

THE *PACTUM SALUTIS*

A SCRIPTURAL CONCEPT OR SCHOLASTIC MYTHOLOGY?

Paul R. Williamson
(Paul.Williamson@moore.edu.au)

Summary

One of the three foundational covenants Reformed/Covenant theology is built upon is the Pactum Salutis or covenant of redemption. This refers to an intratrinitarian covenantal agreement, purportedly made before the creation of the world, to secure the salvation of God's elect. The theological rationale and exegetical support for such a pre-temporal covenant is set out and examined, and it is argued that there are serious exegetical problems with the alleged biblical foundations for such a theological construct.¹

1. Introduction

As well as divine covenants clearly set forth in Scripture, Reformed/Covenant theology is built around three others: a covenant of redemption, a covenant of works, and a covenant of grace. The covenant of redemption refers to a pre-temporal, intratrinitarian agreement to redeem the elect. The covenant of works refers to a probationary relationship between God and Adam which applied to the period between creation and the fall. The covenant of grace describes God's post-fall assurance to fulfil his plan of salvation (Gen. 3:15) that is unpacked in the redemptive–historical covenants that followed.

Each of these three concepts has evoked debate. However, our focus is on the first of these more contentious ideas: an intratrinitarian pact

¹ This is a revised version of the Biblical Theology Plenary Lecture presented at the 2018 Tyndale Fellowship Conference. I am grateful to Andrew Leslie, Peter Orr, Chris Thomson, and Dan Wu for their constructive comments on my initial draft of the lecture material, and the conference attendees for their positive response.

made before the creation of the world. While clearly significant in post-Reformation Covenant theology, its theological and exegetical basis has been negatively appraised by some, but staunchly defended by others. Therefore the following discussion aims to re-examine whether the ‘covenant of redemption’ is a biblical construct or whether it should be dismissed as scholastic ‘mythology’.²

2. The Definition and Significance of the *Pactum Salutis* in Covenant Theology

Often referred to as the *pactum salutis* (agreement of salvation), the covenant of redemption is essentially understood as an agreement involving two or more members of the Godhead,³ established in eternity, and guaranteeing the salvation of the elect through the collaborative missions of the economic Trinity.

As this definition implies, even within Reformed theology debate persists over who exactly is involved in this divine pact and how it is best understood. Historically, most have formulated it christologically, identifying the covenanted parties as the Father and the Son (the Father appoints the Son as covenant mediator and surety, and promises vindication and reward; the Son agrees to be sent, and carry out – through His active and passive obedience – the work of redemption). This formulation has evoked the charge of sub-trinitarianism,⁴ although proponents are simply reflecting a more restrictive understanding of the agreement, based on two observations: (a) that scriptural texts attesting to such intratrinitarian deliberations (e.g. John 17:1-5) explicitly mention only the Father and the Son; and (b) that the *pactum* relates specifically to the Son’s role as covenant surety; as such, the doctrine primarily has a christological focus. But it is understood as conceived within the framework of the ‘counsel of God’,⁵ and thus it is the Triune

² Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/1: 65-66. Others have dismissed it as scholastic tinkering, grotesque, and even sub-trinitarian.

³ Unfortunately the terminology is often used imprecisely, effectively equating ‘agreement’ with ‘covenant’.

⁴ R. Letham, ‘John Owen’s Doctrine of the Trinity in its Catholic Context’ in Kelly M. Kapic and Mark Jones, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to John Owen’s Theology* (Farnham/Burlington: Ashgate, 2012): 185-97, esp. 196.

⁵ J. V. Fesko, *The Trinity and the Covenant of Redemption* (Fearn: Mentor, 2016): 16.

God who ultimately determines this arrangement between Father and Son.

Others, however, resist such a distinction (i.e., between a christological *pactum* and a Trinitarian ‘counsel of God’) and articulate an overtly Trinitarian formulation, as exemplified in the following definition.

At its most fundamental level, the covenant of redemption is the pre-temporal, intra-trinitarian agreement among Father, Son, and Holy Spirit to plan and execute the redemption of the elect. The covenant entails the appointment of the Son as surety of the covenant of grace who accomplishes the redemption of the elect through His incarnation, perfect obedience, suffering, resurrection and ascension. The covenant of redemption is also the root of the Spirit’s role to anoint and equip the Son for his mission as surety and to apply His finished work to the elect.⁶

Rather than ostensibly excluding the Spirit, or placing his work outside the *pactum*, Fesko expressly includes the Spirit in both its inception and execution. All three persons of the Godhead are thus involved, each having a respective role: the Father appoints the Son to his role as covenant surety for those the Father has chosen; the Son obediently carries out this task on behalf of the elect; the Spirit equips the Son for this task and subsequently completes the work of salvation in the lives of the elect. Accordingly, each person of the Trinity participates fully in this covenant.

In either formulation, however, the more serious objection is that expressed by Letham: viz. that ‘a federal relation between the Father and the Son divides the indivisible Trinity [by implying] that such relations are needed to unite them’.⁷ Such an intratrinitarian *covenant* cannot conceivably be understood in the typical biblical sense of a formalised commitment between parties involved in a voluntary or imposed relationship. While such a formal commitment is certainly appropriate for parties who require some form of mutual pact or assurance, and who might otherwise pursue their own agenda, it seems much less so for the Triune God, whose will is undivided and who surely does not require such mutual assurance through covenantal oath.

But however this doctrine is formulated and whatever the theological objections, the main idea is nonetheless clear: in his eternal

⁶ Fesko, *Trinity*: 131-32.

⁷ Letham, ‘John Owen’s Doctrine’: 196.

being, the Triune God formally agreed to secure the salvation of those ‘chosen in Christ before the creation of the world’ (Eph. 1:4).⁸ This divine pact undergirds God’s redemptive plan and thus secures our salvation.

The import of this particular doctrine for Covenant theology is therefore considerable. As with the other pillars in Reformed theology, the *pactum* carries significant theological freight not only in relation to the other foundational *covenants* in the Reformed framework (i.e. works and grace) but also with respect to key doctrines such as predestination, union with Christ, justification, imputation, and the monergistic nature of salvation. It is not necessarily that any of these truths is lost without the *pactum*; rather, the *pactum* is understood to provide a more robust rationale for such ideas along with ‘a thicker account of God’s being and work’.⁹ It thus remains an important lynchpin in contemporary Covenant theology,¹⁰ despite featuring little in contemporary biblical studies.

