

LEGITIMATE DISCONTINUITIES BETWEEN THE TESTAMENTS

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Kenneth Barker in "False Dichotomies Between the Testaments," a stimulating and informative article published in *JETS* 25 (1982) 3-16, invites an amillennial covenant theologian to address in reciprocal fashion the topic of legitimate discontinuities between the OT and NT or, more properly, between the Mosaic covenant and the new covenant in Christ.

Federal theology has been known for its emphasis on the unity and continuity of the two covenants. Critics frequently charge covenant theology with minimizing meaningful discussion of legitimate discontinuities between the covenant of law mediated through Moses and the new covenant administration of grace established by Jesus Christ (John 1:17). Charles Ryrie asserts: "Covenant theology can only emphasize the unity, and in so doing overemphasizes it until it becomes the sole governing category of interpretation."¹ Dispensationalism has rightly insisted on the importance of the law-gospel distinction in a comparison of the old and new covenants. This distinction, deeply rooted in Protestant theology since the beginning of the Reformation, highlights the antithesis between the blessing of God received on the ground of law-keeping (merit) and blessing received on the basis of Christ's atonement for sin (redemptive grace). (The latter way of divine blessing rests on the merit of Christ, the ground of soteric justification and life.) Had Adam before the fall remained faithful to the covenant with his God, he would have merited eternal life for himself and all his posterity. With the entrance of sin into the world, the reconciliation between God and the sinner has been secured through the redemptive work of Christ. As an aspect of the atonement, Christ satisfies divine justice by rendering full and perfect obedience to the law of God and, so doing, fulfills the covenantal-legal obligations. A parallel obtains here between the first and second Adams as representative heads under two distinct covenants (commonly called the covenant of works and the covenant of grace). There is a similar parallel between the first covenant with Adam at creation and the later giving of the law at Mount Sinai. A principle of works-inheritance operative in the original covenant with Adam is reestablished in the Mosaic covenant, although this principle is restricted in its field of operation. Different explanations for the apparently contradictory data in Scripture descriptive of the Mosaic covenant have led to two distinct schools of interpretation within evangelicalism—namely, dispensationalism and covenant theology. Fortunately the current theological scene evidences remarkable change, particularly a growing rapprochement between modern dispensationalism and covenant

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¹C. C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago: Moody, 1965) 35.

theology. In the course of this paper I will indicate some of the reasons for this trend.

Assessing the writings of Lewis Chafer, Charles Ryrie, John Calvin and Charles Hodge (to name only a few representative theologians from both schools) and taking into account the way readers have interpreted their writings, one must admit to a measure of ambiguity in their formulations. As I have stated elsewhere with respect to federalism:

Quite clearly, Reformed theology is in need of clarification here. With good reason Daniel Fuller has remarked: "It is extremely difficult to grasp covenant theology's explanations of how a line of thought, which has the structure of the covenant of works, nevertheless functions as part of the covenant of grace."²

On the other side Robert Saucy acknowledges:

The focus on distinctive expressions of the will of God for human life on earth has led to many accusations that dispensationalism teaches more than one way of salvation. In response, most dispensationalists will acknowledge a lack of clarity and even exaggeration in some statements made by early advocates of this system. But outside of the difficulty that many have had to elucidate clearly the distinction of life for the believer living under the Mosaic Law and the believer under the New Covenant, a certain allowance must be granted in consideration of the reactive nature of some of early dispensationalism.³

The obvious reason for much of the confusion is the exceeding complexity of the issues involved. Jonathan Edwards once observed: "There is perhaps no part of divinity attended with so much intricacy, and wherein orthodox divines do so much differ as stating the precise agreement and difference between the two dispensations of Moses and Christ."⁴

After studying the history and development of federal theology and evaluating the two rival Calvinist interpretations of the Mosaic covenant, I can understand the polemical nature of the vigorous ongoing debate among evangelicals today pertaining to the traditional law-gospel distinction between the two covenants.⁵ But I would hope that evangelicals are in unanimous agreement with the

²M. W. Karlberg, "Reformed Interpretation of the Mosaic Covenant," *WTJ* 43 (1980) 38.

