ,)) ἐπεὶ καὶ πρότερον εἶπεν ((διαθήκην)), μὴ ζητεῖν αὐτὴν ἐν γραφῇ. ἔστι γὰρ διαθήκη ἡν ὁ αἴτιος τοῦ παντός θεὸς τίθεται . . ." Stromateis 1.29.182.

¹⁷ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:555. ". . . εἶναι φάμεν τὴν ἀρχαίαν καὶ καθολικὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ((εἰς ἐνότητα πίστεως)) μιᾶς, τῆς κατὰ τὰς οἰκείας διαθήκας, μᾶλλον δὲ κατὰ τὴν διαθήκην τὴν μίαν διαφόροις τοῖς χρόνοις ἐνὸς τοῦ θεοῦ τῶ βουλήματι δι' ἐνὸς τοῦ κυρίου συνάγουσαν τοῖς ἤδη κατατεταγμένους . . ." Stromateis 7.17.107.

of wisdom, being given by the Lord, through Moses, to the disobedient and hard of heart.¹⁸

In addition to Ferguson's authoritative conclusions, Clement used the terminology of old and new covenants as designations of the canonical Scriptures. For example, "because in both Testaments mention is made of the righteous".¹⁹ In addition, he says:

This, then, is to be believed, according to Plato, though it is announced and spoken, 'without probable and necessary proofs,' but in the Old and New Testament.²⁰

The conclusions of these two important studies are sufficient to avoid needless redundancy, and have only been confirmed by our investigation.

¹⁸ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:356. "Μιᾶς δ' οὔσης ἀρχῆς, ὡς δειχθήσεται ὑστερον, τερετίσματα καὶ μινυρίσματα ἀναπλάσσοντες οἶδε οἱ ἄνδρες φανήσονται. ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἐκ νόμου καὶ προφητῶν προπαιδεύσθαι διὰ κυρίου τῷ θεῷ συμφέρειν ἔδοξεν, ((ἀρχὴ σοφίας φόβος)) εἴρηται ((κυρίου)), παρὰ κυρίου διὰ Μωυσέως δοθεὶς τοῖς ἀπειθοῦσι καὶ σκληροκαρδίοις." Stromateis 2.8.37.

¹⁹ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:453. "δι ὧν οἱ δίκαιοι μνηύονται καθ' ἑκατέρας τὰς διαθήκας." Stromateis 5.6.38.

²⁰ Trans. in Ante-Nicene Fathers, 2:464. "Πιστευτέον ἄρα τοῦτο καὶ κατὰ Πλάτωνα κἂν ἄνευ γε εἰκότων καὶ ἀναγκαίων ἀποδείξεων διὰ τε τῆς παλαιᾶς διὰ τε τῆς νέας διαθήκης κηρύσσεται καὶ λέγεται." Stromateis 5.13.85.

Chapter 6

ORIGEN:

Διάκονος τῆς Καινῆς Διαθήκης, οὐ γράμματος, ἀλλὰ πνεύματος

Origen qualified "covenant," as a title of the scriptures by "so-called." He did this even for the general use of the word: "We must also realize that we have received the so-called covenants of God on conditions, set forth in the agreements which we have made with him" (*Exh ad mart* 12). This passage keeps the biblical sense of "covenant" as "an agreement." Origen seemed to lack the testamentary emphasis frequently encountered in other writings from this period.

Everett Ferguson, "The Covenant Idea," 154.

Introduction

Of the Christian theologians surveyed so far, none used the terminology of "covenant" more frequently than Origen.¹ Yet, as Kinzig has recently observed "a thorough analysis of the use of διαθήκη by Origen is complicated by the fragmentary preservation of his writings and problems of authenticity which make it impossible to give precise overall figures."² In Origen's extant works, διαθήκη most often occurs in biblical quotations and allusions, in reference to the titles of the old and new Scriptures, and in passing comments about the old and new covenant manifestations of the redemptive economy. Only when Origen uses διαθήκη outwith these contexts can one determine his theological use of the term or the significance of the covenant in his redemptive historical system.

¹ For background on Origen see H. Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989); J. Daniélou, *Origen*, trans. W. Mitchell (London: Shedd and Ward, 1966); P. Nautin, *Origène: sa vie, son oeuvre, sa pensée* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1977); and J. W. Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (London: SCM, 1985). For further bibliography see H. Crouzel, *Bibliographie critique d'Origène* and *Bibliographie critique d'Origène: Supplément 1* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971, 1982). See also *EEChr* 668-669, and *EEC* 2:622-623.

² Kinzig, "Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 530.

The Meanings of διαθήκη in Origen

A glance at the usages of διαθήκη in Origen will reveal as many as three ways in which the term is employed: as a title for Scripture, perhaps (on one occasion) as a testamentary document, and, most commonly, as a biblical covenant. There are numerous passages which could be cited as examples of Origen's use of διαθήκη in reference to OT/NT Scriptures. In his Commentary on John [CJohn] 1.5, Origen responds to the objection that "we are wrong in applying the name of the Gospel to the whole of the New Testament" by explaining why such a procedure is legitimate.³ In CJohn 1.36 Origen says "The texts of the New Testament, which we have discussed, are things said by Himself about Himself."⁴ While expounding on the significance of names in the NT, Origen says "The New Testament gives Hebrew names a Greek form and treats them as Greek words" (CJohn 2.27).⁵ In his Commentary on Matthew [CMatt] lays down the rule "Seek every sign in the Old Scriptures as indicative of some passage in the New Scripture, and that which is named a sign in the New Testament as indicative of something either in the age about to be, or even in the subsequent generations after the sign has taken place" (12.3).⁶ In the midst of his explanation of the meaning of "when Jesus had finished these words," Origen says "he will give a declaration on this point with more confidence who devotes himself with great diligence to the entire reading of the Old and New

³ ANCL trans. I have given the ANCL book and chapter reference in the text; references in the notes are to the Greek text, in this case CJohn 1.19.

⁴ ANCL trans. Greek text CJohn 1.228.

⁵ ANCL trans. Greek text, CJohn 2.197.

⁶ ANCL trans., slightly modified. Greek text, CMatt 1.32.

Testament" (CMatt 14.14).⁷ It is also possible to read διαθήκη as NT in CMatt 14.23: "in the New Testament also there are some legal injunctions of the same order as "Moses, because of your hardness of heart, permitted you to put away your wives."⁸ There are three occurrences of διαθήκη in On Prayer [P], each of them in reference to the OT. In P 14.4 Origen observes that the Jews "reject the book of Tobit as not in the Old Testament."⁹ In P 22.1, Origen allows that "It is right to examine what is said in the Old Testament quite carefully"¹⁰ to determine whether OT saints had the privilege of calling upon God as "Father" in prayer, and in P 23.5 he makes passing reference to "a few passages from the Old Testament."¹¹

There appears to be only one passage in Origen's extant writings where διαθήκη can bear the meaning "last will and testament." In CMatt 14.19 Origen says:

Now, keeping in mind what we said above in regard to the passage from Isaiah about the bill of divorcement, we will say that the mother of the people separated herself from Christ, her husband, without having received the bill of divorcement, but afterwards when there was found in her an unseemly thing, and she did not find favour in his sight, the bill of divorcement was written out for her; for when the new covenant [ἡ καινὴ Διαθήκη] called those of the Gentiles to the house of Him who had cast away his former wife, it virtually gave the bill of divorcement to her who formerly separated from her husband — the law, and the Word.

