

**THEOLOGICAL DISSERTATION on the COVENANT OF NATURE, or OF
WORKS**

THEOLOGICAL DISSERTATION

On the

COVENANT OF NATURE, or OF WORKS,

Which,

by the grace of the DIVINE MAJESTY,

at the UNIVERSITY OF FRANKFURT,

under the MOST MAGNIFICENT RECTOR,

THE AUGUST AND MOST SERENE ROYAL PRINCE AND LORD,

LORD FRIEDRICH WILHELM,

HEIR to the KINGDOM OF PRUSSIA and the ELECTORATE OF BRANDENBURG, etc. etc.

under the PRESIDENCY of

BARTHOLD HOLTZFUS, D.

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY and Ordained Ecclesiastic,

his ever-to-be-honored PATRON AND TEACHER,

on the 10th day of November, in the Year of our Redeemer 1711,

at this time and place,

for the Placid Disquisition of the Erudite,

submits

JOHANNES MIKLOSWARI,

of Transylvania.

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§. I.

The Supernatural Providence of God is seen most greatly from the twofold Covenant initiated with men. We have treated the *Onomatologia* (the study of its name), the Definition, and likewise the Agreement or Disagreement of God's pact with men, and the Division of the Covenants or Pacts of God with men in our work *On the Covenant of Grace*, Theses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10. Now, about to treat the Covenant of Nature, or of Works, we shall consider those things pertaining to the matter itself.

§. II.

The Existence of the Covenant of Nature, or of Works, is denied by the Socinians and Remonstrants (see Volkel, *de Ver. Relig.*, Lib. 2, c. 8; Limborch, *Theol. Christ.*, L. 3, C. 2, §. 9, 10). We, however, prove it with arguments drawn from:

1. The Contracting Persons: God, the Creator, Ruler, Legislator, and Remunerator of those who seek him (Heb. 11:6), and Man, in his integrity, who, as an intellectual Creature, could and should be ruled by legislation, the promise of reward, and the threat of punishment.
2. The Parts of the Covenant: namely, the stipulation of duty and the promise of reward on the part of God, and the corresponding stipulation and acceptance on the part of man, as will soon be clear.
3. The federal Condition.
4. The penal Sanction (Gen. 2:17).
5. From Hosea 6:7, where it is said: "They, like Adam, have transgressed the covenant." Here the name Adam is taken as a proper noun, not indeed as a common noun; for if it were taken as a common noun, in this manner: "as men are accustomed to do," their sin would not be so much exaggerated as it would be diminished.
6. The Mosaic Law, given on Mount Sinai and accepted by the Israelites, which with respect to its legal relation was nothing other than a repetition of the Covenant of Nature, is very often called a Covenant, for example: Exod. 19:5, "If you will keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples." C. 24:7,8, "And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the hearing of the people... and he said, "This is the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you." C. 34:27,28, "Write for yourself these words, by which I have made a covenant with you and with Israel... and he wrote on the tablets the words of the ten-word Covenant." See also Lev 24:8, c. 26:9, Num. 18:19, Deut. 5:2, C. 24:1,4, Jos. 23:16, Ps. 25:14, Ps. 78:11, Jer. 31:31, Ez. 16:8, Ps. 74:20, Ps. 103:18, Ps. 111:5, 9.
7. Because God instilled in man a desire for eternal felicity and the enjoyment of God, which He certainly did not do to torment man.
8. Because God equipped man with sufficient strength to perform the federal condition; which would also have been done in vain, if He had not entered into a Covenant with man.

§. III.

The Covenant of Nature, or of Works, is a convention between God and Adam, and in him with his posterity, in which God, by the right of Creation, demanded from Adam and his posterity perfect and constant obedience, and promised a blessed life to those who performed it, but announced eternal death to those who refused, for the praise of His Wisdom, Goodness, and Justice.

§. IV.

The parties or contracting persons are God, considered as Creator and Lord, and hence as Legislator and the exactor of obedience owed to the Creator; and Man, in his integrity and justice, and equipped with sufficient gifts and strength to perform that obedience.

§. V.