³R. Saucy, "Contemporary Dispensational Thought," *TSF Bulletin* (March-April 1984) 10. A sampling of some of the objectionable statements in the original *Scotfield Reference Bible* include: "The Christian is not under the conditional Mosaic Covenant of works, the law, but under the unconditional New Covenant of grace" (95 n. 1). "As a dispensation, grace begins with the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom 3:24-26; 4:24, 25). The point of testing is no longer legal obedience as the condition of salvation, but acceptance or rejection of Christ, with good works as a fruit of salvation" (1115 n. 1). In light of such statements as these, O. T. Allis' criticism is valid: "The fundamental error in the attitude toward the Sinaitic covenant which is shown in the *Scotfield Bible* lies in the failure to distinguish between the law as a covenant of works and the law as a ministration or dispensation of the covenant of grace, in other words in the failure to recognize that the Sinaitic covenant belongs to the covenant of grace" ("Modern Dispensationalism and the Law of God," *EvQ* 8 [1936] 280). This present paper attempts to clarify further the point made by Allis.

⁴Cited in D. P. Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 5-6.

⁵See my work, "The Mosaic Covenant and the Concept of Works in Reformed Hermeneutics: A Historical-Critical Analysis with Particular Attention to Early Covenant Eschatology" (doctoral dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1980).

opinion of Walter Kaiser: "The classic theme of all truly evangelical theology is the problem of law and grace."⁶ Martin Luther and the Reformers in general spoke of justification by faith alone as the crucial doctrine of the standing or falling Church. In many ways the most significant current treatment of this subject is that of Daniel Fuller, entitled *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum? The Hermeneutics of Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology*. Serious criticism has been raised against Fuller's historical and theological analysis. Anthony Hoekema, for example, has difficulty with Fuller's reading of Calvin and subsequent covenant theology.

Implicit in the title of the book is the thought that covenant theology posits a contrast rather than a continuum between law and gospel. . . . Law and gospel are sometimes seen as antithetical by Calvin and the covenant theologians. Apparently, however, according to Fuller, the *only* relationship seen between law and gospel by Calvin and the covenant theologians is that of antithesis. But this understanding is hardly correct.⁷

More important than Fuller's overstatement, in my judgment, is his basic misunderstanding of the Calvinist teaching concerning the legitimate discontinuity between the law and the gospel.

Although the following formulation is not original with him, John Calvin states that "the covenant made with all the patriarchs is so much like ours in substance and reality that the two are actually one and the same. Yet they differ in mode of administration."⁸ In sharing the same substance and reality, there is genuine continuity between the two administrations of God's redemptive program—that is, as pertains to the essence of the Mosaic order or economy, eternal salvation is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Works, though necessary as evidence of justifying faith, do not merit justification or sanctification.⁹ The purpose of this paper is to indicate how the old and new covenants differ in "mode of administration."

In the *Institutes* Calvin discusses at length a fivefold dissimilarity between the OT and NT. First, the spiritual blessings of the Mosaic covenant (or the

⁶W. C. Kaiser, Jr., "Leviticus 18:5 and Paul: 'Do This and You Shall Live (Eternally)'," *JETS* 14 (1971) 19. J. Murray comments: "No subject is more intimately bound up with the nature of the gospel than that of law and grace. In the degree to which error is entertained at this point, in the same degree is our conception of the gospel perverted" (*Principles of Conduct* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957] 181). In defining the Biblical idea of "law" Murray writes: "Law not only enunciates justice; it guards justice. It ensures that where there is righteousness to the full extent of its demand there will be the corresponding justification and life. Only when there is deviation from its demands does any adverse judgment proceed from the law" (*ibid.*, p. 184).

⁷A. A. Hoekema, review of Fuller, *Calvin Theological Journal* 17 (1982) 111-112. Similarly D. J. Moo questions "whether Fuller has really understood the positions he criticizes or allowed sufficiently for the nuances of various approaches" (review of Fuller, *Trinity Journal* NS 3 [1982] 101). I agree with Moo's judgment that while Fuller's analysis of dispensationalism is helpful at points, "I am not sure he has always represented the position accurately" (*ibid.*, p. 100).

⁸J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. J. T. McNeill; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 2.10.2.

⁹For further discussion of the doctrine of justification from a Biblical-theological perspective see my article, "Justification in Redemptive History," *WTJ* 43 (1981) 213-246.