Kinzig claims "here διαθήκη clearly means 'last Will and Testament' and

⁷ ANCL trans. Greek text CMatt 14.14.

⁸ ANCL trans., slightly modified. Greek text CMatt 14.23.

⁹ Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer, and Selected Works, trans. R. A. Greer (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 110.

¹⁰ Trans. Greer, 123.

¹¹ Trans. Greer, 128.

is used metaphorically."¹² Nevertheless, while it is clear enough that a documentary metaphor is being employed in the passage, we should note that "the new covenant" is not being equated with "the bill of divorcement," it is the new covenant that is personified and said both to call the Gentiles and to give "the bill of divorcement." Whatever the case may be here, Ferguson is certainly right when he says "Origen seemed to lack the testamentary emphasis frequently encountered in other writings from this period."¹³

Elsewhere, Origen provides us with as clear an example of a bilateral-covenant usage of *διαθήκη* as can be found anywhere in patristic literature. In An Exhortation to Martyrdom [Ex ad mart] 12, Origen solemnly instructs his readers:

We must also understand that we have accepted what are called the covenants of God [*θεοῦ διαθήκας*] as agreements [*συνθήκαις*] we have made with Him when we undertook to live the Christian life. And among our agreements with God was the entire citizenship of the Gospel, which says, "If any one would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his soul would lose it, and whoever loses his soul for my sake will save it."¹⁴

If this reflects Origen's general understanding of *διαθήκη* it may serve to explain his occasional qualification of the term elsewhere by the preface "so-called [*τὴν λεγομένην*]." In this passage (Ex ad mart 12) and De principiis 4.1.1, Origen refers to the "so-called covenants of God," the "so-called Old Testament" and the "so-called New Testament." Again in p 22.1 and CJohn 5.8, Origen speaks of the "so-called Old Testament." Kinzig takes this to be a reservation, on Origen's part, to

¹² "Καينὴ διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 531, n.65.

¹³ "The Covenant Idea," 154.

¹⁴ Trans. Greer, 49.

use the term as a title for Scripture.¹⁵ This cannot be the explanation, however, since Origen uses "so-called" with "covenant" when he is clearly not referring to the Old or New Testaments (Ex ad mart 12). But if we suggest that the common denotation of διαθήκη in Origen's day was testamentary, and that Origen understood the biblical concept of the διαθήκη to be quite different from this common usage, then his qualification "so-called" would serve to express his concern about the potential misunderstanding of the term in the vernacular. In any case, Ex ad mart 12 provides a clear testimony to a bilateral, biblical usage of διαθήκη in Origen's extant writings.

Covenant as a Theological Category

According to Kinzig, "the concept of 'covenant' does not play a major role in Origen's thought."¹⁶ Whether or not one concurs in this opinion, it is apparent that διαθήκη in Origen occurs most frequently in biblical quotations or allusions, and in passing references to the old and new covenants, rather than as a category in its own right. For instance, in CC 1.53, Origen quotes from Is. 49:8-9 applying it to

¹⁵ "Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 532. Indeed, Kinzig goes on to argue that Origen's use of "so-called" to modify Old and New Testaments is due to the Marcionite origin of the term "New Testament." Kinzig asserts: "The Greater Church did not take over Marcion's canon. It did, however, adopt its name: Καινή διαθήκη. Owing to Marcion's influence, the term had probably become popular in the Church at large, before the 'orthodox' canon took its final shape. The *Église savante* initially tried to fend off this new designation. This explains why it is found neither in Justin nor in Irenaeus. At a later stage it was adopted by theologians such as Tertullian, Origen and Augustine only with considerable reluctance — precisely because they were unaware of its origin. The theology behind this designation, however, was taken over already by Justin, because it suited him well in his own controversy with Judaism," 543.

¹⁶ "Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 531.

Jesus: "And I have given thee for a covenant of the nations [διαθήκην ἔθνῶν] to establish the earth and to inherit the heritage of the wilderness, so that you may say to them that are in prison, Come forth, and to them that are in darkness, Show yourselves."¹⁷. The only significance of this passage as witness to Origen's covenant thought is his identification of Jesus as the covenant (in the manner of Justin), and his strong emphasis on the Gentile character of the new covenant. In CC 4.44, Origen quotes from Gal. 4:21-24, concerning the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, the women who represented "two covenants [δύο διαθήκαι]" but is not primarily interested in the covenants in this passage. Origen's bilateral understanding of covenant and his use of the concept for moral exhortation are both apparent in his quotation of Heb. 10:29 in CC 8.10:

Do we not learn that honour is offered to the Son of God by a life of good conduct, and similarly also to God the Father, both from the saying, "You who boast of the law, by your transgression of the law you dishonour God," and by the words "Of how much more severe punishment, do you think, shall he be thought worthy who has trampled under foot the Son of God and counted the blood of the covenant [τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης] which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and has insulted the spirit of grace." For if the man who transgresses the law dishonours God by his action, and if the man who does not accept the gospel tramples under foot the Son of God, it is obvious that he who keeps the law honours God, and that he worships God who is adorned with the word of God and with His works.¹⁸

One of Origen's very favorite biblical covenant citations is Eph. 2:12, which he refers to over and over again. In CC 2.78, he observes that "God's providence has been amazing in that He has made use of the sin of the Jews to call the people of the Gentiles into the kingdom of God by Jesus, although they were strangers to the covenants and were not

¹⁷ Contra Celsum, trans. H. Chadwick (Cambridge: CUP, 1965), 49.

¹⁸ Trans. Chadwick, 459.

included in the promises."¹⁹ Here again the gracious inclusion of the Gentiles in the new covenant is highlighted by Origen. In CC 5.33, he refers to those who were "strangers to the covenants [ξένοι τῶν διαθηκῶν]" and in CC 8.5 specifies that the covenants to which the Gentiles were strangers are "the covenants of God given through Moses and Jesus our Savior."²⁰ Once more, in CC 8.43, Origen indicates that one of the new things which has happened since the time of Jesus is that those "who were strangers to the covenants of God and alien to the promises" had accepted the truth miraculously. In CJohn 6.2, Origen asserts that it was known to the prophets that the Gentiles, those who were "strangers to the covenants,"²¹ would believe, and in his allegorical interpretation of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem (CJohn 10.18) he explains that the "strangers to the covenants and promise of God" were those who were "outside" on the road "not resting under a roof or a house, bound by their own sins, and to be loosed by the twofold knowledge spoken of above, of the friends of Jesus."²²

Another of Origen's favorite biblical covenant allusions is 2 Cor. 3:6. In CC 6.70 Origen quotes the passage as an illustration of an important hermeneutical principle:

By way of antithesis to sensible things, the scripture usually calls intelligible things spirit and spiritual. For example, Paul says "But our sufficiency is of God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit, for the letter kills, but the spirit gives life." He

¹⁹ Trans. Chadwick, 126.