But is it taught in Scripture? The following section will articulate the biblical–theological case for the *pactum*, which will subsequently be critiqued.

3. The Biblical–Theological Case for the *Pactum*

The *pactum* is a relative latecomer in terms of Christian thought, exposing it to the charge of ‘Novelty, innovation and speculation’.¹¹ Fesko candidly acknowledges that ‘[t]he doctrine does not appear on the historical scene until the middle of the seventeenth century, and it purports to disclose the inner workings of the triune God prior to the creation of the world.’¹² He is quick to add, however, that ‘[t]he employment and application of the covenant concept was not ultimately due to speculation or rationalistic logic but to exegesis of

⁸ Unless otherwise stated, Scripture citations are from the NIV (2011).

⁹ Fesko, *Trinity*: 357.

¹⁰ e.g. Michael Horton, *God of Promise: Introducing Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006): 78–82. Even some critics of Covenant theology endorse the idea, e.g. P. J. Gentry and S. J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical–Theological Understanding of the Covenant* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012): 59–60.

¹¹ J. V. Fesko, *The Covenant of Redemption: Origins, Development, and Reception* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016): 29.

¹² Fesko, *Covenant*: 29.

certain key biblical texts.’¹³ He thus concludes that ‘in absence of an explicit statement in Scripture, Reformed theologians relied upon the principle of good and necessary consequence ... an exercise of the *analogia Scripturae*’. That is, they let Scripture interpret Scripture, collating ‘texts that specifically mention a covenant ... with other texts that demonstrate that Christ willingly undertook the work of redemption’.¹⁴ It may thus seem bold to challenge Fesko’s suggestion that ‘if God has revealed that the trinity [sic.] covenantally willed to redeem fallen and sinful people, then it behoves the church to explore, define, and press this scriptural teaching into service’.¹⁵ But it is the conditional premise of that statement that some *have* questioned, and that is the main focus of this discussion.

Fesko insists that:

the doctrine is not based upon one or two isolated texts but rather an entire web of texts spread across the canon of Scripture ... creating a tapestry of the work of the trinity [sic] in the redemption of fallen humanity ... On exegetical grounds, not speculative, various theologians detected covenantal language in the various parts of Scripture that reported and revealed the intra-trinitarian deliberations regarding salvation.¹⁶

So what are the texts that comprise this tapestry? Numerous verses have been marshalled in support, although not necessarily the same ones by various proponents. Nevertheless, several feature more consistently than others, so it is on these that we will concentrate primarily. But rather than considering the exegetical case through a hierarchy of proof texts, we will attempt to see how the *pactum* conceivably unfolds across the canon of Scripture, beginning with the OT.

3.1 Old Testament Allusions to the Pactum

Exegetical support from the OT is drawn mainly from the Psalms and the Prophets,¹⁷ with much of the emphasis falling on Psalms 2:7-8; 40:6-8 (MT 7-9); 89:3-4,35; 110:4; Isaiah 53:10-12; and Zechariah 6:13. As this selection illustrates, the *pactum* is inferred from texts that

¹³ Fesko, *Covenant*: 29.

¹⁴ Fesko, *Covenant*: 53-54.

¹⁵ Fesko, *Covenant*: 16.

¹⁶ Fesko, *Covenant*: 81.

¹⁷ Other texts are brought into the discussion (e.g. 2 Sam. 7), but mainly to support exegetical conclusions drawn from elsewhere.

respectively focus on three figures in particular: the anointed king, the Isaianic servant, and the messianic branch. To extrapolate a *pre-temporal*, intratrinitarian covenant from such historically or prophetically orientated texts may initially seem strange. However, it is important to understand the prosopological exegesis or typological hermeneutic applied to such material.¹⁸ Since the figure referred to or foreshadowed in the OT is the pre-existent Son of God, the OT text operates in two directions: *backwards* as well as forwards. Thus, a covenant established between Yahweh and David, for example, can *typologically* refer *back* to the pre-temporal *pactum* as well as point *forward* to its historical outworking in the establishment of the new covenant. This hermeneutic is therefore crucial in the exegetical case drawn from the OT, so we must keep this bi-directional reading strategy in mind to make sense of arguments commonly used to defend the *pactum* from the OT.

As noted above, the revelation of the *pactum* is associated with three key OT figures, the anointed king in the Psalms, the Suffering Servant in Isaiah, and the messianic branch in Zechariah. We will thus consider each in turn.

a. Yahweh's Anointed King in the Psalms

While not explicitly stated in 2 Samuel 7, God's promises to David were undeniably covenantal; this is confirmed in 2 Samuel 23:5 and elsewhere.¹⁹ Thus psalms that reflect a 'covenantal dialogue' between Yahweh and his anointed king should in the first instance apply to the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and David. However, even when this is acknowledged, Reformed theologians insist that more is involved than the historical relationship between God and Israel's anointed king. As the latter, David speaks prophetically of his antitype, and thus any covenantal dialogue ultimately involves the one David foreshadows. As such, language that may initially apply to David, also applies to David's greater son. Moreover, as the latter is the pre-

¹⁸ Prosopological exegesis is 'a "person-centred reading strategy" that seeks to resolve the otherwise ambiguous identities of speakers and audiences in the Old Testament in light of their identities in the apostolic gospel'. Scott Swain, 'The Trinitarian Depth of Scripture', third paragraph. <http://www.reformation21.org/blog/2015/06/the-trinitarian-depth-of-scrip.php>, accessed 8 June 2018.

¹⁹ 1 Kgs 8:23-26; 2 Chr. 7:18; 13:5; Jer. 33:21; Ps. 89:3,28,34,39; cf. Ps. 132:11-12; Isa. 55:3.

existent Son of God, it can also incorporate pre-temporal intratrinitarian activity.

Thus, in the second psalm, when the psalmist declares ‘I will proclaim the LORD’s decree: He said to me, ‘You are my son; today I have become your father’ (Ps. 2:7), this alludes not simply to David, or to Jesus as God’s messianic king, but also to the pre-temporal covenant between the Father and the Son.