Mosaic economy more broadly) are typified by temporal conditions and regulations. Second, truth is communicated in the Mosaic economy by numerous symbols and ceremonies typifying Christ. Third, whereas the OT is literal (of the "letter"), the NT is spiritual (of the "Spirit"). Fourth, there is bondage under the old order, freedom under the new. (This fourth aspect involves the antithetical yet administratively compatible principles of law and grace operative within the covenant under Moses. This feature is described more fully in Calvin's commentaries.)¹⁰ Fifth, covenant administration is restricted to one nation under the old economy, whereas it extends to all nations under the new. These five differences, Calvin explains, stem from the freedom and sovereignty of God in ordering the affairs of his people.¹¹

Although Calvin is best known for distinguishing the two covenants along the lines of promise and fulfillment, shadow and reality, he also identifies the peculiar nature of the Mosaic covenant in terms of its legal administration. The typological kingdom inheritance is granted to Israel on the grounds of her compliance with the law of Moses. This inheritance principle is that of works, not faith (Gal 3:10 ff.).¹² While the principle of works is distinctive of the Mosaic covenant, the ultimate and more important principle informing the old economy as a whole (of which the Mosaic covenant is a part) is, to be sure, redemptive grace. The law of Moses occupies a subservient function in the historical and progressive revelation of the covenant of redemption. Reformed theology has rightly stressed the essential continuity between the OT and NT. The law that was added 430 years after the promise to Abraham was limited in duration, serving a pedagogical role in the life of the old covenant people of God.

¹⁰A. J. Bandstra notes that the law-gospel antithesis is clearly presented by Calvin in his commentaries but that in the *Institutes* the law-gospel contrast tends to dissolve into a series of "differences." Consequently, if one restricts himself to the *Institutes* alone the idea of antithesis would not clearly emerge. "Thus Calvin himself may have to shoulder some of the blame for the fact that his views on law and gospel have often been only partially presented. . . . On the other hand, the *Institutes*, no matter how important, do not represent Calvin's total view. Calvin the exegete is as important as Calvin the theologian. Surely the commentary materials need to be taken seriously in attempting to assess the whole of Calvin's view on the law-gospel motif. When this is done, it is clear that the antithesis of law and gospel, properly defined, is a necessary and important part of his total perspective" ("Law and Gospel in Calvin and in Paul," in *Exploring the Heritage of John Calvin* [ed. D. E. Holwerda; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976] 38).

¹¹Compare the similar treatment of this subject in other representative works in the Reformed tradition: G. Zanchi, *Operum Theologicorum* (n.p., 1618), 8. 796 ff.; P. Martyr, *The Common Places* (London, 1583) 582 ff.; Z. Ursinus, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 99 ff.; J. H. Alstedius, *Theologia scholastica didactica* (Hanoviae, 1618) 785 ff. One of the thorny issues in comparing the two Testaments is the question concerning the role of the Holy Spirit in each economy of redemption. Ryrie comments: "It is true that there was a sharp contrast between the enablement under the law and the work of the Holy Spirit today (John 14:17), but it is not accurate to say there was no enablement under the law. The Spirit indwelt many (Dan. 4:8; 1 Pet. 1:11) and came upon many others for special power (Judges 3:10; 1 Sam. 10:9-10; Exodus 28:3), but there was no guarantee that He would permanently or universally indwell God's people as He does today" (*Dispensationalism Today* 120). Compare B. B. Warfield's treatment of this subject in "The Spirit of God in the Old Testament" in *Biblical and Theological Studies* (ed. S. G. Craig; Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1968) 127-156.

¹²For a survey of the historical development of this Calvinist doctrine see my "Reformed Interpretation."

Richard Longenecker notes the many indications in the writings of the apostle Paul where he "did distinguish between the two purposes of the Law in the Old Testament."¹³ First, there is the law as regulative of life with God (the normative use of the law). Second, there is the law as "contractual obligation," the law as "the covenant of works." According to Longenecker we are now discharged from the contractual obligation of the law that held Israel captive. Parenthetically, it is preferable to speak here of the "probationary" use of the law rather than the "nomistic" or "contractual." The term "contractual" in particular is unsuitable and even misleading. Stephen Westerholm makes the following observation:

Paul means seriously that those who lived under the law were obligated to fulfil the "letter." He is of course adamant in his denial that such fulfilment could only be achieved if those who were under its yoke were in fact obligated to observe all of its terms. This is certainly suggested by his references to the (now obsolete) obedience to the "letter"; it is confirmed by such texts as Gal 3:10 and 5:3. The "letter" could not save, but was to be observed; now, when salvation through faith has been revealed, the Christian is no longer obligated to observe the "letter."¹⁴

What must be acknowledged, Westerholm insists, is the antithesis between "two different ways of rendering service" to the covenant Lord. As the epistle to the Hebrews clearly points out, the old economy placed believers under a form of bondage and servitude. In keeping with the typology of the Mosaic arrangement this period of time under the law was probationary in nature, as was the original covenant of works with Adam at the beginning. In contrast to the bondage of the "letter" (whereby the earthly inheritance was to be obtained in the way of works) the "something better" of Heb 11:40 is the semi-eschatological enjoyment of life and salvation under the new covenant inaugurated through the atoning work of Christ, the second Adam, who fulfilled the conditions of the covenant of works on our behalf.