²⁰ Origen employs the phrase twice in this passage, 8.5.6 and 8.5.28 ("strangers to His covenants" is the reading of the latter instance).

²¹ Greek text, CJohn 6.27.

²² ANCL trans. Greek text, CJohn 10.193.

calls the sensible interpretation of the divine scriptures "the letter" and the intelligible interpretation "the spirit."

Origen also makes use of the phrase "ministers of the new covenant in CJohn 1.11 (1.64) and 4.2, in both cases stressing the competency or ability of the ministers of the new covenant. Origen refers to Paul as "a competent minister of the new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit" in CJohn 5.3 (as in 4.2). Finally, in CJohn 5.8, Origen addresses his patron Ambrose, a convert from Gnosticism (cf. Eusebius, HE 6.18.1), and designates himself a minister of the new covenant:

Now I am saying these things in accordance with what appears to me, as a defense for those who are able to speak and write, and as a defense for myself, lest perhaps by not being of such habit of mind as would be necessary for one made competent by God to be a minister of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the spirit, I devote myself too boldly to dictating.²³

The biblical phrase "ark of the covenant" appears from time to time in Origen, for instance twice in CJohn 6.230-231, where the ark [τῆς κιβωτοῦ τῆς διαθήκης] is said to represent "the mystery of the dispensation of the Father with the Son."²⁴ Again in CJohn 10.280, "the ark of the covenant of the Lord" is said to contain "the handwriting of God, the tablets which were written with his finger" (Ex. 31:18).²⁵

Further examples of Origen's quotations of biblical covenant passages include CJohn 2.154 where he says:

For although the life and the light of men are the same, the concepts, nevertheless, are understood in relation to different things. This "light of men" in fact is called also "light of the gentiles" by the prophet Isaias in his statement, "Behold I have sent you for a covenant of the people [διαθήκην γένους], for a

²³ Commentary on the Gospel according to John, Books 1-10, [Fathers of the Church -- FOTC] trans. R. E. Heine (Washington: Catholic University of America, 1989), 166-167.

²⁴ Trans. Heine [FOTC], 231.

²⁵ Trans. Heine [FOTC], 317.

light of the gentiles."²⁶

Here again Origen identifies Jesus as the covenant (cf. CC 1.53). In the midst of a discussion about "signs" Origen quotes Gen. 17:10-11 ("it shall be for a sign of the covenant between me and you") in CJohn 13.451, and in his deliberation on the meaning of glory in CJohn 32.334, Origen quotes Ex. 34:29-30 ("the two tablets of the covenant were in Moses' hands"). These passages, and many others like them, shed relatively little light on Origen's covenant thought, but there are a few references which can aid our estimation of his theological use of διαθήκη. We now turn our attention to them.

While defending against Celsus' charge against the credibility of Christianity in view of the Jewish rejection of Jesus, Origen argues that as the Jews rejected Moses so also they rejected Jesus:

But if Jesus' miracles are said to be equal to those recorded of Moses, what an extraordinary thing is this that the people should in both cases disbelieve in the beginning of God's covenants? For it was when the Mosaic law was first given that your sins of unbelief are recorded to have been committed. And according to our belief it was Jesus who first gave the second law and covenant [διαθήκης δευτέρως]. You testify by the fact that you disbelieve in Jesus that you are sons of those in the wilderness who disbelieved the manifestations of God (CC 2.75).²⁷

Though it is not the main point of the passage, Origen's view of Christ as the giver of the second law and covenant comes through clearly. Here, Origen is following the standard appeal to the parallels between the Mosaic and New covenants, a pattern which stretches back to the NT writers and Jeremiah.

In CJohn 1.36, where Origen is explaining how the coming of Christ has made the Law and Prophets into gospel, he says:

²⁶ Trans. Heine [FOTC], 135.

²⁷ Trans. Chadwick, 123.

Nothing of the ancients was gospel, then, before that gospel which came into existence because of the coming of Christ. But the gospel, which is the new covenant, made the newness of the spirit which never grows old shine forth in the light of knowledge. This newness of the spirit removed us from "the antiquity of the letter."²⁸

Origen goes on to argue that this new covenant newness of spirit is proper to the NT writings, but that it may also be retroactively applied to the OT writings when they are read spiritually. Origen's identification of the gospel and the new covenant, explicit here, illumines many other passages where he employs this terminology (e.g., CMatt 14.19).

After identifying the old covenant (or Testament) as "the beginning of the gospel" in CJohn 1.80 and 85, Origen offers a spiritual exegesis of the names of Zacharias, Elizabeth, and John in 2.198:

John was born as a "gift" from God indeed, from the "memory" concerning God related to the "oath" of our God concerning the Fathers, to prepare "for the Lord a prepared people," to bring about the completion of the old covenant which is the end of the Sabbath observance.²⁹

Both gracious and promissory ideas are connected to the covenant idea here, but the primary emphasis of the passage is on the conclusion of the old covenant.

In CJohn 6.90, Origen returns again to the idea of Jesus as the fulfiller of the Mosaic economy, when he says "some prophet was specially expected who would be similar to Moses in some respect, to mediate between God and men, and, who would receive the covenant from God [Διαθήκην ἀπὸ Θεοῦ] and give the new covenant [τὴν καινὴν] to those

²⁸ Trans. Heine [FOTC], slightly modified, 41.

²⁹ Trans. Heine [FOTC], 148.

who became his disciples."³⁰ In light of this it is no surprise that, for Origen, "there are some legal injunctions" in the new covenant as in the old CMatt 14.23.

In view of this brief survey of the theological use of διαθήκη in the extant writings of Origen, one is ready to concur with Kinzig that "covenant" cannot be seen to be a major theological category in Origen's thought. More often, it serves as an instrument to prove a point which is of greater interest to Origen in a given passage. He does, however, repeat many of the standard second-century patterns and usages of the covenant concept, and provide important third-century evidence for a continuing Christian understanding of the biblical covenants as entailing mutuality and obligation, as well as grace and promise.

Summary and Conclusion

First, Origen employs διαθήκη in the sense of an agreement between God and his people (the "Hebraic" sense) (Ex ad mart 12). He very often uses διαθήκη to delineate the main administrations of redemptive history, old and new (CJohn 1.8,11,14,15). He is fond of alluding to Eph 2:12 ("strangers to the covenants") (CC 2.78; 5.33; 8.5; 8.43) and 2 Cor 3:6 ("minister of the new covenant, not of letter, but of spirit") (CJohn 1.64; 4.1; 5.1; 5.8). He rarely (CMatt 14.19), if ever, means "last will and testament" by διαθήκη. Hence, covenant (rather than testament) is the primary sense of διαθήκη in Origen.