In terms of its life-setting, Psalm 2 is arguably associated with a coronation ceremony. In the face of political intrigue and opposition (2:1-3), Yahweh’s *decree* provides reassurance of protection and victory (2:4-9), while also serving as a warning for those who oppose Yahweh and his anointed king (2:10-12). Understood as synonymous with both בְּרִית (covenant) and עֵדוּת (testimony),²⁰ this ‘decree’ (חֶק) is in effect the substance of God’s covenant with David (cf. 2:7b and 2 Sam 7:14a), analogous with the ‘covenantal certificate given to the king during his inauguration ceremony’ (cf. 2 Kings 11:12).²¹ But it is clear from the NT that the full significance of this decree extends far beyond its historical OT context. Citing both Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14, the author of Hebrews relates both these texts to Jesus (Heb. 1:5) and his unique filial relationship with God.²² Given the association of ‘today’ with covenant renewal ceremonies, ‘Today I have begotten you’ alludes in Hebrews to the ultimate fulfilment of the covenant promise sworn to David, namely, the inauguration of Jesus’ reign and the establishment of the new covenant.²³ And most significant for Covenant theology, this obedient royal Son (cf. Deut. 17:14-20) can anticipate reward for his faithfulness; he can request ‘the nations as his inheritance and the ends of the earth as his possession’, and the Father will give him such (cf. Phil. 2:8-11). This conditional reward is considered a key aspect of the *pactum*.

The familiar lines of Psalm 40:6-8 (MT 7-9) are likewise cited in support of the *pactum*.

Sacrifice and offering you did not desire –

²⁰ Ps. 105:8-10; cf. Ps. 132:12. However, while these and other texts attest to some measure of semantic overlap, they are not interchangeable or exact synonyms in all circumstances.

²¹ Fesko, *Trinity*: 84. Cf. also Deut. 17:18.

²² Fesko, *Trinity*: 85-86.

²³ As Fesko (*Trinity*: 87-88) observes, this is borne out by the way the NT cites this text.

but my ears you have opened –
 burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require.
 Then I said, 'Here I am, I have come –
 it is written about me in the scroll.
 I desire to do your will, my God;
 your law is within my heart.'

Once again, since words that ostensibly refer to the psalmist are applied by the author of Hebrews to Jesus (Heb. 10:5-7), Fesko infers that Psalm 40 'presents a number of elements that confirm Christ's consent to the Father's proposals'.²⁴ Understood christologically, these words of Psalm 40 are thus juxtaposed with other texts, such as Isaiah 53:10, to reflect the Son's willing obedience to be 'an offering for sin' and the Father's expressed will for him to be such (i.e. the essence of the *pactum*).

In light of the hermeneutic noted above, it is hardly surprising that Psalm 89 is also interpreted with reference to the *pactum*. The words of verses 3-4 apply not only to the Davidic covenant, or typologically to the new covenant with Christ, but also allude to the pre-temporal covenant between Father and Son, which these historical covenants 'disclose'. Subsequent verses in the Psalm are similarly understood. Thus Yahweh's promises in this Psalm, encapsulated in the oath of verse 35, refer not simply to covenant obligations Yahweh made to David, but to pre-temporal assurances offered by the Father to the Son.

Psalm 110 is commonly cited as a 'chief exegetical mooring' for the *pactum*, which is unsurprising, given its priest-king imagery and frequent NT citation to underline the Messiah's unique status and superiority as the divine Son of man. Of particular note, however, is the fact that Yahweh's words, directed to David's Lord (יְיָ), are expressly couched in the language of an oath, an intrinsic feature of biblical covenants.²⁵ Thus the assurances Yahweh gives here, which uniquely apply to Israel's ultimate priest-king, are implicitly covenantal in nature. So for Fesko, the all-important questions relate to

²⁴ Fesko, *Covenant*: 53.

²⁵ See Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose* (NSBT 23; Nottingham: Apollos, 2007). Fesko correctly discerns the connections between oath-making and covenants but overstates it by suggesting that 'Within the Old Testament Scriptures swearing an oath is tantamount to invoking a covenantal bond between two or more parties' (*Trinity*: 99).

‘the nature of Yahweh’s oath and its timeframe’.²⁶ What did Yahweh promise in this covenantal oath, and when did he do so?

Like Psalm 2, the life-setting of this royal psalm is arguably the coronation of Israel’s Jerusalemite kings, proclaiming such as heirs of both David and Melchizedek, the city’s ancient priest-king (Gen. 14:18-20; cf. Ps. 132:13-18). Accordingly, these two psalms share several features, not just the fact that Yahweh’s words are addressed to his appointed king. For example, in both the king has a unique relationship with Yahweh, and is thus assured of victory over the rebellious nations, over whom they will jointly reign. The oath in Psalm 110, however, is specifically related to the prospect of an eternal priesthood like Melchizedek’s (Ps. 110:4), through which – according to Hebrews – ‘Jesus has become the guarantor [or surety] of a better covenant’ (Heb. 7:22). Unlike a mediator, a guarantor (ἔγγυος) ensures that promises related to the covenant are implemented. Thus we have here a key element of the *pactum*, couched in the language of a covenant. However, other than Psalm 110, the OT makes no mention of any such oath – one guaranteeing an eternal priesthood to the messianic king. Thus the question naturally arises: When, exactly, did Yahweh declare to David’s future heir ‘You are a priest forever like Melchizedek?’ Finding no obvious historical referent within Scripture, Fesko insists that we must ‘look backward into eternity for the timeframe of this event ... [it] did not occur in history but in eternity’.²⁷

Thus understood, the biblical-theological significance of Psalm 110, along with other key messianic psalms, extends well beyond the historical or even prophetic horizon. Rather than simply giving expression to the Davidic or even the new covenant, these psalms allude to the eternal Trinitarian pact and its historical outworking in redemptive history.

b. The Suffering Servant in Isaiah

In Isaiah the key text (Isaiah 53) concerns the Suffering Servant,²⁸ whom Reformed theology correctly interprets in terms of Jesus and his atoning death. Not surprisingly, therefore, several allusions to the *pactum* are also discerned. In particular, Fesko points to verse 10 and

²⁶ Fesko, *Trinity*: 96.

²⁷ Fesko, *Trinity*: 103-104.