Is the theological concept of the law-gospel antithesis itself Biblically valid? A growing number of critics both within and without the Reformed tradition have so emphasized the continuity between law and gospel, old and new covenants, that any suggestion of antithesis is opposed altogether. Perhaps we can best understand the dimensions of this controversy by reviewing the major premise of Fuller's study. Basic to problems inherent to dispensationalism and covenant

¹³R. N. Longenecker, *Paul: Apostle of Liberty* (New York: Harper, 1964) 145; see also "The Pedagogical Nature of the Law in Galatians 3:19-4:7," *JETS* 25 (1982) 53-61.

¹⁴S. Westerholm, "Letter and Spirit: The Foundation of Pauline Ethics," *NTS* 30 (1984) 240. Westerholm concludes his study: "It would, I suggest, be difficult to find a better starting-point for a study of Pauline ethics than the letter-spirit antithesis. But it is essential that we understand the antithesis as Paul himself intended it, marking not two ways of reading the scriptures, but the ways of service enjoined under the old dispensation and the new" (p. 246). The idea of bondage associated with the Mosaic law—that is, the peculiar covenantal arrangement under Moses—is meaningful only in conjunction with the administrative principle of works-inheritance (enunciated in Lev 18:5), which is operative in the restricted symbolic-typical sphere of life in the covenant of God. The bondage is best defined in terms of the setting forth of the whole law of Moses, not just the civil and ceremonial. During the period of the law God's people were held captive to sin (this being the elenctic function of the law—see Rom 7:1-13), subject to guardianship until the coming of Christ and bound to the law of Moses, which was regulative of Israel's tenure in the land of promise. The nature of the bondage under the old covenant is treated more fully in my "Justification in Redemptive History" 229-235.

theology, argues Fuller, is the illegitimate use of the law-gospel contrast. The idea that Adam prior to the fall could have merited blessing from God in the way of confirmation in righteousness and ultimate glorification Fuller finds repugnant. Such a misconception of Biblical teaching, Fuller contends, distorts the message of sovereign grace. But to the contrary it is Fuller's view that jeopardizes the Biblical doctrine of Christ's atonement for sin, propitiation of God's holy wrath, and satisfaction of God's justice. Fuller's theology involves a clear repudiation of the meritorious nature of the second Adam's obedience, which the apostle Paul speaks of as the "one act of righteousness" imputed through faith for our justification (Rom 5:18).¹⁵

What have been other reactions to Fuller's thesis? Norman Geisler regards it to be "of the greatest doctrinal consequence."¹⁶ In the judgment of Meredith Kline,

Fuller's failing is not simply a flaw in his biblical theological reconstruction of one redemptive economy but an error of massive proportions in his systematic theology, involving the totality of God's covenant administration of his kingdom.¹⁷

Similarly, Douglas Moo observes that

the general tenor of the book does suggest a melding of promise and law as theological categories and OT and NT as temporal categories to an extent that meaningful distinctions cease to exist. But the wiping out of these distinctions, to this extent, entails a radical revision of large segments of traditional theology—a revision which can hardly be justified biblically.¹⁸

Particularly troublesome is Fuller's exegetical handling of Gal 3:10. According to the popular "misinterpretation view of the law" many exegetes, like Fuller, assume that the apostle Paul's quotation of Lev 18:5 is part of an *ad hominem* argument against Judaizers. "You who know the law," says Paul in effect, "must keep the law in its entirety if you wish to merit eternal life." The apostle, we are told, lifts the statement of Lev 18:5 out of its proper OT context of faith and grace. For the sake of argument, the apostle sets the law of Moses thus misconstrued over against the gospel. Proponents of this viewpoint are correct to insist that the law as ordained by God through Moses has nothing to do with salvation by works (for eternal life is the gift of sovereign, redemptive grace), but they are wrong to deny the subordinate operation of a principle of works inheritance on the typological level. Further, theologians sympathetic with this newer exegesis of Lev 18:5 have either wrongly attempted to read their view back into the thought of Calvin (and perhaps some of the later covenant theolo-

¹⁵Many striking parallels have been drawn between Fuller's interpretation and that of N. Shepherd; see W. R. Godfrey, "Back to Basics: A Response to the Robertson-Fuller Dialogue," *Presbyterian* 9 (1983) 80-84; M. G. Kline, "Of Works and Grace," *Presbyterian* 9 (1983) 85-92.

¹⁶N. L. Geisler, review of Fuller, *BSac* 138 (1981) 273.