Second, Origen sees Christ as the fulfillment of the old covenant (CJohn 2.18,27; 6.8). However, the emphasis on Christ's fulfillment of

³⁰ Trans. Heine [FOTC], 193-194.

the Abrahamic covenant, and the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah (typical in the NT writers, Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Clement) is missing in Origen. More often he shows Christ's fulfillment of the Mosaic covenant (CC 2.75).

Third, the covenant concept is of some significance in Origen's presentation of redemptive history (CC 2.75). He tends to emphasize continuity more than discontinuity when relating the old and new covenants (CMatt 14.4; CJohn 10.18).

Fourth, the linkage of the covenant idea with forgiveness of sins is not explicit in Origen (as it is in the NT and Justin). Origen does affirm the graciousness of the divine economy by stressing the divine adoption of the Gentiles, who were formerly "strangers to the covenants" (CC 2.78; 5.33; 8.5).

Fifth, Origen (like Clement of Rome, Barnabas, and Irenaeus) employs covenant thought occasionally in the service of moral exhortation (CC 8.10), and his bilateral emphasis in covenant relations is unmistakable (Ex ad mart 12). Once again, then, the claim is shown to be erroneous that discussion of mutual obligations is absent from patristic covenant thought.

Sixth, Origen does not deny Israel's reception of the old covenant, but his hermeneutical view of the new covenant leads him to see it as the key which alone unlocks the meaning of the old covenant texts (In Num hom 9.4). Hence, Ferguson is right to say that "from one direction Origen sounds like Barnabas; from another he approaches the view of Augustine."³¹

Seventh, like Barnabas, Clement of Rome, Justin, Melito,

³¹ "The Covenant Idea," 155.

Irenaeus, and others, Origen makes a strong appeal to OT in establishing covenant thought (CJohn 2.18; Ex ad mart 19; In Ex hom 5.1; 7.3). He also makes the identification of Jesus as the covenant (CC 1.53), and declares that "Christ on the cross caused the fountains of the new covenant to flow" (In Ex hom 11.2).

Eighth, while the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and New covenants are mentioned or alluded to in writings of the NT, Barnabas, Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement (the latter two both also mention covenants with Adam and Noah), Origen primarily discusses the old and new covenants, with incidental notices of the Abrahamic (CJohn 10.271) and Mosaic covenants (CC 2.75). In one place (CMatt 15.32) he does reference Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Christ, but "mentions a covenant only as regards Noah."³²

³² Kinzig, "Καινή διαθήκη: Title of the NT," 523, n.15.

PART IV :

**ROME :
THE DECLINE OF THE COVENANT TRADITION**

Chapter 7

HIPPOLYTUS OF ROME

Introduction

Hippolytus of Rome, along with Irenaeus and Tertullian, was one of the three great anti-Gnostic writers of the Western pre-Nicene church. In this chapter, we will explore the covenantal aspects in his theology by looking at the fragments from his commentaries and then, after a fleeting consideration of authenticity, we will consider Hippolytus' strategy in The Refutation of All Heresies.

Hippolytus' Commentaries

Evidence of Hippolytus' employment of Irenaean covenant theology is mainly found in his commentaries on portions of the Old Testament. The fragmentary nature of our holdings of his writings and the rather intricate and delicate nature of authorship issues complicate our picture of Hippolytus' views on the covenants. But we have as much textual evidence of his covenant thought as we do for Melito. We need not rule out coming to some consensus on the main outlines of his convictions, nor should we necessarily assume that the covenant idea was less important to Hippolytus. As we will see later, covenantal concepts are not prominent in his Refutation of All Heresies, since he (if it is Hippolytus) uses historical rather than theological arguments.

Covenantal Aspects in the Theology of Hippolytus

There are three prominent aspects of Hippolytus' theology that

provide indications of his covenantal views. First, he is quick to point out the continuity between the Old Testament and the New. Second, there is a definite use of typology in his writings. And finally, he speaks of Christ as the second Adam.

The New Testament in the Old

The reader of Hippolytus' fragments is immediately struck by his high view of continuity between the Old and New Testaments. He wastes no opportunities to show that the New Testament is often seen in the Old. His polemical intentions (anti-Gnostic, anti-Marcionite) are, hence, quite evident within his commentaries.

Hippolytus frequently sees Christ himself in the fulfillment of Old Testament texts.¹ For example, in his commentary of Genesis 49:3 (generally attested as authentic)² he writes, 'Thou hast waxed wanton,' because in the instance of our Lord Jesus Christ the people waxed wanton against the Father."³ Concerning the following verse he says, "For the scribes and priests fulfilled iniquity of their own choice, and with one mind they slew the Lord."⁴ He says of verse 5, "'They slew men, and houghed the bull;' by the 'strong bull' he means Christ. And 'they houghed,' since, when He was suspended on the tree, they pierced through His sinews."⁵ Hippolytus sees the Lord as "the son

¹ The examples below do not include his acknowledgement of the OT references that unmistakably refer to Christ.

² EEC, 1:383.

³ ANCL 5:164.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

goodly and envied" in Gen. 49:22⁶ and identifies the Lord as the horseman of Gen. 49:16-20,

The Lord is represented to us as a horseman; and the 'heel' points us to the 'last times.' And His 'falling' denotes His death; as it is written in the Gospel: 'Behold, this (child) is set for the fall and rising again of many.' We take the 'robber' to be the traitor. Nor was there any other traitor to the Lord save the (Jewish) people. 'Shall rob him,' i.e., shall plot against him. At the heels: that refers to the help of the Lord against those who wait against Him. And again, the words 'at the heels' denote that the Lord will take vengeance swiftly. He shall be well armed in the foot (heel), and shall overtake and rob the robber's troop.⁷

There is a profound section on Christ the Mediator, which is especially relevant to our discussion since it was written in Hippolytus' commentary on Numbers:

Now, in order that He might be shown to have together in Himself at once the nature of God and that of man,-- as the apostle, too, says: "Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. Now a mediator is not of one man, but two,"-- it was therefore necessary that Christ, in becoming the Mediator between God and men, should receive from both an earnest of some kind, that He might appear as the Mediator between two distinct persons.⁸

He says of Psalm 22 (or 23), "And, moreover, the ark made of imperishable wood was the Savior Himself. For by this was signified the imperishable and incorruptible tabernacle of (the Lord) Himself, which gendered no corruption of sin."⁹ Referring to Proverbs 11:30 he states, "The fruit of righteousness and the tree of life is Christ."¹⁰

Not only does Hippolytus see allusions to Christ in the Old Testament, but he also sees in it references to the Gentile Church.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ ANCL 5:166.

⁸ ANCL 5:169.

⁹ Ibid. 170.

¹⁰ Ibid. 173.