²⁸ Advocates draw on other Isaianic material also (e.g. Isa. 42:6; 48:16; 49:8; 54:10; 55:3), but ch. 53 is the most commonly utilised.

its reference to the servant's suffering according to Yahweh's 'will' or 'plan' (יְהִי), something 'not foisted upon the servant [but] ... willingly carried out' (v. 12).²⁹ Fesko thus takes the implied mutual agreement here as alluding to the *pactum*, finding support in Isaiah's reporting of both Yahweh's good plan and the servant's suffering as an accomplished fact.³⁰ He finds further corroboration in 'the interconnected web of texts that constitute the exegetical foundation of the *pactum* (e.g., Ps. 2:7; 89; 110:1; 2 Sam. 7:14; Zech. 6:13; Eph. 1:1-11; 2 Tim. 1:8-9)' and the citation of Isaiah 53:12 in the context of an alleged reference to the intratrinitarian covenant in Luke 22:29.³¹ Moreover, the fact that the servant's life is made a guilt-offering (עֲשָׂה) conveys 'the idea that Israel had breached the covenant ... [a]nd now the servant brings reconciliation as covenant surety ... for the many' who had transgressed.³² He does so by bearing their sin and punishment (Isa. 53:12; cf. Lev. 16:22), and fulfilling God's righteous requirements on their behalf by his representative obedience (Isa. 53:11). Thus the *pactum* is understood as the theological construct that explains and underpins the actions and accomplishments of the Suffering Servant.

c. The Messianic Branch in Zechariah

The *pactum* is also inferred from Zechariah 6, where the messianic shoot (יִצְחָק) is closely associated with priestly rule (cf. Ps. 110). Here the focus is almost entirely on one verse and its final clause:

It is he [the Branch] who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed in majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. *And there will be harmony* (עֵצַת שְׁלוֹמִים lit. 'a counsel of peace') *between the two* (Zech. 6:13).

For Reformed theologians appealing to this text, the 'harmony between the two' alludes to the counsel of peace between Father and Son (Yahweh and the Branch). Accordingly, in a context where God's covenant promises were obviously in doubt, 'Zechariah held out the hope of the coming Messiah, the Davidic heir, who would bring redemption – a hope grounded in a covenant between Yahweh and the

²⁹ Fesko, *Trinity*: 268.

³⁰ I.e. qatal (perfect) verbs are used to depict both.

³¹ Fesko, *Trinity*: 269.

³² Fesko, *Trinity*: 270-71.

Messiah.³³ Fesko understands Joshua to serve in this passage as a type of Christ, the royal messianic Branch, depicted in verses 12 and 13 as the one who will build the temple of the Lord. So rather than seeing two distinct individuals in verse 13 (i.e. a crowned priest *and* a messianic Branch), only one individual is identified (viz. Joshua, the crowned high priest, who foreshadows the anticipated priest-king, who will ‘sit and rule on [or by] his throne’, v. 13). Thus understood, the two between whom there will be harmony refers to the one foreshadowed by Joshua, and Yahweh himself, whose temple throne is implicitly the focus in these two verses (vv. 12-13; cf. Jer. 33:14-18). Accordingly, this ‘counsel of peace’ will exist between Yahweh and the messianic Branch. Moreover, it implies a covenantal agreement (cf. Isa. 54:10; Ezek. 34:25; 37:25) to secure peace between God and his people, premised on the proviso that ‘the Christ would offer the necessary representative obedience that God required of Israel’ (v. 15c). So interpreted, Zechariah 6:13, like Psalm 110, implicitly attests to a covenant between Yahweh and his Christ, anchored not in time, but in eternity.

3.2 New Testament Evidence for the *Pactum*

Exegetical support for the *pactum* is likewise found in a broad range of NT texts, some of which have already been mentioned. Arguably the most important are the following: Luke 22:29; Ephesians 1:3-14; 2 Timothy 1:9-10; Hebrews 7:20-22.³⁴ Numerous others could be added, such as those speaking of the Father *sending* the Son and/or the Son’s voluntary obedience to the will of the Father, or of the Father’s *giving* the elect to the Son. In particular, the interaction between Jesus and the Father reflected in the prayer of John 17 expresses ‘something of this intra-trinitarian dialogue’ that suggests a pact or covenant.³⁵ Without conceding the latter, some such Trinitarian deliberations and delegated responsibilities are undeniable, so we can skip over such material and focus on texts where pre-temporal intratrinitarian dialogue is perhaps less obvious.

³³ Fesko, *Trinity*: 53-54.

³⁴ Further suggested proof texts include John 6:27, Phil. 2:8-9, and Heb. 12:2, where the Father’s approval or the Son’s reward is associated with Jesus’ submission to God’s redemptive plan.

³⁵ Fesko, *Trinity*: 181.

a. Luke 22:29

Theodore Beza (1519–1605) introduced Luke 22:29 into the discussion, rejecting Jerome’s translation of διατίθημι as ‘appoint’ (Latin: *dispono*) in favour of ‘I therefore *covenant* to you, just as my Father *covenanted* to me, a kingdom.’ Consequently, ‘Theologians who once spoke of Christ’s appointment as mediator now believed that Christ was *covenantally* appointed.’³⁶

Noting that the Father’s *covenanting* of a kingdom must have taken place prior to Christ’s heavenly session (cf. Luke 22:69), Fesko concludes: ‘Given that we possess no recorded historical event where this covenantal bond was initiated, we are naturally forced to look backward into eternity for the timeframe of this event.’³⁷ Such a timeframe is further suggested elsewhere in the NT, particularly where our blessings ‘in Christ’ are explicitly grounded in divine deliberations that took place *before* creation.

b. Ephesians 1:3-14

In those familiar words of Ephesians 1:4, for example, Paul asserts that the Father chose us ‘before the creation of the world’.³⁸ Moreover, this and the following verses emphasise that the Father grants us every spiritual blessing ‘in/through *Christ*’. For Fesko, therefore, ‘When Paul invokes [the term Χριστός] ... he inevitably connects the full load of all the Old Testament associations and freight with the person and work of Jesus, and hence Psalms 2 and 110 and Zechariah 6 feed into Paul’s understanding of the Christ’s work.’³⁹ This, together with the locating of God’s redemptive deliberations in the pre-temporal realm, points to an eternal, intratrinitarian covenant.

c. 2 Timothy 1:9-10

The same conclusions can be extrapolated from analogous texts, such as 2 Timothy 1:9-10. Here Paul refers to God’s ‘own *purpose*’ (πρόθεσις cf. Eph. 1:11) and the fact that his grace was ‘given us in Christ Jesus *before the beginning of time*’ (πρὸ χρόνων αἰώνων).⁴⁰ As

³⁶ Fesko, *Trinity*: 5.