¹⁷Kline, "Of Works and Grace" 87.

¹⁸Moo, review of Fuller 102-103. Moo concludes: "It has by now become clear that, however attractive and stimulating the thesis of *Gospel and Law* may be, it suffers from some serious flaws. While any treatment of a topic so large and complex is bound to have weaknesses, I feel that the weaknesses in this case are serious enough to render the thesis unacceptable" (p. 103).

gians) or have forthrightly indicated their departure from Calvin on this point. Moo points out how Fuller's exegesis undermines the doctrine of the substitutionary character of Christ's atonement. F. F. Bruce, in challenging the exegesis of Ragnar Bring, sees "an even greater strain involved in D. P. Fuller's interpretation."¹⁹

An exposition of the Biblical teaching on the atonement must give adequate consideration to the place of the law of God in relation to Christ's procurement of redemption. Jesus Christ, in submission to the will of his Father and as representative head of elect humanity, fulfilled the legal demand of the everlasting covenant (see Isa 24:5; Romans 3-5). The first Adam having defaulted on his representative task, the second Adam merited the eternal reward on behalf of God's elect. Through his obedience, both active and passive, Christ made complete satisfaction of the justice of God the Father and at the same time secured the heavenly inheritance (1 Cor 15:22, 45-49). They who are in Christ have not only been restored to fellowship and communion with God but have also been made heirs of the heavenly kingdom (Eph 1:3-14). The atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ demonstrates the supreme love, mercy and grace of God to sinners (Rom 3:24-26; 5:6-11). With regard to these fundamental aspects of the Biblical revelation concerning redemption in Christ, the concept of law (merit) is essential to the proclamation of the gospel.

Granting the fact that God's covenant mediated through Moses was restricted to one nation, how are we to construe the nature of Israel's calling as the old covenant people of God? What degree of continuity or discontinuity is there between Israel and the Church? On this subject important differences remain between dispensationalism and covenant theology.²⁰ Reformed federalism recognizes that the national, theocratic standing of Israel has relevance as long as the old covenant is in force. Once that covenant has been replaced by the new and better covenant in Christ there can be no return to the outmoded, theocratic administration of law (included here is what the early Protestant Reformers spoke of as the civil and ceremonial law). With the passing of the old and the establishment of the new in the fulness of time, there is now no longer Jew or Greek, spiritually speaking. Such a historical-covenantal transition by no means seeks to eradicate natural ethnic, social and cultural distinctions or obscure the fact that the NT Church originates in the faith of the patriarchs (Romans 9-11). Unless it can be shown otherwise from the Scriptures, the expectation of a future return of national Israel to Palestine in fulfillment of OT prophecy involving a reestablishment of the old Mosaic order is unwarranted.

Alongside dispensationalism and traditional covenant theology, a third position is emerging in Biblical and theological studies. J. A. Ziesler, for example, suggests that Israel retains for all time a special status regardless of her rejection of the Messiah. "At present, therefore, they are not true Israel, nor exactly

¹⁹F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 158.

²⁰Saucy comments: "In particular it is the distinction between Israel and the church which all recognize as the essential mark of dispensationalism. . . . Although all dispensationalists maintain a distinction between Israel and the Church, there are significant differences as to the extent of their separation in the purposes and programs of God. These differences focus on the relationship of the present Church age with the messianic promises of the Old Testament" ("Contemporary Dispensational Thought" 10).

non-Israel. They have tendered their resignation as Israel, all unwittingly. This resignation lies on the table and will not finally be accepted." In Ziesler's view the apostle Paul "expresses the hope that at the End all Israel will be gathered in without saying that they will become Christian."²¹ Historic Reformed theology, on the other hand, maintains that the national election of Israel had served a symbolic and typological purpose in redemptive history. The later drama of redemption was foreshadowed in Israel's exodus from Egypt. In the fulness of time the greater exodus of God's people hitherto held captive to Satan was accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the true passover lamb and faithful servant of the Lord.