Speaking of Gen. 49:11, Hippolytus observes,

By the 'foal' he means the calling of the Gentiles; by the other, that of the circumcision: 'one ass,' moreover, that is to signify that the two colts are of one faith; in other words, the two callings. And one colt is bound to the 'vine,' and the other to the 'vine tendril,' which means that the Church of the Gentiles is bound to the Lord, but he who is of the circumcision to the oldness of the law And, 'in the blood of the grape,' trodden and giving forth blood, which means the flesh of the Lord, He cleanses the whole calling of the Gentiles.¹¹

Commenting on the verse that follows, which he translates "His eyes are gladsome with wine," he says, "It mystically signifies the sacraments of the New Testament of our Savior; and the words, 'his teeth are white as milk,' denote the excellency and purity of the sacramental food."¹²

And on verse 13,

He speaks prophetically of his territory as bordering on the sea, and of Israel as mingling with the Gentiles, the two nations being brought as it were into one flock 'And he is by a haven of ships;' that is, as in a safe anchorage, referring to Christ, the anchor of hope. And this denotes the calling of the Gentiles--that the grace of Christ shall go forth to the whole earth and sea¹³

Also regarding the Gentile Church, he notes, "As therefore Jacob, to escape his brother's evil designs, proceeds to Mesopotamia, so Christ, too, constrained by the unbelief of the Jews, goes into Galilee, to take from thence to Himself a bride from the Gentiles, His Church."¹⁴

Of Proverbs 30:23 he writes, "'The Handmaid casting out her mistress:' i.e., the Church of the Gentiles, which, though itself a slave and a stranger to the promises, cast out the free born and lordly

¹¹ ANCL 5:164-5.

¹² Ibid. p.165.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid. 169.

synagogue, and became the wife and bride of Christ."¹⁵ Through the above examples, we see that Hippolytus is quick to identify the New Testament in the Old, especially concerning the Lord Jesus Christ and the Gentile Church.

Typology

Typology in the Old Testament seems to be an important aspect in the thinking of Hippolytus. He says of Gen. 49:27, "For Saul, who was of the tribe of Benjamin, persecuted David, who was appointed to be a type of Christ."¹⁶ He writes of Abraham's family: "Isaac conveys a figure of God the Father; Rebecca of the Holy Spirit; Esau of the first people and the devil; Jacob of the Church, or of Christ."¹⁷ Hippolytus says that "The Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they 'shall reign with Christ.'"¹⁸ Also, "Learn that easily, O man; for the things that took place of old in the wilderness, under Moses, in the case of the tabernacle, were constituted types and emblems of spiritual mysteries, in order that, when the truth came in Christ in these last days, you might be able to perceive that these things were fulfilled."¹⁹

Christ the Second Adam

Hippolytus stresses the fact that Christ is the second Adam, the

¹⁵ Ibid. 175.

¹⁶ Ibid., 168.

¹⁷ Ibid. Hippolytus' view of Adam and Eve seems to differ greatly from Irenaeus, who defends their redemption after the fall.

¹⁸ Ibid., 179.

¹⁹ Ibid.

federal head of his people. He writes, "God, the Word Incarnate, passed in honour through the virgin's womb; and creating our Adam anew, he passed through the gates of heaven, and became the first-fruits of the resurrection and of the ascension for all."²⁰ Commenting on Daniel 7:14, he says, "(He showed Him forth also as) the first-begotten of a virgin, that He might be seen to be in Himself the Creator anew of the first-formed Adam, (and) as the first-begotten from the dead, that He might become Himself the first-fruits of our resurrection."²¹

In his Treatise on Christ and Antichrist, he displays the same emphasis on Christ the second Adam:

He showed all power given by the Father to the Son, who is ordained Lord of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth, and Judge of all: of things in heaven, because He was born, the Word of God, before all (ages); and of things on earth, because He became man in the midst of men, to re-create our Adam through Himself²²

The Refutation of all Heresies

Nautin has seriously challenged the Hippolytan authorship of The Refutation of All Heresies. His candidate for author is Josipos (the name preserved in the Chronicle).²³ Nevertheless, we will survey the Refutation for the sake of comparing the manner and content of argument with Hippolytus' attested writings (and with Irenaeus and Tertullian). In his introduction to the contents in Book I, Hippolytus²⁴ states that

²⁰ Ibid., 175.

²¹ Ibid., 189.

²² Ibid., 209.

²³ EEC, 1:384.

²⁴ No position on the work's authorship is intended by this appellation, which is used throughout this section.

his purpose is to summarize the tenets of natural philosophers, moral philosophers, and logicians.²⁵ He does so in order that

We may prove them atheists, both in their opinion and their mode (of treating a question) and in fact, and (in order to show) whence it is that their attempted theories have accrued unto them, and that they have endeavoured to establish their tenets, taking nothing from holy Scriptures . . . but that their doctrines have derived their origin from the wisdom of the Greeks, from the conclusions of those who have formed systems of philosophy, and would-be mysteries, and in the vagaries of astrologers,--it seems, then, advisable, in the first instance, by explaining the opinions advanced by the philosophers of the Greeks, to satisfy our readers that such are of greater antiquity than these (heresies). . . in the next place, to compare each heresy with the system of each speculator, so as to show the earliest champion of the heresy availing himself of these attempted theories, has turned them to advantage by appropriating their principles, and, impelled from these into worse, has constructed his own doctrine.²⁶

At the end of his introduction, Hippolytus declares, "Assigning to each of those who take the lead among philosophers their own peculiar tenets, we shall publicly exhibit these heresiarchs as naked and unseemly."²⁷

The first fourteen chapters of Book I are devoted to natural philosophers: Thales, Pythagoras, Empedocles, Heraclitus, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Anaxagoras, Archelaus, Parmenides, Leucippus, Democritus, Xenophanes, Ecphantus, and Hippo. After summarizing the teachings of these "physical speculators," he turns his attention to the moral philosophers.²⁸

Hippolytus limits the scope of moral philosophy to Socrates and Plato, with the latter receiving the majority of attention. There are

²⁵ ANCL 5:9.

²⁶ Ibid., 10.

²⁷ Ibid., 11.

²⁸ Ibid., 17.

particular statements he makes about Plato that foreshadow later Gnosticism. For example, Hippolytus gives Plato's view of the knowability of God: "God, he says, is both incorporeal and shapeless, and comprehensible by wise men solely."²⁹ Also, "Plato therefore says, that the only really good things are those pertaining to the soul, and that they are sufficient for happiness."³⁰

The final 6 chapters of Book I are devoted to the logicians. In this group Hippolytus includes Aristotle, the Stoics, Epicurus, Pyrrho, the Brachmans, the Druids, and Hesiod. Books II and III have not been discovered yet.

Book IV begins the second of two parts of The Refutation of All Heresies. Whereas the first part (Books I-III) gives a summary of Greek philosophy, part two (Books IV-X) relates different Gnostic sects to the previously mentioned Heresies. Book IV deals with astronomers, astrologers, and magicians. During a discussion on magicians in Chapter XLII, Hippolytus displays the similarity of their teaching to that of his opponents. For example, he declares, "The heresiarchs, astonished at the art of these (sorcerers), have imitated them, partly by delivering their doctrines in secrecy and darkness, and partly by advancing (these tenets) as their own."³¹ Also, "We have been however drawn, not unreasonably, into a detail of some of the secret (mysteries) of the sorcerers, which are not very requisite, to be sure, in reference to the subject taken in hand."³² Finally, "We have

²⁹ Ibid., 18.

³⁰ Ibid., 20.

³¹ Ibid., 40.