³⁷ Fesko, *Trinity*: 103.

³⁸ Cf. Phil. 4:3; Rev. 13:8; 17:8.

³⁹ Fesko, *Trinity*: 110-11.

⁴⁰ Surprisingly, Fesko ignores Titus 1:2, used by others to validate the *pactum*, e.g. W. Hendricksen, *I & II Timothy and Titus* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1960): 341-42. However, while this text similarly grounds the hope of eternal life in God’s eternal plan or decree, it does not necessarily imply *intra-trinitarian* promises. Rather,

in Ephesians, soteriology is thus correlated with pre-temporal Christology and God's intended purpose, clearly suggesting that Christ's incarnation and ministry, as well as our calling and salvation, were divinely planned and set in motion in eternity. So when this text is read in the light of others we have considered, it is likewise seen as alluding 'to the existence of ... a covenantal agreement among the triune God to plan and execute the redemption of the elect'.⁴¹

d. Hebrews 7:20-22

In view of its emphasis on Jesus as a faithful priest-king like Melchizedek (Heb. 5:6, 10; 6:20; 7:11,15,17), it is no surprise that the *pactum* should also be extrapolated from the book of Hebrews. Indeed, as noted already, Hebrews cites several of the key OT texts considered above and applies them exclusively to Jesus as God's eternal Son. But arguably the most significant citation is in chapter 7, where the oath of Psalm 110:4 supports the claim that Jesus is 'guarantor of a better covenant' (Heb. 7:20-22).

Here the author highlights the superiority of Jesus by contrasting the priesthood of Jesus with that of the Levitical priesthood; such is the emphasis of both the wider (4:14–10:18) and immediate (7:11-28) context. So the author is pointing to the divine oath of Psalm 110:4 to underscore Jesus' superiority: 'Others became priests without any oath, but he became a priest with an oath, when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'"' (Heb. 7:20-21). But when exactly was Jesus made priest with an oath? As noted above, the obvious answer for Fesko is 'that the event did not occur in history but in eternity when the Trinity planned and conceived the redemption of the elect'.⁴² Thus understood, the divine oath here underpins the 'better covenant' of the subsequent verse (Heb. 7:22), in the sense that it serves as its pre-temporal, intratrinitarian foundation.

So the *pactum* is clearly not conceived as a doctrine without a text. Rather, several texts apparently corroborate the idea. Therefore McGowan's appraisal might initially seem rather misinformed: 'There are no biblical grounds whatsoever for suggesting that there was a

'promised' might simply allude to God's eternal decree or plan of salvation and does not necessitate a pre-temporal *covenant*.

⁴¹ Fesko, *Trinity*: 120.

⁴² Fesko, *Trinity*: 103-104.

‘covenant’ relationship between Father, Son and Holy Spirit.’⁴³ But McGowan is not the only detractor, which is hardly surprising when the biblical–theological case is examined more closely.

4. The Exegetical Arguments for the *Pactum* Critiqued

4.1 *The Underlying Hermeneutic*

The most obvious place to start is with the underlying hermeneutic. As already noted, the interpretation of several key OT texts involves a reductionist exegesis or an unusual application of typology. On the one hand, a prosopological reading strategy tends to ignore or overlook the original meaning of the OT text altogether. The bi-directional typological interpretation, on the other hand, runs counter to a normal typological hermeneutic.

Whatever one may think of typology in general, its deployment to validate the *pactum* is counter-intuitive. Beale defines typology as follows:⁴⁴

The study of analogical correspondences among revealed truths about persons, events, institutions, and other things within the historical framework of God’s special revelation, which, from a retrospective view, are of a prophetic nature and are escalated in their meaning.

Admittedly, not everyone insists on a foreshadowing element, with some defining typology simply in terms of an *analogy* between the Old Testament and the New.⁴⁵ But even such a broader definition restricts typology to within the sphere of history rather than to something beyond it in the pre-temporal realm.

Admittedly, there is at least one biblical example which ‘reverses the usual typological imagery and identifies τύπος with the heavenly model for which the Old Testament institutions were “anti-types”’.⁴⁶ The author of Hebrews (9:24) portrays the tabernacle as the *antitype*

⁴³ A. T. B. McGowan, *Adam, Christ and Covenant: Exploring Headship Theology* (London: Apollos, 2016): 106.

⁴⁴ G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012): 14.

⁴⁵ David L. Baker, ‘Typology and the Christian Use of the Old Testament’ in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, G. K. Beale, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994): 327–28.

⁴⁶ E. E. Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker): 166 n. 66.

(ἀντίτυπος) of a heavenly *type* or *pattern* (cf. 8:5). Here the analogy seems to be operating outside the historical realm, employing what Ellis dubs a ‘vertical’ as opposed to a ‘horizontal’ typology.⁴⁷ He goes on to observe that the vertical dimension is incorporated into the horizontal, with the ‘heavenly’ being identified with the age to come. However, it is not quite clear that the ‘type’ or ‘pattern’ can be so understood, either in Hebrews or in the other biblical texts that speak of Moses constructing the tabernacle (or its furniture) according to a revealed pattern (Exod. 25:9, 40; 27:8; 26:30; 27:8; Num. 8:4; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5). In particular, there is the problem of the meaning of Exodus 25:40, the text cited in Hebrews 8:5 to support this vertical typology under consideration. Working out the precise nuance of the noun תבנית (pattern/model/plan) in Exodus 25 (vv. 9, 40) is notoriously difficult. While some understand the ‘pattern’ as something like a construction plan or architectural model, others interpret it as alluding to a heavenly ‘archetype’ which the earthly sanctuary is designed to replicate or reflect. Two observations support the latter interpretation: (a) when they climbed Mount Sinai, Moses and the others caught glimpses of heavenly realities (cf. Exod. 24:10; cf. Ezek. 1:26-28); (b) God’s heavenly dwelling is subsequently depicted in terms of the Tabernacle’s design (cf. Heb. 9:11-12, 24b). However, we should hardly infer from this symbolical language that there is some kind of tabernacle-like construction in heaven. Rather, the earthly sanctuary is intentionally designed to represent God’s transcendent residence and convey the reality of his holy presence – something revealed to Moses and his associates when they ascended Sinai. As such, the ‘pattern’ in Exodus 25 denotes both actual and eschatological realities, and functions as most other biblical types. Thus even this peculiar instance reflects nothing of the *pre-temporal* focus inferred from other biblical texts and used to validate the *pactum*.