In this Covenant, Adam did not stand only for himself, nor did he act only in his private person, as the Jews, Socinians, and more recent Remonstrants wish; but he was the Head, not only Natural, but also Moral, of the human race. This is gathered from Rom. 5:14, ff., and also 1. Cor. 15:22, 45, and from the goods bestowed upon him in Creation, which he received not for himself but for the whole human species; likewise, from the death and miseries that flow from the sin committed by Adam not only upon the first parents, but upon the entire human race; such as hard labor in cultivating the earth, ejection and exile from Paradise, the pains of childbirth common to all who give birth, and the reduction to dust (Gen. 3:16, 17, 19).

§. VI.

Regarding the Good promised to the first parents in that Covenant, the Socinians and Remonstrants hold that God promised nothing at all to the first parents, but only threatened death. See Volkel, *de Ver. Rel.*, L. 2, c. 8; Episcopius, *Instit. Theol.*, L. 2, C. 1; Limborch, *Theol. Christ.*, L. 3, c. 2, §. 9, 10.

§. VII.

The French Reformed Theologians who follow the method of Cameron, among whom are Amyraldus, Placeus, Testardus, Dallæus, and Mestrezat, Cregutus, and Johannes Claudius, state that God promised to man a perpetual life, abounding in every kind of good, to be lived in the earthly Paradise. See the Works of Cameron, *Thes de Tripl. Dei cum hom. Fœd.*, Thesis 9, pag. 544, 545; *Theses Salmur.*, Part. 1, de Trib. Fæder., th. 11, 12, p. 254; Testard, *Iren. sive Synops. de Nat. & Grat.*, Th. 12, ff. Grotius joins himself to these here, in *Annot. ad Cassand.*, Art. 2, where he writes: "The first man had no promises of a celestial life, but only of an earthly one." Likewise, *Exam. Animadv. ad Artic. 2; Voto pro Pace*, Art. 2, *Discuss.* p. 30.

§. VIII.

These different opinions are to be opposed with different reasons; and indeed we refute the first error:

(1) with the general axiom of the Apostle in Hebr. 11:6, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Hence God addresses Cain in Gen. 4:7, "If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted?" (that is, receive a reward).

(2) This is confirmed by Epictetus from the Light of Nature, in Arrian's Commentaries, L. I, C. 12: "If there are Gods and they care for men, but no reward is to be expected from them by men, nor even by myself, how, I ask, will this be sound?" (namely, to say this). And Seneca in Epistle 95: "Progress will never be sufficient, unless one has conceived in his mind what God ought to be like, having all things, bestowing all things, giving benefits freely. What is the cause for the Gods to do good? Nature." The Jews also number this among the Articles of their Faith: That with God there is שכר ועונש, Reward and punishment, and that for the reason that God cheats no creature of its wage.

(3) It is proven from the divine Goodness: for since God is essentially good, and indeed is Goodness itself and Love itself, He will also be communicative of His Goodness.

(4) Otherwise, Adam would have had no hope of a promise, in which miserable condition of the gentiles Paul describes them in Eph. 2:12.

(5) The Tree of Life confirms this Promise (Gen. 2:9; c. 3:22), as a Pledge of the Reward to be expected.

§. IX.

That eternal life was promised to the first parents, against the above-named French Theologians and Grotius, we prove:

1. From the promise of the Mosaic Law, which, as to its substance, is the same as the Law inscribed on the hearts of the first parents. But that law also promised eternal life, Lev. 18:5, "He who does these things shall live in them," as Christ explains in Matth. 19, 17, "If you wish to enter into (eternal) life, keep the commandments."
2. God, through the obedience and death of His Son, performed that which was impossible for the Law to perform, because it was weakened by the flesh (Rom. 8:3). But it is established that Christ acquired for men the right to eternal life, which the Law could not confer, not because of itself, or because it did not have the promises of eternal life, but because it was weakened by the flesh. Therefore, if man had been without sin, the Law would have led men to eternal life.
3. Because Christ by His obedience and death restored to us what we lost through the disobedience of Adam (Rom. 5:15,17,18,19,21). But Christ restored to us a life to be lived not in the earthly Paradise, but in the heavens (Heb. 9:12). This is confirmed from the fact that Christ rendered to the Law that obedience which

the Law required; and therefore, by the fulfillment of the Law, He also prepared that life which was promised by the Law. And hence Christ is called the Tree of Life in Apoc. 22:2, because He restored to us that life which the Tree of Life in Paradise signified.