³² Ibid.

explained the opinions of all (speculators), exerting especial attention towards the elucidation of the opinions introduced as novelties by the heresiarchs."³³ In Chapter XLVI and XLVII, Hippolytus shows how the heretics have borrowed ideas peculiar to Aratus.

In Book V, Hippolytus continues to relate the heresies of his day to philosophical traditions. He introduces the contents of this book by saying,

What the assertions are of the Naasseni, who style themselves Gnostics, and that they advance those opinions which the philosophers of the Greeks previously propounded, as well as those who have handed down mystical (rites), from (both of) whom the Naasseni, taking occasion, have constructed their heresies.³⁴

In Chapter I he continues,

From philosophers the heresiarchs deriving starting points, (and) like cobblers patching together, according to their own particular interpretation, the blunders of the ancients, have advanced them as novelties to those who are capable of being deceived, as we shall prove in the following books.³⁵

Chapter II refutes the Naasseni claims that their teaching came from James (the half-brother of Jesus), who passed it on to Mariamne.³⁶ In this chapter Hippolytus also uncovers examples of their faulty attempts to show biblical warrant for their teaching. For example, they ascribe the following statement to the gospel according to Thomas: "He who seeks me, will find me in children from seven years old; for there concealed, I shall in the fourteenth age be made manifest."³⁷ Hippolytus quickly points out, "This, however, is not (the teaching) of

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., 47.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid., 48.

³⁷ Ibid., 50.

Christ, but of Hippocrates, who uses these words: 'A child of seven years is half of the father.'" On the topic of the soul, Hippolytus points out that "they do not, however, (on this point) institute an inquiry from the Scriptures, but ask this (question) also from the mystic (rites)."³⁸

He gives several examples of the misuse of Scripture by the Naasseni throughout Chapters II and III. The remaining chapters of Book V mostly deal with the system of the Peratae. He includes such things as their tritheism and their thoughts on the generation of all living things. Hippolytus relates their heresy to the astrologers, saying, "It has been easily made evident to all, that the heresy of the Peratae is altered in name only from the (art) of the astrologers. And the rest of the books of these (heretics) contain the same method, if it were agreeable to any one to wade through them all."³⁹

Later he writes, "This is the diversified wisdom of the Peratic heresy, which it is difficult to declare in its entirety, so intricate is it on account of its seeming to consist of the astrological art."⁴⁰ The final chapters of Book V are concerned with the Sethian and Justinian heresies.

Book VI begins with the significant doctrines of Simon Magus, though Hippolytus points out that "With much greater wisdom and moderation than Simon, did Apsethus the Lybian, inflamed with a similar wish, endeavour to have himself considered a god in Libya."⁴¹ He

³⁸ Ibid., 49.

³⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 63.

⁴¹ Ibid., 74.

traces Simon's thoughts to "magicians and poets,"⁴² and also shows his dependence on Heraclitus and Aristotle.⁴³ Next, Hippolytus discusses the heresy of Valentinus, showing its connection with Plato and Pythagoras. The final chapters of Book VI focus on the heretic Marcus, who is described by Hippolytus as "an adept at sorcery, carrying on operations partly by sleight of hand and partly by demons."⁴⁴

The first half of Book VII deals with the heresy of Basilides, who leaned heavily on Aristotle. As he did in the previous book with Pythagoras, Hippolytus reviews Aristotle's general views and then shows the direct comparison with Basilides. In the last half of the book, Marcion and Cerinthus are discussed but given surprisingly little attention. With the former, Hippolytus reviews the system of Empedocles and shows this to be the basis of Marcion's teaching. "The principle heresy of Marcion, and (the one of his) which is most free from admixture (with other heresies), is that which has its system formed out of the theory concerning the good and bad (God). Now this, it has been manifested by us, belongs to Empedocles."⁴⁵

Most of the attention of Book VIII is given to the Docetae and Monoimus. Hippolytus shows that the roots of the Docetae are found in the Sophists. "But the fact is, that the Sophists of the Greeks in ancient times have previously devised, in many particulars, the doctrines of these (Docetae), as it is possible for my readers (who

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 75.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 91-92.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 112.

take the trouble) to ascertain."⁴⁶ The final chapters of Book VIII are aimed at Tatian, Hermogenes, the Quartodecimans, the Montanists, and the Encratites. Regarding Montanus and the two "wretched women, called a certain Priscilla and Maximilla, whom they suppose (to be) prophetesses,"⁴⁷ Hippolytus writes, "the majority of their books are silly, and their attempts (at reasoning) weak, and worthy of no consideration."⁴⁸

Book IX is devoted to the teachings of Noetus, Callistus, the "strange spirit Elchasai,"⁴⁹ and the Esseni. Hippolytus shows the reader that Noetianism is clearly rooted in the tenets of Heraclitus, but does not go into nearly the detail that he does in his treatise, "Against the Heresy of One Noetus."⁵⁰ He then summarizes the history and thought of Callistus. The next five chapters consist of refutations of the Elchasaites, who derive their system from Pythagoras, and who also administered a second baptism for those who commit grievous sins. After discussing the Jewish Esseni, Hippolytus ends Book IX with a conclusion for the previous nine books:

It seems to us that the tenets of both all the Greeks and barbarians have been sufficiently explained by us, and that nothing has remained unrefuted either of the points about which philosophers have been busied, or of the allegations advanced by the heretics. And from these very explanations the condemnation of the heretics is obvious, for having either purloined their doctrines, or derived contributions to them from some of those tenets elaborately worked out by the Greeks, and for having

⁴⁶ Ibid., 121.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 123.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 124.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 223-231.

advanced (these opinions) as if they had originated from God."⁵¹

Book X gives us another summary of philosophers covered in earlier books. He devotes specific chapters to the Naasseni, the Peratae, the Sethians, Simon Magus, Valentinus, Basilides, Justinus, the Docetae, Monoimus, Tatian, Marcion and Cerdo, Apelles, Cerinthus, the Ebionaeans, Theodotus, Melchisedecians, the Montanists, Noetus and Callistus, Hermogenes, and the Elchasaites. The next two chapters recall the history of the Jews. The final chapter consists of Hippolytus' concluding remarks. He advises, "Do not devote your attention to the fallacies of artificial discourses, nor the vain promises of plagiarizing heretics, but to the venerable simplicity of unassuming truth."⁵²

Whatever our conclusion on authorship, we note a difference in the manner of argument in this treatise (almost exclusively historical) and Hippolytus' attested writings, which are robustly scriptural in method and content. Irenaeus devoted himself to a comprehensive description of the heresies in his *magnum opus* Adversus Haereses, but reverted to *testimonia* and redemptive historical arguments in his refutation. Tertullian, too, employed "historical argumentation" (e.g., the argument of the priority of truth), but supported his rebuttal of heresy with appeals to scriptural evidence (e.g., "the argument from the argument from prophecy"). The author of Refutation had a different strategy. Instead of theological arguments, he exclusively employs historical arguments to discredit his opponents. The Gnostics claimed to have new revelations from God. To refute their

⁵¹ Ibid., 138.