But as well as being very odd, the kind of bi-directional typology used to defend the *pactum* is arguably unwarranted. Old Testament texts that allegedly allude to a pre-temporal *covenant* seem rather to anticipate or prefigure the future activity of God in Christ. This is true of each of the three OT figures we have already considered.

⁴⁷ Ellis, *Prophecy*: 166.

4.2 Relevant Old Testament Texts Point Forward, not Backward

As noted earlier, the historical setting for Psalms 2 and 110 was possibly a coronation ceremony for the Davidic king. However, taking their cue from the promises of 2 Samuel 7, in their canonical context these psalms also anticipate David's greater Son, the ultimate Messiah.⁴⁸ A key issue addressed by the Psalter is the apparent failure of God's promises concerning the Davidic dynasty (cf. Ps. 89). But these two psalms (2 and 110), along with others (e.g. Pss. 72; 132) affirm that God's promises will not fail. Rather, such hopes would yet be realised in a future, ideal Davidic ruler. And the NT leaves us in no doubt as to when and in whom such fulfilment took place.

Thus understood, Yahweh's 'decree' proclaimed by the psalmist in Psalm 2:7-9 alludes to the covenant promises made to David concerning his offspring in 2 Samuel 7:11-16, in particular, the promise of a filial relationship (2 Sam. 7:14a) and an enduring reign (2 Sam. 7:13b,16). These promises are ultimately fulfilled in David's greater Son, acknowledged as such at both his baptism (cf. Matt. 3:17) and transfiguration (cf. Matt. 17:5), and subsequently 'appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead' (Rom. 1:4). As such, the definitive Messiah was indeed exalted to God's right hand (Acts 2:33-36; Eph. 1:20-23), from where he rules until all his enemies submit (1 Cor. 15:24-26; Phil. 2:9-11), fulfilling God's covenant promises to David.

Likewise, the twin oracles referred to in Psalm 110 are almost certainly extrapolated from God's covenant promises to David. While the assurances recorded in verses 1 and 4 are not mentioned explicitly elsewhere (whether in 2 Samuel 7 or the rest of the OT), the oracular formula in Psalm 110:1 and the reference to a divine oath in verse 4 arguably alludes to the Davidic covenant (cf. 2 Sam. 7:11b; 23:5; Ps. 132:11). This receives significant support from the way these divine assurances of military triumph and universal rule are linked in Psalm 110 to a unique relationship between this Davidic 'priest-king' and Yahweh himself, reflected in the 'right hand' motif of verses 1 and 5.

⁴⁸ While the latter could be understood in the sense of re-interpretation and re-application, it is arguably 'more reasonable to suppose that these psalms, like Nathan's prophecy and other texts referring to royal Messianism, had a twofold meaning from the moment of their composition: every king of the Davidic line is a figure and a shadow of the ideal king of the future'. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1965): 110.

Sitting at a king's right hand was an indication of royal status (cf. 1 Kgs 2:19). Moreover, God's right hand is often associated with the defeat of his or Israel's enemies (e.g. Exod. 15:6,12; Ps. 44:4). While the reference to Melchizedek may seem somewhat abrupt and incongruous, it closely follows a reference to Yahweh extending this king's rule from *Zion* (v. 2; cf. Ps. 2:6), and his explicit association with 'holiness' (v. 3).⁴⁹ The introduction of this otherwise 'surprising twist'⁵⁰ in the psalm may thus have been prompted by the priestly status of Jerusalem's kings.

Admittedly, however, the absence of any such promises elsewhere in the OT may indicate that Psalm 110 constitutes an entirely new prophetic oracle and is thus doing more than simply *foreshadowing* future events. This could be extrapolated from the unique placement of **נָאֻם יְהוָה** (an oracle of YHWH) at the outset of the psalm,⁵¹ and the possible declarative *qatal* in verse 4. In any case, given the strong emphasis on military triumph and the special status of Jerusalem's kings, these assurances clearly link in with those expressed in the Davidic covenant. It is thus unnecessary to look back beyond time itself for a divine oath concerning such assurances, some of which clearly presuppose a historical timeframe.⁵² Moreover, since this sworn assurance applies to David's *Lord* (i.e., Yahweh's anointed king), we simply do not need to search elsewhere in Scripture for such a covenantal oath made in relation to Jesus. The Davidic covenant, as expressed or rearticulated here in Psalm 110, constitutes such an event. Moreover, this receives confirmation in Hebrews 7, which plainly states that Jesus 'became a priest with an oath *when* God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'"' Because of *this* oath, Jesus has become the guarantor of a better covenant'. And then a few verses later, the writer adds: 'the oath, which came *after* the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever'. Therefore Psalm 110 does not allude to a pre-temporal covenant between the Father and the Son, but refers rather to the Davidic covenant and foreshadows its ultimate fulfilment in Jesus.

⁴⁹ Zion, like Salem (Gen. 14:18), most likely refers here to Jerusalem; cf. the poetic parallelism of Ps. 76:2; cf. also Ps. 132:13-18.

⁵⁰ T. Longman III, *Psalms* (TOTC; Downers Grove/Nottingham: IVP, 2014): 382.

⁵¹ Elsewhere in the OT this regularly concludes a prophetic oracle or sub-unit.

⁵² E.g. The assurance of v. 4b is premised on the past, historical existence of Melchizedek, making its wording incongruous in the context of a *pre-temporal* intratrinitarian pact.