4. If by the death which God threatened Adam, should he transgress the positive Law concerning the forbidden tree, is to be understood not only natural death but also eternal death (which the French Theologians do not deny), then certainly by the life contained in the promise, eternal and celestial life must also be understood. For divine Goodness is not narrower than divine Justice; but rather the former exceeds the latter (Ps. 36:6,8; Ps. 103:11,12; Eph. 2:4).
5. The nature and excellence of Man, created in the image of God, required the promise of eternal life. For since man in his most important part is Spirit, and understood the end for which he was created, and was led by a vehement desire for it, it is not probable that only an earthly life was proposed and promised to man in place of a reward.
6. This is confirmed by Fulgentius in *de Incarn.* c. 12, that Adam, if he had kept obedience, would have received not only a perfect and inamissible immortality of the body, but also in his soul such a grace of living holily that he could not sin thereafter, and indeed would have been made a partaker of eternal beatitude. And John of Damascus in *de Orthod. Fide*, c. 30, says that God promised Adam that if he guarded the dignity of his soul, granting victory to reason, acknowledging Him who had created him and keeping His precept, he would become a partaker of eternal beatitude and would live a life everlasting, having become superior to death.

§. X.

The Condition of the Covenant, under which God had made these promises, was not only Obedience toward the positive precept of abstinence from the forbidden tree (Gen. 2:16, 17), but also the fulfillment of the Law inscribed on the hearts of the first parents, (1) perfect with respect to its degrees (Deut. 6:5; Matth. 22:37; Luc. 10:27; Ps. 119:4), (2) complete with respect to its parts, extending itself to all parts and jots of the Law (Jac. 2:10), and (3) constant and persevering with respect to its duration, embracing all differences of time: past, present, and future (Ezech. 18:24).

§. XI.

To perform this condition, God had given man sufficient strength: for in his intellect He had kindled the light of Wisdom; to his will He had instilled Holiness and Justice, and had made his very body immortal. Hence man accepted this condition of fulfilling the given Law, and correspondingly stipulated with the stipulating God, which Eve attests in express words in Gen. 3:2, 3, "Of the fruit of the trees that are in Paradise, we eat; but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of Paradise, God has commanded us that we should not eat it and that we should not touch it, lest by chance we die."

§. XII.

The celebrated Witsius states that there are four Sacraments of this Covenant, namely Paradise, the Tree of Life, the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, and the Sabbath (*Oecon. Fæd.*, L. 1, c. 6, §. 2). Burmannus and Braunius contradict him; with whom we admit two seals or Sacraments of the Paradisiacal Covenant: the Tree of Life and Paradise. For the former not only had the virtue of conserving the life of the first parents, but was also a pledge of immortal life, if they should persevere in obedience toward God; whence Christ in Apoc. 22:2 is called the Tree of Life. And Augustine in *de Gen. ad Lit.*, L. 8, c. 4 writes: "In the other trees and timbers he had nourishment, but in that one there was also a Sacrament." The latter (Paradise) was the other pledge of the divine promise, by which Adam was made more certain of the continuation of perennial life. Hence Scripture calls the place of eternal felicity Paradise, Luc. 23:43, "Today you will be with me in Paradise." In 2 Cor. 12:2,4, the third heaven is called Paradise. See also Apoc. 2:7.

§. XIII.

The Tree of Knowledge of good and evil was not a Sacrament: for

1. Sacraments are instituted for use; but the use of this tree was prohibited.
2. Sacraments signify, exhibit, and seal some spiritual good; but the abuse of this tree brought death, and therefore sealed some evil.
3. The use of sacraments leads to the felicity of men; but the use of this tree produced the infelicity of men. Besides Cocceius, Burmannus, Wittichius, and Braunius, Matth. Martinus in *de Fœderis Nat. & Grat. Signac.* Tract. 1, c. 3, p. 39 and Alstedius in *Theol. Didact. Scholaft.* Sect. 3, C. 17 correctly observed this.

§. XIV.