⁵² Ibid., 152-153.

claims, Hippolytus showed that their teachings were not new at all. They were simply a repetition of pagan Greek philosophy from previous centuries. Their views are not to be mistaken as Apostolic teaching secretly passed down to the Gnostics; rather, they are to be exposed as philosophical heresy.⁵³ Such an observation cannot decide the authorship debate on its own, but perhaps lends weight to Nautin's skepticism about the traditional attribution of Refutation to Hippolytus.

Summary and Conclusion

The apparent diminution in significance that the covenant idea undergoes in Hippolytus (in comparison to Irenaeus or Tertullian), is attributable to the fragmentary character of his works as we have them. Yet many of these fragments give evidence (implicit and otherwise) of thorough saturation with Irenaeian covenant theology. Through pointing out aspects of the New Testament found in the Old (especially Jesus Christ and the Gentile Church), Old Testament typology, and Christ the Second Adam, we see that Hippolytus provides unmistakable intimations of covenantal theology. Hence, one cannot say that the idea of covenant is entirely missing from his theology simply because he rarely uses the word διαθήκη.

⁵³ See J. Mansfield, Heresiography in Context (New York: E. J. Brill, 1992); and C. Osborne, Rethinking Early Greek Philosophy (London: Duckworth, 1987).

Chapter 8

NOVATIAN OF ROME

Novatian . . . not only knows the book titles *Vetus* and *Novum Testamentum*, but also uses the terms fairly regularly in this sense. He may even be the only author so far in whose works the term occurs only as a book title. . . . In *trin.* 7,5 (*bis*); 9,2 (*bis*); 10,1; 10,2; 18,10; 28,20; 30,1 *testamentum* quite clearly refers to the Bible; in 17,3; 17,5 (*quater*) and 17,6 (*bis*) possibly so. There are no further occurrences in his writings.

W. Kinzig, "~~Latin Latin~~: The Title of the NT," 533, above and n. 83.

The paucity of material on covenant in the extant writings of Novatian of Rome--in contrast to other Ante-Nicene theologians--is noteworthy. As the reader can readily see below, the few occurrences of *testamentum* in Novatian's major extant work, De Trinitate, are (except for one simple quote from Isaiah 55:3) merely part of the title for the Old and New Testaments of the Scriptures:

For in the Old Testament God is called fire to strike fear in the hearts of a sinful people by appearing as their Judge; whereas in the New Testament he is revealed as a spirit, that the Renewer and Creator of those who are dead in their sins may be acknowledged by the goodness of His mercy granted to those who believe.¹

For we read that this Jesus Christ, the Son, I repeat, of this God, was not only promised in the Old Testament, but also has been manifested in the New Testament, fulfilling the shadows and types of all the prophecies concerning the presence of His Incarnate Truth.²

¹ Novatian, The Trinity, The Spectacles, Jewish Foods, In Praise of Purity, Letters, translated by R. J. de Simone (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1974), 38. "nam et in veteri testamento ideo deus ignis dicitur, ut peccatori populo metus incutiatur, dum iudex ostenditur, et in novo testamento spiritus esse profertur, ut rector et creator in delictis suis mortuorum per hanc bonitatem collatae credentibus indulgentiae comprobetur." Novatian, De Trinitate, 7.39, translated by Douglas F. Kelly (Ph.D. Diss., University of Edinburgh, 1972), 209.

² Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 42. "hunc enim Iesum Christum, iterum dicam huius dei filium, et in veteri testamento legimus esse repromissum et in novo testamento animadvertimus

He refers to Him again when he describes His Gospels: "I will make with you an everlasting covenant, the holy and sure promises of David."³

I must warn you that no other Christ should have been sought for in the Gospel than this one who was promised before by the Creator in the writings of the Old Testament . . .⁴

To that counterfeit and spurious Christ, devised somehow from old wives' tales by heretics who reject the authority of the Old Testament . . .⁵

Consequently, we believe and hold, according to the teaching of the Old and the New Testaments, that Christ Jesus is both God and Man.⁶

Consequently, the authority of the Old Testament regarding the Person of Christ remains unshaken because it is supported by the testimony of the New Testament. Nor is the force of the New Testament undermined, since its truth has under it the roots of this same Old Testament. They who take it for granted that Christ, the Son of God and the Son of Man, is only man and not also God are really acting contrary to both the Old and the New Testament, inasmuch as they are destroying the authority and the truth of both the

exhibitum, omnium sacramentorum umbras et figuras de praesentia corporatae veritatis Implentem." De Trinitate 9.46, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 240.

³ Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 43. "hunc, quondo eius evangelia descripsit: et disponam vobis testamentum aeternum, sancta David fidelia;" De Trinitate 9.48, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 247. In citing Isaiah, as well as linking Jesus with the covenant, Novatian follows a tradition stretching back to Justin and Tertullian. Note, also, that Novatian shows interest in covenant in Isaiah 55:3, like these two earlier authors. See 90-4, 164, 173, 176, and 201 above.

⁴ Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 44. "Sed illud admoneo, non alterum in evangelio Christum expectandum fuisse, quam hunc a creatore veteris testamenti litteris ante promissum . . ." De Trinitate 10.50, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 254.

⁵ Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 44. "ut merito haeticorum istorum testamenti veteris auctoritatem respuentium nescio cui commenticio et ex fabulis anilibus ficto Christo . . ." De Trinitate 10.50, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 254.

⁶ Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 65. "merito secundum institutionem veteris et novis testimenti et deum et hominem Christum Iesum et credimus et tenemus." De Trinitate, 17.95, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 399.

Old and the New Testaments.⁷

Heretics must realize that they are acting contrary to the Scriptures when they say they believe that Christ was also an angel, but do not want to admit that He is also the God who they read came frequently to visit the human race in the Old Testament.⁸

Now I should have quite a wearisome task, if I were to try to gather together all the possible passages bearing on this question. For throughout the Divine Scripture of the Old, as well as the New Testament, He is shown to us as born of the Father...⁹

They could indeed have been propounded at greater length and drawn out with more solid argumentation, because the entire Old and New Testaments could have been brought forth to prove that such is the true faith.¹⁰

Kinzig concludes from this survey that Novatian "may even be the only author so far [in his historical survey] in whose works the term occurs

⁷ Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 66. "Sed deus hominem ad imaginem dei fecit; deus est ergo, qui fecit hominem ad imaginem dei. deus ergo Christus est, ut merito nec veteris testamenti circa personam Christi vacillet auctoritas, dum novi testamenti manifestatione fulcitur, nec novi testamenti intercepta sit potestas, dum radicibus veteris testamenti eiusdem nititur veritas, ex quo, qui Christum, dei filium et hominis, tantummodo praesumunt hominem, non et deum, contra testamentum et vetus et novum faciunt, dum et veteris et novi testamenti auctoritatem veritatemque corrumpunt." De Trinitate 17.97, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 404.

⁸ Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 69. ". . . intellegere debent contra scripturas se agere haeretici, qui, Christus cum dicant se et angelum credere, nolint illum etiam deum pronuntiare, quem in veteri testamento ad visitationem generis humani legunt saepe venisse." De Trinitate 18.104, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 420.