Similar conclusions may be drawn from other psalms which clearly have the Davidic covenant in view, such as Psalm 89.⁵³ Here the covenantal oath mentioned (cf. vv. 3-4, 28-29, 34-37, 49) plainly alludes to the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:11b-16),⁵⁴ which Israel's current circumstances seem to belie (Ps. 89:38-45, 49-51). There is not the slightest hint of a pre-temporal Trinitarian pact here. Any such inference is not only exegetically unfounded, but leans very heavily on the extraordinary use of typology challenged above.

The same applies to Psalm 40:6-8. Whether we understand the original speaker here to be David or someone else, it is only by tortuous exegesis that his words can be placed on the lips of the *pre-incarnate* Christ as part of a 'pre-temporal dialogue between the Father and the Son'.⁵⁵ The psalmist's cry for deliverance (vv. 11-17) is prefaced by recalling his past response (vv. 3-10) to divine intervention (vv. 1-2). That response, as emphasised in verses 6-8, was obedient (cf. Isa. 50:4-5) and wholehearted devotion to God. Rather than offering mere ritualistic sacrifice and offering, the psalmist presents himself as a 'living sacrifice' (cf. Rom. 12:2) – a life submitted to God's will or instruction. The author of Hebrews does indeed place these words addressed to God on the lips of the Christ, but significantly it is the *incarnate* Christ who speaks them: the NT author expressly says 'when Christ came into the world, he said ...' (Heb. 10:5) and the main point is to demonstrate how Christ's *bodily* sacrifice is superior to the types and shadows that could never eradicate sins. Admittedly, the identity of the scroll referred to in verse 7 remains an interpretative crux; indeed, even the syntax of this verse is ambiguous. But if the original speaker is David, speaking here as God's anointed king, the scroll most likely alludes to the law of kingship or the royal copy of the Torah (Deut. 17:14-20). Thus understood, verse 7b draws attention to how David's submissive attitude to Yahweh reflects the royal ideal.⁵⁶ So when these words are applied to the incarnate Christ in the NT, Jesus is presented as the perfect representative of his people, whose death could uniquely atone for sin.

⁵³ Likewise, Ps. 132:11-18.

⁵⁴ See Williamson, *Sealed*: 134-36.

⁵⁵ Fesko, *Trinity*: 133.

⁵⁶ While there is no explicit reference to kingship in this psalm, the parallel petitions in Ps. 70 are located within a messianic context.

This is likewise true of Isaiah's Suffering Servant.⁵⁷ Like the ideal messianic king, the NT clearly equates God's will for the servant with the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. However, while this attests to a divine plan to which the Son voluntarily submitted himself, there is no justification in Isaiah for understanding this in terms of a pre-temporal, intratrinitarian *covenant*. Nor can this simply be imported from other biblical texts that allegedly refer to such a concept; as already noted, the suggested 'proof-texts' do not clearly attest to such a *pre-temporal* covenant either, but have in view the Davidic covenant and the new covenant realities it foreshadows. While it is true that Isaiah largely portrays the servant's ministry using *qatal* verb forms, the consequences of the servant's suffering are consistently reported by *yiqtol* verbs; moreover, there is clearly no suggestion that the suffering itself (reported by *qatals*) took place *before* the creation of the world. At most, it can be construed as something God had pre-ordained (Rev. 13:8; cf. Rev. 17:8; Eph. 1:5; 1 Pet. 1:19; cf. also *Test. Moses* 1:14), and is thus depicted as an 'accomplished fact' in the plan of God. While Jesus made his life a 'guilt-offering' for those who had breached the covenant, and as 'covenant surety' secured reconciliation for the many who transgressed, to suggest that he did so as part of a pre-temporal intratrinitarian covenant is another matter entirely and finds no real support in Isaiah 53.

The use of Zechariah 6:13 to validate the *pactum* has been challenged even within the Reformed camp, with some dismissing it as largely irrelevant. It is easy to see why. While Zechariah 6:13 anticipates harmony (peaceful cooperation) of some kind, there is no mention here of any pre-temporal basis for such harmonious relations. Moreover, even if one concedes that the two parties involved are Yahweh and the messianic Branch,⁵⁸ the harmonious relationship between them is depicted as a future rather than an eternal reality. Therefore, whatever interpretation of this admittedly challenging verse we adopt, it provides no basis for a covenant made before time. Any

⁵⁷ Most likely an individual, arguably the Davidic King, who will serve as 'the ideal Israel'; so John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah Chapters 40–66* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998): 108.

⁵⁸ Often assuming a measure of subsequent corruption or editing, historical critics discern some sort of priestly and royal diarchy, designed to address socio-political tensions of the early post-exilic era.

peace or harmony is a future prospect, presented neither as a current nor a past reality.

Thus none of the key OT texts used to support the *pactum* bears up to exegetical or biblical–theological scrutiny. At most they foreshadow new covenant realities or relate to OT types that foreshadow such. Indeed, the future orientation of most of these texts speaks strongly against imposing any pre-temporal meaning upon them.

4.3 New Testament Texts Allude to a Pre-temporal Divine Decree or to Redemptive–Historical Covenants

Turning to the NT, Luke 22:29 is ostensibly the most promising support for a covenant between the Father and the Son, especially if the verb διατίθημι is interpreted here in the light of its cognate noun (διαθήκη). The latter carries a consistent covenantal significance throughout Scripture (both as the translation of בְּרִית in the LXX and as the typical term for covenant in the NT). Moreover, the verb is associated with covenant-making in all its other NT occurrences,⁵⁹ as is predominantly so also in the LXX. However, in these other instances – where διατίθημι clearly denotes making or establishing a covenant – the cognate noun (διαθήκη) is usually its express object.⁶⁰ Here in Luke 22 the object is most likely βασιλεία,⁶¹ and the verbal idea is arguably ‘assign’, or ‘confer’ (cf. modern EVV).⁶² Understood as such, Jesus may possibly be referring to a divine *decree* rather than an intratrinitarian covenant. Moreover, the question remains, when precisely did the Father confer or covenant the kingdom to the Son? To what is Jesus alluding here – is it necessarily a pre-temporal divine decree at all? Might it simply be the historical covenant promise(s), granting the kingdom to Abraham’s royal seed and David’s royal heir (cf. Luke 1:32–33)?

In any case, while διατίθημι certainly encompasses the idea of covenant-making, its semantic range is broader than that, and thus it

⁵⁹ Acts 3:25; Heb. 8:10; 9:16–17; 10:16. Cf. also its consistent association with covenant-making in the LXX.