Nor was the External Sabbath a Sacrament of this Covenant; we assert our reasons for this opinion in our work *On the Moral Law*, §. 58, where at the same time in §. 59 we teach what sort of Sabbath had its place in the State of Integrity, namely, an Internal and Spiritual one.

§. XV.

The purpose was the declaration of the divine Wisdom, Goodness, Justice, and Sanctity, which perfections of GOD shone forth in the most holy Law, the most liberal Promise, and the most certain Reward given to those who seek GOD with a sincere mind (Heb 11:6).

§. XVI.

The Covenant of Nature and of Grace agree:

- I. by reason of the Contracting Parties, which in both are GOD and man.

II. In both, there is a Promise of eternal life.

III. In both, some Condition is prescribed, namely, filial obedience.

IV. In both, the end is the same: the glory of the Wisdom and Goodness of God, and with respect to men, Life.

§. XVII.

They differ:

I. by reason of the relation of the Contracting Parties. In the covenant of Works, GOD is regarded not only as Creator and Lord, but also as the highest Legislator and the Exactor of perfect Obedience from Man in his Integrity; but in the covenant of Grace, GOD is regarded as a merciful Father calling lapsed and sinful man back to the bosom of Grace.

II. In the former, there is no place for a Mediator; in the latter, there is a Mediator.

III. There, the Condition of perfect Obedience is required, to be fulfilled by man's own strength; here, Faith and, from faith, filial Obedience is required, to be performed by the strength of Grace.

IV. There, it is a matter of man working and demanding a wage from debt; here, of one believing and most humbly hoping for a liberal and abundant reward from Grace.

V. There, it is a declaration primarily of Justice and Sanctity; here, especially of the unsearchable Wisdom, glorious grace, and divine Mercy, shining forth most of all from the giving of the Son into death (Eph. 1:6; Joh. 3:16; Tit. 3:4).

§. XVIII.

The Effect of this Covenant, had it been observed, would have been man's right to the promised Reward and Legal Justification, by which God would have declared the first parents just and worthy of eternal life: for to the one who works, the wage is imputed from debt (Rom. 4:4), not indeed on account of the equality and intrinsic proportion of the work to the wage, but from the Pact and acceptance of God. Whence man, as a faithful servant, could have rejoiced in the fulfilled Condition, gloried, and sought his wage.

§. XIX.

But the Violation of this Covenant brought upon the human race Death, as the most certain effect of the threat (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:12, ff.), and not only corporal Death with its preceding diseases, miseries, calamities, pains, labors, and sweats (Gen. 3:16, 17), but also Spiritual death, which is the departure of divine favor and of the Holy Spirit from the soul on account of sin. Hence in Eph. 2:1, unregenerate men are said to be "dead in sins," and in 1 Tim. 5:6, the widow who is in pleasures "is dead while she liveth." See also Luc.

15:32. And Eternal death, Rom. 6:23, "The wages of sin is Death," and indeed the death opposed to eternal life in the same place.

§. XX.

Just as in the same chapter (5:16) he attributes condemnation (*κατάκριμα*) to that sin, and opposes to it the gift (*δώρημα*) and grace (*χάρισμα*) of Christ "unto justification" (V. 16), "unto justification of life" (V. 18), who absolves us from condemnation (*κατακρίματος*), so that "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus" (Rom.8:1). See also Rom. 5:15 to 19.

Hence, this Covenant having been broken by the Inobedience of the first parents, the Law itself, as the Formula and Condition of this Covenant, can no longer justify man, nor lead him to the friendship of God, which however it ought to have done (Rom. 3:10; Gal. 2:16), "By the works of the law shall no flesh be justified before God." See also Gal. 3:21. On the contrary, it has become a sentence of death and damnation (Gal.3:10), "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things... to do them." It has become a "ministry of death" (2 Cor. 3:7), "the letter that killeth" (V. 6), the "commandment unto death, which was ordained to life" (Rom. 7:10). "For the sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56). Nevertheless, what the Use of the moral Law is, in the State of Sin and of Grace, we indicate in our work *On the Law*, C. 2, §. 26, ff.

May the attentive and salutary Consideration of this promote our eternal Salvation!

THE END.