Some Reformed interpreters have modified this third position along more conservative lines. For present purposes I will identify this particular view as the "new Dutch interpretation."²² Representative of this newer Reformed thinking, Willem Van Gemeren in a review article urges "a positive confession pertaining to Israel."²³ He argues for a distinct place for national Israel in the historical plan and purpose of God. "The fulfillment of the prophetic word takes place between the first and the second comings of Jesus Christ."²⁴ As concerns Israel's hope, Van Gemeren places the focus of attention on the present era in which we live rather than on a future period of time as is done, for example, by premillennialists. Details of Israel's eschatological hope, he argues, can only be discerned in the actual outworkings of history. God has not given us information regarding the when and how of this promise. "The fulfillment is a hope, and hope is no longer hope when we know in detail how everything fits together. An exclusion of Israel from this hope is presumptuous, because it assumes to know exactly what God's plan for Israel is."²⁵

The "new Dutch interpretation" entails a markedly different, and in some cases radical, approach to the OT Scriptures. Quoting C. Graafland, whose book Van Gemeren reviews: "The character of the promise of salvation has meaning in understanding the Old Testament, when it pertains to the future expectation of and for Israel."²⁶ This view maintains that even as NT believers we under-

²¹J. A. Ziesler, *Pauline Christianity* (New York: Oxford University, 1983) 66, 67.

²²This nomenclature serves to indicate the dominant influence of certain leading Dutch theologians in some circles of present-day Calvinism.

²³W. A. Van Gemeren, "Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux in the Interpretation of Prophecy," a review article of C. Graafland's *Het Vaste Verbond. Israel en het Oude Testament bij Calvijn en het Gereformeerd Protestantisme*, *WTJ* 45 (1983) 143. Graafland's study is marred by an uncritical dependence on the earlier work of H. H. Wolf, *Die Einheit des Bundes. Das Verhältnis von Altem und Neuem Testament bei Calvin* (Neukirchen: Neukirchen Kreis Moers, 1958).

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 144.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶*Ibid.* Compare A. A. Van Ruler's attempt to find many forms of the kingdom of God, Israel and the Church being only two of such forms (*The Christian Church and the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971]). H. Berkhof argues that "the millennial kingdom, also called the kingdom of peace, or the intermediate kingdom because it falls between our dispensation and the consummation . . . will take place in our space and time; a recovered Israel will be the center of it" (*Christ the Meaning of History* [London: SCM, 1966] 153). Both the "millennium" and the "consummation" are symbolic terms in the

stand the OT aright when we consider it in terms of Israel, not the Church. Consequently this approach insists that covenant hermeneutics is not adequate for the task. A different theological method is needed to open the meaning of the OT. In calling for special recognition of the state of Israel as the chosen people of God, these interpreters offer a corrective to what they judge to be traditional covenant theology's disregard for the unconditional promise God made to Israel. Repeating the charge made long ago by dispensationalists, spokesmen for this new Reformed view find covenant theology guilty of "spiritualizing." Van Gemeren "rejects an eschatological hope which spiritualizes OT promises and transfers them to the spiritual Israel, the church."²⁷ His theological preference is for a kind of "tension" and "openness" rather than ahistorical dogmatizing and historical closure, which he perceives as an all-too-prevalent inclination among Reformed systematians. Van Gemeren points out the difference between the views of William Brakel and Calvin on the nature of God's promissory word to Israel regarding the land of Canaan. According to Brakel, notes Van Gemeren,

the Church could not be identified with the New Israel. . . . Brakel expected *all* twelve tribes to repent and express faith in Jesus as the Messiah. He also held that the Jews would be privileged to return to their land. The promise of the land is not just a type of the eternal rest or of heaven, rather it is part and parcel with the covenant of grace which God made to and affirmed with Israel. Brakel kept Israel and church together. There is *one* covenant, one covenant people, one salvation, and one Savior.²⁸

Van Gemeren commends Graafland's study "for reintroducing hope [i.e., the hope of Israel] as a vital aspect of faith. The hope of the church focuses on a full appreciation of God's promises, and this includes a hope that God's promises to Israel will be realized, while at the same time the manner of the fulfillment remains hidden from us."²⁹

thinking of Berkhof. "Because sin and death still reign, a brief but fierce setback [prior to the "consummation"] is unavoidable. But this represents the transition to the union of heaven and earth, which is reflected in the kingdom of peace by the abolition of their boundaries" (p. 168). In a later section Berkhof clarifies his meaning: "Talk about history is talk about consummation" (p. 180). "The consummation as the glorification of existence will not mean that we are taken out of time and delivered from time, but that time as the form of our glorified existence will also be fulfilled and glorified. . . . We cannot discuss the consummation as though it were merely the end of history. For the consummation also takes place within the bounds of time" (p. 188). Berkhof's neo-orthodox views are given systematic treatment in his *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). See the helpful critique of this important work in M. H. Woudstra, "The Old Testament in Biblical Theology and Dogmatics," *Calvin Theological Journal* 18 (1983) 47-60.

²⁷Van Gemeren, "Israel as the Hermeneutical Crux" 143.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 142-143. To be sure, Van Gemeren is emphatic that Israel's election to salvation is made efficacious through the personal operation of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the true Jew (p. 142).