⁶⁰ One of the few biblical exceptions is Neh. 10:1 (Eng. tr. 9:38), which employs a synonym for covenant (πίστις in the sense of an oath or pledge).

⁶¹ The Greek syntax is admittedly ambiguous (cf. NASB), but most EVV take βασιλεία as the object of both clauses in v. 29.

⁶² Such a broader semantic range is suggested in BDAG and is confirmed by the infrequent use of the verb with non-cognate nouns elsewhere (cf. LXX Hos. 11:8; Jubilees 5:18; Josephus, *Ant.* 13.407).

does not necessarily denote here the covenantal associations it has elsewhere. Accordingly, despite the obvious appeal of this text, its ability to carry the theological freight that some place on it is at least questionable. Even if it does allude to a pre-temporal divine decree, this does not firmly establish the existence of an intratrinitarian *covenant*. The two concepts (i.e. decree and covenant) are not necessarily synonymous.

The same applies to Ephesians 1:3-14. These verses underline the pre-temporal nature of our election in Christ (v. 4), and the fact that we have been predestined according to God's eternal plan (vv. 5,11). In other words, they attest to a pre-temporal divine decision (or 'decree') to save the elect and 'bring unity to all things in heaven and on earth under Christ' (v. 10). But this does not necessarily entail an intratrinitarian *covenant*, unless the latter is defined simply in terms of any mutual *agreement*. However, this is much too broad a definition for a biblical covenant, something that formally ratifies a relationship by means of a verbal or enacted oath. The attempt to import the idea of an intratrinitarian covenant here through the text's repeated emphasis on 'Christ' seems equally misguided. While the use of Χριστός may arguably allude to significant royal Psalms such as Psalms 2 and 110, or more indirectly to Zechariah 6, none of these texts plainly attests to a pre-temporal covenant between the Father and the Son. Thus to argue for the *pactum* in Ephesians 1 on the basis of such allusions is to employ a circular reasoning that is undermined by the 'corroborating' evidence. While these verses in Ephesians certainly affirm that God's redemptive plan and our salvation originated with 'trinitarian deliberations over these matters before the creation of the world',⁶³ there is no clear warrant for labelling these divine deliberations a covenant. Rather, they are better understood simply in terms of a divinely agreed resolution, plan or decree.

This is also true in the case of 2 Timothy 1:9-10, which likewise locates the initiation of God's saving plan πρὸ χρόνων αἰώνιων. Salvation is again intrinsically linked with Christology: God's grace has been given to us *in Christ*. As before, however, there is no hint of a *covenant* between Father and Son. Once again, this concept must be imported by perceived allusions to other christological texts and by an appeal to 'the analogy of Scripture'. However, as with Ephesians 1, all

⁶³ Fesko, *Trinity*: 110.

this text clearly attests to is a pre-temporal divine plan to confer saving grace on the elect – those chosen ‘in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time’ (2 Tim. 1:10; cf. Titus 1:2). This divine plan or decree must not necessarily be understood as covenantal, implying a more *formalised* agreement or contractual relationship between the persons of the Trinity that arguably undermines God’s tri-unity.

With respect to Hebrews 7:20-22, the most important question obviously relates to the timing: when was Jesus made priest with an oath? Did this happen in time, or in eternity? While *pactum* advocates suggest the latter, taking the divine oath as alluding to a pre-temporal covenant, Fesko nonetheless concedes that the final verse in this chapter could pose a significant challenge for such an interpretation: ‘For the law appoints as high priests men in all their weakness; but the oath, *which came after the law*, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever’ (Heb. 7:28, emphasis added). This would seem to suggest that the oath through which Jesus became a priest forever (v. 21) chronologically came *after* rather than before the Mosaic Law. Fesko is thus forced to insist that it is not the oath itself, but the ‘word’ or ‘revelation’ of the oath which is said here to have come after the Law (*Trinity*, 104 n.30). But while the text does indeed refer to ‘the word of the oath’ (ὁ λόγος δὲ τῆς ὀρκωμοσίας), there is nothing to demand an understanding of the Greek syntax here that would arguably make the ‘revelation’, rather than the ‘oath’ itself, the subject of following clause. Surely it is the divine oath, rather than its revelation, that ‘appointed the Son’?

Given the allusions in Psalm 110 to the Davidic covenant and the special status of Israel’s Davidic kings, the most likely oath in view is surely that which God solemnly swore to David. In other words, the author of Hebrews is highlighting the supremacy of Jesus as priest on the basis of his relationship to David and the covenant promises God had made to him. As David’s Lord and heir, Jesus is the ultimate priest-king in whom God’s covenant promises to David are fully realised. Thus understood, Hebrews 7:20-22 is not referring to a covenant made before time, but rather to one made in time, and fulfilled or made complete in Jesus.

5. Conclusion

In light of the texts examined above, it may seem surprising that Covenant theologians continue to espouse the idea of a pre-temporal, intratrinitarian covenant of redemption. Perhaps even more surprising is the fact that, despite numerous criticisms of traditional Covenant theology, leading advocates of Progressive Covenantalism also endorse the idea.⁶⁴

This article has critically reviewed the biblical–theological case that may be made for such a covenant. As we have seen, advocates do not see it as merely a theological construct. However, the exegetical case that can be mounted does not stand up to close scrutiny. This is not to say that God’s eternal decrees must therefore be denied. As Palmer Robertson observes:

The intention of God from eternity to redeem a people to himself certainly must be affirmed. Before the foundation of the world God set his covenantal love on his people.

But affirming the role of redemption in the eternal counsels of God is not the same as proposing the existence of a pre-creation covenant between Father and Son. A sense of artificiality flavours the effort to structure in covenantal terms the mysteries of God’s eternal counsels. Scripture simply does not say much on the pre-creation shape of the decrees of God. To speak concretely of an intertrinitarian [sic.] ‘covenant’ with terms and conditions between Father and Son mutually endorsed before the foundation of the world is to extend the bounds of scriptural evidence beyond propriety.⁶⁵

Accordingly, unless a more robust case can be made, the *pactum salutis* lacks the clear biblical support that would absolve it from the charge of scholastic tinkering or mythology.

⁶⁴ See n. 10 above.

⁶⁵ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980): 53–54.