⁹ Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 92. "Et satis longum facio, si enisus fuero omnes omnino ad hanc partem voces congregare, quandoquidem non tam veteris quam etiam novi testamenti scriptura divina ubique ostendat illum ex patre natum . . ." De Trinitate 26.147, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 534.

¹⁰ Novatian, trans. R. J. de Simone, 104. "latius enim potuerunt porrigi et propensione disputatione produci, quandoquidem ad testimonium, quod ita se habeant fides vera, totum et vetus et novum testamentum possit adduci." De Trinitate 30.173, trans. by D.F. Kelly, 594.

only as a book title."¹¹

A more careful reading of Novatian's complete extant corpus, however, indicates otherwise. Although before the Twentieth Century erroneously attributed to other authors,¹² Novatian's De bono pudicitiae contains one reference to *testamentum* as a will and testament:

It forces its own children upon the affections of strangers and places the child of an unknown and undesirable background in the wills and testaments of other people.¹³

Of perhaps more note is Novatian's usage of the phrase *pactus divini foederis* in a passage in chapter 5 of De bono pudicitiae:

The head matches its own limbs and the limbs their own head, a natural bond uniting both in complete harmony, lest the pact of the divine covenant be shattered by some sort of discord arising from the division of members.¹⁴

In summary, Novatian's usage of *testamentum* is not significant in his extant writings, beyond use as a title for the parts of scripture, although there is at least one usage in his extant corpus. His use of

¹¹ Kinzig, 533.

¹² This work was typically classed with the literary remains of Cyprian, until discovered in 1900. For a fuller discussion of Novatian's authorship of De bono pudicitiae, see R.J. de Simone, 159-160 and J. Quasten, vol. II, 217 and 225-6.

¹³ Trans. J. R. de Simone, 167. ". . . alienis affectibus suos inserens filios, in aliena testamenta sobolem ignoti et corrupti generis inducens." Disciplina et Bono Pudicitiae liber Epistola Ignoti Auctoris. Patrologia Latina (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1879), 854.

¹⁴ Novatian, trans. J. R. de Simone, 169. ". . .caput enim suis convenit membris, et membra capiti suo; utraque naturali fibula in concordia mutua cohaerent, ne qua oriente discordia de divisione membrorum pactum divini foederis rumperetur. Disciplina et Bono Pudicitiae liber Epistola Ignoti Auctoris. Patrologia Latina (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1879), 855. This usage of *pactum* and *foedus* is, according to the findings of the present study, unparalleled in patristic writings to that point. Prior to Novatian, these terms are not used to stand for covenant.

pactum and *foedus* as terms for covenant are, however, quite noteworthy developments in the history of the covenant idea.

EPILOGUE :

**AN EVALUATION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE
OF THE COVENANT IDEA
IN ANTE-NICENE THEOLOGY**

Chapter 9

EVALUATION

This thesis has argued that the covenant idea was more significant in the writings of particular ante-Nicene theologians than has generally been admitted in patristic research or general surveys of the history of the covenant idea in the Christian tradition. Indeed, this survey of the covenant idea in the ante-Nicene period has demonstrated a significant usage, development, and modification of the covenant as it is found in the OT and NT writings, and early Judaism. This investigation reveals that the covenant idea functions in several arenas of early Christian thought.

It is first employed to stress moral obligations incumbent upon Christians. Both Clement of Rome and Barnabas employ the covenant in the context of moral exhortation. Clement of Rome in particular stresses the consequences of Christian obedience. Justin also uses the term as exhortation to moral responsibility. Irenaeus' obediential emphasis is unmistakable.

Covenant is also used to deny the reception of these promises to the Israel of the flesh, that is, Israel considered merely as an ethnic entity. Barnabas and the Gnostics point out that Israel lost the covenant at the start through disobedience, and never understood it rightly. Melito and Irenaeus disagree, but Tertullian also teaches that the Jews have been rejected, because of disobedience and idolatry, from the covenant.

Throughout the period in question, authors used the term covenant to demonstrate continuity in the divine economy. Barnabas, for example, never speaks of a new covenant, because for him Jesus is the

only covenant. Justin sees the church as fulfillment of OT prophecy concerning the salvation of the Gentiles, and is the true spiritual Israel. Melito sees Israel as "the people" and "the church" as its new covenant fulfillment. Irenaeus sees the incarnation and work of Christ as fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant prophesied by Jeremiah. Cyprian also recognizes the new covenant fulfillment of Jeremiah 31. Like the other Fathers studied, Origen uses covenant terminology to identify the two parts of Scripture (OT and NT). However, Origen always used the qualifying phrase "so-called" before this usage, as in "so-called Old Testament." Origen also uses the term most frequently in reference to Bible texts that he expounds, thus making him more exegetical than any other author studied. Hippolytus is also quick to point out the continuity between the Old and New Testaments. As shown, Novatian most frequently uses the covenant terminology as a referent to scripture. However, he also appears to be the first to use the important terms *pactum* and *foedus* with regard to the covenant idea, which was so important in medieval theology.

The different authors also used the term covenant to explain discontinuity in the divine economy. For Justin there is an old and a new covenant, and Christians are the recipients of the new, as Israel was of the old. For Irenaeus, Gentile believers have replaced the Jews as "the people" of God. Tertullian integrates the themes of continuity and discontinuity by pointing out that the movement from the old to the new covenants is not an afterthought in God's economy but had been planned by god, and predicted from the beginning of the Scriptures.

Although in many cases acknowledging continuity between the testaments, the ante-Nicene theologians usually take OT covenant

passages (not NT passages) as the starting point in their applications of the covenant concept to Christian living. For example, the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants are mentioned or alluded to in writings of the Apostolic Fathers and Apologists. Barnabas, Justin, Clement of Rome, Melito, and Cyprian all appeal to OT rather than NT passages as the basis of their covenant teachings. Irenaeus also makes a strong appeal to the OT in establishing covenant thought, mentioning the Adamic, Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants. In addition, Clement of Alexandria mentions five covenants: those made with Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Christ.

The early Christian use of the covenant idea evidences that they generally understood the covenant to be both unilateral and bilateral, promissory and obligatory, to bring divine blessings and entail human obedience. Clement of Alexandria stresses Christians' responsibilities in the covenant relationship. In Barnabas and Justin, covenant clearly retains its Hebraic sense of mutuality, and Irenaeus also employs covenant thought in the service of moral exhortation.

These writings also show that, from the very earliest times, Christian authors (following OT and NT examples) have employed the covenant concept as a key structural idea in their presentations of redemptive history. Irenaeus uses it to delineate the main eras of this history, and Tertullian's salvation history is not just one movement from old to new, but a succession of stages or administrations that advance mankind in the knowledge of God. For Cyprian as well the covenant concept serves to emphasize progress in redemptive history.

Thus, the covenant idea was more significant in the writings of particular ante-Nicene theologians than has generally been admitted in

patristic research or general surveys of the history of the covenant idea in the Christian tradition.

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