²⁹Ibid., p. 143. At the conclusion of his review article Van Gemeren remarks: "A positive confessional statement regarding Israel would affect the manner in which the church proclaims the OT as Scripture. The promise of the OT gives a new dimension to the faith of the church. The inclusion of Israel in the confessions would prevent the immediate application of OT texts to the NT church" (p. 143). Compare the similar concern for this matter in P. M. van Buren, *A Christian Theology of the People Israel. Part II: A Theology of the Jewish-Christian Reality* (New York: Seabury, 1983). This is the second of a multiple-volume study in systematics written from a thoroughly neo-orthodox perspective. It is indicative of widespread trends in ecumenical religious studies.

Those who share some of Van Gemenen's concerns and outlook, both millenarians and nonmillenarians, anticipate a literal fulfillment of the earthly promises in history prior to the consummation of history. One decisive difference between modern dispensationalism and the "new Dutch interpretation" is the former's projection of the final, climactic fulfillment of God's promises to Israel into the millennium, the literal thousand-year reign of Christ preceding the end of history.³⁰ Amillennial covenant theology affirms the messianic fulfillment of the OT promises in the "millennium," the semi-eschatological period of time extending from the first to the second coming of Christ. According to amillennialism, the present age of the NT Church is a first phase of the kingdom of God (= kingdom of heaven) inaugurated and established by Christ himself in actual fulfillment of the promise given to Abraham, Moses and David. The present kingdom manifestation prior to the consummation of God's covenant promises in the eternal kingdom (Acts 3:21) is already an age of realized eschatology. The consummating work of God results in the establishment of the everlasting kingdom, wherein the external, physical dimension comes finally into its own. (The present distinction between Church and kingdom of God will no longer be applicable.) With respect to the ancient Israelite theocracy, the typical, earthly prefiguration finds ultimate fulfillment in the new heavens and the new earth. It is possible for an amillennial covenant theologian to speak of a future kingdom fulfillment in addition to the present messianic fulfillment of the OT promises. That future kingdom fulfillment would then simply be the consummation of the present kingdom reality. (This idea is conveyed in the eschatological terminology of the "already" and the "not yet.") As a supernatural inbreaking of God into history, the consummation brings about the glorious eternal state.³¹

³⁰Ryrie remarks: "Concerning the goal of history, dispensationalists find it in the establishment of the millennial kingdom on earth, while the covenant theologian regards it as the eternal state" (*Dispensationalism Today* 17). Later he notes: "The entire program culminates not in eternity but in history, in the millennial kingdom of the Lord Christ. This millennial culmination is the climax of history and the great goal of God's program for the ages" (p. 104). Historic premillennialists rest their case almost exclusively on their interpretation of Rev 20:1-6. G. E. Ladd maintains: "Premillennialism is the doctrine stating that after the Second Coming of Christ, he will reign for a thousand years in the new heavens and the new earth of the Age to Come. This is the natural reading of Revelation 20:1-6" (*The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* [ed. R. G. Clouse; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1977] 17). For a more thorough discussion see Ladd's *Crucial Questions About the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1952).

³¹H. Hoyt insists that although the NT applies OT prophecies to the NT Church "it does not do so in the sense of identifying the church as spiritual Israel. It makes such application merely for the purpose of explaining something that is true of both" (*The Meaning of the Millennium* 43). Ladd, a former dispensationalist, understands dispensationalism to teach that "the millennium is not a stage in the redemptive work of Christ but the fulfillment of the theocratic promises to Israel" (*The New Bible Dictionary* [ed. J. D. Douglas; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962] 390). K. Barker distinguishes between preliminary fulfillment in the NT period or in the continuing Church age and final, complete fulfillment in the millennium ("False Dichotomies Between the Testaments"). The relationship between this final fulfillment in the earthly millennium and the eternal state is unclear. On the supposition of the reestablishment of the Israelite theocracy in the millennium, L. Berkhof correctly insists: "The theocratic nation itself was merely a type, a shadow of the spiritual realities of a better day, and therefore destined to vanish as soon as the antitype made its appearance. The restoration of the ancient theocracy in the future would simply mean the recurrence of the type—to what purpose?—and not at all the establishment of the Kingdom. It should be borne in mind that the beginnings of the Kingdom of God existed long before the theocracy was established, and continued to develop, and even after it lost its national existence. And the founding

Whereas traditional covenant theology regards the earthly promises associated with the Mosaic economy to be symbolic and typical (and thus fulfilled by Christ in two phases: first, in the new, semi-eschatological age of the Spirit, and second, in the new heavens and the new earth yet to come), dispensationalism goes beyond this position by retaining an additional, literal fulfillment in Palestine during the millennium. The dispensational interpretation of the millennium raises the following important questions: (1) Does not the glorious age of the Church seemingly fade in comparison with the glory of the earthly, thousand-year, theocratic rule of Christ in Palestine? (2) Is national Israel or the true, spiritual Israel (the Church) the immediate object of God's saving activity revealed in the incarnation, life and death of Jesus Christ, in the Father's raising of his Son in the power of the Spirit, and in the subsequent outpouring of the Spirit upon the Church? (3) Does not the idea of a distinct (future) messianic-kingdom climax prior to the eternal state undermine the sufficiency and finality of the reconciling work of Christ (Eph 2:11-22)? Resolution of lingering differences of interpretation among evangelicals depends, to a large extent, on a proper assessment of the nature and function of OT typology.³²

Holding to the unconditional promise of Israel's eternal inheritance of the land of Palestine, dispensationalists are apparently satisfied in thinking that a future millennial kingdom-theocracy does full justice to their reading of OT prophecy. It seems to me that dispensationalism ultimately ends up in a kind of "spiritualizing" (if I may use that unfortunate expression). If it is true that there are not two distinct and eternal destinies for separate peoples of God (Israel and the Church), as acknowledged by many present-day dispensationalists, then what purpose does the thousand-year, theocratic rule of the state of Israel serve other than to satisfy a literal reading of certain elements in Revelation 20? As suggested earlier, the key to the hermeneutical impasse (between modern dispensationalism, traditional covenant theology and the "new Dutch interpretation") is the proper understanding of the system of typology in Scripture. O. T. Allis' classic critique of early dispensationalism is still quite useful in understanding modern dispensationalism. "The primary aim [of the book] has been to show that Dispensationalism has its source in a faulty and unscriptural literalism which, in the important field of prophecy, ignores the typical and preparatory

of the Kingdom in the new dispensation was in no way dependent on the fortunes of the Jewish nation" (*The Kingdom of God: The Development of the Idea of the Kingdom, Especially Since the Eighteenth Century* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951] 170-171).

³²See e.g. L. Goppelt, *Typos: The Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); R. M. Davidson, *Typological Structures in the Old and New Testaments* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University, 1981). I have reviewed Goppelt's book in *JETS* 26 (1983) 490-493. R. Nicole's summarization and evaluation of the teaching of Patrick Fairbairn on Biblical typology is especially useful. Nicole contends: "It is high time that in the midst of controversies in which all kinds of accusations are levelled against the use of the Old Testament by New Testament authors the painstaking work of Patrick Fairbairn and his monumental scholarship be once again taken into consideration" ("Patrick Fairbairn and Biblical Hermeneutics as Related to the Quotations of the Old Testament in the New," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible* [ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984] 774). Helpful also are the response papers of R. F. Youngblood and S. L. Johnson in the same volume.

character of the Old Testament dispensation."³³ Agreeing with a point made by Herman Bavinck, Allis sees Israel, not the Church, as the divine parenthesis in history. Similarly, Kline regards the Israelite theocracy as "the provisional prefiguration of the eternal kingdom of the new covenant."³⁴ It appears to me that the subject of Biblical typology will move to the forefront of discussion in years ahead. This prospect offers hope of further fruitful lines of discussion as together we explore the richness of God's Word. Tremendous progress has been made among evangelicals in recent decades. May the Lord grant us continued growth and mutual understanding.

Whatever our millennial position, for the sake of Christ's Church and the cause of evangelicalism we need to cooperate more effectively in the proclamation and defense of the gospel of Christ in our day. Allis wisely observed: "Whether there is to be such a millennium is a question which must be decided in the light of Scripture. It does not seem to involve any issue sufficiently serious to warrant its being a divisive factor among those that are of the household of faith."³⁵ But it is vital to the gospel that in any discussion of legitimate discontinuities between the OT and NT we adhere to the Biblical-theological distinction between law (works) and gospel (grace). And in this connection it is of critical importance that dispensationalism and covenant theology recognize and expound more clearly the subservient, probationary function of the law of Moses as regulative of Israel's enjoyment of the land under the temporary conditions of that particular historical administration of the covenant of redemption.

³³O. T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969) 256. For a more recent discussion of this subject see the excellent and thorough study by A. A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).

³⁴M. G. Kline, "Genesis," in *The New Bible Commentary: Revised* (ed. D. Guthrie and J. A. Motyer; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 80.

³⁵Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* 261.